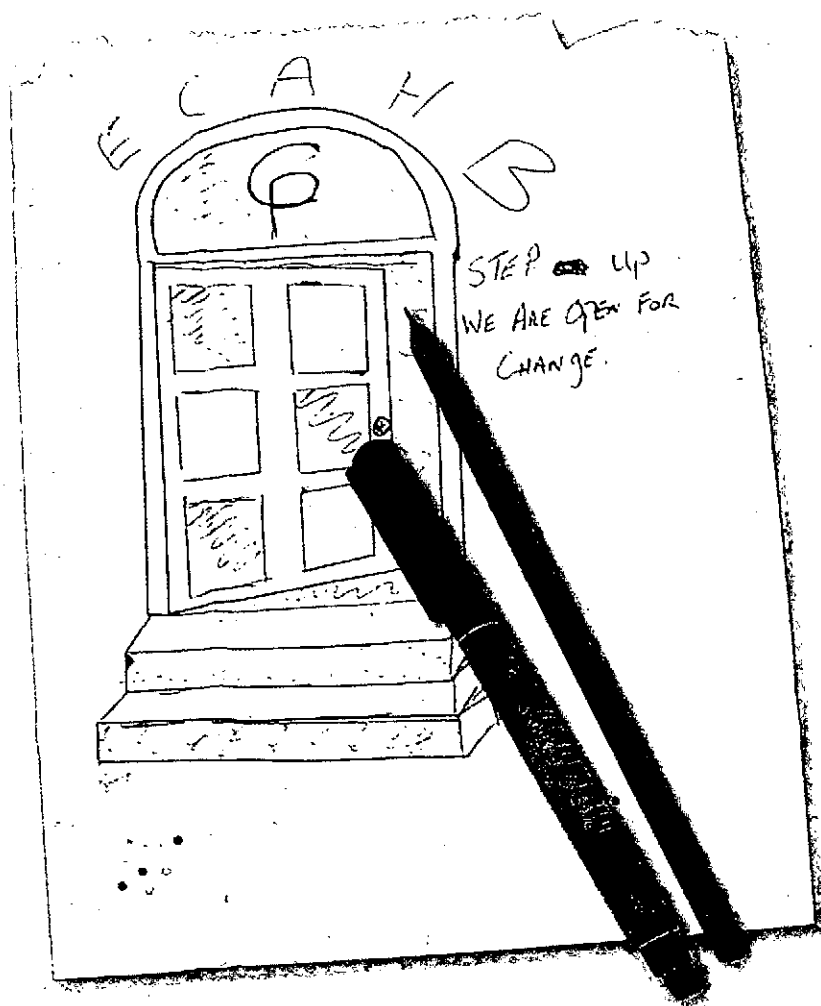




East Coast Area Health Board
Bord Sláinte Limistéar an Chósta Thoir



Keep the Change!

2000-2001 – The first year of the East Coast Area Health Board's Transformational Change Management Programme

THE IMPORTANT THING
IS THAT PEOPLE SEE A
PLACE THEY WANT TO
GET TO, RATHER THAN
JUST A PLACE THEY WANT
TO GET AWAY FROM.
CHANGE MUST BE DRIVEN
BY THIS INSPIRATION.



Pearse Costello, *Director of Human Resources*

also Retention

"People kept saying to me: They won't change. They won't allow that. They won't do it. People from all the various levels and the different parts of the organisation said this to me. I said – Never mind about them, what about you?"

Pearse Costello, Director of Human Resources, East Coast Area Health Board

The East Coast Area Health Board covers an area of Ireland that runs from South Dublin City to Dundrum through Dun Laoghaire to Bray and down to Arklow, Co. Wicklow. A large administrative organisation of health care workers, it faces the all-but-inevitable public service struggle for more money, more time, more people and more respect. Many employees tend to view ECAHB as a remote concept - they identify much more strongly with the individual hospital or clinic where they work than they do with ECAHB as a whole. They also often identify and define themselves through their disciplines. When called upon to communicate an individual identity the likelihood is that, for example, an employee will first describe themselves as a nurse, second as a nurse working at a particular hospital, and only thirdly as somebody who is a part of the Health Board. This is symptomatic of a view of the Board as an administrative convenience. The formation of the ECAHB – resulting from the break up of an even bigger organisation, the Eastern Health Board in March 2000 - is seen by many of its employees as a change in name only. Problems with bureaucratic structures, sectoral mentalities and communications continue, alongside the many practical challenges relating to such areas as accommodation, recruitment and retention. There is both hope and fear of change but also hope and fear that things will remain the same. When Pearse Costello arrived to the new post of

