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Report of the Short-Life Working Group on Recording and Reporting in Schools

Summary

This report discusses the issues associated with recording and reporting on young people with special educational/training needs (SETN). It makes recommendations to encourage common approaches nationally, to ensure that reports appropriate to key purposes can be made available, either from schools or from careers service companies, for all young people with SETN.

Remit and Recommendations

Remit

The group met on 2 occasions in early 1998 to:

- review school processes for assessing and communicating pupils' academic and personal/social/vocational progress and attainment;
- identify good practice which is consistent with national advice on assessment recording and reporting; and
- report, summarising the review and recommending steps to be taken to improve quality and consistency of practice across Scotland.

Recommendations

- Schools should be encouraged to implement common approaches nationally for recording and reporting core minimum information on young people with SETN. The target audience includes education authorities, and schools' senior management teams, guidance staff, and learning support staff;
- Advice and support should be provided for schools to self-evaluate current practice, and to promote and disseminate the agreed common approaches.

This report includes the following items as means of addressing the 2 recommendations above:

- an outline specification for a self-evaluation resource for schools. The proposed resource would be based on national performance indicators applied to recording and reporting on SETN;

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- an outline reporting format with accompanying notes of guidance. This illustrative reporting format shows the range of core information which is suggested as appropriate. It is recommended that all schools dealing with pupils of secondary age are encouraged to adopt the reporting format as school policy, thus ensuring the availability of core information for all young people with SETN.

The Background

Reviews carried out by SE and HIE indicated that variations in assessment practices and procedures presented major difficulties when attempting to ensure appropriate provision for young people with SETN. Further work carried out by a Scottish Office Working Group, with members from SE, HIE and the careers service, concluded that this problem existed across all post-school provision. One of the main difficulties identified by the Working Group was the flow of information from schools.

A research study into assessment was commissioned from Professor George Thomson of Edinburgh University. To complement this study, a short-life Working Group was set up to consider the difficulties associated with recording and reporting essential information on attainments and support needs for young people with SETN. These difficulties adversely affect the communication of key information to agents with a legitimate interest, for example at the point of the individual achieving school leaving age.

The principal objective of the group was to explore the issues and suggest possible strategies for improving procedures for recording and reporting key information on young people with SETN – in essence to ensure that an appropriate report on SETN might, in future, be readily obtained for all relevant young people. It was noted that, in terms of equality of opportunity, providing young people with SETN with a report of the kind envisaged, would equate to provision of a UCAS report for a young person applying for entry to higher education. It was recognised that it would be important to ensure acceptance of such a principle of equality in schools. Improvements of the kind proposed would ensure that employers, training agents and others with a legitimate interest in the young people involved were better informed about the individuals' strengths and support requirements, in order to recognise better each young person's talents and to take appropriate action to support them in training or in the workplace.

These young people would include those for whom Records of Needs had been opened, and a wider group with a range of identified special needs with implications for employers and training agents. There was a specific interest in those young people with poor or irregular patterns of attendance for whom recording and reporting is problematic.

Standards and Quality in Reporting for SETN

Proforma and Guidelines

The agreed national approach should be underpinned by a common proforma and guidelines. These illustrate the proposed scale of the core record, and raise the issues which have to be dealt with in the young person's report. These guidelines should be promoted as constituting the minimum core information for all young people from age 16. It was recognised that there are also arguments for use of the core report from an earlier stage (e.g. S2 or S3) since some of the young people in the target group will show irregular patterns of attendance in their later years in school.

Self-evaluation of Practice

The Working Group identified a selection of national performance indicators (PI) from "How Good is Our School?" which are believed suitable for evaluation of practice in recording and reporting on SETN. The performance indicators are:

- PI 3.4 assessment as part of teaching;
- PI 4.3 quality of curricular and vocational guidance;
- PI 4.4 guidance role in monitoring progress and attainment;
- PI 4.6 implementation of SEN legislation; and
- PI 5.3 links with other schools, agencies, employers and the community.

It would be appropriate to prepare a short manual, with each of the performance indicators illustrated using SETN contexts, for flexible use in staff development activities. The resource would provide important support for the introduction of national standard approaches.

Next Steps

It will be necessary to address a number of issues to achieve any degree of success in encouraging common approaches nationally.

- Policy acceptance and high level endorsement; dissemination should engage all the EAs and encourage their acceptance of the proposals as policy for their establishments. Independent establishments should likewise be recruited. It will be highly advantageous if key influential agencies including the careers service companies, LECs and EBPs, and employers and training agents communicate clearly their support for the introduction of the national standard.
- Staff response; the principle of equality of opportunity (where SETN needs are equated to UCAS requirements and expectations) was raised earlier in this report. It will be crucial that staff are persuaded of the validity of the SETN case.

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- Support for staff; the proposed manual/performance indicator resource should be developed and disseminated. The reporting format should remain simple and of transparent value, to attract uptake and a positive attitude more generally.
- Dissemination through relevant current development opportunities, for example Higher Still, and the imminent relaunch of National Records of Achievement/Progress File. It will be helpful to associate these SETN proposals closely with relevant developments in assessing recording and reporting more widely.

It might be appropriate to consider mounting a suitable event, such as a "launch" conference or seminar, perhaps related to other plans of the Beattie Committee. Such an event could achieve a high profile among the EAs and agents more widely, and could form a starting point for engaging agencies eg in the use of the self-evaluation resource. An alternative would be to secure a place in other key relevant staff development events.

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Copies of the full report and background documents can be obtained from Anne Dagg at

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