

Subject:

ENTITLEMENT FRAMEWORK SUPPORT

**STRAND ONE: VOCATIONAL ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME
2007/08 (Revised)**

Circular Number: DEL FE 02/07

DE 2007/03

Revised

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Target Audience:

- Principals of post-primary schools
- Principals of Special Schools with post-primary pupils
- Chairs of Boards of Governors (schools)
- Principals/Directors of FE colleges
- Chairs of Governing Bodies (FE)
- Education and Library Boards (ELBs)
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)
- Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)

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 providers of applied/Professional and Technical education wishing to participate in the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) during 2007/08. This circular describes:

- The background to VEP and how it is evolving;
- The criteria to be used to determine approval for VEP provision;
- The application and approval process for 2007/08 including the timescales for applications and decisions.

Enquiries:

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Governor Awareness:

Essential

Status of Contents:

For information and action by FE colleges and schools

Related Documents:

VEP application form
Exemplar Service Level Agreement
(available on DE/DEL websites)

Superseded Documents:

DEL FE 02/05 FE13/05
DE 2005/17 2006/03

Expiry Date:

N/A

DEL & DE Websites:

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

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

DE: Tel 028 91 279353
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, Further Education colleges and other providers of applied and Professional and Technical education about funding for the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) in the 2007/08 academic year.

Context

2. The Education (NI) Order 2006 provides the broad legislative framework for a number of key education reforms, under the Entitled to Succeed (e2s) Programme, including the revised curriculum, assessment arrangements and the Entitlement Framework (EF).
3. The EF is a key element of the new post-primary arrangements, and will address the current inequalities of access for pupils in relation to the numbers and range of courses available to them, and the lack of emphasis on the Professional and Technical knowledge and skills that the economy needs.
4. From September 2009 all pupils aged 14 and upwards must have access to a minimum number of general and applied courses. Pupils will be able to choose from a wide variety of courses, which meet their needs, interests and career plans. The EF will be given statutory effect progressively and will ultimately require schools to offer access to at least 24 courses for pupils at KS4 and 27 courses for pupils post-16, with at least one third applied and at least one third general, as defined by the Department of Education.
5. Initial guidance on the classification of courses as general or applied was published by the Department of Education on 30 November 2006 (Circular 2006/24), and this should be used by schools as a reference point for planning VEP provision that will be classified as applied for the purpose of meeting the requirements of the EF. Schools, or providers on behalf of schools, may contact DE for advice on the classification of any course that is not currently listed, and this offers an opportunity for schools to explore the possibility of introducing greater variety in the applied/Professional and Technical offer for their pupils, in conjunction with their partner providers.
6. It is unlikely that many schools will be able to provide access to the EF on their own; schools will need to develop arrangements to co-operate and collaborate with other schools and with the FE sector and other providers. These arrangements will be developed locally to respond to local needs and circumstances.
7. There are two main strands of support for schools in developing these collaborative arrangements:-
 - Strand 1 - the VEP focuses on supporting collaboration between schools and FE colleges or other providers and is the subject of this circular.
 - Strand 2 - the School/School Collaboration Programme focuses on supporting collaboration between schools and details of the funding arrangements for this strand will be the subject of a separate circular.

Both strands are transitional programmes, aiming to provide the opportunity to test and refine models of effective collaborative working, and disseminate good practice.

The 2007/08 year will be the last in which support for the delivery of the EF will be separated into these two strands. From 2008/09, support for collaborative arrangements between schools, and/or between schools and FE colleges and other providers, will be provided through a single programme co-ordinated on an area basis. It is therefore important that we move the current VEP programme and the school/school collaboration programme towards the arrangements for 2008/09.

8. Within the Education and Library Boards, CCMS, NICIE and CnaG, e2s Development Officers (e2s DOs) are currently working to help schools develop collaborative arrangements and increase pupils' access to courses in preparation for the introduction of the EF. VEP should be seen within the wider context of the e2s DOs' work. Within the FE sector, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) continues to provide support and advice for FE colleges as they refine the provision on offer to schools in anticipation of full implementation of the Entitlement Framework.
9. As part of the application process, schools are required to alert the relevant e2s DO(s) to their proposed VEP provision, to assist with the monitoring of how individual schools are expanding their applied/Professional and Technical offer to pupils, and the development of appropriate area based applied/Professional and Technical provision.

