



Committee for Employment and Learning

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Aiming Higher Project: Include Youth and  
Business in the Community

14 January 2015

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Employment and Learning

Aiming Higher Project: Include Youth and Business in the Community

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### **Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)

Mr Sydney Anderson

Mr William Irwin

Ms Anna Lo

Mr Fra McCann

Ms Bronwyn McGahan

### **Witnesses:**

Ms Emma Morrison

Business in the Community Northern Ireland

Ms Lesley Johnston

East Belfast Mission

Ms Lorraine Devlin

Include Youth

Ms Tanya McCallen

Include Youth

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** I welcome Ms Emma Morrison, programme manager from Business in the Community Northern Ireland; Ms Lorraine Devlin, mentoring worker from Include Youth; Ms Lesley Johnston, business development and social enterprise hub manager from East Belfast Mission; and Ms Tanya McCallen, who is a participant from Include Youth.

Good morning, ladies. You are very welcome to the Committee. Thanks very much for coming along. I especially welcome Tanya, who is a participant. The Committee finds it really useful to hear from participants at first hand. We thank you for taking the time to come along today and talk to us a wee bit about your experience. We appreciate it. It is over to you.

**Ms Lorraine Devlin (Include Youth):** Thank you, Mr Swann. Good morning. Thank you very much for welcoming us and for giving us the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Lorraine Devlin, and I am employed as a mentoring worker in the Aiming Higher project. Today, as part of our presentation, you will hear a bit from me to highlight some of the key points in the briefing paper that you have received. You will also hear an account from Tanya, who is a previous participant in the Aiming Higher programme. I would also like to introduce you to Emma Morrison, my colleague in the Aiming Higher partnership. Emma works with Business in the Community Northern Ireland. She will say a little bit about how it recruits mentors and about the mentor's role. Then we have Lesley Johnston, who has very kindly come along today to say a little bit about her role as a mentor. We also have a DVD and, time permitting — it runs for a whole three minutes — we can show you that at the end of our presentation. You will hopefully get a flavour the detail of the project from that.

Tanya McCallen, who was a previous participant in the Aiming Higher programme, was involved in our first group just over a year and a half ago. However, before we go into the detail of the programme and Tanya's account, there are about seven points that I want to draw to your attention in the briefing

paper. It is around the context and the challenges that our young people, who are in care and are care leavers, face in education, training and employment. We recognise that this is a particularly difficult challenge in the current economic climate, and there are some figures that say that there is quite a persistent high level of youth unemployment. The most recent figures from the labour force survey for July to September 2014 suggest that one in five of our young people are currently unemployed and that 16.8% of them are classed as not in education, employment or training. Our specific project, Aiming Higher, is about supporting a particular group of young people in our society, those who are looked after by the state. They are known as "care leavers". By the time they reach adult age, from 18 to 21 years, the local healthcare trust has the responsibility of supporting them as they come through care.

We recognise that a lot of efforts have been made by Departments to try to improve outcomes for young people who are unemployed, and particularly for those leaving care. However, we argue — and the statistics reflect this — that it is a lot more difficult for young people leaving care to obtain employment. If you look at some of the figures on the second page of the written presentation you will see that only 18% of young people who are care leavers will have obtained five GCSEs or higher, compared to 77% of the overall school population. Let me just highlight again that roughly one third of our 16- to 19-year-olds who are care leavers are not in employment education or training. They are NEET. We would like to highlight that a level of inequality and disadvantage is being experienced by young people who are in care and are leaving it. Tanya is going to reflect on some of the barriers that she overcame to gain employment.

