

Subject:

Circular Number: DEL FE 13/05
DE 2006/03

VOCATIONAL ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME 2006/07

Date of Issue: 6 January 2006

Target Audience:

- Principals/Directors of FE Colleges
- Chairs of Governing Bodies (FE)
- Principals of post-primary schools
- Principals of Special Schools with post-primary pupils
- Chairs of Boards of Governors (schools)

Summary of Contents:

This circular, issued by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education (DE), details the arrangements for schools and colleges wishing to participate in the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) during 2006/07. This circular describes:

- How VEP is evolving;
- The funding available for 2006/07 and the criteria to be used to determine funding and where applications for funding exceed the total sum available;
- The application and approval process for 2006/07 including the timescales for applications and decisions.

Enquiries:

Any enquiries about the content of this Circular should be addressed to:

Colleges:

Sarah Armstrong
Learning and Curriculum
Policy Branch
Department for Employment
& Learning
Adelaide House
39 – 49 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8FD

Schools:

Sybil Campbell
Curriculum & Qualifications Branch
Department of Education
Rathgael House
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

Governor Awareness:

Essential

Status of Contents:

For information and action by
colleges and schools

Related Documents:

Stage 1 and 2 application forms
Exemplar Service Level Agreement
(available on DE/DEL websites)

Superseded Documents:

DEL FE 02/05
DE 2005/17

Expiry Date:

N/A

DEL & DE Websites:

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/home.htm>
<http://www.deni.gov.uk>

DEL: Tel: 028 90 257497
Fax: 028 90 257417

DE: Tel 028 91 279539
Fax: 028 91 279100

Introduction

1. This circular has been prepared by the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to inform schools and Further Education colleges about funding for the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) in the 2006/07 academic year.

Background

2. The development of collaborative partnerships at a local level is aimed at extending the vocational offer available to school pupils, and assisting schools and others to work together in ways which will become the norm once the Entitlement Framework becomes a statutory requirement from September 2009. Whilst the VEP focuses on extending such vocational provision, it is set within the wider context of the Entitlement Framework, which will in time also extend the academic offer available to pupils.
3. The VEP is a transitional programme, the aim of which is to provide the two Departments with the opportunity to test models of effective collaborative working, and disseminate good practice to schools and colleges.

How VEP is Evolving

4. During 2004/05, 6 colleges and 34 schools were involved in the programme, with 16 colleges and 175 schools participating in 2005/06.
5. An independent evaluation of the first year of VEP (2004/05) revealed many positive aspects of collaboration between schools and colleges, with tangible benefits for the pupils, schools and colleges involved. It also identified a number of obstacles to collaborative working, and these are being addressed in DE's further guidance to schools on the Entitlement Framework, and the refinement of the VEP application process for 2006/07. A further evaluation is being undertaken for the 2005/06 academic year, the result of which will be shared with schools and colleges.
6. The two Departments have agreed that VEP in 2006/07 will be based on the college-led model of collaboration employed in 2005/06, with some refinements. Whilst this has proved an effective model, the legislative responsibility to secure access for pupils to the required range of courses in the Entitlement Framework will rest with schools, and VEP needs to evolve accordingly. VEP in 2006/07 will therefore be a more learner-centered purchaser/provider model, funded primarily through colleges, with schools expected to take a more proactive role in forming collaborative arrangements.
7. When schools are considering the range of vocational courses they wish to provide their pupils with access to, it will be important that best use is made of the specialist facilities and lecturing expertise on offer. It is not in pupils' interests to have unnecessary duplication of provision, and the two Departments will take this into account when considering applications.

8. Provision in an area is likely to be most effective where it results from discussions at a local level involving schools and FE colleges, and which complements and extends the options available, in a way that addresses the needs of individual pupils.
9. The Entitlement Framework will not prescribe how schools should provide their pupils with access to vocational education and training. However, most vocational provision outside of the school will be arranged in partnership with FE Colleges. VEP in 2006/07 is structured in a way that reflects this reality. Schools wishing to work with other providers of vocational education and training may also submit applications to the DE/DEL assessment panel. In such cases, schools must satisfy themselves that the provider meets the necessary standards in terms of health and safety, pastoral care etc.
10. Vocational courses may be delivered at a school or a college, or a combination of sites. This information will be requested as part of the application process so that the Departments can monitor the evolving pattern of collaborative activity under VEP.
11. The evaluation of VEP to date has highlighted the value of schools providing some induction for college staff to help ensure that they are familiar with the school's modus operandi and to help with progression between school and college. Evaluation evidence also supports the practice of having a supervisory school presence off-site, and the value of parental involvement prior to a pupil being involved in the VEP.
12. The two Departments are keen that applications should reflect some other features of the Entitlement Framework : innovative approaches to the delivery of courses such as distance learning; groups of schools collaborating with a provider to deliver a course, or lecturers travelling to schools. Ideally, there should be a good geographic spread in VEP provision, with bids from schools in both rural and urban areas. In addition, it would be desirable to have boys and girls, and the two age groups (14-16 and post-16), as well represented as possible.
13. In summary, the objectives for this phase of VEP are:
 - To improve access to high quality vocational courses for school pupils;
 - To move towards a purchaser/provider funding model;
 - To build upon good practice and established collaborative activity;
 - To promote innovative and effective collaborative working (which may take a number of forms, for example, schools grouping together to ensure that applications meet class size viability thresholds).

