

**An Evaluation of the Bus-Escort Training  
Programme Provided by St Angela's College,  
Sligo in Partnership with the National  
Association of Boards of Management in Special  
Education (NABMSE)**

**Dr. Emer Ring,  
Mary Immaculate College,  
Limerick**



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## **Introduction**

Children with special educational needs benefit from environments that are characterised by consistency and predictability and in which they feel safe, secure and affirmed. In Ireland, due to the geographically dispersed location of both mainstream and special schools, significant numbers of children with special educational needs avail of the school transport system (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2011). The importance of providing an appropriate environment for children with special educational needs as they travel to and from school has been highlighted nationally and internationally (Tiernan, Deacy and McDonagh, 2013). Bus escorts have a key role in contributing to the provision of this appropriate environment.

## **Bus-Escort Training Programme: A Context**

A pilot training programme for twenty-three bus escorts was provided by St. Angela's College, Sligo in collaboration with the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE), at Galway Education Centre in Autumn 2013. The project emanated from the *Summary Report of Inter-Departmental Collaboration on School Transport for Students with Special Needs* (Inter-Departmental Working Group on School Transport, 2010). This working group was established in Sligo in 2005 to provide for all those involved in school transportation of children with special educational needs to collaborate and work together. The working group comprised members from the Department of Education and Science (DES), principals of special schools in Sligo and Bus Éireann. The working group was chaired by a member of the Inspectorate of the DES. It is to be noted that the title of the DES has been renamed the Department of Education and Skills from May 2010 (DES, 2011). Discussions with bus escorts and occupational therapists also informed the work of the group. Meetings were held regularly in Sligo Education Centre and joint training sessions for bus escorts and drivers commenced in Sligo Education Centre in early 2007. Subsequently a parent representative was also invited to join the working-group. In July 2010, the working group compiled a report. A number of key conclusions were identified and included the following:

- Working with children with special educational needs, learning disability and communication difficulties constitutes a rewarding but equally challenging occupation;
- Children with special educational needs benefit when 'joined-up thinking' is a feature of provision;
- Positive approaches, knowledge of children and their disabilities and consistency are critical in providing appropriately for children with special educational needs;
- Joint-training for bus personnel, who are employed by different agencies, assists in eliminating potential ambiguities and ensures clear messages are delivered.

The Report recommends that a series of training seminars and support be provided for bus personnel, which focus on the relevant issues specific to their role. The report reflects research and good practice in other jurisdictions and advises that the programme of training for bus personnel should be cognisant of current social, educational, health and welfare,

political and legislative contexts, the organisational and professional milieu in which bus personnel operate and the stakeholders with whom they collaborate.

The pilot training programme for twenty-three bus escorts provided by St. Angela's College, Sligo in collaboration with NABMSE, commenced at Galway Education Centre in Autumn 2013. The bus escorts were providing support for children in ten schools comprising three mainstream primary schools, one mainstream post-primary school, five special schools and one Irish-medium special school located in the Gaeltacht. The duration of the bus journey for children to these schools ranged from fifteen minutes to two hours and fifteen minutes.

The training programme comprised twenty hours in total and participants attended seven weekly sessions from 10.30 am – 1.30 pm. An evaluation of the programme was independently undertaken. Programme material was examined including research conducted prior to developing the training programme, literature related to the role of bus escorts for children with special educational needs was explored and focus groups were conducted with participants, lecturers on the programme and NAMBSE representatives. The report is presented under the following headings: **Rationale; Bus Escorts; Programme Content; Programme Delivery; Participant-Evaluation; Conclusion/Recommendations.**

## **Rationale**

The twentieth century marked the beginning of a rights-based approach to providing for individuals with special educational needs. There has been a profound and quite deliberate shift away from a 'caring perspective' of disability to a 'civil rights' and 'entitlement' frame of reference (Jordan, 2008). In Ireland, a raft of legislation has enshrined the rights of children with special educational needs to an appropriate education and the provision of support services (Ireland, 1998; 2000; 2000-2004; 2004; 2005). International policies and trends have contributed significantly to the consolidation of special education provision in Ireland (Gash et al., 1996; Hughes, 2000). Ireland was a signatory to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, which it subsequently ratified in 1992 (Children's Rights Alliance, 1998). Quinn (2000) observes that Article 23 is of particular importance in that it marked the first time that the rights of persons with disabilities to education, training and healthcare were explicitly referred to by a UN human rights treaty.