ECAHB Director of Human Resources in September 2000 his appointment was the first step in the establishment of a Human Resources Directorate that was to be responsible for providing strategic human resource policies and support for the 2,300 staff within the Board. Pearse has more than twenty years experience of public sector organisations, and the views he has always held on the importance of valuing individuals and encouraging them to develop have influenced his approach to managing change "What the management gurus are now saying about the importance of organisational culture and making it something that belongs to everybody is something which has been true all along" says Pearse. "The people are the organisation. It's not a difficult concept. My vision is a simple one: fulfilment of a common objective by achieving a consensus and involving everyone in a partnership that will work together to achieve it. Even from very early on I could tell from my day-to-day involvement with people what enthusiasm there is for this. The important thing is that people see a place they want to get to, rather than just a place they want to get away from. Change must be driven by this inspiration."

Pearse's personal vision for ECAHB would see it becoming an organisation where

- "We collaborate in partnership to create a sense of ownership of our organisation.
- We foster a culture which listens to our staff, who should be the building blocks for our Human Resources policies.
- Managers are advocates and agents for change.
- Managers are enabled to make Human Resource decisions as close as possible to the point of contact with clients.
- Public service achievements are recognised and celebrated."

The vision that Pearse has is of a partnership between managers and staff, between individuals in all the diverse areas encompassed by ECAHB.

He saw the opportunity for the Board to start down a road whereby it would to a certain extent re-invent itself as a new organisation, through the co-operation and the shared efforts of everybody who worked for it, all learning together more about each other, and more about the ways that they could change and improve their situation. He immediately recognised that this approach required two vital things.

Firstly it required the commitment, the goodwill and the energies of people at all levels within the Board. Without this the whole initiative would quickly founder. Secondly, it needed the help of outside facilitation:

the assistance of somebody who could add a neutral perspective, whose expertise was in encouraging the enthusiasm and the commitment of participants, and putting some structure around their activities. Both Pearse and the external facilitator, Alison Gardner, were determined that the change programme would be action-based. Commitments would be made to taking actions that would actually make changes and improvements a reality for the ECAHB. They were also insistent that the programme should be inclusive. Staff from all levels and areas of the Board would be invited to participate and decide what changes needed to be made, and they would operate on a fully equal basis.

Pearse's vision of the future was that of a fountain. He saw the ECAHB as a pool full of ideas, and what he wanted to create was a pumping mechanism that would draw these ideas up and then shower them down again over the pool,

oxygenating the water, clarifying things and enabling all within the pool to thrive and grow. In effect the staff of the ECAHB would provide their own consultancy, set up communication channels and ways of co-operative working that would enable genuine change and improvement in the areas where it was most vital that it occurred.



Alison's approach was a creative one, unlocking all the ideas and the inspirations that ECAHB employees had. Every effort has been made to make the programme enjoyable and this in itself has been of considerable benefit, in that staff began to feel acknowledged, valued and able to contribute.

"I am acutely aware that I cannot move this forward on my own. I need your ideas, your contributions and your commitment as well"

Pearse Costello, Invitation to the programme's initial workshop, December 2000.

Alison has a long background of public sector involvement. She also has very definite ideas about how change happens. "What was immediately apparent was that Pearse and I shared a lot of common ground about the way in which this was going to happen" she says. "You can't just get a hundred people in a room and tell them to work as a partnership. What you need to do is encourage something more gradual. If you can formulate and encourage effective collaborations between individuals and between groups of individuals then that is likely to lead eventually to more general organisational change. Soft issues such as the

evolution of a shared culture and effective communication channels are vital to this process."