Funding

14. The two Departments have committed a total of £4m for the 2006/07 academic year to take VEP forward, which matches the sum committed for 2005/06. This amount is in addition to funding that DE will provide during the 2006/07 academic year to allow pupils to complete their second year of study under

Phase 6 of the Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative. The £4m for VEP is earmarked and will be used exclusively for that purpose.

15. The Entitlement Framework will foster a purchaser/provider relationship between schools and colleges, and the VEP will increasingly reflect that. The transitional nature of VEP in 2006/07 means that funding will again be directed towards colleges, however, schools will be more actively involved in the application process. Schools will be required to liaise with their local FE college, and neighbouring schools if class sizes are small, to determine the content of their VEP application. FE colleges will be responsible for collating applications from schools in their area, and submitting composite bids to a joint DE/DEL project team for consideration. The application form requires evidence that the proposed provision has been agreed by all parties involved.
16. The Key Stage 4 Flexibility Initiative will end with the introduction of the revised curriculum in September 2006. Funding during 2006/07 will be provided for pupils in their second year of study, allocated by DE on the same basis as previous phases of the initiative. Activity previously funded under this initiative may be eligible for funding under VEP.

Funding Criteria

17. The overarching objective is to offer opportunities that best meet the educational needs of pupils. In order to protect the interests of pupils, priority will be assigned to bids that relate to pupils in the second year of a two year VEP funded course, and the application process requires schools to clearly identify such pupils. Both Departments wish VEP to have relevance for special schools, and until the full implications of the Entitlement Framework for this sector are clear, applications will continue to be considered even if all the criteria cannot be met.
18. Within that context, there are four main strands to the criteria for VEP in 2006/07, which reflect the priorities of the two sponsoring departments. Firstly, quality of vocational provision and clear progression routes; secondly, degree of fit with priority skills areas in order to meet economic needs; thirdly, the economic viability of course provision in terms of class size; and finally, how the proposed provision demonstrates collaborative intent by schools, and enables the school to move closer to meeting the full requirements of the Entitlement Framework. These priorities are described in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Quality of Provision and Clear Progression Routes

19. It is important that schools should be able to demonstrate that the proposed vocational provision is in the best interests of its pupils, and offers clear progression routes that complement the provision of careers advice within the school. Where possible, schools should demonstrate the involvement of parents and pupils in agreeing the proposed provision.

Priority Skill Areas

20. Priority will be given to innovative proposals that encourage the development of enterprise skills among young people through provision that relates clearly to

economic requirements (local and/or regional), the promotion of employability and entrepreneurship. To ensure opportunities for progression, courses considered for funding will be those that will lead to an accredited qualification or are units of courses that could lead to an accredited qualification. Bids for funding will be assessed using the following priority areas.

(a) Skills: provision that is

- on the National Qualifications Framework¹ (NQF); and
- clearly and robustly linked to any of the following 6 priority skill areas;
 - Software Engineering
 - Electronics
 - Manufacturing Engineering
 - ICT
 - Hospitality, Catering and Tourism
 - Construction

As a guide to what is considered suitable provision within the 6 priority skill areas, schools should refer to the 15 'New Sector and Subject Categories' (NSSC), which are described within QCA's database of accredited qualifications www.openquals.org.uk.

(b) Local relevance: provision that is

- on the National Qualifications Framework¹ (NQF); and
- clearly in line with the following areas of the NSSC:
 - Area 1 - Health, public services and care
 - Area 3 - Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care
 - Area 7 - Retail and Commercial Enterprise
 - Area 8 - Leisure, Travel and Tourism
 - Area 9 - Arts, Media and publishing
 - Area 14 - Preparation for Life and work

Viability of Classes

21. The VEP experience in 2005/06 has prompted both departments to assign a lower priority to bids which are not economically viable in terms of class size. In such cases, schools should consider clustering with other schools in their locality to increase class size. This reflects how schools will operate once the Entitlement Framework becomes a statutory requirement.

¹ If schools wish to include as part of their bid a course that meets all the stated criteria except for being on the NQF, they may contact DE to receive advice prior to submitting an application. Whilst courses outside the NQF will not be supported in almost all cases, both departments are prepared to consider the possibility of a small number of exceptions if the vocational benefits for pupils are compelling.

22. Following discussions between DEL and the FE sector, it has been agreed that a minimum class size, for the purposes of VEP, should be 16 pupils. Bids with class sizes smaller than 16 will be assigned a lower priority, and if they are funded, it is likely that this will be at a reduced level. Schools should liaise with neighbouring schools and their local FE College to ensure that the minimum class size is achieved and maintained.