In 1990 Ireland subscribed to a European Community (EC) declaration to pursue a policy of integration, which was further endorsed by the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (EC Council of Ministers of Education, 1990; Ireland, 1993). In 1994, Ireland was one of ninety-two governments and twenty-five international organisations subscribing to the Salamanca Statement, which asserted that access to mainstream schools must be provided for all pupils with special educational needs (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1994). Ireland has signed and ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) and the European Social Charter (revised) of 1996, which together govern discrimination, education and the education of people with disabilities (Council of Europe; 1950; 1996). Ireland is also a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which commenced in May 2008. Article 24 recognises the rights of individuals with disabilities to

education and asserts that all States Parties shall ensure, *inter alia*, an inclusive education system and lifelong learning directed to the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity as well as their mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (UN, 2008). Article 24 S(4) explicitly refers to States Parties taking appropriate measures to train professionals and staff and that such training shall include disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

In 2009, Ireland was a party to the recommendation of the Council of Europe in relation to the education and social inclusion of children and young persons with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) (Council of Europe, 2009). The importance of initial and continuing training programmes for professionals liable to be involved in the education of children and young people with ASDs is explicitly referred to in the recommendation.

It is clear therefore that education provision for children with special educational needs in the twenty-first century is located within a rights-based framework and underpinned by the principles of equality of access to, and participation in, appropriate educational experiences. There is also a recognition nationally and internationally that professionals and staff working with children with special educational needs should have sufficient knowledge and understanding to enable them to respond appropriately to the child's needs and provide a safe, secure and supportive environment for the child.

### **Bus Escorts**

In Ireland, a school transport scheme is in place to support the transport to and from school for children with special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability (DES, 2011). This service is operated by Bus Éireann on behalf of the DES. The Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) advises the DES if a child's care and safety needs are such as to require the support of a bus escort and allocates funding to schools, for the employment of escorts to accompany children on the bus journey to and from school (DES, 2011).

While there is no explicit definition of the role of the bus escort in documentation or circulars issued by the DES, reference is made to the need for children with special educational needs to be escorted while traveling on school buses and taxis, needing help with embarking on and disembarking from the bus and needing help and supervision during the journey where a student has a lack of control mechanisms required for comfortable and safe travel (DES, 2011).

In contrast to the DES in Ireland, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in Britain advises that all local authorities should ensure that all drivers and escorts taking pupils to and from school and related services have undertaken disability equality training (DfES, 2007; 2011). According to the DfES, it is also good practice for those responsible for planning and managing school transport to have disability equality training. It is advised that disability equality training should consist of developing an awareness of different types of disability including hidden disabilities; an awareness of what constitutes discrimination;

training in the necessary skills to recognise, support and manage pupils with different types of disabilities, including hidden disabilities and certain behaviour that may be associated with such disabilities; training in the skills necessary to communicate appropriately with pupils with all types of different disabilities, including the hidden disabilities; and training in the implementation of health care protocols to cover emergency procedures.

According to a *Value for Money Review of the School Transport Scheme* conducted by the DES in 2011, the rationale for the theory behind the school transport scheme is that through the provision of inputs (financial resources, buses and taxis, escorts, staff-time), children who may have difficulties in accessing schools are transported to school (the output of the scheme) and allowed to participate fully in the education system and access to education is equitable to all (the intermediate outcome). Through participating fully in education, children are enabled to develop to their full potential and thereby contribute to the economy and wider society (the final outcome of the scheme) (DES, 2011).

In order to participate fully in the education system, children require access to staff members who have a knowledge and understanding of the implications of their special educational needs and thus provide an environment where they can meaningfully and actively participate. Bus escorts are provided only for children who require high levels of support and can be described as the most vulnerable children in the education system. It is clear from a range of literature that staff and personnel who are involved with children with special educational needs should have appropriate training (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2008; DES, 2012). This is further substantiated by the findings of a questionnaire survey disseminated to principals of mainstream and special schools by St. Angela's College, which yielded a response rate of 60% (72/120 questionnaires were returned). There was a hundred percent agreement by participants that bus escorts should receive training with reference to their role. It is critical therefore that bus escorts are provided with training commensurate with their role.

