



**Consultation on the
proposal to integrate
additional disability support
within the Department for
the Economy's training
programmes at Entry Level
and Level One**

July 2024

MINISTER'S FOREWORD

One of the key objectives in my economic vision is to create more opportunities for people to have good jobs. This means creating the opportunities for everyone to fulfill their potential and to make best use of their talents.



By providing vocational education and training at Entry Level and Level One, my Department supports a diverse range of young people to develop their skills and achieve qualifications to allow them to progress to the next step on their journey.

Some of our young people experience barriers to learning – we want to do all we can to remove these barriers.

The evidence shows that half of participants on these programmes have one or more disabilities. Currently a range of support mechanisms are in place to support young disabled people. This consultation seeks your views on a proposal to change the delivery of one aspect of the support provided and has been developed following engagement with stakeholders.

Getting the delivery mechanism right will better support our young people to access opportunities, and contribute to my goal of an inclusive economy.

It is important that our programme is fully accessible and inclusive by design. I welcome your views on this proposal ahead of the consultation closing date on Friday 11 October 2024.

Conor Murphy MLA
Minister for the Economy

ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

This is a consultation in relation to the Department for the Economy's (DfE) proposal to integrate additional disability support within Entry Level/Level One (ELL1) training programmes.

This document provides an outline of the proposal and DfE invites feedback via responses to the questions set out on page 12.

Duration of the consultation

This is a 12-week consultation. The deadline for responses is 17.00h on Friday 11 October 2024.

How to Respond

We would ask that you respond to the consultation using the online survey which can be accessed at the [consultation page](#) on the nidirect website.

If you are unable to respond using the online consultation facility, you can email your response using the response template provided at the DfE consultation page to the following email address: ELL1.Youth@economy-ni.gov.uk

Alternatively, you may post your response to DfE at:

To be opened by the addressee only

Youth Inclusion Branch

Department for the Economy

5th Floor, Adelaide House

39-49 Adelaide Street

Belfast, BT2 8FD

If you require documents to be provided in an alternative format, please contact us by email: ELL1.Youth@economy-ni.gov.uk

Unless specified, DfE will treat all responses as public. Therefore, it is your responsibility to mark any confidential submissions clearly. DfE may contact some respondents directly to clarify issues raised in the responses and may not publish such clarification correspondence.

Before you submit a response, please read the Privacy Notice published alongside the consultation documents on the DfE consultation page, which shows how we will use personal information as part of the processing of responses.

Following the end of the consultation, DfE may publish anonymised direct quotes from your consultation response. In addition, we may make responses available to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Equality Screening

A draft Section 75 Equality Screening document has been published along with this consultation. The proposal is currently screened out with mitigation, however DfE welcomes additional information or feedback that would be relevant to the screening. We will update the draft Section 75 Equality Screening following the consultation.

Child Rights Impact Assessment

A Child Rights Impact Assessment has been completed and published along with this consultation.

PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AT ENTRY LEVEL AND LEVEL ONE

DfE commissions work-based vocational education and training opportunities for young people at Entry Level and Level One through its Skills for Life and Work (SfLW) programme.

Current Provision

SfLW is open to 16–17 year-olds, with extended age eligibility for young people with a disability and young people who are care experienced (up to 22 and up to 24 respectively). Participants have a training entitlement of 104 weeks, or 156 weeks for those with disabilities.

The aims of the programme are to:

- address individual barriers to learning where appropriate and relevant;
- prepare participants for progression to the NI traineeship, further education, ApprenticeshipsNI or other employment; and
- provide participants with access to regulated qualifications.

All participants target qualifications in:

- personal, social and employability skills;
- professional and technical learning; and
- Essential Skills (where they do not have relevant prior achievement aligned with their capabilities), i.e. literacy, numeracy and ICT / digital skills.

More information on SfLW can be found at [Skills for Life and Work | nidirect](#).

Future Provision

ELL1 provision is provided by selected Further Education Colleges and a range of contracted training providers through regular procurements.

The provision of vocational education and training at Entry Level and Level One has experienced a period of reform. SflW replaced the Training for Success programme in 2021. Changes introduced in SflW were aimed at making the programme more accessible for young people by reducing barriers to participation. These included a reduction in the weekly hours requirement, including flexible attendance while young people settle into the programme, flexibility around work placement and a new broad-based occupational area that allows participants to undertake more than one vocational area.

The next iteration of the ELL1 provision is due to be in place from August 2025.

