

**Response to Department of Education and Skills (DES) on the coordination of services and future working arrangements between NCSE (including its Inclusion Support Service) and NEPS**

**(March 2015)**

# TUI represents teachers (12,000+) employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and in Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools. Department data on enrolment patterns indicates that most schools enrol some students with SEN. However, close examination of all relevant data indicates that schools in the ETB and C&C sectors enrol, by far, the largest proportion of students with SEN, representing a vast range in terms of the type and level of need experienced by individual students.

**Resources**

TUI accepts that in the short-term, the coordination of services and working arrangements between NCSE and NEPS may need to be cost neutral. However, that is not to say that such a situation should continue as the economic situation improves. Furthermore, TUI cannot emphasise enough that the co-ordination of services between NCSE and NEPS cannot be an exercise in cost saving. The important service provided to schools, students, and parents by NCSE, NEPS, VTS, SESS and NBSS must continue so that schools continue to have access to at least the current level of resources including staffing. Existing staff in the NBSS and VTS for example, have attained significant levels of expertise and are recognised for same by the teaching profession. This ‘institutional knowledge’ must not be lost. TUI also highlights the fact that any change in the terms and conditions of our members who are currently employed on concessionary hours derived from such services will not be accepted.

NBSS currently provides essential and valuable services to schools. For example, schools can access additional staffing to implement behaviour for learning strategies. TUI understands that approximately 84 whole time equivalent teaching posts are supported through allocation from the NBSS. Advice from Regional Development Officers (RDOs) is also tremendously valuable to schools. One of the significant benefits of the NBSS interventions is that programmes are tailor made for the needs of the schools to which the RDOs are deployed owing to the significant consultation between schools and the NBSS. NBSS also supports valuable work in schools by providing support to small groups, students and indeed the teaching staff as a whole. It is important to note that many NBSS interventions are school focussed rather than focussed toward individual students. It may be worthwhile, nonetheless, to expand the role of NBSS to supporting schools in providing interventions to improve behaviour with individual students.

NEPS and SESS also provide valuable services to schools. The advice and training that both NEPS and SESS provide to schools and teachers should be continued at least at the current level. As the economy continues to improve, those services should be expanded. In relation to psychological services specifically, there used to be a psychological support service in the former City of Dublin VEC and Co Dublin VEC.  Their model of psychological support was excellent because it dealt not just with student issues but where appropriate also with teachers with psychological issues/problems from time to time. This service was not just confined to schools and colleges but was also available to adult and further education and Youthreach. We are unclear at time of writing whether this model still exists, but if so, feel it should continue to be available under any future service restructuring.

**Coordination of Services**

Each of the above agencies currently provide their advice and support to schools in the context of the agency’s individual specialised area. Coordination of this can be beneficial by reducing the administrative burden on schools of seeking support from each agency individually. However, the reduction in administrative burden is more beneficial if the sum total of existing allocations is maintained under the proposed new model. Furthermore, the detailed consultation that has led to bespoke interventions must be retained to ensure that schools are assisted in supporting students through meaningful engagement with the proposed ISS rather than simply selecting interventions from an available suite. TUI believes that transitional arrangements, utilising the full range of existing supports, will be necessary. TUI fears that the new dispensation may not be genuinely coordinated at agency level and further fears a dilution of the current available services.

**Agency Structure**

It is unclear from the call for proposals what the structure of any future coordinated model might look like. TUI is cognoscente that the integration of the extant services into the NCSE may require the redeployment of staff between public service payrolls. In the event that members of TUI are being transferred to a new management structure, and potentially a new employer, TUI is interested in understanding the management structures that would apply to the ISS and how, from a managerial perspective and a payroll perspective, they will be co-ordinated by the NCSE. This will require considerable consideration, and also consultation with stakeholders. Furthermore, our members who join this new body will continue to be represented by TUI and, as such, TUI expects to participate in a detailed consultation on the retention of our member’s current terms and conditions, including payment, if they are to transfer from their current roles in the proposed ISS.  It is important also, to understand any proposed grading structure in advance of progressing the transfer of staff as per standard practice in relation to a transfer of undertakings between public service employers. Further to these concerns the TUI wishes confirmation, as soon as possible, as to whether members of ours currently working in the separate, extant, services will report to the NCSE as a line manager while retaining their current contractual and pay arrangements, or whether they will have a new contractual relationship directly with the NCSE as an employer.

**Transparency**

As stated above, there is a benefit to coordinating services if the administrative burden on schools is reduced. However, schools and families will continue to require transparency and notice of what services they will be able to avail of in subsequent years. Both schools and families have a reasonable expectation, from one time period to another, of what resources and support they will have access to. Unexpected and sudden changes in same will lead to an unacceptable burden on them.

TUI is happy to discuss the above points in greater detail should the DES find it beneficial.

Ends

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**Glossary**

NBSS National Behaviour Support Service

NCSE National Council for Special Education

NEPS National Education Psychological Service

SEN Special Educational Needs

SESS Special Education Support Service

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

VTS Visiting Teacher Service