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

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

Develop meaningful working relationships with non statutory sector who are providing support services to children and students in education.

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

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)?

The overall broad concept of mainstreaming in schools has been well embedded through the work of the Department, however sometimes the practical application of the concept is lost through lack of attention and resources to detail with the individual students.

The introduction and use of an advocacy type resource could address this and could prove an invaluable resource to parents who are often forced into a relationship of both advocate and parent with the educational system.

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?

As above

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

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

A holistic approach to education that recognises the equal importance of both the academic and social developmental needs of children with disabilities is required.

Educational plays a critical role in the preparation for employment. Although children with vision impairments are achieving academically, they are not gaining the social and life skills at the same rate as their sighted peers. This leaves them at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to competing for employment.

We would advocate for the introduction of an expanded core curriculum for children with vision impairment to address this disadvantage. This would include the required compensatory skills such as mobility, digital literacy and low vision skills and could be

provided in co-operation with the non-statutory sector in a structured and co-ordinated way.

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

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).

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

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

As above, the expansion of the core curriculum of children with vision impairments to include compensatory and independence skills in their early years would maximise their potential not just within the educational system but also in employment.

Particular attention needs to be paid to transition periods within the educational system and ensure that preparation and progress is structured.

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).

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

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

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).

3 (b) How should progress on diversity and choice for parents be measured?

3 © What would you consider to be the priority action and outcomes in this area?

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).

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- 4(b) How should progress on Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools be measured?
 4(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

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).

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- 5(b) How should progress on Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students be measured?
 5(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

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).

This approach needs to be broader than physical infrastructure – there is a range of Not for Profit Organisations within communities working to support children and with whom the Department could build more positive relationships to maximise potential outcomes for children. While this happens on a local level there are too many variables to ensure consistency and it needs to be supported on a national level.

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- 6(b) How should progress on Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities be measured?
 6(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

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).

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- 7(b) How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?
 7(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

The introduction of an expanded core curriculum for children with vision impairment to include compensatory and independence skills is the priority action required. Also necessary is training and appropriate resourcing for specialist subjects e.g. Braille Maths / Music and assistive technology.

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).

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

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