The employment of Alison as an external facilitator, without any pre-conception, is in this context essential to the success of the programme. In order for the different expertise of individual collaborators to be recognised it is necessary for them to recognise similarities and differences in each other. As Alison says, "a working collaborative relationship will recognise differences in values and in beliefs, and build productive relationships round this. It is able to accommodate differences and disagreements. In this context I aim to offer objective, supportive, non-judgemental viewpoints, to assume a long-term, global perspective and deal with resistance to it." Alison seeks to engender a culture that encourages risk taking and which overcomes specific problems creatively. Through encouraging this co-operative attitude, dealing with negative personal responses and identifying and overcoming cultural differences Alison helps foster partnerships, and then facilitate their spread, thus turning individual learning

into organisational learning. "A lot of the value achieved is intangible. Just getting people together in a room and setting them talking, getting them to recognise they have something in common is a start. From there you can move towards agreement on an overall objective, and identify all the little objectives that contribute to it. The important thing is that the people involved do all this themselves, but they probably wouldn't be able to without my encouragement, the

direction and the structure I add to the process. It's vital the whole thing is action-based, that it doesn't just become a talking shop. People need to be able to point to concrete achievement, towards things that have happened because of the programme. On the other hand a lot happens that can't be measured so easily. People communicate, people recognise a shared agenda, a common desire, common barriers. Partnerships of this sort are not an abstract concept, they're a practical way of achieving relevant and sustainable change"

Pearse identified the Heads of Discipline within ECAHB as being a recognisable group that might first be approached with this collaborative, participative vision. Through the dissemination of question sheets, and then Heads of Discipline workshop facilitated by Alison, held in December 2000, a much clearer idea of ambitions, barriers and enablers was identified. As a result a second facilitated workshop was held in January 2001, at which the Heads of Discipline and Senior Management Team identified areas where they

could take action to address difficulties and achieve benefit for the Board. They then volunteered for various "Action Teams", which would confront these issues on an ongoing basis, reporting back regularly to Pearse, Alison and the other Teams.



These Action Teams cover subjects as diverse as Communications, Mentoring, Induction, Recruitment, Accommodation, Retention, Area and Senior Management Team Forum, Care Group Planning, Staff Facilities and Incentives and Client Participation. Each of the Teams involves individuals

drawn from different disciplines, and this is vital to the programme. As Pearse puts it – "You get a hospital manager sitting down with a speech and language therapy manager and somebody who works in child care services. Chances are they might not have even met before, and at first sight they don't have that much in common – they're from different disciplines and different parts of the organisation, so it seems there's no crossover of interests. Yet they've all signed up to tackle an issue that they themselves have identified as important to them and to the part of the organisation where they work – so that's the common ground. If they all see the need to do something about recruitment, or about accommodation, or they all think a mentoring programme or a staff newsletter would be valuable, then they start to see that there are similarities, common objectives and concerns. When they work together to achieve their goals their involvement starts to go a long way to binding the organisation as a whole closer. It's no longer an individual problem or an individual ambition – it's become something wider, and just seeing that is in itself a considerable achievement."

At the end of the first year identifiable successes of these Action Teams include the development of a structured Induction Programme, the setting up of a Mentoring scheme within ECAHB, a client participation survey conducted within the Central Mental Hospital and the production of a template for carrying out accommodation audits which has already assisted in ensuring concrete developments. The intangible benefits achieved at the same time are by their nature immeasurable. However, Pearse,

Alison and the Action Teams themselves, see them as considerable. Michael Doran, of the Human Resources Directorate and an Action Team member, offers a view on this. "A lot is being achieved that isn't immediately obvious, even to those directly involved. It's vital in helping HR to do their job, because the nature of our work means we're one step removed from service delivery, so we don't always know what people want us to do for them unless they tell us. You have to see the importance of the link between the establishment of a HR Directorate, the change programme, and ECAHB as a new organisation. The shift will occur because of what the people in the organisation want. The programme just gives it shape, direction and a bit of impetus."

Some of the Action Teams have very much run themselves, but others have needed assistance in defining their direction and their objectives. A year in, Pearse and Alison are more closely involved than ever in the programme, re-focussing and re-committing Action Teams as the programme reaches the difficult "middle

stage", where initiative fatigue sets in.