I will move on to the Aiming Higher project. This is a partnership between Include Youth and Business in the Community. We are funded by the Big Lottery Fund. We have about another year and a half's funding, with the opportunity, hopefully, of getting further funding so that we can continue for another two years. We will work with 60 young people across a three-year programme, and our target is to move 70% of those young people into full-time education, training or employment. Part of our model is that, once a young person moves into training, or hopefully employment, we will endeavour to continue supporting them for another six months after they have finished our programme of activities. Our partnership was designed purposely to complement and interlink with other programmes. For example, the Careers Service complements the work that we do. Let me say that the rationale for the Aiming Higher project was based on work that Business in the Community had completed on mentoring programmes with young people in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. In ourselves and Include Youth, we have the Give and Take programme, in which run a mentoring programme.

One of the key features within Aiming Higher was also to provide a mentor from a professional background for the young people. This is really important, because a lot of the young people who are involved with organisations and who have had experience of care tend to have had a lot of professionals involved in their lives, such as social workers and personal advisers. They may have had access to psychologists and a whole host of people who are there for a reason, but who are obviously paid to work with the young people. One of the lovely things about this programme is that the young people get access to an adult who is not paid but who is there in a voluntary capacity. It is an adult whom they may not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet and it is someone who is not there for a statutory reason.

As far as research is concerned, we have referred to some work done by Include Youth. The Rowntree organisation has also done some work on mentoring. They say it is based on a social way of working with young people. One of the key features of our programme is about building relationships with young people, and particularly with the mentors, to support them in whatever individual goals the young people have.

A key outcome for Aiming Higher is that four out of every five young people in the programme have moved into education, training or employment as a result of taking part in the project. We also align with key government priorities and strategies, particularly around the Pathways to Success strategy, working with young people who are not in employment, education or training.

One other point to refer to is around social return on investment. Include Youth recently took part in an evaluation, and it was highlighted that, within Aiming Higher, our social return on investment is that for every £1 spent £5 is saved elsewhere in the public service system.

I will summarise some of the key points. Our learning points to date have been around developing trusting, supporting relationships with young people, which is key to the success of the project. Developing supportive relationships with employers and businesses is also imperative. We are aware

that every young person who comes through the programme is unique, that one size does not fit all, that they have their own interests and needs to help them with their readiness for work and employment. A unique feature about our programme within Aiming Higher is that it has allowed exposure to opportunities and employers, through Aiming Higher, that young people would not have had access to otherwise. One of the lovely things has been that we have been able to bring previous participants back to act as peer mentors or influences and role models for young people coming through the programme.

My last bit for now is that we have three recommendations that we would like the Committee to consider. Local authorities in England run a National Care Leavers' Week in October. We would like to promote that in Northern Ireland. We would like to pilot a mentoring week as part of the care leavers' week in October, and we would like the Northern Ireland Assembly, through your Committee, to support that. We would work with you on that, in partnership with the Committee and other Departments, such as Employment and Learning, to achieve that. We would also like to run a conference before the end of 2015 to look at learning and good practice. Again, this is something that we would like the Committee to consider supporting.

Finally, we would like to add to any particular strategies or policies that are around at the minute, such as, for example, the review of the careers service, looking at things like ESF funding for young people who are particularly vulnerable and are not in education, training and employment.

That is my wee bit over for now. I will now pass over to Tanya to give her account to you.

**Ms Tanya McCallen (Include Youth):** I work in the Allen ward for sick children as a nursing auxiliary, based in the Royal Victoria Hospital. I am going to tell you all about my journey to work. I start work at 7.30 am; however, I do not have my own car and live in Carrickfergus. Therefore, I get up at 5.30 am each day and walk to the local train station to catch the 6.20 am train to Great Victoria Street. I then take the bus from Great Victoria Street to the Royal Victoria Hospital to start my shift. Some people say that that is a considerable journey each day, but, in reality, my real journey to full-time permanent paid employment took much longer.

I first met the Belfast Trust's employability service in 2009 when I was completing year 12. I was having difficulty with my GCSE maths, so arrangements were made for me by the employability service to have support from a maths tutor for two hours each week when I was completing years 13 and 14 of high school.

In April 2012, I applied for a temporary post as a seasonal support service assistant. I was successful and worked for a few months as a catering assistant in the Mater Hospital. That gave me my first experience of paid employment and knowledge of what it would be like to work in the Belfast Trust.

