



FICTA
Federation of Irish
Complementary Therapy Associations

Proposed amendments to The Education of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2002

Preface.

An integrated approach to education for persons with disability has to take into account the vastness and diversity of disability and to consider that a "one size fits all " policy is inappropriate. Education is supposed to involve the development of physical, emotional and cognitive potential.

Denham J. quotes .O'Dalaigh C.J. as saying "Education essentially is the teaching and training of a child to make the best possible use of his inherent and potential capacities - physical, mental and moral". (The Jamie Sinnott Case at the High Court, 2001.) The holistic approach intrinsic to complementary therapy offers a flexible and adaptable range of options to support the development of that inherent and potential capacity.

F.I.C.T.A. Proposes :

- 1) that an independent assessment team to which all concerned would have recourse in the event of an appeal be formed.
- 2) that a holistic approach - giving equal input to parents, teachers, doctors, carers, therapists and assessors be adopted.

Education:

- Lack of an integrated education from the beginning has further marginalised adults with disability. The specifications outlined in the Bill for children under eighteen should also apply to those over eighteen.
- We submit that the care and education of the disabled is a highly specialised field, which requires specialised training. The Bill as published, does not take into account the need to 'educate' teachers, medical practitioners, carers and families alike.

The National Council for Special Education.

- The proposed National Council for Special Education would benefit from the inclusion on the council of a parent with an understanding of both the functions of the Council and of the implications of having a disabled child. (Section 5 - 9)

The Special Needs Organiser:

- The Special Education Needs Organiser must have an understanding of the special needs of the disabled and of *all the therapeutic options available*.

- The findings of the Special Education Needs Organiser must be co-ordinated and consolidated to form an integrated education and training plan. We submit that the inclusion of a complementary therapy representative on the Council would go some way towards providing an adequate framework to this end.

Introduction:

The Federation of Irish Complementary Therapy Associations is composed of professional associations and regulatory bodies representing a number of complementary therapy disciplines in Ireland. The practitioners represented by the regulatory bodies making this submission aim to provide the highest level of service to their clients. FICTA represents approximately 5000 practitioners of complementary therapy which is the treatment of choice of a growing number of people. FICTA is actively involved in the ongoing consultation process on the regulation/registration and recognition of complementary and alternative therapies, which is an element of the current Health Strategy.

To date the care of the disabled has been left more or less in the hands of voluntary groups without statutory obligations to maximise the potential of the people in their care, and health boards who have been limited to the use of a medical model wherein the disabled are treated as “sick” rather than people whose potential requires alternative treatments, education and training procedures.

The Bill is aspiration, in that it lays the foundation on which a more legally binding service for disabled people may be provided. It is however flawed in that it is based upon an education model which takes insufficient account of the multidisciplinary and multidimensional ways of learning utilised by disadvantaged and disabled people.

It is this narrow base which is of concern to F.I.C.T.A.

F.I.C.T.A. Proposes that:

- 1) An independent assessment team to which all concerned would have recourse in the event of an appeal. Parents frequently find themselves up against the “experts” who turn a deaf or patronising ear to their worries. Parents require full and proper information in matters of the health and education of their offspring.

A Holistic Independent Team which would liaise with parents and the National Council for Special Education in the best interests of the disabled person and their parents/guardians and insure that parents/guardians do not feel excluded from the care of their charges. Such a team would be composed of a representative from the following bodies:- Parents Council, Special Educationalists, Alternative and Complementary Therapy Consultants, Justice Equality and Law Reform, the Disabled Community itself, Allopathic Medicine, Health Boards, the Education Board and Schools Management Boards and at least one independent and neutral member of the public.

The National Council for Special Education: The proposed National Council for Special Education would benefit from the inclusion on the council of a parent with an understanding of both the functions of the Council and of the implications of having a disabled child. (Section 5 - 9)

- This is a vital consideration in order to assist the Special Education Needs Organiser in the delivery of

"appropriate support services"

Counselling: For the parents of special needs children the journey towards registration as outlined in the bill - section 5/9- can be traumatic and difficult. An inclusive approach, with parental involvement from the outset, is of paramount importance.

- This should involve support, counselling and education of parents in preparation for the registration process.

2) A holistic approach that gives equal input to parents, teachers, doctors, carers, therapists and assessors.

In order to design and deliver an appropriate education plan, it is necessary that a team of experts in medical, psychological, nutritional, educational and supportive therapies be on, or advisory to, the proposed National Council for Special Education. The National Council would benefit from the inclusion of a Complementary Therapy Consultant as an aid to the Special Needs Organiser in supporting an integrated plan towards health and education.