Current Disability Support (Status quo – Option 1)

The young people taking part in ELL1 training programmes have a diverse range of needs and barriers to their participation and progress. Many participants enter the programmes with a disability or disabilities, or with a complex range of issues and barriers to learning and achievement, including mental health challenges. The training providers and FE Colleges delivering these programmes are therefore required to provide support and make reasonable adjustments within their delivery of training. This is supported by additional funding for the provider and additional time on programme for the participant.

For those young people with a disability who may require further support, in addition to that provided by their training organisation, the Department currently commissions, manages and funds a separate Disability Support Services (DSS) contract.

The intention of the DSS is to provide appropriate, proportionate and high-quality information, advice and support to participants who have a disability, both prior to entering (Pre-Entry) and while on the programme (In-Training), to help them overcome barriers to learning and to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Under the current model, providers can access the additional disability support via a separate contract, which is managed by the Department. However, this adds a level of administrative burden which can lead to challenges around the planning and provision of the support needed by young disabled people on the programme. Under this separate contract, the additional support is provided by a different organisation.

Typically, around 50% of participants¹ on ELL1 training programmes present with one or more disabilities, and around half of these access the additional support provided through the DSS contracts.

On the current DSS contract, disabilities are categorised as follows:

- **A** Cognition and Learning
- **B** Social, Behavioural, Emotional and Well-Being
- **C** Speech, Language and Communication Needs
- **D** Sensory
- **E** Physical Needs

The vast majority (over 90%) of support provided through the current DSS contract for participants on SfLW relates to categories A and B.

Review of DSS

Disability support is key in widening the participation of young people with additional needs and barriers in the Department's ELL1 training programmes. A review of disability support provided on the previous ELL1 provision was undertaken in 2020/21 which included consulting with young people who used the service. Following this review, a number of changes and improvements were made to the administrative processes.

Changes were introduced to the current DSS provision through the subsequent procurement process to award the contract on the basis of the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) based on hourly rates and Value for Money and a more effective regime of contract management. These changes provide the Department more assurance that the DSS is meeting the needs of those participants who require additional help, whilst ensuring the Department's responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SEND0) are met.

Legislation makes it unlawful for education providers to discriminate against students and prospective students with disabilities, including by failing to make reasonable adjustments.²

1 Statistical bulletin published June 2024 – 51% of young people on SfLW have a disability. [Skills for Life and Work statistics September 2022 to January 2024 | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

2 Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) makes it unlawful for service providers, including those providing vocational guidance and training, to discriminate against disabled people (Part III sections 19-21A) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SEND0) makes it unlawful for further and higher education institutions to discriminate against disabled students (Chapter II).

However, the current delivery model has challenges:

- blurred lines between roles and responsibilities of each party;
- lack of continuity in support workers supplied which can be to the detriment of some young people who require consistency;
- rigidity of operating separate contracts does not support flexible delivery in terms of being able to adjust support needs easily; and
- support not always being in place in a timely fashion either through recruitment issues or miscommunication.

The Department wishes to ensure that the disability support model maximises the support provided to participants with a disability and is delivered flexibly to meet the specific needs of the young people on ELL1 training programmes.

Ultimately, the Department wishes to have the optimum delivery model to help all young people with disabilities achieve their full potential on the new ELL1 programme.

OPTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION

The purpose of this consultation is to consider the options for disability support provided to young people accessing DfE ELL1 provision.

Option 1 – Status quo – Separate contracts for ELL1 and Disability Support.

Option 2 – A new integrated delivery model where both training and disability support are provided by the contracted Training Provider.

Current Disability Support Provision (Option 1)

As outlined previously, under the current model, additional disability support is provided via a separate contract, managed by the Department. Under this separate contract, the additional support is provided by a different organisation.

Proposal for new integrated provision (Option 2)

The proposal we are consulting on is to transition from the current delivery model, where additional support is provided by a different organisation, to an integrated provision that includes disability support as part of the mainstream offer to disabled participants³ provided by the training provider. This proposal would give the core providers additional support and responsibility to deliver or source support as appropriate for the young people on their programme.

The aim of this proposal is to maximise the support provided and offer a more seamless service to those participants on the ELL1 programme who require additional support to address their disability needs, whilst taking part in the training or educational aspects of the programme. Organisations delivering the programmes are already identifying the specific needs for young people and making referrals under the current system. Under this proposed delivery model, they would be able to put in place any adjustments they see fit in a more flexible way to support young people with disabilities, reducing bureaucracy.