In October 2012, I applied for a position as a nursing auxiliary. However, I did not meet one of the entry criteria, which was GCSE maths or equivalent, and failed to pass the numeracy test. Therefore, I was not shortlisted for interview. That knocked my confidence; however, I was determined to get a job next time round, and I had some work to do to give myself the best chance of securing employment.

In December 2012, I enrolled to complete my level 2 numeracy with Start360, which I achieved. In February 2012, I started a work placement two days a week as a care assistant in Tamlaght nursing home. I then started the Aiming Higher programme with Include Youth in March 2013. When the nursing auxiliary position was advertised again in November 2013, I thought that I was in a much better position to apply. I now have a nursery qualification and relevant work experience, and I feel more confident in myself following completion of the Aiming Higher programme. I was successful at interview and was placed on a waiting list for a post.

While on the waiting list, I continued to attend my work placement on a voluntary basis. In April 2014, I was offered employment in Tamlaght nursing home, working an average of 30 hours a week. In June 2014, I was offered my post in the Belfast Trust as a nursing auxiliary. Following my pre-employment checks, I commenced my post on 1 September. So far, this has been a good experience. I have met new people and learned new skills, and I now earn over £14,000 a year.

Although being taken into care was a positive thing for me as an individual, there was a number of very challenging aspects to my experience as a young person in care. Overall, I have been receiving support from the employability service since year 12 until now and that has increased my chances to

gain employment. Without that support, I would not be in the position I am in today. My goal is to work as a children's nurse, which will require more study and hard work, so my journey continues.

**Ms Lo:** Well done.

**Ms Devlin:** Thank you, Tanya, well done indeed. On the way in here, we were all a little bit nervous, but Tanya is the calmest of us all today. *[Laughter.]* She has had the opportunity to speak on a couple of occasions. I will just share something with you very quickly; one of the first times she spoke was in a group of mentors and, more recently, she addressed an audience of 500-odd people at one of Business in the Community's conferences just before Christmas. Full credit to her; she came in today quite calm but the rest of us were a little bit nervous. Thank you, Tanya.

I will pass over to Emma, who will say a little bit about Business in the Community's role in the programme in linking with businesses and mentors.

**Ms Emma Morrison (Business in the Community Northern Ireland):** Thank you, Lorraine. Business in the Community is a membership organisation that has around 260 members throughout Northern Ireland. We rely on our dedicated team in Business in the Community to promote the Aiming Higher programme to our members.

We have had a brilliant uptake of the programme. It is a very different and unique programme. Our members have been really interested in getting involved in the issue of looked-after children and this was a perfect opportunity for them. Once the contact has been made and they express an interest, I meet them or speak to them on the phone to explain the programme in more detail and give them the reassurance that we will be there, step-by-step. They will be invited to a mentor training programme, which normally takes around one day and is an accredited training programme. We go through some of the areas that they could face as a mentor. We bring a young person in — and Tanya has spoken at one of our mentor sessions — to speak to the mentors and give them a true account of what her life has been like and some of the issues that they could face.

After that initial training, our mentors work with us and come to some of our sessions at the beginning of a phase with the young people; we keep it quite informal. We have seen some great relationships blossom from that and it is really because of the informal attitude that we take. From there, the mentor is matched with a young person and will work with that young person over a five or six-month period. We are there, week-by-week, to reassure them and help them with that.

We have often been asked why a mentor want to get involved. For them, it is a personal development opportunity. We see mentors continue from phase 1 right through to phase 4, which is just now commencing. For us, that is a true testament to the programme. We saw those mentors grow and the opportunities that they were able to provide to us for the programme have been phenomenal. Lesley will be able to explain that in more detail as a mentor who has been involved.

