

‘Life chances for young people from the economically deprived areas of Belfast’

Government Response to the Report Produced by the Environmental and Social Committee of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body

Recommendation	Response	Background
<p>1</p> <p>The Committee welcome the Children and Young People Funding Package announced in March 2006. If this funding is carefully applied to the deprived areas of Belfast it should prove to make a real difference.</p> <p>and</p> <p>18</p> <p>We recommend that the Children and Young People Funding Package is specifically targeted to assist those young people from the deprived areas to provide the best value for money for those who need it most.</p>	<p>The government is committed to doing all that we can to give children and young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds <i>throughout Northern Ireland</i> the best possible start in life. The aim of the Children and Young People Funding Package is to reduce social, health and educational differentials. The package has two complementary approaches to targeting resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area based, drawing on Neighbourhood Renewal areas, but recognising that there are disadvantaged areas beyond these, including the needs of deprived rural areas; and • Client-based (necessary for some elements of the package such as looked-after children, child protection, children with special needs and disabilities, some services, and some allocations to schools which reflect the proportions of pupils entitled to Free School Meals). 	<p>The Secretary of State launched the Children and Young People Funding Package in March 2006. Over £100m has been provided to reduce social, health and educational differentials and give children and young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds the best possible start in life. £44.7m is to be spent in 2006/07 with the remaining £57.6m being spent in 2007/08.</p> <p>The funding was announced in three separate announcements and this is outlined below.</p> <p>Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) projects</p> <p>On 6 March, the Secretary of State announced that additional funding of £14.6 million was to be made available over 2 years, 2006/07 and 2007/08, to assist Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) projects working with children in disadvantaged areas, whose funding would otherwise have ended at various times from the end of March 2006 onwards.</p> <p>Funding announced 7 March 2006</p> <p>On 7 March 2006, the Secretary of State announced funding totalling £61.7m. This funding has been divided into 6 themes. Baseline spending for each theme, totalling £28.4m in 2006/07 and £33.3m in 2007/08, is given in brackets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended Schools (£13.25m/£13.3m)

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1 and 18 (Cont)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended Early Years provision (£3.85m/£7m) • Looked-after children / vulnerable young adults (£2.85m/£2.75m) • Youth outreach (£0.75m/£1.025m) • Child protection (£1.8m/£2.55m) • Children with special needs and disabilities (£5.9m/£6.675m) <p>Chancellor's Budget</p> <p>On 22 March the Secretary of State announced that an additional £26m would be made available over the next 2 years as part of the Children and Young People Funding Package, bringing the total to over £100m. This additional funding was made available as a result of the Chancellor's Budget.</p> <p>It is anticipated that £20m out of this £26m will be allocated directly to schools in the next 2 years. The £10m earmarked for 2006/07 has already been allocated to schools in Northern Ireland.</p>
2	<p>The Sure Start and the Pre-school education programmes are ideal methods of assisting parents to improve their parenting skills and we warmly welcome the expansion of these programmes within the deprived areas of Belfast.</p>	<p>We welcome this comment and recognise that the life chances of children from disadvantaged areas can be greatly improved if there is early intervention and support, enabling them to have good quality learning experiences in their pre school years. From April 2007 Sure Start will be expanded in Northern Ireland to bring the total number of projects to 32, covering the 20% most disadvantaged areas, including such areas in Belfast. Additionally there are plans to further develop Sure Start services by establishing Children's Centres which will provide integrated care and education for young children, support for their families and help facilitate the return to work of those parents who are unemployed.</p>	<p>Sure Start aims to work with parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of children age 0 to 4, particularly those children from disadvantaged areas, to ensure they are well prepared for school and later life. It aims to meet the needs of children both directly and through supporting and empowering their parents</p> <p>With the expansion of Sure Start from April 2007 approximately 32,000 children throughout Northern Ireland will have access to services. The Programmes are designed to reflect and respond to local need and typically comprise partnerships between local agencies and</p>