### **Programme Content**

Programme content for the training programme was informed by an in-depth and extensive documentary analysis of literature related to provision for bus escorts nationally and internationally. A questionnaire survey was distributed to principals of special and mainstream schools in October 2011. Seventy-two of the hundred and twenty questionnaires were returned, yielding a 60% response rate. Additionally focus-group interviews were conducted with bus escorts, parents and principals in November 2011. As previously discussed, participants' responses to the questionnaire survey recorded a 100% agreement that bus escorts should receive training with regard to their role. Principals were asked to indicate what training bus escorts had received to date. Twenty-two out of seventy-two (30.5%) indicated that their bus escorts had not received any training, Fifty out of seventy-two (69.4%) reported that their bus escorts had received varying levels of training in relation to manual handling, crisis prevention institute (CPI) training, health and safety and child protection. Seventeen out of seventy-two (23.6%) indicated that they had a budget for training; forty-two out of seventy-two (58.3%) indicated that they did not have a budget for training and nine out of seventy-two (12.5%) indicated that they didn't know if a

budget for training was available. Three of seventy-two (4.1%) did not respond to this question.

The importance of the bus escort in supporting home/school links was highlighted by the consultative focus group discussions that were conducted during the research. It was reported that information is communicated via the bus escort between the home and school. It was further reported that the child's ability to participate in school is influenced by the events and conditions of the bus journey. It was noted that the skill of the bus escort in ensuring a successful journey is often challenged by the duration of the journey and appropriateness of the bus in accommodating the child's specific needs. All stakeholders supported the value and importance of adequate training to enable the bus escort to fulfil his/her duties.

A number of areas were highlighted in the data as constituting priority training needs. These areas are listed in Appendix A. Based on the findings of this research, a twenty-hour training programme was developed. The key aim of the programme was identified as enabling bus personnel to gain knowledge, develop skills and thus be better equipped to assist children during their bus journey to and from school. The content of the programme is summarised in Table 1. below:

**Table 1. Content of Twenty-hour Training Programme for Bus Escorts**

<b>Table 1. Content of Twenty-hour Training Programme for Bus Escorts</b>	
Session 1	The Role of the Bus Escort
Session 2	Policy and Legislation
Session 3	Understanding Students with Special Educational Needs
Session 4	Epilepsy
Session 5	Critical Incidents, Report Writing and Record Keeping
Session 6	Manual Handling
Session 7	Promoting Positive Behaviour

A clear link is evident between programme content and initial survey research/focus-groups conducted. The inclusion of direct quotations from the initial survey/focus groups that inform this research is particularly effective in demonstrating clear links between the theoretical framework of the programme and the content. A relevant policy and legislative context is beneficially constructed. The role of the bus escort is clearly situated within the overall provision of education for children with special educational needs. A focus is maintained on bus escorts' daily areas of responsibility as they relate to children's health, well-being and safety while travelling to and from school. A child-centred approach is promoted and the holistic development of the child is consistently highlighted. Significant attention is directed towards developing participants' understanding of the concepts and principles that inform and shape the development of special education. The implications of specific special educational needs for children's participation in daily activities are investigated and analysed. The importance of developing clear and effective communication strategies and creating a positive, respectful and affirmative environment for children is emphasised. Collaboration, consultation and team-work with parents/carers, school

personnel and bus drivers are highlighted as key components to be considered in the context of the role and responsibilities of a bus escort.

Programme content is comprehensive, accessible and clearly presented. Powerpoint presentations are augmented by well-designed and detailed session-plans, which have the potential to facilitate the delivery of this training programme in the future.

### **Programme Delivery**

A wide variety of course materials is used and includes handouts, powerpoint presentations, flip-charts, and case-studies. Course materials are clearly presented and are of a high-standard.

Participants' involvement in, and ownership of the programme is secured from the outset through the distribution of a needs and expectations survey, which focuses on participants' professional needs, expectations in relation to the training programme and the contribution participants consider they might make to the programme.

Learning outcomes are clearly articulated and beneficially presented at the start of each session. This provides an immediate focus for learning and enables participants to take an active role in their own learning. The inclusion of an ice-breaker activity in Session 1 [The Role of the Bus Escort] potentially contributes to the creation of a relaxed and comfortable learning environment.