**Ms Lesley Johnston (East Belfast Mission):** Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak to you today. I came on board as a mentor in phase 3, in the last phase of the programme. At that stage I was working in National Museums Northern Ireland in its volunteering and employability programmes. The museums were keen to reach out and work with harder-to-reach groups that maybe would not automatically think of a museum as a place that was relevant for them. I was asked to come on board the Aiming Higher programme. I did not know much about mentoring or working with young people who were coming from care, but I thought that I would see whether some of the skills I had acquired to date would be of use. I thought I might be able to help young people in some way. So, I went through the training programme and was matched with my young person quite quickly, because he was keen to find out more about museums and what happened in museums. Of course, people just think that you go as a visitor. I was working, one to one, with my young person.

I also attended on other days, when young people were brought on work inspiration days to different workplaces. We visited the Coca-Cola site so that the young people could learn all about what happens there and more about industry and different models of work. I did not get to join them when they went to Asda, but I took part on the day on which they met up at Enterprise rent-a-car. The manager from Enterprise rent-a-car and I worked with the young people on that day. We did a lot of ice-breakers with them and chatted with them.

For the young people, I suppose you are not there as a social worker; you do not have a care hat on; you do not have any expectations of them. You are merely sharing your expertise, knowledge or

whatever background you have to let them see a little bit of the working world out there so that they can learn a little bit more.

At Enterprise rent-a-car, I told them about my job at museums and about the sort of things that take place there. They were keen to find out more, so I worked with Emma and hosted a work inspiration day in Cultra, last summer. It is hard to imagine today, when it is snowing, but it was a beautiful day. We met in the education room. It was a very informal space. Nick Ferguson, the visitor services manager in Cultra, came straight to museums when he left school. He met the young people and talked them through his experience of how he came in as a part-time assistant and worked his way up to have the career that he has. We also did a show-and-tell session with different objects from the 'Downton Abbey' period. They enjoyed that a lot. There were other mentors there that day. We finished off with a tour around the farm area of Cultra. They wanted to see the pigs and the hens. I think they were more interested in the pigs and hens than they were in me, but there it goes. They had a really good day, and they got a lot out of it.

That is how I came to be on board on phase 3. I have moved to the East Belfast Mission and do business development there, but I hope to keep on board and work on the next phase. I will see how that works out. I hope that gives an overview of how I came to be a mentor and became involved. The mentors are from lots of different fields, and the young people get lots of opportunities to find out about different areas of work. [*Interruption.*]

**Ms Devlin:** Sorry, excuse me.

**Ms Johnston:** I will show you a DVD of the presentation that was shown at the graduation. It is phase 3.

**Ms Devlin:** I apologise. I thought I had switched my phone off.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Thank you for the presentation. Tanya, I congratulate you on your story. I know your current position, because I know Allen ward well; it is one of the wards my son goes on. That is why I thought that I recognised your face, but I just could not place it when you came in. I know the work you do there and what is going on. I wish you well on becoming a children's nurse, because I think that children's nursing is one of the most challenging areas of practice out there.

**Ms McCallen:** Thank you.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Congratulations on your journey. As a Committee, we wish you well.

Lorraine, I have a couple of points to make on your presentation. You reference OFMDFM, Health and DEL as three Departments working in this area. Unless I have misread your tone, you are not exactly endorsing the work they do. Do you feel that there is a gap in what they are providing, or is it a lack of coordination between the three Departments?

**Ms Devlin:** Firstly, the work that the Departments do certainly comes through in our practice. We can see where policies are put in place, and, as an organisation that takes part in different policy consultations, we can see where the views of young people, practitioners and managers make a difference. In our experience, there is some joined-up work. For example, in the Belfast Trust area, we have been able to have named careers advisers, so that young people can go to them directly through us. They know that there is a person they can speak to about careers information. Tanya referenced employability. The Aiming Higher project is set within the employability provision in the health and social care trust. One of the requirements for what is now called the transition team for young people leaving care is that it has to look at their education and employability. It is a statutory requirement for the social worker.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Is that solely in the Belfast Trust? Is it not replicated across the other boards?