Special Education Needs Organiser . Section 7 (1)

The Special Education Needs Organiser must have an understanding of the special needs of the disabled and of **all the therapeutic options available**, that can be combined and alternated to the maximum benefit of the person concerned. The findings of the Special Education Needs Organiser must be co-ordinated and consolidated to form an integrated education plan.

- This is essential, considering the current situation where, even in special needs schools, children are not receiving adequate education.

FICTA submits that the inclusion of a complementary therapy representative on the Council would go some way towards providing an adequate framework for balanced and effective legislation.

- The term "complementary" refers to both the health and education options and requires consideration of alternative and multi-intelligent approaches to the education of people with disabilities. Multiple treatment and teaching methods have to be applied.

EDUCATION.

- The Bill does not take into account the need to 'educate' teachers, medical practitioners, carers or parents.

We submit that the care and education of the disabled is a highly specialised field, which requires specialised

training in awareness for doctors, teachers and carers alike, with particular emphasis on acute and highly developed skills in communication - from sensory integration and nutrition, to behavioural, cognitive, verbal and non verbal expression.

THE ROLE OF COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

Therapies such as Reflexology, Yoga and Cranio Sacral Therapy^{1&2} have a very important role in the delivery of education - for the obvious reason that where illness, distress and/or discomfort are present, learning is impossible. The efficacy of complementary therapies is well documented - in this country and elsewhere³ - in benefiting and relieving numerous conditions associated with disability - from infancy to old age.

- The facility to avail of complementary therapies should be integrated into the education system for the disabled.

THE HEALTH BOARDS

Health and education are intrinsically linked, as is shown in the recognition in this Bill that education referral is deemed to originate with the "opinion of the health boards".

- This referral process should also consider the role of and consult with complementary health care professionals.

EDUCATION for ADULTS with DISABILITIES

- The specifications outlined in the Bill for children under eighteen should also apply to those over eighteen.

The education of the disabled person, is a long and slow process and dependent on the nature of the disability. The Bill does not take into consideration the educational needs of adults with disabilities currently in the support services and institutional systems and which presently struggle to offer a service which exceeds containment. Part of the struggle has to do with inadequate facilities for learning and part is due to the lack of an integrated approach. While endeavouring to implement equality, social inclusion and independent living, these services are beleaguered by inadequate funding, inappropriate premises and inadequately trained staff.

- Lack of an integrated education from the beginning has further marginalised children and adults with disability.

Ideally, education within the mainstream is best, with suitably trained teachers supported by suitably trained therapists. Such teachers and therapists should be adequately remunerated in accordance with their qualifications and experience in this field.

SUMMARY

An integrated approach to education for persons with disability has to take into account the vastness and diversity of disability, and consider that "one size fits all" is inappropriate. Education is supposed to involve

the development of physical, emotional and cognitive abilities.

"Education essentially is the teaching and training of a child to make the best possible use of his inherent and potential capacities - physical, mental and moral". Denham J. - quoting O'Dalaigh C.J. the Sinnott Case at the High Court, 2001.

- Further consideration should be given to the provision of ongoing courses in parenting and care of disabled persons.
- The education of the adult disabled requires due consideration of the need to consult with the disabled and their parents and/or guardians.
- Provision for greater openness, case study and review between medical, educational and complementary professionals is also required.

Finally, the questions must be asked:

Does this Bill reflect the expressed needs of the disabled themselves?

Have the disabled had a voice in the formulation of the recommendations set out therein?

- 1 Unique Studies of Craniosacral System. John Upledger, D.O.F.A.A.O. § Ernest Retzlaff, Ph.D. Michigan State Universities College of Osteopathic Medicine
- 2 Craniosacral Function in Brain Dysfunction John E. Upledger, D.O. Dept of Biomechanics Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine from "Osteopathic Annals" - July 1983
3. A Thermographic View of Autism John Upledger, D.O. - Osteopathic Annals August 11 .8/1983

The therapy associations contributing to this submission are:

Association of Irish Acupuncturists
Association of Irish Reflexologists
Bio-Energy Therapists Association
Institute of Clinical Hypnotherapy & Psychotherapy
Irish and International Aromatherapy Association
Irish Reflexology Institute
Irish Yoga Association
Kinesiology Association of Ireland
Rebirthing Psychotherapy Association
Scenar Practitioners Society of Ireland
Shiatsu Society of Ireland
The Reiki Association of Ireland
Yoga Federation of Ireland
Yoga Society Ireland
Yoga Therapy Ireland