



Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

21 June 2016

Corporate Development Unit
Department of Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

Dear

I refer to your recent correspondence on behalf of Mr. Seán Ó Foghlú, Secretary General, in relation to the preparation of the Department of Education and Skills new Statement of Strategy 2016-2018. The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government welcomes the opportunity to provide its observations, for your consideration.

This Department has responsibility for a number of programmes and schemes, including the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), which aims to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders. As SICAP will continue to engage with the most difficult to reach in the most disadvantaged areas, collaboration and engagement with the Department of Education and Skills will be essential. To this end, the Social Inclusion and Communities Unit has prepared a specific response to the Consultation Paper published on your website (please see attached).

Feedback from the Forward Planning Unit in this Department has identified the provision of student housing as an important issue for inclusion in the Department of Education and Skills new Statement of Strategy. Demand for student accommodation currently exceeds supply in certain parts of the country and the unmet demand has a significant related impact on the private rental sector. The projected increase in the student population nationally over the next decade will further exacerbate this problem and it is recommended that the Department of Education and Skills should specifically

target the creation of increased on and off-campus student accommodation as a key objective of its new strategy.

In addition, the provision of educational facilities plays a critical role in the formation and development of new residential communities. The Department of Education and Skills Strategy should include measures to ensure that the provision of new school facilities by the Department is highly coordinated with the planned new residential development areas (e.g. statutory Local Area Plans, SDZs, etc.) and with the infrastructural investments by other Departments and local authorities in these areas. This will ensure that public resources are aligned to maximise their benefit and provide significant new housing areas with school facilities in a timely and structured fashion. Guidance on this approach is provided in *The Provision of Schools and the Planning System: A Code of Practice for Planning Authorities* (2008) and *the Local Area Plans, Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2013). Furthermore, additional comments on your Department's Strategy have already issued directly to <blank> from <omitted>, <omitted> in this Department's Forward Planning Unit.

Finally, with reference to another cross-cutting issue relating to housing/accommodation and linked to the work of your Department, it is recommended that the Department of Education and Skills Strategy would also address the need to ensure that there is sufficient skilled labour available to support an increase in residential construction activity.

If you would like to discuss any of the above issues further, please contact <omitted> in the Strategic Business Support Unit via email at strategy@environ.ie or by telephone at (053) 911 7450.

Yours sincerely,

<Omitted>

Strategic & Business Support Unit

SURVEY-

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS – Consultation Paper - Statement of Strategy 2016-2018

Survey at:

https://www.research.net/r/consultation_paper_department_education_and_skills_statement_of_strategy_2016_2018

How well does the Education service meet the needs of children and students?

Social Inclusion and Communities Unit leads the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) which aims to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders.

Data collected from SICAP participants indicates that the Department meets the needs of many children and students well, however there appears to be a significant number of travellers and young people in particular who leave school at an early age. Traveller representative groups would have suggestions as to how education provision at national, secondary and third level could be improved. Due to the significant detrimental effect that early school leaving has on young people, as evidenced by our Programme, and the likelihood of those who have left school early falling into poverty, we would see that addressing this issue should be a significant target for the Department of Education and Skills.

We would also like to see the needs of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) – addressed – a proportion of whom we are assisting through SICAP, and we are in receipt of ESF funding under the YEI initiative, under the managing authority of the Department of Education & Skills, in order to progress this. Progress is being made in relation to reducing the unemployment rate amongst this group, however, it remains significantly higher than the average rate. Greater attention should be given to keeping those ‘at risk of leaving’ in school, or helping them in the transition from school into further education and training.

1(a) What improvements can be made within existing resources

Greater education attainment levels in disadvantaged areas/areas where there has traditionally been low education attainment levels and progression to Third Level.

The Education and Training Boards (ETB) are members of the new Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) in each Local Authority area, over time it will be important that greater inter-agency co-operation between the ETBs and all the other agencies represented on the LCDCs will lead to greater services to children and youth, and to the wider communities served. Through, for example, greater consultation with children and young people on education provision/services and greater access to, and usage of, school facilities after hours.