**Ms Devlin:** It is replicated across the five trusts in Northern Ireland. They have an employability provision or service for each young person leaving care. Our project is currently within two trust areas, namely the Belfast Trust and the South Eastern Trust. Maybe I am reflecting on my own individual practice, but I would say that there is joined-up work between social work professionals, other professionals involved with young people in care, and those involved in education, in the voluntary

sector and now, additionally, the business or private sector. There are more opportunities for that to increase.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** I would like to ask you about the funding of your project. You are funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Are you receiving core funding from any Department?

**Ms Morrison:** No. Our funding is purely from the Big Lottery Fund.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** You have a year and a half, with a two-year extension.

**Ms Morrison:** We are now entitled to apply for an extension to the project, because we are in our last year. Big Lottery Fund announced in October, at an information session for grant holders, that we would be entitled to apply, which we will now be doing. They are very happy with our work to date and can see its potential. We are hoping that we will get that extension.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** So you do not come under the current Budget situation in any Department. Your work is not being affected in any way at this time.

**Ms Morrison:** Not this particular project, no.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Emma, you raised the valuable input that volunteers make as mentors. Tanya, I think that your mentor was an Assembly employee, Roisin Fleetham. Roisin is in the Public Gallery. How do you recruit volunteers to be mentors? Is there a lack of them? Are there enough out there?

**Ms Morrison:** There has been a very good uptake. We produce literature about the programme. When dedicated Business in the Community staff are out speaking with the members, they are able to talk about the programme in more detail and then put them in touch with me. At that stage, it is just giving them more information, warts and all. We know that there are issues throughout the programme. We learned in phase 1 that there are ups and downs, but we make them aware of that right at the beginning of the programme and ensure that we are there to support them throughout the phases. As I say, we have two mentors who have been with us from phase 1, and they have been able to provide opportunities through their own contacts. Work inspiration is part of every session for us, as are learning groups, and then we have had great opportunities through their contacts and wider networks. So there has been a very good uptake of mentors. It is something that we are constantly doing, because it is good to get fresh blood on board and different sectors involved. There has been a very good uptake for the programme.

**Ms McGahan:** Thank you for your presentation, and congratulations to Tanya. Your objective is to improve outcomes for children and young people, and you referred to children from a care background. You have three recommendations in relation to that. You mentioned that there are a lot of people from different agencies who work with young people, and, I assume, with specific roles and responsibilities. How do you believe agencies working together on a statutory basis could improve outcomes for children and young people? Currently they do not.

**Ms Devlin:** For example, there has been a push in recent years for teachers in schools to work more closely with social work colleagues when dealing with children in the care system to try to improve their educational outcomes, and not just their educational achievements at GCSE, but their experiences in school. There is a focus on trying to reduce the number of moves in foster placements and to increase stability for young people in care. At the same time, there is a named person in schools to take responsibility for young people who are looked after. Each looked-after child's educational progress is recorded at their statutory looked-after children case conferences and their review meetings. That is kept up to date to help with making decisions on where a young person can stay on their foster care placement or on where they are to live.

Certainly, the five trusts across Northern Ireland have realised that there had to be more work on education, training and employment to try to improve those outcomes. The emphasis on putting employability services or staff into each trust to work with a young person, 16-plus, to look at their options and to give careers advice indicates to me that the trusts have a role and a willingness to look at the life chances for young people coming through the care system.

**Ms McGahan:** Do you acknowledge that, if the agencies worked on a statutory basis, it would improve outcomes for children and young people by making all the agencies more efficient and effective?

**Ms Devlin:** Yes, I do, and I think that the way forward is working in partnership, as has been happening in recent years. An example of that within Include Youth is where we run the Give and Take scheme. Young people come through that and other training programmes, working with the social work staff, to look at what will best meet their needs and what training or education they require.