Alison recognises that this is inevitable, and she is in full agreement with Michael Doran's remarks about intangibles. "A lot is achieved without people realising that

it's been achieved" she says. "One of our biggest achievements so far has been the setting up of a mentoring programme within ECAHB. People can point to that as something really worthwhile, and they're quite right to do so. However, it's not just about the scheme itself, it's about what it says about the organisation and the way it values



its employees. That will have a knock on for recruitment and retention, for people feeling more contented, prouder of the organisation, more able to identify with it, and themselves as a part of it." Pearse agrees with this. "Honesty and openness are crucial qualities that this programme encourages and facilitates. For example, we have identified problems which people have with their accommodation, but they think nobody cares. Through this programme we say we know, we do care and we sympathise – and we appreciate how difficult things are. Let's do something about it, all of us." Action Team members feel the same way. Gerry McCarthy is a Mental Health Services Area Manager. He is also an active member of the Action Team that has set up the mentoring programme within ECAHB. His vision of the participative change programme is a very positive one – "We are the Health Board. It's great for us to be able to feed in to the changes that we can see need to take place". As Bevin Tiernan, Speech and Language Therapy Manager and Retention Action Team member, puts it – "Better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness".



"Not everyone's involved, but everybody's got an opportunity to be involved, and that's the big difference"

Mairead Kelly, ECAHB Change Programme Co-ordinator

The primary objective all along is that the change programme would be both participative and inclusive as well as action-based. Commitments would be made to taking actions that would actually make changes and improvements a

reality for the ECAHB. Partnerships would form, and would be the tool by which concrete achievement would occur. The nurturing of the Action Team partnerships is therefore essential. One of the problems with such a participative programme is that those involved will tend to go off on tangents, and not always be able to

see their work in the context of a broader picture. Pearse and Alison thus very much recognise the vital importance of a reinforcement of the vision: a vision that is not something dreamed up by themselves, but that is something which all

participants have arrived at, evolved and committed to. This commitment must be a genuine one: some Action Teams are having problems with uneven dedication, leading to one or two members of a Team taking on the work of the whole. Communication shortfalls within some Teams are also evident: this has meant that in some instances a single member of an Action Team has turned up at a workshop, then found themselves in a position where they have to report back on the work of a whole Team, the other members of which they expected to be present. This having been said, there are now two very encouraging signs, pointing not only to the successes achieved by the Teams, but also at their potential for autonomy. The first of these is the increasing ownership that Action Teams feel for their areas of interest – for example, when questioned whether they would continue to work together towards their objectives even if the change programme itself was discontinued, members of the Induction Action Team responded very positively that they would. Secondly, there is a growing feeling that the successes of individual

Action Teams – for example in the areas of mentoring and the client participation survey – are the successes of the change programme as a whole. This is a significant cultural shift, showing a continuing commitment and allegiance to a shared agenda that will facilitate a common vision. At the moment the programme is still very much dependent upon the direct involvement of Pearse and Alison, but the objective is that this will not always be the case. "It's like a child learning to swim" comments Change Agent Vicki Callanan. "You start off with a float, then progress to just having a hand there to hold the child up. Slowly you withdraw your hand without the child realising it, and there it is swimming away on its own". In this context it is vital that the Action Teams do not become isolated from the organ-

isation as a whole, and it was to prevent this happening that the creation of volunteer "Change Agents" was encouraged – individuals within the organisation who would systematically complement and extend the work done by the Action Team partnerships.

"Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it"

George Bernard Shaw, "Man and Superman", 1903. Penguin edition. 2000.

Change Agents act as vital conduits between the Action Teams and the wider ECAHB population. Their role is essentially a dual one: they exist to publicise the work of the Action Teams to colleagues, and also to inform Action Teams of the opinions and desires of the organisation.



In June 2001 Open Days were held where both Action Teams and Change Agents described their work to around 600 participants from all areas within ECAHB. The way employees feel about the ECAHB was very ably captured by a team of Change Agents who ran a room at this Open Day event. Liz Balfe, Ann Murphy, Samantha Seabrooke, Louise Pert and Vicki Callanan come from different parts of ECAHB, and had had little or no contact with each other prior to becoming involved in the programme. They got involved with it, doing much of the work in their own time, because they

felt inspired by the potential of what might be achieved, and because they felt – as Vicki put it – that for the first time they "might be able to make a difference". At the June event they encouraged participants to fill out a feedback form which made clear their views about ECAHB at the

present time, and the possible ECAHB of the future. The responses they got from the 600 or so Open Day participants provided a raw snapshot of an organisation where the majority of employees feel they could be better valued. "Work/life balance", the recognition that employees give of their best when they are able to enjoy a life outside work without the stresses of their jobs impinging on their free time, and where organisations recognise the benefits of allowing their staff necessary flexibility and fringe benefits, is of relevance here. In an outward-facing, customer-focussed service such as that offered by ECAHB the opportunities for allowing flexible working arrangements, such as working from home or not working core hours are likely to be limited. Many ECAHB staff work beyond their allocated hours, out of a desire to offer the best possible service to their clients. Their work is often

stressful, difficult and emotionally draining. The combination of these factors make it all the more important that ECAHB employees feel fully valued by the organisation for which they work.