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2 (Cont)			<p>parents, whose participation in the design and delivery of the programme is strongly encouraged, with parents often working as volunteers. Sure Start encourages early contact with parents, with initial introduction often being made during pregnancy, thus ensuring as far as possible that support networks are available from the earliest possible stage.</p>
3	<p>The Government should investigate whether the Irish scheme to assist the long term unemployed move into work through a benefits subsidy scheme could in some way be applied to Northern Ireland encourage the long term unemployed back to work.</p>	<p>There are significant employment and training programmes already available to assist individuals to move towards and into work, for example, the full range of New Deal programmes and Working Family Tax Credit is also available to assist those on lower incomes.</p> <p>With reference to Paragraph 2.2 in the report, Jobs & Benefits offices and JobCentres already operate throughout the West Belfast and Greater Shankill areas providing a full range of work-focused support to clients. There are also training opportunities available locally e.g. through Impact Training, Springvale Training and others. DEL's 'Targeted Initiatives' which aim to assist those with barriers to work has also recently been extended until March 2007 and Pathways to Work has been extended to the Falls and Shankill areas from 30 October. Also located in North/West Belfast is Ulster Supported Employment (USEL), which is funded by DEL and provides training and employment opportunities for people with severe disabilities.</p>	<p>In the public Employment Service significant assistance is available to those claiming Jobseekers Allowance. Participation in an initial Work-focused Interview (Wfi) is also mandatory for those people who make new or repeat claims to working age benefits other than Jobseeker's Allowance. Currently these benefits are Incapacity Benefit, Income Support and Severe Disablement Allowance. Recipients of Bereavement Benefit and Carer's Allowance can participate in WfIs on a voluntary basis.</p> <p>Each interview involves face-to-face contact with a Personal Adviser. Discussion centres on clients' personal circumstances and explores their experience, skills, strengths, abilities and job goals, whilst aiming to identify any barriers to employment which they may have.</p> <p>While the client remains in receipt of benefit repeat interviews are arranged at specified intervals. This ensures that clients stay in touch with the world of work and are given the opportunity to examine and re-examine their employability options.</p> <p>From April 2007, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) will pilot a more flexible, menu-based approach better targeted at dealing with individuals' barriers to employment in 4 areas in NI.</p>

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3 (Cont)		<p>A new programme 'Local Employment Intermediary Service' (LEMIS) will begin from April 2007 following the end of the pilot Targeted Initiatives. It will be available throughout Belfast and in Londonderry and Strabane – all areas that are currently suffering high levels of multiple deprivation. LEMIS will therefore build on elements of Targeted Initiatives and offer a community-based and employment-focused advisory service designed to engage those who, for whatever reason, are presently deemed to be economically inactive but wish to return to work. It is important that clients are assisted to overcome non-physical barriers to employability so that they can access jobs.</p> <p>In NI, as in GB, we are piloting the Pathways to Work Initiative which targets those on Incapacity Benefits to assist them to return to work. By October 2006, the Pathways service was available to 30% of annual new/repeat claims to the benefit, including in West Belfast and Greater Shankill. Pathways to Work will be rolled out across NI by mid-2008.</p> <p>Pathways to Work requires recipients to attend for work focussed interviews when a Personal Adviser will discuss options, including a return to work credit of £40 pw for 12 months. Those on Jobseekers Allowance are already subject to a mandatory work focussed interview process designed to identify opportunities. This process can also provide the client with an estimate of how they might stand financially in work compared with their current benefit entitlement. In addition, we can offer the New Deal Employer Subsidy to eligible unemployed clients.</p> <p>Working Family Tax Credit is also available to assist those on lower incomes.</p>

