

Graduation for Learning Disabled Jobseekers – Minister Awards Prizes

The new Minister for Employment and Learning Sir Reg Empey today visited an innovative North and West Belfast training organisation which helps people with learning disabilities prepare for employment. The Minister handed out special achievement awards to some of the 74 students enjoying their graduation ceremony.

The NOW Project, based on the Springfield Road, delivers a wide range of accredited courses which are recognised by local employers. NOW's Employment team also helps individuals with learning disabilities aged 16-65 to access paid jobs with local employers. The organisation won a 2006 National Training Award and this year's Aisling Award for excellence in education and training.

Sir Reg commented: "It is a great pleasure to be a part of today's ceremony, which recognises the exceptional achievements of people with learning disabilities. The success of the NOW Project in training these young people for work is particularly impressive as it is working in an area which still suffers high social and economic disadvantage. It is plain to see that every successful job gained is the result of a successful blend of high quality accredited training, the right amount of ongoing support and mentoring and excellent links with local employers."

Maeve McRory, Director of the NOW Project, said:

"We are delighted that the Minister has been able to take time out of his schedule to support our graduation ceremony. In the 6 years since we have been operating in this part of Belfast, we have helped around 400 students to prepare for the world of work. Support from the Department has enabled us to concentrate on accredited qualifications and giving individuals the support they need to get the job they want and keep it. In the changing times ahead it is important that we highlight the achievements of people with learning disabilities and recognise that these students have the opportunity to make the move into paid employment in their local communities."

Trainees celebrated successfully passing courses in money management and independent travel as well as vocational qualifications in hospitality and catering.