How VEP is Evolving

10. The VEP was piloted in 2004/05 with 6 FE colleges and 34 schools, working with 2,000 pupils. In 2005/06 participation was extended to 16 FE colleges and 175 schools, covering 8,000 pupils. The VEP has continued to evolve and in 2006/07, all FE colleges, 8 training organisations and 189 schools are delivering applied /Professional and Technical courses to over 9,000 pupils.
11. Independent evaluation of VEP to date has revealed many positive aspects of collaboration between schools and FE colleges, with tangible benefits for the pupils, schools and FE colleges involved. It has also identified a number of obstacles to collaborative working, and these have been addressed in DE's 'Entitlement Framework – Further Guidance' (Circular 2006/20) and through refinement of the VEP application process for 2007/08.
12. VEP in 2007/08 will continue to be based on a FE college-led model of collaboration, with a number of modifications to ensure a smooth transition to a school-led model of collaboration, as required by the EF, which will be put in place for the 2008/09 school year. **This is the final year that VEP funding will be paid primarily through DEL to be managed and administered in the main by FE colleges.**
13. VEP in 2007/08 will be a more learner-centred purchaser/provider model, with funding issuing primarily through DEL. The e2s DOs will work with schools, the FE sector and other providers to ensure that the proposed VEP provision fits into the overall development of collaborative arrangements in each area. With the support of the e2s DOs, schools will be encouraged to take a proactive role in forming collaborative arrangements. With full implementation of the EF only 2 years away, schools should be ensuring that planning for the delivery of the EF is now an integral part of their school development planning.
14. The intention is that for 2008/09 the e2s DOs should be ready to assume an even more pivotal role in advising schools on the formation of collaborative arrangements of all types and on the range of courses available from other providers in the area. This

planning process will start in late 2007 and will make use of the EF online audit information collected from schools and information about courses on offer from other institutions. This will allow for an area based assessment of bid material, making use of relationships between schools, the FE sector and other providers, that are being developed within learning communities.

Issues to be considered when preparing a VEP application

15. While schools may seek to build upon existing areas of strength or ethos, the range of courses that schools deliver (through VEP and school/school collaboration and ultimately under the EF) should be informed by a number of factors, including an assessment of what is available in the local area. **The EF Online audit tool (currently under refinement) which has been developed by the WELB and is available to all schools, will be particularly valuable in this area.** It will be important that best use is made of the specialist facilities and teaching/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.
16. Schools should be able to demonstrate that the proposed provision is in the best interests of their pupils. Priority should be given to the development of enterprise skills among young people through provision that relates clearly to economic requirements (local and/or regional) and the promotion of employability and entrepreneurship.
17. Provision should offer the prospect of clear progression that is supported by careers education, information, advice and guidance within the school. Where possible, schools should demonstrate the involvement of parents and pupils in agreeing the proposed provision. To ensure opportunities for progression, courses considered for funding will be those that lead to an accredited qualification or are units of courses that could lead to an accredited qualification.
18. Provision in an area is likely to be most effective where it results from discussions at a local level involving schools, the FE sector and other providers, and which complements and extends the options available in a way that addresses the needs of individual pupils. All parties should actively engage in discussion to develop the VEP proposals.
19. The EF will not prescribe how schools should provide their pupils with access to applied/Professional and Technical education and training. However, most applied/Professional and Technical provision outside of the school is likely to be arranged in partnership with FE colleges. Schools wishing to work with other providers of applied/Professional and Technical education and training may also submit applications and in all cases, **schools must satisfy themselves that the provider meets the necessary standards in terms of:**
 - health and safety;
 - codes of behaviour;
 - pastoral care, including a check that staff have been vetted and are eligible to work with pupils in accordance with the requirements of the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003 ; and
 - the quality and appropriateness of the provision offered.

These features must form part of a **Service Level Agreement (SLA)** between the school and the provider (detailed guidance is provided in DE Circular 2006/20a “Delivering the Entitlement Framework- Guidance for Schools” on these and a range of other issues). Evaluation evidence has highlighted the value of a 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.