Collaboration and the Entitlement Framework

23. As part of the application process, schools are required to describe in what way they have acted collaboratively, for example, clustering with neighbouring schools to achieve a viable class size. Schools must also describe how the proposed provision enhances the current range of course options open to pupils. This will demonstrate to the joint DE/DEL assessment panel that schools are considering appropriate collaborative arrangements in order to progress towards meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework.
24. The Departments are aware that local 'learning communities' are already forming in certain areas. This consortium approach will facilitate local dialogue and the development of proposals for a coherent range of provision.

Application Process and Timetable

25. On receipt of this guidance, schools should initiate discussions with their local FE College(s) to identify courses that would best meet the needs of their pupils. For convenience, listed below are the relevant contacts:

Armagh	Mr T Kennedy	028 3752 2205	t.kennedy@armaghcollege.ac.uk
Belfast	Ann Marie Barr	028 9026 5496	abarr@belfastinstitute.ac.uk
Castlereagh	James Lee	028 9070 8201	j.lee@castlereagh.ac.uk
Causeway	Mr I Houston	028 7034 0113	ian.houston@causeway.ac.uk
East Antrim	Mrs Pamela Shields	028 9085 5015	Pam.shields@eaifhe.ac.uk
East Down	Stephen Glass	028 44611502	stephen.glass@edifhe.ac.uk
East Tyrone	Tom Forsythe	028 8772 2323	tforsythe@etcfhe.ac.uk
Fermanagh	Vincent Murphy	028 6634 2254	murphyv@fermanaghcoll.ac.uk
Limavady	Dr Anne Heaslett	028 77761001	draheaslett@limavady.ac.uk
Lisburn	Josephine Kelly	028 9262 6773	jkelly@liscoll.ac.uk
Newry	Brian Doran	028 3025 9655	doranb@nkifhe.ac.uk
North Down	Willie Maxwell	028 9127 6757	williemaxwell@ndai.ac.uk
North East	Dr Catherine O'Mullan	028 2566 4281	comullan@nei.ac.uk
North West	Marion Johnston	028 7127 6109	marion.johnston@nwi.ac.uk
Omagh	Leo Murphy	028 8225 5215	leo.murphy@omagh.ac.uk
Upper Bann	John Quinn	028 3839 7800	quinnj@ubi.ac.uk

26. Schools should then complete a Stage 1 application form, in consultation with their partner college². This form is available for download from the DE website at www.deni.gov.uk and should be completed electronically (see above table for contact e-mail addresses). Section 1 of this form collects basic information that will be common for each course being applied for, and need only be completed once. Section 2 should be completed for each cohort and course being applied

² Schools wishing to partner with an institution other than an FE College should contact DE for further advice.

for. If schools are collaborating to increase cohort size, they should jointly agree the contents of the form with their partner college and each participating school should complete and sign Section 4 of the Stage 1 application form. In order to help colleges meet the deadline of 28 February 2006, it would be helpful if schools and colleges could agree Stage 1 application forms by **14 February 2006**.

27. Evaluation evidence has highlighted the value of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in ensuring a common understanding of what is expected by all partners in any collaborative arrangement. An example of a SLA has been placed on the DE and DEL websites, and this may be downloaded and adapted as necessary to fit with local arrangements. Stage 1 applications should feature as an integral part of each school(s)/college Service Level Agreement.
28. FE colleges should collate all Stage 1 applications received from partner schools, and prepare a composite Stage 2 application using the form which is available for download from www.delni.gov.uk. When the collated bid is complete, Stage 1 and Stage 2 forms should be e-mailed to sybil.campbell@deni.gov.uk and sarah.armstrong@delni.gov.uk by **28 February 2006**. In all cases evidence is required that will allow for verification that the proposed provision has been signed off by the relevant school(s) and partner college. Where electronic signatures are unavailable, the electronic application should be supplemented with a hard copy version. Signed hard copy versions should be retained by both school and college, and incorporated within the Service Level Agreement.
29. The two Departments will jointly assess each application received from the FE colleges. ELBs, ETI and LSDA will be asked to provide advice, but the final decision on allocations will be made by the two Departments.
30. On the evidence of VEP in 2005/06, where bids of over £7.5m were received against a budget of £4m, schools and colleges cannot expect to have bids met in full. Schools and colleges will be advised of provisional allocations by **24 March 2006**, which should allow sufficient time for planning purposes.
31. If schools, in consultation with their partner colleges, consider that the criteria have not been applied fairly, joint appeals may be submitted to the two Departments in writing. The closing date for appeals will be **7 April 2006**.
32. Final allocations will be confirmed, and made available to colleges in two tranches, after numbers are confirmed with schools and colleges in September 2006.

Arrangements for 2007/08

33. VEP will continue in 2007/08, but it is too early to determine the level of funding that will be available, or any adaptations that may be made to the pilot. Further evaluation work will be carried out on the 2005/06 pilot, and it is intended that the 2006/07 pilot will also be subject to evaluation.