A range of interactive and participatory learning and teaching strategies is employed. Activity-based learning, discussion, experiential learning and direct-teaching are used to good effect. Individual, pair and group-work are variously employed. A respectful atmosphere is cultivated and confidentiality in relation to participants' work is valued and promoted. A commendable emphasis is placed on providing participants with opportunities to discuss experiential everyday contexts.

Due attention is directed to participant-evaluation. Participants are encouraged to evaluate each session's learning outcomes and determine whether they have been achieved. Participants are invited to identify that they found to be most useful, least useful and to provide some general comments.

A commitment to using evaluation data to inform further planning is articulated.

### **Participant Evaluation**

In this section the findings from the evaluations conducted by the participants after each session are included in addition to the data collected during the semi-structured focus-group interviews. Evaluations were completed in a comprehensive and thorough manner by participants and indicated high levels of reflection and engagement with the evaluation process. Participants' responses, both in the evaluation and semi-structured focus-group interviews, demonstrate the indepth learning achieved by participants and the positive outcomes of all sessions in relation to supporting participants in their role as bus escorts.

Responses also demonstrate the complexity of the bus escort’s role and the criticality of bus personnel having a knowledge and understanding of the implications of children’s special educational needs in order to cultivate and promote positive and supportive interactions.

A selection of the evaluations provided by participants in relation to each session is provided in Tables 2 – 8 below. It is important to point out that participants were invited to evaluate each session anonymously. In the majority of cases the section on the evaluation under ‘what did you find least useful?’ was left blank by participants.

**Table 2. Selection of Participant Evaluations – Session 1: The Role of the Bus Escort**

<b>Session 1</b>	<b>The Role of the Bus Escort</b>
<b>What did you find most useful?</b>	<i>Participants’ experiences; Hearing what other people had to say and listening to their experiences and sharing mine; Analysing the role of the bus escort, the lack of clarity from the Dept. about the role and its responsibilities; Being able to talk about and hear other approaches to bus escort role; The opportunity to share thoughts and best practice; All issues, behavioural problems etc, it was good to communicate with other bus escorts; Other people’s views; Other escorts’ experiences; Comments from other people; Discussions with Other; That there are others with the same issues and concerns to me, tips and helpful ideas; Feedback from others in the group; Safety of children; Certain procedures that I did not know about, which I do now.</i>
<b>What did you find least useful?</b>	<i>Found it very interesting; Items need to be sorted with school; Not relevant as it has opened up valuable discussion; All discussions were useful.</i>
<b>General Comments</b>	<i>Enjoyed meeting all the bus escorts; Good session and ran well; I found the discussion among the class useful and interesting; Different needs of different escorts; Looking forward to more clarity on role; A great, well-organised and informative workshop. Well done; Overall good; Enjoyed session, very clear, good; very enjoyable; Took a lot from the day; Very good; Interesting, very good; Feel our experiences are very important to future expectations of role of escort.</i>

**Table 3. Selection of Participant Evaluations – Session 2: Policy and Legislation**

<b>Session 2 Policy and Legislation</b>	
<b>What did you find most useful?</b>	<i>Hearing about how others adapt to situations and scenarios; Learning about the school policies; Learning all about school policies, unaware to this point of their role within the school; Going into great detail on each policies, different views sought, clear guidelines; Found it very helpful, very interesting topics to discuss; To be aware of the policies I need to know and the officers in the school; Policy and legislation information; Highlighting the need to be aware of school policies and how they relate to the job of the bus escort; The trigger to investigate what the policies are that I need to read at school; All very relevant to our job, making us more aware of who to go to and who's responsible; Breakdown of various roles within the school environment.</i>
<b>What did you find least useful?</b>	<i>The frustration of not knowing properly policies and procedures; Everything very useful; At this class found everything useful; Found all aspects useful; Found everything of great benefit to us; All very informative and very well delivered.</i>
<b>General Comments</b>	<i>Very interesting; Enjoyed the class, found it very interesting; Need to contact Board of Management; Really enjoyed it; It's great to hear other people's opinions on different areas; Putting all the heads together to solve situations; General comments useful; I was made aware of gaps in my knowledge of school policies, and the legislation related to the work of bus escorts e.g Health, Safety and Work Act 2005; The legal aspect of policies and the practical application of policies as well as the sharing of protocols with classmates was invaluable, thank you; Case study opens up great information from all participants; Very good course; Well presented; The course highlights the importance of clarifying so much for the bus escort.</i>

