**Royal College of Occupational Therapists Submission to the Education Authority’s inquiry into education funding in Northern Ireland.**

This submission is made on behalf of the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, the professional body for over 33,000 occupational therapists across the UK.

The submission is in response to the Education Authority’s inquiry into education funding in Northern Ireland, and demonstrates how, when used effectively, occupational therapy can improve children’s outcomes and is cost effective. Further information on any aspect of this response can be gained by contacting the College.

While the Committee has invited written evidence on six issues, the College has concentrated its response on the following issue: ‘*How can funding be used to support the different school sectors in Northern Ireland, including schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities?*’

**Executive Summary**

This response outlines the vital role of occupational therapists in working with partners in education to enable children with special educational needs and disabilities to achieve their personal and academic potential.

Key points to note from this submission include:

* Occupational therapists play a key role in supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities.
* Occupational therapists provide direct intervention to enable skill development and participation in children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who attend mainstream and specialist schools.
* Occupational therapists also provide indirect support by training teaching staff.
* Occupational therapists have the skills and expertise to recommend specialist equipment to enable children with SEND to access learning opportunities and the wider school curriculum.

**Submission**

Occupational therapists are committed to person-centred practice and work in partnership with families, education providers and others to ensure that children with special educational needs and disabilities reach their personal and educational potential. As a science-based profession, occupational therapists incorporate evidence–based practice into our work to ensure the best outcomes for children and families.

* **Occupational therapy in schools**

While there are no occupational therapists currently based in mainstream schools in Northern Ireland, occupational therapists provide in-reach support to children with special educational needs and disabilities in mainstream settings, providing individualised therapy programmes, working collaboratively with other agencies and providing training to teaching and support staff.

Occupational therapists are highly skilled in assessing the needs of children within the special school environment and providing appropriate therapy, support and equipment to maximise skills and enable children to reach their academic and personal potential.

RCOT members in Northern Ireland point out that there has been no investment in occupational therapy services since special schools transferred from health to education in 1986, meaning that some children with special needs and disabilities are missing out.

RCOT members in Northern Ireland would like further detail about how the Proposed Framework of Future Provision in the Early Years for Children with Special Educational Needs and the Educational Authority’s Special Schools Area Plan will interact with existing health and education services to ensure that services work cooperatively.

RCOT would also welcome clarity about commissioning arrangements for occupational therapy input to special and mainstream schools and recommend that this is considered as part of the review to ensure that children receive the therapy and support they require to develop skills and maximise learning opportunities.

* **Equipment**

Many children with special educational needs and disabilities require specialist equipment to enable them to access learning opportunities and occupational therapists have the skills to identify the most appropriate equipment or adaptation to meet a child’s needs.

RCOT members would welcome clarity about the process and responsibility for funding, provision and maintenance of specialist equipment, including specialist seating to support children with special educational needs and disabilities in mainstream and special school settings.

**About the Royal College**

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists is the UK Professional Body and Trade Union for over 33,000 Occupational Therapists, support workers, managers and students. Occupational Therapy enables people of all ages to participate in daily life to improve health and wellbeing. They are the only Allied Health Profession trained at a pre-registration level to work within both physical and mental health and work across both health and social care.

**Contact**

For further information on this submission, including any further detail on data sources or service examples, please contact:

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