20. Organisations that wish to partner with schools to offer applied/Professional and Technical training/education are not permitted to subcontract any or all of the agreed provision. Lecturers should be employees of the partner organisation and schools should satisfy themselves that this is the case.
21. Applied/Professional and Technical courses may be delivered at a school or a FE 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.
22. Evaluation of the VEP to date has highlighted the value of schools providing some induction for FE college staff to help ensure that they are familiar with the school’s ethos and modus operandi, and to help with progression between school and FE college. Evaluation evidence also supports the practice of having a supervisory school presence where pupils are being educated at a venue other than the school where they are registered, and the value of parental involvement prior to a pupil being involved in the VEP. These should feature as an integral part of any arrangement.
23. The two Departments would encourage applications that reflect some of the key features of the future delivery of the EF: 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.
24. 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, where possible, to have boys and girls, and the two Stages (14-16 and post-16) well represented.
25. In summary, the objectives for this phase of VEP are:
 - To improve access to high quality applied/Professional and Technical courses for school pupils;
 - To move towards a purchaser/provider funding model for the delivery of the EF, which will encompass VEP and school/school provision;
 - 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); and
 - To encourage the development of effective careers education, advice, information and guidance.

Funding

26. Funding for VEP is earmarked and must be used exclusively for that purpose.
27. The EF will require a purchaser/provider relationship between schools and the FE sector/other providers. However, in 2007/08 VEP funding will continue to be paid primarily through DEL to be managed and administered in the main by FE colleges. **This is the final year that support for school/FE collaboration will be routed in this way.**
28. VEP evaluation evidence has highlighted, in a limited number of cases, the problems that schools incur in transporting pupils from a school(s) to an FE college or other provider. To further explore this issue, the Department of Education needs to collect more detailed information using the VEP application form. Where pupils are being transported distances in excess of 3 miles, the distance travelled and associated cost should be recorded. As part of the analysis of bid material received, the Department will decide whether a small proportion of funding may be earmarked as a contribution towards such costs, for schools, where they are unavoidable, although all available options should be explored in order to minimise these costs, through timetabling etc. The level of funding required for transport should be agreed between school and provider, and form part of the SLA.
29. For FE providers, VEP funding can only be generated from the Departments in respect of Professional and Technical education partnerships where the FE college retains ultimate responsibility for the delivery of the provision. In particular, the following general principles must be met:
 - The provision must constitute an integral but identifiable part of the FE college's development plan;
 - Appropriately qualified FE college lecturers must deliver the provision which must also be controlled fully by the FE college and should be subject to the FE college's quality assurance arrangements;
 - Pupils must be enrolled as students of the FE college; and
 - The FE college, in conjunction with the partner school, must be responsible for assessing the progress and achievement of the students. To facilitate this, it is important that the SLA includes arrangements for the sharing of information about pupil achievements.

Funding Criteria

30. 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, (information gathered from 2006/07 bid will inform the Departments as to second year bids) and the application process for 2007/08 requires schools to clearly identify such pupils.
31. Priority will also be given to bids which clearly demonstrate, with reference to the outcome of the audit exercise arranged by the e2s DOs, that they will expand the applied/Professional and Technical curricular offer in the individual school or in the local area.

32. Both Departments wish VEP to have relevance for children with special educational needs (SEN). Schools and providers should make clear in the relevant part of the application the number of children with SEN in each cohort¹.
33. Within this context, there are two main strands to the criteria used to determine approval for VEP provisions in 2007/08, which reflect the priorities of the two sponsoring departments:
- The degree of fit with priority skills areas in order to meet economic needs; and
 - The economic viability of course provision in terms of class size.

These priorities are described in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Priority Skill Areas

34. Priority will be given to innovative proposals that encourage the development of professional and technical skills that contribute directly to the economy. 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 Framework (NQF) *National Database of Accredited Qualifications*; 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.accreditedqualifications.org.uk

(b) Local relevance: provision that is

- on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF); and
- clearly in line with the following areas of the NSSC:
 - Area 1 - Health, public services and care

¹ Only pupils who have been placed on the SEN school register as required under the SEN Code of Practice should be recorded. A pupil's placement on the SEN register should occur when he/she is placed on Stage 1 of the Code of Practice. Pupils who do not have special educational needs, but receive therapeutic or other health related services from external agencies, are not recorded on the SEN register and should not be included in the application as having SEN.