**Table 4. Selection of Participant Evaluations – Session 3: Understanding Students with Special Educational Needs**

<b>Session 3 Understanding Students with Special Educational Needs</b>	
<b>What did you find most useful?</b>	<i>Hearing how different people handle different situations; The idea to use picture plans. The discussion on strategies to help reduce problems. The terms to use when describing students with special educational needs; Strategies discussed about behaviour, policies, safety, communication; Very good, a lot of new information; Very good; Communication skills and how to handle situations; Open discussion and feedback from others. Thinking about all different types of special educational need; Helping me to understand the child and more confidence in dealing with them; The subject on autism; Made me think about things on my bus and relationship with school; Methods of dealing with different behaviour; Categories of special educational needs; How to help children develop appropriate communication using the bus journey to model correct language/pronunciation; Communication ideas and how to implement these; Role of the bus escort. Highlighting means of communicating and intervening on behaviour issues.</i>
<b>What did you find least useful?</b>	<i>Nothing; Everything was useful; Nothing, all very useful; Not having enough time; Communication skills; Communications with pupils with special need; All topics discussed were very informative.</i>
<b>General Comments</b>	<i>Well-ran, learned new things and met nice people; Thank you. Great to learn the descriptions of each syndrome/condition we deal with; The discussion on language and visual communication; Enjoying the course, looking forward to the next class; All very interesting, how to handle verbal and non-verbal situations; Learning to include PECS; Very enjoyable and well presented; I found it very easy to understand; Find the session very clear, helpful and enjoyable; Simple, clear. Treating children in a respectful manner, respect to all; A great lecture, thank you very much; Today's course helped make me aware of instances during the journey I could help the children communicate better and of ways I could improve my interactions with them.</i>

**Table 5. Selection of Participant Evaluations – Session 4: Epilepsy**

<b>Session 4</b>	<b>Epilepsy</b>
<b>What did you find most useful?</b>	<i>Being able to witness a seizure, to be put at ease, to listen to people’s experiences; Recognise the dangers; Learning about the different types of seizures. Dispelled any fears that one would have. Learning management of seizure. Handouts very useful; How people can lead a normal life with epilepsy; Very good explanatory video; The signs to look out for, the precautions to take; DVD evidence; Listening to people’s account of their seizure; Questions answered thoroughly by tutor. Very informative and now feel I would be able to handle a seizure in a more professional manner; The slides on epilepsy, they were very good.</i>
<b>What did you find least useful?</b>	<i>Recognise the symptoms; As I wasn’t aware of epilepsy before and had heard a lot of myths, everything I learned was useful; I found it all very helpful; All information is useful maybe not now but perhaps in later work with other individuals; I would have loved more time, very interesting.</i>
<b>General Comments</b>	<i>Found the tutor very good, explained the content very clearly; Found very useful; Learning about the different types of seizures. Listening to people talking about their seizures before and after; Think it was very hard to focus for so long on the one subject; A lot to take in on one subject; This section is a must for all people working in this area, where safety of child/young adult is paramount; More information on all these aspects of events that can happen with special needs clients should be explained to all bus escorts; So much to learn in one session; Thought today was very helpful.</i>