The desired outcome is to support participants with disabilities to remain on the programme, have a positive education and skills experience and achieve their targeted qualifications so that they can progress towards and into further or higher education, training, and employment.

In order to fund this additional disability support, the Department would propose to increase the weekly training fees for participants with disabilities, which would allow providers to provide or source support in a tailored way. As part of the appraisal process, for this option, DfE will consider measures, including those of a contractual nature, to ensure that this support would be ring-fenced to ensure that the funding will be directed towards those young people who need it.

³ Under this proposal, participants with disabilities on the current SflW programme would continue to access the additional disability support via a separately contracted DSS. The proposal to integrate additional disability support would be for the next iteration of ELL1 provision and participants with disabilities joining that programme from August 2025.

Under Option 2, the procurement specification for the new programme would set out the requirements on training providers to provide this support to people with disabilities.

As part of the proposal, other measures being considered include the recruitment of a disability specialist to offer advice and guidance to organisations, but also quality assurance to the Department, alongside revised monitoring arrangements and processes so that the quality of the learning experience for people with disabilities is kept under review. Under Option 2 a review would be undertaken, after a period of time, to ensure the provision meets the needs of people with disabilities on the programme.

Pre-Entry Support

Pre-Entry Support is intended for young people with disabilities who have indicated a desire to join SfLW. It has been devised in order to identify potential support needs prior to starting training. DSS Contractors are contracted to provide Pre-Entry Support to these potential participants.

The purpose of this support is to prepare a potential participant for the type of training they wish to apply for and provide advice and support on areas such as:

- advice on benefit entitlements;
- assistance that may be provided in relation to their learning;
- information on equipment that could be provided whilst they are in training;
- information to Training Provider staff/tutors on specific disability(ies) and how these might impact on a potential participant's ability to train; and
- information and advice on reasonable adjustments to be put in place prior to entering training.

An internal review of the current Pre-Entry Support for young disabled people has indicated that some of this support is duplicated elsewhere, (for example: provision of information around benefit entitlement).

As part of this consultation, the Department is seeking views on how Pre-Entry Support should look going forward.

Stakeholder Engagement

This proposal has been developed following a review of current provision and engagement with stakeholders. The Department hosted a range of workshops with stakeholders – including training providers and FE Colleges, currently delivering SfLW. Separate workshops were held with representatives of the disability sector to provide them with background on the SfLW programme and seek their views on the proposal.

Comments from both current providers and representatives of the disability sector on the proposal included that it would enable:

- more flexible, tailored and timely support for all participants;
- a more open and integrated support environment, with a greater proportion of participants likely to ask for additional help from training and support staff that they know and trust; and
- teaching staff to take more responsibility for identifying the needs of their own trainees and suggesting the help that may be most appropriate.

The Department intends that the new ELL1 provision, however that will look, will ensure that investment in additional support meets the needs of young people with disabilities.

DfE welcomes your views on the above by responding to the questions contained in the online survey and noted below.

Next Steps

Following the consultation period, DfE will consider the responses received to inform the options to be taken forward for appraisal. DfE plan to update the Economy Committee on the outcome of the consultation and the proposed way forward.

A summary of responses and details of the action that DfE has taken will be published on www.economy-ni.gov.uk

Questions

- Do you think the current disability support model used within DfE programmes at Entry Level / Level One (Option 1) is the most appropriate way to support young disabled people to complete their training? *(The online survey/response template will ask for a Yes/No/Don't Know answer but will also have space to allow for any additional comments.)*
- Do you think that the proposal to integrate additional disability support within DfE programmes at Entry Level / Level One (Option 2) would be the most appropriate way to support young disabled people to complete their training? *(The online survey/response template will ask for a Yes/No/Don't Know answer but will also have space to allow for any additional comments.)*
- Do you think that the proposal outlined under Option 2 would meet the needs of young disabled people on DfE's Entry Level / Level One training programmes? *(The online survey/response template will ask for a Yes/No/Don't Know answer but will also have space to allow for any additional comments.)*
- Do you think Pre-Entry Support should change from what is currently provided? *(The online survey/response template will ask for a Yes/No/Don't Know answer but will also have space to allow for any additional comments.)*
- In your opinion, how can we best tailor Pre-Entry Support for young people considering vocational training as their next step? *(The online survey/response template will have space to allow for any additional comments.)*
- Do you wish to leave any additional information or feedback, including anything that would be relevant to the equality screening? *(The online survey/response template will have space to allow for any additional comments.)*