**Ms McGahan:** Perhaps that is something for your organisation to consider: there should be a recommendation for agencies to work with a more joined-up approach. I do not believe that they do. I think that they still operate very much in their silos. If you go to a health trust and talk about education, you find that that is not within their statutory responsibility, so they can abdicate their responsibilities. I have seen that happen. That is just something for you to consider, because this is about improving outcomes for children and young people.

That is really it. Thank you for your presentation.

**Mr Irwin:** I also want to congratulate Tanya. It is good to see a young person who is prepared to get up at 5.30 am to journey to work. *[Laughter.]* I see from your targets that you hope to work with a minimum of 60 young people. I presume that, with more resources, you would hope to work with more than that. Is it the case that, if you had more resources, there are more young people out there who could be reached?

**Ms Devlin:** That is correct. At the minute, as I said, we are working within two trust areas. That is a limited number of young people, but we hope to expand the model, and we have talked about this in terms of the project development. The north-west area is another ideal location that we could work in, because —

**Ms Morrison:** There is already a Business in the Community office in the north-west, as well as an Include Youth office. So, it would be great if we could take the programme to another area. I think that, when we first put the programme together, we felt that keeping it to a small number would make it more manageable, but, obviously, we would love to be able to work with more young people. Hopefully, if we get the extension, we will be able to work with more.

**Mr Irwin:** OK. It is a great project, and I congratulate you on what you are doing. I hope that you can expand it in the future and help more young people.

**Ms Lo:** Very well done, Tanya. Very good. You are really confident. Good for you.

I want to hear more about the mentoring scheme and what we can do as a Committee to help you. I think that it is a great idea to have a mentoring week. What can we do to help to boost understanding and create more awareness of it? Another thing is that you are aiming to help a minimum of 60 young people; so far, how many have you helped?

**Ms Morrison:** We aim to work with 10 young people in each phase, and we have completed three phases. We normally start with 10, but we completed the last phase with eight. For some young people, issues arise during the course of a phase. Homelessness has been a big factor; and some things out of our control can mean that we cannot retain a young person on the programme. One particular young person was brought back onto phase 3. It did not really work out for them in phase 2 because of other issues, and we were able to bring that person back. That is something that the Big Lottery Fund agreed that we could do. It maybe was not just the right fit for them at that time. But, yes, we would love to be working with more young people.

**Ms Lo:** I know that you said that you can work with people aged between 16 and 21, but what is the average age?

**Ms Morrison:** It is 18 or 19 years.

**Ms Lo:** That is about the time they leave care, or are close to leaving it.

**Ms Morrison:** Yes.

**Ms Lo:** Is the mentoring scheme restricted to the Business in the Community membership? Can a politician offer a place?

**Ms Morrison:** The majority of our mentors have come from Business in the Community member companies, but, yes, certainly; it is one of the things that we would really like to promote. We have had two Members of the Assembly. Roisin, who has been mentioned, and one of her colleagues were mentors on phase 1, and that was great because that is how our opportunity today arose. We availed ourselves of the opportunity to have our first graduation at Stormont. That was supported by Alex Maskey. Sammy Douglas supported the second phase, and that is how we progressed to today. The more support we have, the better. That would be great.

**Ms Lo:** And what can we do as a Committee to help to promote the project and the mentoring week?

**Ms Devlin:** I was just going to say that, if the Assembly could act as a role model, it could demonstrate to other agencies and organisations by promoting mentoring week. We could look into practical suggestions, such as having young people come to Parliament Buildings. If an MLA were able to offer a couple of hours or "A day in the life of", it might encourage some discussion around political issues or the issue of education and training. As Emma and Tanya have said, we have been very fortunate to have two of your officials act as mentors for the first group. There might be other opportunities. Staff members could even have a young person with them for a couple of hours or at agreed times over that week. It might also help to look at the experiences that young people have had, and for young people to see the work that goes on behind the scenes in the Assembly. I am sure that many of them do not get the opportunity to see that. We were very fortunate in the groups of young people that we have brought to the Assembly so far. It has been fantastic, even to generate discussion and give them a sense that this is their Assembly as well.