**Table 6. Selection of Participant Evaluations – Session 5: Critical Incidents, Report Writing and Record Keeping**

<b>Session 5</b>	
<b>Session 5</b>	<b>Critical Incidents, Report Writing and Record Keeping</b>
<b>What did you find most useful?</b>	<i>The outline of how to respond to critical incidents, to be aware of school policies and the location of incident report books and the basics of writing up reports; Very clearly presented. Making us more aware of talking to team manager, principal on clear guidelines of procedure; All the content was useful, clear, delivered very well, examples given very good from other bus escorts. The suggestion to keep an account for myself. Writing reports, e.g. being clear, facts etc; Today everything we spoke about was useful; The practical advice and the frank nature of the delivery. Was great to hear examples from presenter and to be treated as professionals. Presenter was extremely knowledgeable, honest and ‘with it’ in relation to bus escorting and what is exactly involved –well done; I found this session very interesting, there was lots of interesting topics; It was all most useful, learned of school policy that I was not aware of and that was relevant to me. Also report writing most useful; Knowledge of policy, procedures re. role of escort; Listening to other people’s comments and learning about school policies, critical incidences; Now know how to fill out reports properly and how to keep records properly; Clear and to the point. Making the principal and Board of Management aware of the role of escort; Knowing how important it is to look for policies and procedures and to protect yourself and the children; The information discussed about special needs assistants as well as bus escorts. Communication between different groups; Importance of keeping your own records- short , concise account of it. Factual not Emotive. Importance of informing yourself. Being part of a team; Powerpoint information excellent.</i>
<b>What did you find least useful?</b>	<i>Nothing, everything was useful and helpful; All useful; Not enough time to cover everything; Nothing, everything is worthwhile; Not enough time to deal with all policies;</i>
<b>General Comments</b>	<i>The example of a well-written report was very useful as I had never seen one before and now feel confident that I understand how to record details appropriately. Thanks so much for providing this course – it was really informative and reassuring. I hope it’ll be possible to provide something similar to other bus escorts in future; Never thought of bus passport – good idea; Found this session very helpful, makes me more aware of policy and procedurs and the need to know what these are and not be afraid to ask for them; A brilliant presenter, very easy to listen to; Presenter was very professional and down to earth. Did not ‘speak down to us, like some. Excellent speaker; Excellent course; All escorts should have to do courses similar to special needs assistant; Very good; Well ran and nice to see how other people have dealt with situations; How important to report all critical incidences. Need to have school phone for work; It made me think about my record-keeping and gives me confidence in the way I am doing things; Great clarity on issues; There is a need for collaboration between all parties involved – Bus Éireann/Transport, Dept. of Ed., Schools Involved and Parents; It was a very interesting learning day; Would like content information to be communicated with the Board of Management.</i>

**Table 7. Selection of Participant Evaluations – Session 6: Manual Handling**

Session 6	Manual Handling
What did you find most useful?	<p><i>Practically everything, but the lifting and sitting very useful; Lifting; Health, safety, posture; Different lifting techniques. Knowing how the spine/back works; Practical aspects, what to do. Highlighting the onus on yourself as an escort to perform a 'risk assessment'. Being proactive – not waiting for an incident to happen – a crisis can be avoided. Importance of awareness, assessment and reporting – working with a team. Ask for information. It's ok to ask. Planning essential; Learning what I was doing wrong and now knowing how to do it right in regards to lifting. Also listening to what others say helps deal with different situations; General duties of the employers. General duties of the employees. Manual handling and moving of pupils. Powerpoint very useful; Making me more aware of manual handling and the health and risks that exist if you don't do this properly; Yes very useful especially wheel-chair. Lifting the child from chair to seat, not to pull or take child's hands to get child onto the bus; Not to be lifting and report if not happy about situation; The risks involved in the line of lifting. We are not to lift a child on and off the bus; Best methods of lifting, bending, transferring on and off bus; Lots of safety suggestions.</i></p>
What did you find least useful?	<p><i>Nothing; Nothing. I think now I have a greater ability to resolve different scenarios; Nothing was useless.</i></p>
General Comments	<p><i>Never given any of the instructions before; Great course; Overall very useful; Found the class very useful; Clear content. Clear delivery. Importance of building up awareness. Importance of communication; I now think I can deal with situations better after this class. Very good and interesting; Very informative and very well presented. Would like to see input and feedback by St. Angela's to the schools; On a bus where space is limited it's not always easy to put things into practice; I have become aware of twisting my body in this confined space. Made me aware to position myself first; Well-presented; Very clear and easy understood; We all should participate in this course; Every escort should do it; Narrowness of buses causing problems.</i></p>