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3 (Cont)			<p>DEL is aware of the changing employment market and will be encouraging individuals to travel to where suitable employment opportunities exist. The Department's Careers Service provides an all age Careers Information Advice and Guidance Service to young people in education and training, and to employed and unemployed adults through a network of Careers Advisers, who are based in JobCentres/Jobs and Benefit offices and Careers Offices throughout Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Additionally, the Belfast Institute, Castlereagh College, East Antrim Institute and the Workers' Educational Association, as the main statutory and non statutory education and training providers for Greater Belfast, offer a wide range of provision aimed at tackling educational disadvantage, including Essential Skills provision.</p>
4	Pre-Primary provision needs to be given the highest priority in order to make a difference in young peoples' lives from the earliest stage.	We welcome this recommendation and recognise the great importance of pre-school education in ensuring that children are ready to learn from their earliest days in formal education. As reflected in the Effective Pre-School Provision in Northern Ireland research, published in 2006, we know that high quality pre-school education is of particular benefit to disadvantaged children and that these benefits continue well into primary school.	<p>The aim of the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) is to provide one year of high quality funded pre-school education, in the year before compulsory education, for every child whose parents wish it.</p> <p>Children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds receive top priority in selection for funded pre-school education.</p> <p>The Children and Young People Funding Package (CYPFP) included £1.4m over two years for the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme in conjunction with Sure Start. This finance has helped to ensure that there are sufficient funded pre-school places for every child in Belfast whose parents applied.</p> <p>There is no evidence to suggest that there is any unmet need for pre-school education in socially</p>

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4 (Cont)			deprived areas in Belfast.
5	The young people who are already disengaged from society (often those already involved in paramilitary activity and the black market) need additional assistance to enable them to engage in society.	There are a number of programmes available to assist young people and adults to move towards and into work e.g. New Deal 18-24, New Deal 25+, New Deal for Lone Parents, New Deal for Disabled People, Pathways to Work, progress2work(NI) (a pilot initiative aimed at assisting those with drug/alcohol issues, homelessness or who are ex-prisoners).	<p>With reference to Paragraph 3.11 the report mentions Job Assist Centres (JACs) but refers to these Centres providing training for young people. This is incorrect. They are essentially community-based employment services contracted to deliver services and are operating on a pilot basis at present. They are designed to attract those in the 'harder to help' category who might ordinarily be inclined to avoid contact with the public employment services for fear of their benefits being put at risk in some way. JACs do not normally offer training services, and they are not funded by government to provide same. To end December 2006, £1.5m had been spent on JACs in West Belfast and Greater Shankill but employment outcomes were low (total spend on JACs was £2.6m). Targeted Initiatives, of which JACs are a part, were extended until March 2007 to allow for evaluation and consideration of future provision.</p> <p>A new programme, 'Local Employment Intermediary Service' (LEMIS) will come into operation from April 2007. It takes account of the outcome of the evaluations and experience elsewhere and will be more employment focused.</p> <p>DEL's new 'Training for Success', professional and technical training provision, will 'Address Barriers to Employment' and will be operational from September 2007. This strand of the new provision will specifically target those young people who have emotional, behavioural or social difficulties (the "Not in, Education, Employment or Training" (NEET)).</p>

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5 (Cont)		<p>A major emphasis of the provision will be the progression of young people to maximise their potential to employment, apprenticeships and to Foundation Degrees. Specialist services will be available to assist training organisations to deliver additional individual support and guidance to young people who have been identified as having specific problems or barriers to overcome.</p> <p>The Department's Further Education Division supports a number of initiatives aimed at tackling educational disadvantage in Belfast including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Springvale Community Outreach Initiative, which aims to improve educational standards, promote social, cultural and economic regeneration in North Belfast, West Belfast and the Greater Shankill areas; • 8 actions under the Renewing Communities Initiative, which deal with improving life prospects and growing civic and community leadership and active citizenship; and • the Essential Skills for Living Strategy, which provides adults in all areas of Northern Ireland with the opportunity to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, to enable them to function and progress in society; <p>The 'Step-Up' project began at the University of Ulster Magee Campus in 2000. The aim of the project is to provide an opportunity for disadvantaged pupils, who have potential but low attainment levels and relatively low expectations, to improve their academic performance, self esteem and motivation, and gain entry to and complete programmes of study in higher</p>