- 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

35. The resources available to support VEP provision are finite and VEP experience in previous years has prompted both departments to prioritise bids, with a lower priority assigned to bids that are less 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 more closely how schools will operate once the EF becomes a statutory requirement.
36. It has been decided that a class size of 14 should be the target class size for schools seeking to maximise their VEP funding offer. Applications from schools, or groups of schools, that meet the criteria for funding, but involve a class size above or below this target figure, will attract funding on a pro rata basis. Larger groups will therefore attract a more favourable level of funding but it may be possible for funding offers to be made in respect of relatively small class sizes. However, in such cases the offer may not be sufficient to make the provision economically viable and will be less of a priority for both Departments when making funding decisions. It is therefore in the interests of schools and providers to submit proposals that will result in an economically viable class size.
37. In recognition of the fact that class sizes in special schools and special units may be smaller, the target class size figure is 10, and funding will also be calculated on a pro rata basis above or below that figure.
38. For cohorts which are not exclusively made up of children with SEN, funding will be calculated on a pro rata basis based on the numbers of SEN and non SEN pupils as outlined in paragraphs 36 and 37.

Application Process and Timetable

39. On receipt of this guidance, schools should initiate discussions with their partner organisation(s) to identify courses that would best meet the needs of their pupils and meet the funding criteria described above.
40. For convenience, listed below are the VEP contacts within FE colleges:

Armagh	Rita McGuigan	028 3752 2205	r.mcguigan@armaghcollege.ac.uk
Belfast	Ursula Pollock	028 9026 5496	upollock@belfastinstitute.ac.uk
Castlereagh	James Lee	028 9070 8201	j.lee@castlereagh.ac.uk
Causeway	Ian Houston	028 7034 0113	ian.houston@causeway.ac.uk
East Antrim	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	Anne Beattie	028 6634 2254	beattia@fermanaghcoll.ac.uk
Limavady	Anne Heaslett	028 77761001	draheaslett@limavady.ac.uk
Lisburn	Paddy McShane	028 9262 6773	pmcshane@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	Tom Heaney	028 2566 4281	theaney@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

Schools should complete a VEP application form in consultation with their partner provider. The form is available for download from the DE website (www.deni.gov.uk) or DEL website (www.delni.gov.uk) and is designed to be completed electronically with different sections the responsibility of different parties to the agreement. Sections coloured blue should be completed by schools, and sections coloured orange by their partner provider. Separate worksheets have been provided to distinguish partnerships between a single school and a provider from (consortium) partnerships between a number of schools and a provider.

41. As soon as a school, or group of schools, has provisionally agreed VEP provision with a provider, the following summary information **must** be sent to the relevant e2s DO(s) by each participating school:

- Name of partner provider;
- Name of partner schools(s), if applicable;
- Number of pupils involved ;
- Year Group of pupils involved;
- Full title of proposed course;
- Confirmation of whether the proposed provision has been discussed with pupils as part of their careers education, information, advice and guidance – yes/no; and
- Confirmation of whether the proposed provision will increase the number of applied/Professional and Technical courses on offer to pupils, relative to the number on offer in 2006/07 – yes/no.

42. For convenience, listed below are VEP contact details for the e2s Development Officers. Some schools will have more than one e2s DO, for example, a grant-maintained integrated school located in the Western Education and Library Board area will need to circulate details of its proposed VEP provision to the NICIE and WELB e2s DOs. Similarly, a Catholic Maintained school located in the Belfast Education and Library Board area will need to circulate details of its proposed VEP provision to the relevant area CCMS and BELB e2s DOs. If the relevant e2s DO(s) requires any further information about the proposed arrangements, he/she will contact the participating school(s)/provider.