**Table 8. Selection of Participant Evaluations – Session 7: Promoting Positive Behaviour**

Session 7	Promoting Positive Behaviour
What did you find most useful?	<i>How people handle different behaviours. Learned how to deal with different behaviours. Good group discussions, which get everyone involved; Positive relationship. Top strategies; Different coping strategies. It got me thinking of my own behaviour; Discussions on behaviour management, our role and that of the driver. Looking towards ourselves and being aware of the environment the children are in and where we can make improvements; Positive behaviour strategies; Learning more about behaviour, how to respond to it. The different types of behaviour from other children; Ask for more information; The strategies for dealing with challenging behaviours and the focus on positive reinforcement and recognising how my own behaviour can affect situations; Listening to other people's comments throughout the class; Positive behaviour. Focus on the pupil not the behaviour. Personal space; How to phrase wording to sound positive rather than telling the child what to do; The slides very good; Helping us to get guidelines for the children to make things easier overall; Talking in general about situations; Again class discussion; Strategies; Positive language and positive reinforcements. Distractions. Use of handouts.</i>
What did you find least useful?	<i>Nothing. I thought everything was worthwhile; I found it all interesting; Nothing, everything absolutely useful.</i>
General Comments	<i>I thought it was an open session and when you spoke you were listened to and others helped with how they would do things in the same situation; Very good; I found the sessions very useful; Very easy to communicate with presenter; Very enjoyable and interesting and helpful; The emphasis on the differing abilities of children – that what is unacceptable behaviour from one child may be acceptable from another child was useful; Start each day fresh, be positive, calm; Overall very informative on the do's and don'ts of how to handle various behavioural issues; The presenter stayed within the parameters of the role of the escort – specific to what we might encounter and so I learned a lot. Encouraging class to speak, learning from others experience. Vocabulary not too verbose. Thank you; Finding the course/training so informative. All topics are all relevant to use all as bus escorts; Would like to see all bus escorts being able to have opportunity to see how behavioural issues are dealt with in the classroom.</i>

The focus-group interview schedule is included in Appendix B. A focus-group interview with participants of the programme was conducted on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2014 for the duration of one hour. Merriam (1998) advises that group interviews need to take account of group processes. Group interviews generate rich data, are flexible, assist in stimulating participants' recall and provide a perspective on the research question not available through individual interviews (Fontana and Frey, 1998). The group-interviewer requires the skills of both an individual interviewer while also remaining sensitive to the script of questions and the evolving patterns of group interactions and dynamics (Fontana and Frey). During the focus-group interview session attention was directed to the potential of the emerging group culture interfering with individual expression, the possibility of the group being dominated by one person and the importance of being alert to the impact of group dynamics on data collection. All participants contributed to the focus-group interview process and a communicative atmosphere prevailed.

Participants affirmed the interactive manner in which the programme was delivered and considered that the promotion of open-discussion supported and consolidated participants' learning. The affable and approachable manner of the lecturers who delivered the programme was affirmed and participants suggested that the creation of a safe and secure

environment optimised active participation. Table 9. below provides a selection of participants' responses to focus-group questions.

<b>Table 9. A Selection of Participants' Responses to Focus-Group Questions</b>
<b>What was most beneficial about the professional development you accessed?</b>
<i>The role of the escort is made clearer</i> <i>The training directed attention to important areas and provided strategies for behaviour</i> <i>I didn't have any information on autism</i> <i>There is a presumption that you know and you don't</i> <i>I have become more pro-active after the training</i> <i>We will be able to keep in touch with each other</i>
<b>What was least beneficial about the professional development you accessed?</b>
<i>Reduce the time spent on studying 'epilepsy'</i> <i>Behaviour management needs more time and should be more specific to the context of the bus and the management of behaviour in a confined space</i>
<b>Were there any other elements that could have been included in the professional programme that would have assisted you in your work?</b>
<i>I would have liked more information on medication and the policies and practice clarified</i> <i>Different schools have different practices and some schools have a policy of 'no medication'</i> <i>Risk assessment should be included in the training</i> <i>The role of the bus escort with regard to parents should be communicated by schools to parents.</i>
<b>Do you feel that the way the programme was delivered enabled to you to get the best from the experience?</b>
<i>More time for the group to share experiences would be a positive addition to the training</i>
<b>Do you have any suggestions with regard to the development of the programme in the future?</b>
<i>Include the bus-driver in the training as it is difficult when the bus driver does not have training</i> <i>The programme should be compulsory before you start and be supported by the school</i> <i>It would be great to have the opportunity to shadow a special needs assistant or a teacher in the school</i> <i>We should be in the loop for the development of children's behaviour management plan because at present that stops at the school</i> <i>The training programme should be recognised on the national qualification framework</i> <i>The role of the bus escort in managing children's personal hygiene should be included in the programme</i>

A summary of the findings of the focus-group interviews is presented in Table 10 and Table 11 below. Positive aspects of the professional development are identified and suggestions for the future development of the programme detailed.