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5 (Cont)			<p>education.</p> <p>Following the success of the programme at the University of Ulster Magee Campus, the initiative was extended to Belfast in September 2006. The 'Step-Up' programme in Belfast, which is funded through the Renewing Communities budget, has been allocated £1.6m funding between 2006/07-2012/13 and disadvantaged pupils from schools in these areas are taking part in this very innovative and performance raising programme. The 'Step-Up' programme in Belfast is one of the key projects in the Renewing Communities Action Plan. The Action Plan identifies 62 actions to tackle disadvantage at individual, family and community levels both across all parts of Northern Ireland and in specifically targeted communities.</p>
6	<p>The Committee would encourage the British Government to make early decisions on school closures. This would allow for long term future planning and to improve morale in schools.</p>	<p>The Government recognises this recommendation and has recently accepted in full the recommendations of the Strategic Review of Education (the Bain Report).</p>	<p>Any proposal to close or rationalise existing school provision in East, North and West Belfast will be initiated by the relevant school authority, be that the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) or the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) in respect of the controlled sector, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) in respect of the catholic maintained sector or, in the case of Irish-medium and grant maintained integrated schools, the individual Board(s) of Governors.</p> <p>Such proposals require the publication of a statutory development proposal which must be preceded by full consultation between the relevant education authority and the board of governors, staff and parents of the school(s) directly affected and neighbouring schools likely to be affected by the proposal. Only when agreement is reached to progress the closure or rationalisation, is a development proposal</p>

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6 (Cont)		<p>published, which in turn, initiates a further 2-month period during which all interested parties can make written representation to the Department of Education. At the end of the 2-month period, Department officials prepare a submission for the Minister of Education's consideration, following which the Minister makes a decision on the proposal. It should be noted that the Department's direct involvement only commences with the publication of the development proposal.</p> <p>The Department of Education fully appreciates that any undue delay in deciding on development proposals, especially proposals relating to school closures and rationalisations, can create significant concern and affect the morale among teachers, pupils and parents directly affected. The Department in all cases seeks to ensure that decisions are expedited. The statutory requirements involved in bringing forward a proposal, including the requirements for full consultation, mean that the overall process can take time. It is estimated that a majority of these cases will take 9-12 months to progress from the initial consultation stage through to a decision being made and in some more sensitive cases it is likely to be longer.</p> <p>The decline in the school-age population has resulted in a significant level of surplus places in schools across Northern Ireland and this demographic decline has had particular impact in Belfast. Some schools are unable to provide the full curriculum and budgets are spread too thinly across too many schools and colleges and that it also creates uncertainty about the future of individual schools. In the past 5 years 5 primary and one post-primary school have been rationalised in the Belfast area. In March 2006</p>

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6 (Cont)		<p>the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Peter Hain MP, commissioned a Strategic Review of Education led by Professor Sir George Bain to examine, among other issues, the strategic planning and organisation of the school estate.</p> <p>On 4 December 2006, Sir George Bain published his report. The Minister with Responsibility for Education, Maria Eagle MP, provided the Government's initial response on 12 December and on 23 January 2007, the Secretary of State pledged full implementation of the Review recommendations. The main issues are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the education system must move to Area-based Planning of the schools estate. • That all schools should be sustainable. The Department of Education issued a policy paper for consultation on Sustainable Schools on 23 January 2007. • Government accepted the minimum (not optimal) enrolment thresholds recommended in the Bain Report; 105 for rural primary schools, 140 for urban primary schools, 500 for post-primary and 100 for the sixth form in an 11-18 school. <p>Based on the 2006 school census data, there are 22 primary schools and 12 secondary schools in the Belfast area that fall below the thresholds for urban schools. Two of the secondary schools have been approved for closure and a further two secondary schools are the subject to on-going proposals for closure. In addition, there are four small Irish-medium primary schools established</p>