Respondents were also asked to suggest a vision of a brighter future within the Board. They indicated a desire for training on, and easy access to, the internet and other relevant up-to-date information technology applications. They look towards a future where an appropriate range of recreational and social facilities will be available with ECAHB support and encouragement. Besides practical desires such as the provision of crèches, canteen facilities and adequate parking, respondents wanted accommodation that facilitated easier communication, that was not uncomfortably cramped, and that met health and safety requirements. Finally, with regard to their prospects within the ECAHB, those surveyed signalled not only a need to be rewarded and to have their personal development needs addressed, but also a desire for "recognition" and "fairness". It is crucial that these views, the frustrations and ambitions of the wider ECAHB population, are expressed to the Action Teams, and that the Teams themselves are then seen to recognise these and to take appropriate action. This is the vital function of the Change Agents, a function which is just as important as the work the actual Action Teams carry out. The Change Agents therefore represent a structured expansion of the partnership strategy. By forming new partnerships between Change Agents and Action Teams, and between Change Agents and ECAHB the more widely the process is extended, it moves closer towards its goal of facilitating participative collaboration".

The early work with Headquarters staff is symbolic of the opportunity the Programme presents to

a newly established unit to recognise its significant role and to be honest enough to acknowledge and challenge the perceptions others may have of it. The Establishment of a HQ Liaison Action Team is a critical first step in 'connecting' with the wider board. The early work at St. Columille's Hospital, Loughlinstown is a natural extension of the Programme's overall aim to respond to people's desire for involvement and inclusion.

The change programme clearly will take time to have a full impact. What it does do is twofold. Firstly, it provides incremental progress towards identified shared objectives in vital areas such as accommodation and recruitment: problems are acknowledged and shared, there is a recognition that something is being done. Secondly, crucially, the culture is changed into something that is participative and inclusive, that is supportive and progressive. Through the change programme ECAHB is moving towards an organisation that embraces a notion of collective responsibility. It signals the beginning of a greater sense of purpose right across the organisation where staff are supported fully in their work. If something goes wrong it is everyone's problem, and everyone shares in the learning opportunity. If everybody knows what is going on and is able to see the broader picture – and this is after all what collective responsibility is all about. Successes too, are the successes of everyone, and will be generally celebrated – for these successes are successes of the whole, not of any individual. From this juncture comes the notion of collective pride, of being proud of working for a particular organisation, and of the end product resulting.

"It is clear from the comments regarding staff's views on the present and the future of the ECAHB that there is a great need for organisational development and

change. Now is the time for the ECAHB to formulate and implement a strategy for change"

Summary of Change Agents feedback presentation, August 2001

Increasingly, management theorists are signalling a move away from the traditional, bureaucratic model of organisational management, with its formal structure, detailed procedures and vertical command chains. It is being replaced by a leadership that is less defined and more egalitarian, that is inspirational in nature, that is based on commitment to shared values and to individual development. Organisational leaders will no longer desire that others follow. They will instead hope that their leadership skills can take them and their colleagues to a place they've all agreed they want to travel to. As Director of Human Resources in the ECAHB Pearce Costello is in a unique position, in that he can stand apart from the day to day management of the organisation and the people who work within it. Their job is people: helping people to do their job, at all levels and in all areas of the organisation. The change programme within ECAHB is all about such leadership, and it is about managers and staff, all the people within ECAHB, recognising the importance of themselves and of each other. Part of it is about individuals recognising what they have to offer each other, and how they can develop themselves and others. Part of it is about each individual feeling that they belong to something bigger than just an individual discipline or an individual workplace. Part of it is about job satisfaction and work/life balance. The whole

is about people being valued, and able to give willingly of their best. The challenge now is to continue, and to progress. The work of the Action Teams, and the Change Agents continues, Pearce and Alison are still very much directly involved with the programme, and at the same time the word is spreading. The change programme has achieved concrete benefits towards fulfilment of the shared vision it promulgates: these have been achieved not only in such areas as the work of the Action Teams and the involvement of the Change Agents, but also in the informal networks that have been set up and the promulgation of a feeling that change is in the air and that everyone will have the opportunity to make a difference, to shape the future.