**Ms Lo:** I am sure that a lot of MLAs have work experience students on placement with them, usually in lower sixth. I can never tell the years.

**Ms Devlin:** Year 13.

**Ms Lo:** Yes. I am from the age of the O level. I would be very happy to do it, if it were a one-off. I cannot commit myself to, say, a six-month stint, but, if it is a one-off, I would be happy to sponsor a day for a student at any time. You do not have to wait for that week. Let me know.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Let me pick up on that Anna. I do not want to speak for anybody else, but maybe we should approach that as a Committee. Maybe every Committee member could take somebody for a day. We could raise the profile in that way. We could coordinate that through the Committee Clerk to do something along those lines. Is that all right? I do not want to steal your thunder, Anna. I was just looking at the recommendation.

**Ms Lo:** I am speaking for myself, but, absolutely, that is a good idea.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** I cannot speak for everybody on the Committee, but I think that, if enough of us were doing it, we could make a difference.

**Ms Devlin:** That would be fantastic. After today, once we get a chance, we will look at what that might entail and the detail involved and forward that to you to do some work on it.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Looking at your three recommendations, I think that the one that we could most easily pick up on is hosting something in October for the Care Leavers Mentoring Week. Maybe we could host something in the Long Gallery along those lines. For recommendation 2 about the conference, we would need more detail. We do not have the facility to support or sponsor conferences, but we could certainly look at attending it. Recommendation 3 is more for the Department than for the Committee itself, but certainly, we can work on the details of the first recommendation.

**Ms Lo:** We could launch the mentoring week in Stormont — hold a reception or something — and generate some publicity for you.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** Yes.

**Ms Devlin:** That is excellent. On the back of that, let me say that anything that raises the profile of the needs of young people and the work that is taking place is welcome. That would not just be the case for our partnership; I am sure that there are other organisations out there that do similar work. Anything that promotes and highlights that would be really welcome. Thank you.

**Mr Anderson:** Thanks everyone for coming along today. I was pleased to listen to your presentation and, of course, to Tanya. Congratulations. As my colleague said, for a young person to get up at 5.30 am is not easy — for any of us — and you are certainly to be admired for that. Well done. I wish you well in the future.

**Ms McCallen:** Thank you.

**Mr Anderson:** On the outcomes and benefits of the programme, Lorraine, will you expand on the work that is going on in the looked after children employers' forum and the engagement with that sector? Do you think that more work needs to be done? How do you find it?

**Ms Devlin:** Would you like to address that, Emma?

**Ms Morrison:** We put that into our application as something that we could see happening throughout the programme. We have very much relied on our mentors. We would like to see that grow and probably widen out to other organisations. I suppose that those who are working as mentors see the value in that, and its purpose was really for them to bring the young people to the table — we brought a couple of young people to our first meeting — and the opportunities that they would get from that. We would love to increase that. It is probably more mentor-focused at the moment, but we would love to widen that out.

**Mr Anderson:** How do you see that being widened out to get more involvement?

**Ms Morrison:** As the programme grows, it is really up to us to try to promote it and increase the membership of the forum to other members who may not necessarily be able to commit to being mentors, but who could maybe commit to participating on a one-off basis. That would maybe enable the ring-fencing of jobs. One of the reasons why we set up the forum was to ring-fence positions. That maybe has not happened as quickly as we first anticipated, but there have been a couple of opportunities. I suppose that we have work to do to try to promote that further.

**Mr Anderson:** So that is an area of work that you hope to further promote.

**Ms Morrison:** Yes.

**Mr Anderson:** You highlighted that four out of every five young people have moved into education, training or employment as a result of their participation in the Aiming Higher project, and I certainly commend everyone for that. What about the 20% who have not progressed? Do they come back into the system? What happens to try to catch them? We would all love 100%, would we not? How do we catch that 20% to try to move that on further?