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6 (Cont)			<p>in recent years with enrolments below 140.</p> <p>The enrolment minima represent a level of school size at which it becomes important to review a school to ensure it is providing children with the education they need and would continue to do so in to the future. This process of review will be taken forward carefully and sensitively and will require time to complete. The review will be centred on educational quality and the particular needs of local areas. It will be on a case-by-case basis and will not simply be about establishing continuation or closure as the future for a school. It will also explore the way provision can be improved though school collaboration and partnership and will take place within the development of a new area-based approach to school planning in which there will be a much greater emphasis on connectedness and coherence of provision at local level.</p>
7	<p>The Belfast Education and Library Board needs to act to encourage the best teachers and head teachers to work schools in the deprived areas. We suggest that the most successful teachers should be encouraged to apply to those schools which deal with the hardest children (and they should be rewarded financially for doing so)</p>	<p>It is unlikely that principals and teachers could be encouraged to work in schools in deprived areas without offering some financial incentive. Pay and conditions of service for teachers in Northern Ireland are negotiated locally, although historically they have tended to mirror broadly the arrangements in England and Wales, which are based on recommendations to Government by the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB). Any changes to the pay and conditions of teachers in Northern Ireland would have to be agreed by the Teacher Negotiating Committee (TNC), on which the teacher employers and the five recognised teacher unions are represented. There may be a reluctance to negotiate such changes in the absence of similar provision in England and Wales.</p>	<p>The teachers' pay system currently includes provision to allow schools to pay one of two Recruitment and Retention Allowances to classroom teachers where deemed necessary, although in practice these are seldom used. In England and Wales, schools have the flexibility to award whatever financial assistance, support or benefits to a teacher for recruitment and retention purposes as they see fit, but for a fixed 3-year period. In exceptional circumstances, incentives awarded for retention reasons may be renewed. To date the TNC has decided not to replicate this arrangement in Northern Ireland, primarily due to the low uptake of the existing recruitment and retention allowances.</p> <p>As for head teachers, delegated school budgets and considerable flexibilities in the leadership group pay arrangements mean that it is already</p>

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7 (Cont)			<p>possible for schools, if they are adequately resourced, to make posts more attractive to prospective applicants. The current Leadership Group pay arrangements recognise that each school will have different circumstances and challenges, and that schools are best placed to determine pay levels taking account of their unique position. To this end, the arrangements provide schools with the flexibility to determine appropriate pay ranges, which reflect job weight but also take account of any difficulties there may be in recruiting and/or retaining the principal or vice-principal. Where such difficulties exist, the school may select a pay range outside that which would normally be attributed to a school of its size. Furthermore, on appointment, schools may place a principal on any one of the first four points of the selected pay range (rather than on the base point which is the norm) in order to make the post more financially attractive.</p> <p>A recently published PricewaterhouseCoopers study into school leadership, commissioned by DfES, examines a range of current and new ideas and practices to boost school standards and deliver even more effective management of schools through improved leadership models. Against a background where modern school leaders are required to fulfil an increasing number of roles, such as accountant, architect, and human resources manager, the report makes a number of key recommendations, such as removing barriers that may prevent a wider range of professionals with the relevant skills from becoming school leaders - although there must always be a head of teaching and learning who is a qualified teacher. It also recommends distributing leadership roles among a broader range of senior staff, and developing wider skill</p>

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7 (Cont)		<p>sets for the future, with increased expertise in areas such as finance, human resources, collaboration and project management. However, it considered that the existing system of pay and reward needs modification rather than radical change.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Alan Johnson, will shortly write to the STRB setting out the remit for its 17th report, part two of which will be due by the end of February 2008. The STRB will be asked to consider the need to ensure that every school has the scope to establish the leadership structures that will meet their needs, and to recommend whether there should be changes to the pay and conditions for the leadership group, taking account of the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allow for federations and other collaborative arrangements that might provide effective solutions to schools' needs; • aid and promote the distribution of leadership within schools, as appropriate; and • enable appropriate leadership and management arrangements for the extended services provided directly or indirectly through their schools. <p>Given the current reviews of leadership arrangements, there may be scope in future to negotiate pay and conditions changes in Northern Ireland which encourage school principals to seek employment in specific schools. In the interim, the Belfast Education and Library Board may remind schools in deprived areas of the flexibilities and incentives</p>

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7 (Cont)			available through the existing pay system for the recruitment and retention of teachers and head teachers.
8	The Committee learned about one project on the dangers of joyriding which had been particularly successful when they were linked to schools. The model could be adapted for other problems such as suicide and alcohol and drug addiction.	New alcohol and drug treatment services for young people up to 18 years old have been in place across Northern Ireland from January 1 2007.	
9	We recommend that schools should, where possible, play a wider role in their communities and become the centres providing a broad range of support activities such as counselling and social work. Schools are also the ideal place to focus additional intervention programmes in order to improve life chances.	The Department of Education agrees fully with this recommendation.	<p>As is acknowledged in the report, the Children and Young People Funding Package is facilitating this through the Extended Schools theme. £10m has been allocated in 2006/7 and a further £10m in 2007/8 to just under 500 schools to support the development of after school provision and stronger links between schools and voluntary and statutory agencies in the area.</p> <p>The intention is that extended schools will make a significant contribution to reducing differentials and improving the quality of life for children and young people in disadvantaged areas by, for example:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provision of activities before and after school linked to the key themes set out in the Ten year Children's Strategy; • securing the active engagement of their communities; • engaging positively with families; • sharing facilities with local community groups; and • establishing close links with statutory and voluntary agencies working in the area.