1(b) What improvements can be made through new provision

Greater supports for the harder to reach in society and their families, smaller class sizes, greater number of Special Needs Assistants, Home School Liaison Officers, more NEPS assessment provision etc;

2. Comment on work currently being undertaken by the Department in your area of interest and/or expertise. (What are we doing well, what could we do better)?

There are still a large number of adults who have literacy and numeracy issues which is affecting their employment capabilities. Additional focus, outreach and resources could be given to this area. We welcome the work of the Department in relation to early years education, and would like to see increased provision of early years support to children and families, especially in disadvantaged areas.

3. Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016 - 2018 strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the continuum of education and skills?

Provision of language support for the children and adults of new communities who do not have English as their first language which should pay dividends in relation to adults helping children do homework, and with benefits continuing up through the education system.

4. How should success on achieving our strategies be measured.

Improvements in school completion rates and rates of unemployment amongst groups who are at-risk of poverty, including young people, should be looked at in terms of measuring success.

Progression to Third level by marginalised groups such as Travellers, Roma and Migrants.

5. Comment on any issues relating to the continuum of education and skills, in addition to your particular area of interest and/or expertise

SICAP (Goal 2) provides for educational supports and lifelong learning supports to the harder to reach which is reliant on effective collaboration with local education providers and the ETBs to ensure complementarity of SICAP with mainstream education provision.

6. Any other observations that you would suggest the Department should consider in the formulation of our strategy for education and skills 2016 – 2018

Greater recognition of the need for apprenticeships and more resources for that area.

1. Prioritising Early Years

1(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

Additional supports in a targeted way for parents of young children before they enter the education system should be considered. See the latest issue of 'Changing Ireland' for details of one group's assistance in this regard.

1(b) How should progress on Prioritising Early Years be measured?

Outcomes on progression and retention rates, as well as qualitative feedback from parents/ teachers where quantitative results may be difficult to obtain.

1(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Targeting of children with the greatest need, for example those from SICAP target groups, namely: Children and Families from Disadvantaged Areas, Lone Parents, New Communities (including Refugees/Asylum Seekers), People living in Disadvantaged Communities, People with Disabilities, Roma, The Unemployed (including those not on the Live Register), Low Income Workers/Households and Travellers.

2. Tackling Disadvantaged

2(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We agree with the provisions of the Programme for Government in this regard. This Unit sits on the DEIS Review IDG and is contributing to that process.

2(b) How should progress on Tackling Disadvantaged be measured?

Higher school retention rates in disadvantaged areas

Higher progression to Third Level by disadvantaged groups and communities

2(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Enhanced school completion rates

Greater supports (including the Department of Defence initiative) for early school leavers

3. Diversity and Choice for Parents

3(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The need for more evidence based policy is required, more evaluations built into funding models and programmes, more longitudinal studies.

Would question the statement (p 89 PFG) '*we will ensure that no small school closes against the wishes of parents*', surely this would have to be dealt with on the basis of cost and service efficiencies and not down to individual parental choice.

3(b) How should progress on Diversity and Choice for Parents be measured?

For example, the numbers of immigrant, Traveller, Roma, LGBT children, children of no religion/denomination- or equally of a religious denomination- attending school, being treated equally, and progressing to Third Level. Feedback from pupils and their parents on the range and quality of services provided.

3(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As above.

4. Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools

4(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

Yes all key issues are captured.

4(b) How should progress on Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools be measured?

Through regular evaluation including quantitative and qualitative research.

4(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Through nurturing different ambitions, greater subject choice and mainstreaming youth entrepreneurship.

5. Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students

5(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The PFG is comprehensive in this regard.

5(b) How should progress on Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students be measured?

Regular independent evaluations and longitudinal studies.

5(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

This activity should be a priority in areas where there are low employment opportunities in existence e.g. rural and border areas. There should be a focus on harder to reach groups such as Travellers.

6. Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities

6(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The PFG is comprehensive in this regard.

6(b) How should progress on Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities be measured?

Regular quantitative & qualitative feedback from pupils, parents, teachers, and the wider community.

6(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area? Local Community Groups and Community Development Organisations should also be given the opportunity to make use of these central and spacious facilities out of school hours.

7. Special Needs Education

7(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The section in the PFG is very short and does not cover all of the child special needs issues faced by parents and schools every day.

7(b) How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?

