



**Response of the Ulster Teachers' Union
to the
Future Provision for Children in the Early Years with
Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

The Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU) welcomes the opportunity to furnish you with our views on the Consultation into the Future Provision for Children in the Early Years with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

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.

Please see scanned document pages 1-11 & 16-18

11. The 2 Phase Framework of Provision

In the consultation document we have concerns over who and what liaison will be available in the Integrated Framework of Support 2 phase Programme of Provision (0 to 4 years) as detailed. In the experience of our members, a well resourced team can be effective but all areas need to be resourced adequately. These teams must be easily and quickly accessible regardless of geographical location. It is important that a professional workforce has the capacity to deal with the provisions as set out in this document.

12. Proposal 1 – Communication

We disagree with or are uncertain about several aspects of communication as set out in Proposal 1, such as the methods of liaising and communicating with parents for example. Who, when, where and with what information shall be communicated with the parents? We also would wish to see reference to the practitioner and would wish to see teacher based input in the Early Years Panel. The documentation in the proposal lacks the depth and detail to allow us to respond in some areas.

13. Proposal 2 – Partnerships

We agree with this area of Proposal 2 - Partnerships. However, a joined up engagement with the Health and Social Care partners is needed in order to enable them to deliver their side of the integrated provision. Again, integrated fully funded teacher-led practitioners are necessary. With regard to the Joint Education/Health Working group, a practitioner/teacher must be represented on this.

14. Proposal 3 – Support which precedes the pre-school year

The UTU agrees with this aspect in Proposal 3 – Support.

With regard to **Enhance the skills of early years practitioners to identify, assess and meet the needs of children facing barriers to learning**, we feel that there are many complex needs that will need support. Not every situation will be able to have trained practitioners able to meet the needs of the child when the need arises. So it will be important that the capacity to quickly train and support early year practitioners can be met with adequate funding and resources.

It is not clear who will **Provide parent and child sessions across a range of early years SEN settings for children aged 0 to 3 years.**

With regard to the point, **Establish and facilitate parent cluster groups throughout the EA, supported by health and social care and voluntary and community providers**, the UTU notes that input will also be necessary from playgroup leaders and educational practitioners in these cluster groups. There will also be a requirement for a baseline of professional skills required to meet the needs of the child.

15. Proposal 3 – Support which precedes the pre-school year – AS ABOVE.

16. Proposal 4 – Additional Support to Mainstream Pre-school Settings

The UTU disagrees with point 1 of Proposal 4 – Additional Support: Through an agreed framework, enable mainstream pre-school settings to access additional EA professional and practical in-school support to meet the needs of children with SEN. It is important that in meeting the needs of children with SEN that the other children in the school setting are not disadvantaged. Classroom assistant provision, for example, will need to be fully supported in funding to ensure that time is given to preparation, planning and evaluating and not just pupil contact time. The UTU also notes that recruitment of Early Years Practitioners must not only have qualifications but the relevant experience with Early Years SEN. It is important that the appropriate and necessary training is fully funded.

Finally, with regard to additional support, who determines what is appropriate to the child's specific needs?

17. Proposal 5 – Extension of the Continuum of Mainstream Pre-school Provision

The UTU is uncertain with regard to the pilot of Early Years SEN centres mentioned in Proposal 5. If the pilot is deemed to have been successful it will be necessary that SEN centres are adequately financed and resources provided at the same level as the pilot. It will be necessary to examine any research of a pilot closely. We are uncertain that it can be replicated on a full scale provision across the Province.

The UTU disagrees with the point to Establish capacity at around 12 children per class, for a minimum of 15 hours per week, with flexibility to meet the individual needs of the child. "Around" is ambiguous and we would rather that the ratio is 8 children to 1 fully qualified and experienced teacher.

The delivery model management must be linked to the capacity of the educational setting with adequate level of support fully funded.

18. Proposal 6: Special School Provision

The UTU agrees with some areas of Proposal 6 – Special School Provision. With regard to consistent access arrangements, it must be noted that in rural areas this can only be achieved with funding to enable adequate provision. In the best interest of all learners, the UTU notes that experienced and qualified teachers are necessary to lead the workforce in the nursery settings.

With regard to **Establish capacity at around 8 children per class, for a minimum of 15 hours per week, with flexibility to meet the individual needs of the child,** the UTU would insist that 8 would be the maximum children per class.

The delivery model must meet the needs of the child and fair equitable provision must be provided and fully funded.

With regard to the last point - **Support children's transition from nursery into an appropriate Year 1 placement,** the UTU is uncertain about what appropriate support will be in place, although is in agreement with this in principle.

19. General Comments

Although the UTU generally agrees with many proposals in **the Future Provision for Children in the Early Years with Special Educational Needs (SEN)** consultation document, there are some areas where we are uncertain or disagree with. The adequate funding will be necessary for the training of staff in the early years setting. It is also important that the EA has the capacity and resources available to meet the needs of children when necessary.

*** 22. Are you aware of any evidence we should consider in respect of potential rural impacts?**

The UTU has taken note from members that in some rural settings pupils may be on transport to and from the educational setting for long periods of time.