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## Committee for Employment and Learning

### RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION PAPER ON A VICTIMS' STRATEGY

The Committee for Employment and Learning welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation paper on a Victims' Strategy prepared by the Victims Unit, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

We strongly support the initiative taken by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and we regard this as a very important cross-cutting issue, which is highlighted in the Programme for Government.

The areas of the draft Action Plan detailed in the Consultation Paper, which impact on the work of the Department for Employment and Learning are: -

#### *1. Corporate Planning*

*Point 1 - Beginning in the 2002-03 financial year, all Departments and Agencies will ensure that victims' needs are reflected in their corporate planning documentation.*

#### *2. Consultation*

*Point 2 - By March 2002, ensure that all public consultation includes, where appropriate, victims' groups and individuals.*

#### *3. Departmental Staff Training*

*Point 3 - By September 2002, examine on a NICS wide basis, what additional staff training is required for those dealing with victims, particularly those dealing with front line services.*

#### *4. Identification of what problems are encountered by victims under DEL remit:*

*Point 5 - By June 2002, clarify what literacy and numeracy needs exist among victims.*

#### *5. Non-Departmental Public Bodies*

*Point 6 - By March 2002, consult with Non-Departmental Public Bodies, especially those providing educational and/or outreach programmes to consider including victims in their target*

*audiences.*

*6. Implications for Training Providers, FEC's/Universities/Teacher Training Colleges*

*Point 21- By April 2003, examine how teacher development can address barriers to learning experienced by victims.*

*Point 22 - By April 2003, examine how parent support, including the development of parenting skills, can be developed by schools and other agencies.*

*7. Implications for Departmental Employment Programmes*

*Point 25 - By December 2002, examine the development of alternative programmes for getting intimidated young people back into education.*

**The Committee's views are: -**

1. The Committee for Employment and Learning is generally supportive of this Action Plan, but would like the actions to be more detailed with clearer targets. These targets need to be measurable and reported on openly. They should be integrated but visible in the Business Plans and Strategic Plans of the Department for Employment and Learning.

2. The Committee would suggest that the structures for managing this important issue be revisited. The departmental group may need to be classified as an implementation group with a higher level body, which includes representatives of victims, to set the strategic goals. The Committee for Employment and Learning recommends the inclusion of representatives from the affected groups to sit on the strategic level group.

3. The difficulty (from the public's perspective) of having two Victim Units, i.e. the NIO and the OFMDFM involved, is an issue. The remit of each needs to be very clearly defined so the public have no misunderstanding and a single point of entry needs to be established, to enable the public to make one contact/application, which will be dealt with by the relevant Unit.

4. There should be central yearly collation of results and outcomes on a par with New TSN. We recognise that the Committee of the Centre should have a very important scrutiny role in this process.

5. As funding for victims is currently provided from a variety of sources, consideration should be given to central co-ordination of this. To meet these objectives it should be clearer if additional funding will be made available or will it rest, as with New TSN, on the skewing of resources.

6. The Committee raised the issue as to why grants to encourage victims back into higher and further education are limited to one per family, and whether such procedures would have equality implications.

7. The Committee fully supports the additional work on literacy and numeracy and recognises this as a key issue for immediate development in Northern Ireland (point 5). However, the Committee will be interested to learn how the Department intends to quantify 'the post 16 age group'. Perhaps consideration should be given to extending this recommendation to ensure that the Department knows the extent of the problems faced by victims in relation to other basic skill needs e.g. Information Technology and Communication skills.
8. Geographical spread of the pilot literacy and numeracy scheme is essential and the Committee suggests that Information Communications Technology (ICT) should be included in this pilot.
9. There is no age definition mentioned, under point 25, as to what constitutes a 'young person' so there may be implications for 18-25 year olds eligible for New Deal/Walsh Visa Programmes etc.
10. Under point 25, it is unclear which bodies, other than schools, will have a role in developing 'parenting skills'. This should be made more specific e.g. will Training Organisations and/or Further Education Colleges have a role in this area?
11. The Department needs to precisely define the needs of victims to be catered for under its remit and ensure measures are put in place to meet the needs of each individual victim, however unique their needs might be, at a local level. This should include more than the basic skills e.g. victims returning to tertiary education or previously held jobs.
12. To ensure equity of access, there should be a geographical spread of education and training facilities for victims.
13. A strategy should be formulated to address local problems of access to locations of education and training, against a background of segregation and a bridging plan put in place to ensure access in the interim.
14. In order to ensure comprehensive consultation with victims, consideration needs to be given as to how best the views of individuals, who do not belong to victim organisations, can be captured.
15. A system should be implemented to facilitate the central collation of accurate data on the number of pupils/students who have had their education interrupted as a result of violence/intimidation.
16. There is an absence of data on those injured during the 'troubles'. This would have been a very useful yardstick to measure not only the numbers of individuals involved in this category of 'victim' but would have informed the development of strategies to ensure resources were

'geared' to meet the needs of each individual.

17. The Department must ensure easy access to clearly defined information on the full range of services that it will put in place to support/rehabilitate victims.

18. Consideration should be given to adopting an integrated and comprehensive approach across all government bodies to post traumatic stress as currently implemented by the Sperrin and Lakeland Trust following the Omagh bombing.

19. A wide-ranging media campaign, that could include television advertisements, should be launched to raise public awareness of what support is available for victims. This should have a particular focus on the individuals who are not in victims' groups.

20. There must be a meaningful and concrete cross-departmental approach to ensure the success of this very important issue.

Dr Esmond Birnie, MLA  
Chairman  
25 October 2001

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