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10	The Schools Completion Programme introduced in Ireland some years ago might have lessons for the deprived areas of Belfast; we urge that this be investigated.	The Department welcomes this recommendation.	<p>While the support structures for schools, pupils and parents in Northern Ireland are different to those in the Republic of Ireland, many of the School Completion Programme activities have a local equivalent. However, as with the School Completion Programme not all activities are offered in every school.</p> <p>The Department is committed to the development of a cohesive plan to address the issue of educational performance in Belfast and will examine the School Completion Programme and other possible interventions in the course of this work.</p>
11	We call on leading businessmen and local community leaders to engage with schools in the most deprived areas, perhaps by joining the Board of Governors.	The Department of Education supports this recommendation.	<p>Community governors</p> <p>The Department (DE) proposes under the Review of Public Administration to strengthen the capabilities of school Boards of Governors, through the appointment of individuals with specific skills and expertise. This will be achieved by creating a new category of “Community” governors. Those governors will be selected by the new Education & Skills Agency (ESA) from volunteers who live or work in the local community or who come from the business community, and can make a positive contribution to the good government and success of a school. This will create further opportunities for businessmen and local community leaders to participate in school governance.</p> <p>Reconstitution of Boards of Governors</p> <p>The Department of Education (DE) has already begun a process of attracting local business people and community leaders to engage with schools by becoming governors of schools.</p>

Recommendation		Response	Background
11 (Cont)			<p>During the last reconstitution of boards of governors in 2005, DE targeted the business community and those with particular skills and experience in finance, personnel management and business management through an advertising campaign with a reasonable degree of success.</p> <p><i>Renewing Communities Initiative</i></p> <p>In recognition of the particular challenges faced in Protestant working class communities, the Renewing Communities Programme provides a support programme under the strengthening Governance initiative to encourage people with appropriate skills to put themselves forward for appointment as school governors in these areas. The Belfast Education & Library Board is running this Programme, which will include a recruitment exercise and a mentoring support to develop the skills potential of volunteers.</p>
12	<p>Training facilities should be aimed at young people who are not academically gifted but rather provide trades which are practical and with high demand for example plumbers and bricklayers.</p>	<p>DEL is currently in the process of reconfiguring the training provision for young people. A consultation document has been issued seeking input in respect of the proposed training provision and the Department would welcome the views of the Committee on the proposed menu of provision especially with regard to addressing 'Barriers to Employment'.</p> <p>FE colleges currently offer a wide and varied vocational curriculum, in line with the current skills areas of need identified for the Northern Ireland economy, including plumbing and building.</p>	

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13	<p>Childcare facilities must be improved in order to encourage young mothers into the workplace.</p>	<p>We acknowledge that access to childcare facilities is an important factor in encouraging young parents into the workplace and recognise that by breaking the cycle of unemployment that exists for some families, the life chances of children from disadvantaged areas can be greatly improved.</p>	<p>One way in which Government demonstrates an appreciation of the importance of daycare is shown by the fact that part of the Children and Young Peoples package has been dedicated to facilitating daycare within Sure Start and this will be inextricably linked to work and training. It is therefore anticipated that young parents within the sure Start catchment areas will have the opportunity of accessing daycare through their local Sure Start project to enable them to access work focussed training. Additionally there are plans to further develop Sure Start services by establishing Children's Centres which will provide integrated care and education for young children, support for their families and help facilitate the return to work of those parents who are unemployed. This will be closely linked to the extended schools model.</p> <p>Government also facilitates access to childcare through provision of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit provided by HMRC which can meet up to 80% of childcare costs for eligible families. We are also committed to raising the status of childminding as a profession, improving the numbers of available childminders through promotion of the role and introducing quality measures and training requirements to further enhance the daycare experience for those who chose home based childcare. The introduction of the home child carer approval scheme has facilitated access to work for some parents for whom traditional day care is not appropriate, for example those with disabled children or those who work outside of the 9-5 working hours normally associated with daycare. Employing an approved home child carer now qualifies the parent to access the childcare element of the working tax credit if the other eligibility criteria are met.</p>