Through an outcomes based approach-tracking individual children and their parents- following the allocation of additional resources to the special needs area.

7(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

A school placement for every child with special needs and all relevant SNAs etc; in place.

8. Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future

8(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The PFG is comprehensive in this regard.

8(b) How should progress on Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future be measured?

Creation and retention of jobs in the regions.

Greater level of upskilling to take up new and emerging jobs

8(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area? We welcome the provisions in the Programme for Government. It should be noted that there are many adults living in / at risk of poverty who require pre-development assistance before they would be able to participate in an organised course or training scheme, and may require additional support in order to complete such schemes. Apprenticeships are very important but some target groups will need intensive supports to reach the stage where they can take up an apprenticeship.

FEEDBACK FROM THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK UNIT-

The National Planning Framework (NPF) Unit within the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government welcomes the opportunity to comment on the new Strategy Statement for the Department of Education and Skills.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) will be the successor to the National Spatial Strategy 2002 (NSS). It will be the long-term, 20 year strategy for the spatial development of Ireland that will seek to promote a better quality of life for all, with sustainable economic growth and an environment of the highest quality as key underlying principles. The NPF will influence regional strategies (in particular Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies) and city/county development plans as it will be the central planning policy document for the Country and through this it will provide a clear vision to guide future development and investment decisions.

In light of the preparation of the new NPF and in tandem with the 8 priority areas identified for inclusion by DoES, the area of education is considered central to shaping how Ireland will look in 20 years' time and as a response to the request for observations, the NPF Unit wishes to highlight the following 4 areas where policy is cross cutting and pertinent to the DoES strategy:

1. Strategic planning of, and subsequent investment in, the provision of schools at both primary and post primary level remains central to reinforcing the delivery of sustainable communities, offering choice and accessibility to a high standard of education. Planning for increased demand on school infrastructure remains a challenge. The DoES engages with Local Authorities in the planning of school infrastructure through the statutory land use plan processes (development plans and local area plans). It is considered imperative to retain this engagement and consideration is to be given to increasing the information exchange with the Local Authorities ahead of any formal consultation process as part of plan preparation. This would be considered useful in terms of aligning baseline data that is focused on population projections and locational needs.
2. The NPF unit acknowledges the value of technical guidance documents that are in force (TGD-027 - Identification and Suitability Assessment of Sites for Post-Primary Schools and TGD-025 - Identification and Suitability Assessment of Sites for Primary Schools), particularly in light of establishing consensus with Local Authorities in delivering school sites. The overall patterns of commuting to schools and colleges is an area of focus for the NPF, particularly having regard to establishing patterns and trends. The Census 2016 results will indicate in great detail through the POWSCAR data how commuting trends have changed since 2011. It is anticipated that commuting levels will have in fact increased and therefore exert a greater pressure on the existing capacity of school sites to cater for associated traffic, in an already congested space. This is a key cross-cutting policy area for consideration as to how to continue to work with schools to improve solutions to the safe and sustainable methods for travelling to school.
3. Provision of third level education is seen as a key enabler for regional competitiveness. The NPF will provide the policy direction for the Regional Assemblies to prepare their Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), and as a result a strong national policy on third level education is likely to be included in the NPF and in greater detail in the RSEs. Access to third level education and highest level of education attained are key indicators for competitiveness and the NPF Unit would welcome a robust supporting statement for the continued investment in and support of third level institutions which offer choice and quality across the country. Future projections in relation to third level education are also a cross cutting area where the NPF Unit would welcome further discussion.
4. Many of the cross cutting issues are already included in the Statement of Strategy 2015-2017 and at this juncture, an inclusion to the reference to the NPF would be timely and appropriate. The NPF Unit would welcome reference to the National Planning Framework within the Strategy for Education and Skills as a means of highlighting the NPF's role in setting out a plan for where investment is to take place for both the private and the public sector. This will have implications at a national policy level.

It is to be noted that the Department of Education and Skills are represented on the Cross Departmental Steering Group on the NPF, chaired by Minister Coveney. The NPF Unit would welcome further discussion on matters related to long term educational needs as part of a spatial framework for Ireland and how that might manifest in national policy. We look forward to continuing discussions with the DoES at cross departmental level, in addition to bilateral meetings in the interim periods.