"When we dream alone it is but a dream, but when we dream together it is no longer just a dream but the beginning of reality"

Brazilian proverb, quoted by Alison Gardner in change management programme literature

After one year the programme is not without its problems. The all important link between the Action Teams and the Change Agents has yet to gel. Some Action Teams have suffered



from individuals' lack of time to participate and through over-ambitious objective setting. There is a need for clearer direction and for the relevance of the programme to be made clearer to ECAHB as a whole. Against this should be set the many tangible and intangible benefits the programme

has produced, not least through the shift towards a more positive, participative and inclusive

culture, and improved communications. Change Agents and Action Team members take on responsibilities towards the programme in addition to their very demanding core duties, and this being so their continuing enthusiasm and group commitment to the programme is evidence in itself that real progress is being made.

The ECAHB programme is a "transformational" change management programme. Such change management is not about dictation or coercion. It is about persuasion, encouragement and the elucidation of a vision that can be shared by everyone. There must be continued awareness that change such as this does not occur overnight, and that there is still a long way to go. The concrete achievements of the Action Teams – the induction pack, the client survey, the mentoring scheme, the accommodation audit template – are incremental steps towards a wider achievement. Although the programme is action based, and therefore focussed upon tangibles, many of the organisational benefits derived will be intangible. The communication opportunities and the cultural shift engendered by the programme and the move towards the formation of a learning organisation which is participative and inclusive and values its employees, are of immense, although largely immeasurable, benefit. The feeling that problems are being acknowledged, that everybody has a voice, that senior staff are approachable, that progress towards a common vision is being achieved and is being communicated is a vital cultural move away from the dispiriting responses given to Change Agents, Josephine Roche and Marie Vickers in response to the questionnaires they disseminated at the June 2001 Open Days: "Many people feel there is a need for change, but are unwilling to contribute or act upon it", "People are afraid of change", "Old habits die hard". The tangible benefits that the East Coast Area Health Board derive from this transformational change management programme will be in part

derived from these crucial, immeasurable intangibles. An organisation that values its employees, and that recognises the worth of their participation, that communicates openly and that strives for the achievement of a common vision, will be an organisation that is successful, and an organisation that is proud of itself, that recognises itself as more than just a name, or a loose conglomeration of interests. Much of the benefit from the programme will therefore be derived **outside the programme itself**. Besides the concrete, tangible achievements of Change Agents and Action Teams something broader is occurring. The cultural shift inspired by the programme, and the way that this facilitates opportunities for communication and for joined-up working is something that will bring tangible benefit through intangible attitudinal shift. This, combined with the impact of concrete achievements through the mechanisms of the Change Agents and the Action Teams, will fulfil the vision of ECAHB as a "learning organisation", where staff feel valued, and themselves add value by their individual and collaborative contributions. Such change is a journey, not a destination. The participative approach to the learning organisation is ongoing. In fact, it's the one constant in a world of change.

This article summarises and discusses the conclusions of a full report on the first year of the East Coast Area Health Board Change Programme. This full report, by the same author, Stewart Gott, and also entitled "Keep the Change!" was presented to the ECAHB Board on 8th November, 2001 and is available from:

**Mairead Kelly,
Change Programme Co-Ordinator,
Human Resources Directorate, East Coast Area
Health Board, Southern Cross House, Southern
Cross Business Park, Bray, Co. Wicklow, Ireland.
Tel: +353 (0) 1 2014210, Fax: 201 4281,
e-mail:mairead.kelly@erha.ie**



STEP ~~UP~~ UP...
WE ARE OPEN FOR
CHANGE.

Keep the Change!

2000-2001 – The first year of the East Coast Area Health Board's Transformational Change Management Programme





The "Step up - we are open for change" logo was designed and selected by the change agents based on a number of original ideas developed by them. The cover shows both the original 'raw' version and the final printed version. This is now the official logo of the ECAHB Change Programme.