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13 (Cont)			<p>Sure Start aims to work with parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual and social development of children age 0 to 4, particularly those children from disadvantaged areas, to ensure they are well prepared for school and later life. It aims to meet the needs of children both directly and through supporting and empowering their parents. A key element of parental support is the facilitation of opportunities to access work and training with the addition of the provision of daycare to enable parents to access their chosen course of training.</p> <p>The Children and Young People's funding package has allocated £0.65m in 06/07 and £1.2m in 07/08 specifically to ensure that parents can access daycare in the locality via Sure Start. In addition HMRC pay a childcare element of Working Tax Credit to those families who satisfy the eligibility criteria; this means that up to 80% of childcare costs can be met. This element is now also payable to parents who chose to employ a home based childcarer since the introduction of the home child care approval scheme in 2006.</p>
14	The lack of facilities available to provide addiction counselling for adolescents must be improved as a matter of urgency.	New alcohol and drug treatment services for young people up to 18 years old have been in place across Northern Ireland from January 1 2007.	

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15	The new 18 bed adolescent inpatient mental health facility for 13-18 year olds planned as part of the Children and Young People Funding Package should be based in the centre of the area for which it is most needed – North West Belfast.	<p>There are plans to build a new 18-bed mental health adolescent inpatient unit for 14-17 year olds to replace the existing inpatient facilities at Knockbracken. An Outline Business Case is also being considered to build a replacement of the 15-bed child psychiatric unit for under 14 years joined to the adolescent unit and sharing some common facilities. The location of these facilities is planned for the Forster Green site in Belfast which already has the infrastructure in place to support them.</p> <p>Accessibility was a key factor in considering the location of these units particularly in terms of transport links i.e. access to all main arterial routes as well as to public transport. Another key factor which affected the decision regarding the siting of these regional units was the availability of trained staff already working in existing child and adolescent mental health facilities.</p>	
16	The recommendations of the Report of the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Taskforces must be taken forward.	<p>The Government is firmly committed to addressing the problems of poverty and disadvantage in the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Task Forces' areas.</p> <p>The Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service is personally overseeing this activity to maintain momentum and consistency across the range of Departments involved.</p>	<p>Following publication of the original Task Forces' Report, a successful bid to the Integrated Development Fund secured a funding package of £21.7m towards 17 projects specific to the Task Force areas. To date £16.6m IDF funding for 14 projects has been formally approved and the total costs of these projects is in the region of £50m.</p> <p>Over the past year, senior officials in relevant Northern Ireland Departments have been working closely with local community representatives in West Belfast and Greater Shankill to identify the key outstanding development opportunities for the areas and to identify and agree a mutually acceptable way forward. In January 2007, the communities produced a Report on the current needs of their areas and Departments are considering this Report and the related financial implications.</p>

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16 (Cont)			<p>Departments will then work closely with local community representatives to explain current strategies, identify relative priorities and agree an Action Plan which will set out a clear timetable for implementation.</p> <p>For example DCAL has worked closely with the local community and language activists in exploring the ways in which the recommendation for the creation of a Gaeltacht Quarter and the establishment of a Development Board to oversee delivery can be realized. To this end Integrated Development funding of almost £500,000 has been offered to An Ceathrú Gaeltachta Teo (The Gaeltacht Quarter Limited) to produce a physical masterplan for the area along with a development and marketing plan. This will also cover the costs of employing three staff for the company for three years. It is hoped that this company will become fully operational in April 2007.</p> <p>The library staff in the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) recognise the need to involve parents and grandparents more closely in children's development and are trying to make libraries more child friendly by installing new changing facilities, where possible.</p>
17	Funding decisions need to provide more than just a short term solution, they need to provide for the long term.	The Government is committed to making appropriate long term funding available to support life changes for young people and will continue to do so within the budgetary framework in place at the moment.	