**Ms Devlin:** One of the features in the programme is continued support for each individual young person for six months after they complete the programme of weekly activities. Typically, we meet every Thursday to go to our business visits and meet our mentors. We have a programme in place and run that for that group of young people every Thursday. When they graduate and the programme comes to an end, the onus is on us to still have regular contact with them. That might be through providing practical support if they are going for an interview for either a training organisation or a job. We try to make sure that everything is put in place for them to help them with that, through advice, clothing grants or whatever.

We talked about the fact that there is a statutory responsibility on each health and social care trust for young people in care up to the age of 21. The support that they receive from their social worker and other staff comes to an end at that age, and, based on that, the upper age limit for the project is 21. However, we still endeavour to provide the six months of further support. Even if a young person does not complete the programme or does not move on to other training, employment or education directly after the programme, we still work with them. Another colleague who is not part of the panel today, Gary Cooper, works within employability in the Belfast Trust. It is his responsibility to pick up with the

young people. As Emma said, there have been two occasions on which two young people have been able to come back into the programme, and that has worked successfully for them.

**Mr Anderson:** Does some extra work need to be done to move that 20% to a higher level? I am focusing on that 20% because, while good work has obviously gone on in the programme and that should not be lost, maybe a bit more higher level work would bring that 20% along.

**Ms Devlin:** I agree, absolutely.

**Mr Anderson:** It is good that you keep in contact with the young people and try to move them on.

**Ms Devlin:** I want to draw the Committee's attention to something. We would call that area "transition" or "transitional support". Include Youth has been very fortunate to get funding to have two workers in place, as a model for providing support for young people once they finish a programme. It is like a safety net, almost, of trying to put support in place. We have one full-time worker in the Belfast Trust area and one full-time worker in the Western Trust area. They are in place for young people who come through our Give and Take programme. That model could also be put in place for the Aiming Higher project, although it would require additional resources.

You are quite right: the successes for us are the young people who move on to other programmes and, hopefully, employment. However, we know of at least one or two young people who got a job but left it after a number of weeks, because it was such a big jump for them to move from not being in work to getting all the pieces of the jigsaw in place so that they could continually arrive at a designated place at a certain time. One key area of support is in helping them with that, but, as you rightly said, we also need to help the young people who have not been able to make that move at that point in time.

**Mr Anderson:** I appreciate that. I certainly congratulate you on your work and look forward to hearing more good things in the future.

**Mr F McCann:** What is it that they say? Keep the best wine to last. *[Laughter.]* I know of the work that Business in the Community has done over a long period of years, and I certainly recognise the work that Include Youth has done over a lengthy time. I wish you well for the future, Tanya. It can seem a difficult task, but the rewards at the end of it are good. I know that mentoring can be the lifeline that many people require to take them from hopelessness to realising that there might be a future for them somewhere down the line. I know the difficulties that people in communities that have NEETs face, and I spoke about those during the session with the OU. Additional barriers are faced by those who come out of care. Anybody who works to try to create a better future and offer better opportunities to those who are coming out of care has to be commended.

While partnerships can be built up between Business in the Community and Include Youth, sometimes, when you are dealing with statutory organisations, those partnerships become unequal. We need to work to ensure that there is an equal partnership, and we all have a responsibility to try to ensure that that is done.

The offer is there from the Committee to do anything that we can do. I repeat the point that Anna and the Chair made. One of the things that we have done fairly successfully are the Long Gallery events that have showcased work that is being done. Maybe such an event could help to launch the conference that you are talking about. If there is anything that we can do to assist with that, we will do it.

**Ms Lo:** Do you mean to launch the mentoring week?

**Mr F McCann:** Yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Swann):** No other members have indicated that they want to ask a question. Ladies, thank you very much for your time and for coming here today. Tanya, the Committee again wishes you well in your future studies as you go on to be a children's nurse. Dear help you. *[Laughter.]*