**Table 10. Identification of Positive Aspects of the Professional Development by Participants**

- Clarity with regard to the role of the bus escort.
- Focus on areas relevant to the day-to-day work of the bus escort – behaviour management strategies; developing an understanding of children’s special educational needs including autistic spectrum disorder; health and safety issues as they relate to the bus escort’s tasks; the importance of communication with parents/school personnel and the bus driver.
- The creation of a learning-community of bus escorts and the future networking opportunities provided by participating in the programme.
- The importance of being proactive and pursuing relevant information with regard to the child with special educational needs.

**Table 11. Participants’ Suggestions for the Future Development of the Programme**

- The programme should be compulsory for all bus escorts.
- Newly appointed bus escorts should access the programme prior to commencement of employment.
- The focus in the programme on behaviour management strategies specific to the context where the bus escorts are working in the confined space of the bus should be maintained and extended.
- Reduce the time spent exploring ‘epilepsy’.
- Include content on ‘Risk Assessment’ in the programme.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

The conclusions/recommendations are presented with reference to **Specific Programme Content**, and **Future Programme Development**.

### **Specific Programme Content**

- Terminology – continue to encourage participants to use ‘children with special educational needs’ – avoid use of ‘SEN’.
- Increase the use of visual cues on slides in order to further consolidate participants’ learning and provide for individual participants’ learning styles.
- Consider including some visual clips on slides e.g. Session 3 types of communication devices/sensory clips etc.
- Isolate ‘eye-contact’ re. potentially difficulties for students with ASDs
- Retain information per session. However consider increasing the number of slides as on occasions there appears to be a significant amount of information on specific slides.
- Consider providing recommended reading at the end of each session for those who may be interested in pursuing this further.

- Provide more clarification on the differences between what is perceived as the binding status of the UN Convention v. the binding status legislation -
- Stimulate discussion re. the concept of categories as ‘Signposts’ rather than definitive.
- Caution re. potential of who benefits most slide Session 3 re. confined to children with those special educational needs.
- Session 4 – consider pre-cursor to session as alerting bus escorts to behaviour plan/individual education plan so that they are familiar with potential identified triggers.

### **Future Programme Development**

Based on the evidence outlined in this report, the training programme has the potential to impact positively on the quality of life for children with special educational needs and their families and enhance children’s educational experience. It is unacceptable that bus escorts, who support children with special educational needs, for extended periods of time on a daily-basis, do not receive training with regard to their role. Specific reference was made by participants to the challenges in managing children with ASDs and the difference the training programme made in terms of developing their knowledge and understanding of the implications of ASDs for children. This is particularly important in view of the progressively rising prevalence trend for ASD reported over the past decade (Wing and Potter, 2009) and the associated likelihood that all bus escorts will encounter children with ASDs in the course of their work. This practice should not be allowed to continue and should be addressed. Consideration should be given to the following:

- Providing for a national roll-out of this training programme using the existing structures/mechanisms for providing training for special needs assistants through local education centres.
- Directing attention to the concept of life-long learning and locating the programme on the national qualifications framework.
- Seeking clarification from the DES with regard to the role of the bus escort and requesting that a circular issues detailing same.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further clarification with regard to this report.

Le Meas,



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## **Appendix A**

### **Areas Highlighted as Priority Training Needs**

(These areas are listed alphabetically)

Administration of medication

Behaviour management/challenging behaviour

Child Protection

Clamping

Communication

Confidentiality

Critical Incidents

Dealing with conflict

Dealing with emergency situations – safe evacuation

Dignity and respect policy

First Aid

Health and Safety - First Aid

Health and Safety Law on Transport

LAMH

Liaising with parents

Manual Handling

Medical Issues – suction techniques; epilepsy; use of respirator; Non-violent crisis prevention intervention

Rapid Response – medical emergency

Report writing skills and record keeping

Rights of Child

Safe transport of equipment – wheelchairs; walkers

Sighted guiding skills

Stay Safe programme

Studio 3

Use of safety harnesses

**Appendix B**  
**Focus-Group Interview Schedule**

What was most beneficial about the professional development you accessed?

What was least beneficial about the professional development you accessed?

Were there any other elements that could have been included in the professional programme that would have assisted you in your work?

Do you feel that the way the programme was delivered enabled you to get the best from the experience?

Do you have any suggestions with regard to the development of the programme in the future?