BELB 40 Academy Street BELFAST BT1 2NQ	Margaret Watson Tel: 9056 4049 MargaretW@belb.co.uk Mary Torrens Tel: 9056 4067 MaryT@belb.co.uk
WELB Omagh Teachers' Centre 1 Spillars Place OMAGH BT78 1HL	Alison Smyth Tel: 8225 3666 alison_smyth@welbni.org

NEELB Antrim Board Centre 17 Lough Road ANTRIM BT41 4DH	Verona Hassan Tel: 9448 2298 verona.hassan@neelb.org.uk Heather Thompson Tel: 9448 2298 heather.thompson@neelb.org.uk
SEELB Grahamsbridge Road DUNDONALD BT16 0HS	Bill Swann Tel: 9056 6598 bill.swann@seelb.org.uk Uel Dougherty Tel: 9056 6593 uel.Dougherty@seelb.org.uk
SELB 3 Charlemont Place ARMAGH BT61 9AX	Aidan McCormick Tel: 3751 2482 aidan.mccormick@selb.org
CCMS 160 High Street HOLYWOOD BT18 9HT	Sean Rafferty :Clogher and Derry Diocese (WELB Area): Tel: 8775 1500 seanrafferty@pprce.org Nuala O'Donnell: Armagh and Dromore Diocese (SELB Area): Tel: 8775 1500 nualaodonnell@pprce.org Herbie Artt: Down and Conor Diocese (BELB/SEELB/NEELB Areas): Tel: 9032 7875 herbieartt@ccmsschools.com
NICIE Aldersgate House 3-19 University Road BELFAST BT7 1NA	Ivan Arbuthnot Tel: 9023 6200 iarbuthnot@nicie.org.uk
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta Teach an Gheata Thiar 4 Sráid na Banríona Béal Feirste BT1 6ED	Liam Mac Giolla Mheana Tel: 9032 1475 limgmheana@comhairle.org Micheál Ó Duibh Tel: 9032 1475 moduibh@comhairle.org

43. Schools should aim to submit their forms to their partner providers by 9 March 2007. Partner providers should then submit composite bids electronically to a joint DE/DEL project team for consideration. Completed bids must be e-mailed to 14-19Team@deni.gov.uk and sarah.armstrong@delni.gov.uk by 23 March 2007. DE will ensure that all composite bid material is copied to the relevant e2s DO(s) at this stage in the process.
44. The two Departments will jointly assess each application received from providers. ELBs, Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), LSDA and a nominated e2s DO(s) will be asked to provide advice, but the final decision on allocations will be made by the two Departments.
45. On the evidence of VEP in 2006/07, where bids of over £10m were received against an initial VEP budget of £4m, schools and FE colleges cannot expect to have bids met in full. Schools and Professional and Technical education providers will be advised of provisional allocations by **20 April 2007**, which should allow sufficient time for planning purposes.

46. If schools, in consultation with their partner providers, 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 **4 May 2007**.
47. Final allocations will be confirmed, and made available to FE colleges in two tranches, after numbers are confirmed with schools and FE colleges. Funding for partnerships between schools and other providers will be routed through schools.
48. Schools should be aware that VEP funding levels are subject to change if pupil numbers fluctuate after a provisional offer is made. If pupil numbers reduce significantly, the provision may be put at risk. To minimise any detriment to pupils, it is recommended that schools, when formulating the SLA, discuss and agree with their chosen Professional and Technical education provider how any financial shortfall will be met.
49. Claims for funding in the case of FE colleges should be submitted using NICIS Student Type 20 (VEP) reports, accompanied by a signed Annex D. These reports will be measured against the originally submitted numbers. Significant variations from the original submissions should be detailed in Annex C, and it should be noted that unapproved provision will not automatically be funded, even if it fully meets the funding criteria described in this circular. Providers should keep the Departments informed of any proposed changes to provision, and approval should be sought in all cases.
50. Providers other than FE colleges should invoice their partner school(s) in two instalments, at times which will be notified in due course.

Revision of circular 27 February 2007

51. Following an interim evaluation of the Pre-Apprenticeship pilot already underway, it has been determined that further work is required to develop the project for readiness as an extended pilot. As this work will most likely take us beyond 1 September 2007, the start date for Training for Success, the Pre-apprenticeship option will therefore not be a feature of provision in the 2007/08 academic year and reference to this pilot has now been removed from the VEP circular (paragraphs 26-28 in the original circular).