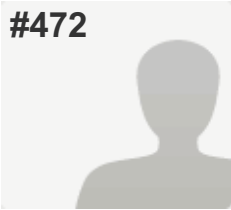


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Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link)

Started: Wednesday, June 08, 2016 2:59:33 PM

Last Modified: Wednesday, June 08, 2016 5:41:27 PM

Time Spent: 02:41:53

IP Address: 137.191.252.84

PAGE 1: Please complete this consultation paper in respect of your area of interest and/or expertise

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Q4: 1(a) What improvements can be made within existing resources

- The National Disability Authority welcomes the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government (2016) to providing every child with inclusive educational services from early childhood to higher education
- The focus of the National Disability Authority's submission is on the educational issues that are specific to children and young adults with disabilities, and their parents, as well as, on how a Universal Design approach to learning could enhance and enrich the educational experience of all children and young people
- The National Disability Authority acknowledges the significant expenditure supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs which amounted to in excess of €1.4 billion in 2015 – approximately 15% of the overall budget within the Department. With regards to the allocation of resources to schools the National Disability Authority sees the shift away from a diagnostic-based model to one based on the school's educational profile, along with a baseline component to every mainstream school to support inclusion; prevention of learning difficulties; and early intervention, as a significant and important development. The National Disability Authority suggests that once the current pilots of New Model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students with Special Education Needs in Mainstream Schools is reviewed, that it is implemented as a matter of urgency
- The National Disability Authority is of the view that where training is being provided on specific disability related issues, for example, Autism – such training, where appropriate, should also be extended to others involved with children and young people with disabilities, such as, SNAs, and not be delivered exclusively to teachers

Q5: 1(b) What improvements can be made through new provision

•Universal design for learning – differentiating the curriculum.

Different children learn differently. In addressing the diversity of children in a classroom, it is essential that the classroom teacher is able to tailor how they teach and communicate to how different children learn. The primary role for teaching the child rests with the classroom teacher, and the quality of teaching is the key factor in education outcomes for children with disabilities or special education needs. The National Council for Special Education's policy advice on Supporting Students with Special Education needs in Schools (p. 66) cites evidence that students who have classroom support may experience less input from teachers in their learning. It is important that children with disabilities, and, in particular, those with significant learning needs or who learn differently, get direct access to qualified teaching. The National Disability Authority advises that universal design for learning forms part of initial and ongoing professional development for teachers.

•Including children with disabilities in all aspects of school life

The National Disability Authority's research on effective anti-bullying approaches for students with disabilities or special education needs shows the importance of whole-school approaches in ensuring children with disabilities are effectively included in school life.

The new Inclusion Support Service has an important role to play in establishing and supporting schools at local level to adopt effective whole-school approaches, and in encouraging leadership. In this regards, the Department of Education and Skills, in partnership with the NCSE, could offer practical advice as to how children with disabilities and special educational need could engage meaningfully in the life of the school community, in areas, such as, physical education and extra school activities, and guide on the role that Special Need Assistants could play in supporting such inclusion. The Special Need Assistant has a critical role in supporting and facilitating some students with care needs to actively engage in the wider life of the school, in line with the individual's capacity and ability. Positive risk taking is an integral part of such engagement.

In particular, it is important that children with disabilities are enabled to participate and engage directly with their peers, with the SNA in the background, rather than SNA support becoming a factor that isolates children with disabilities from their peers.

•Review the Vocational Training Scheme (VTC)

The National Disability Authority recommends that the current funding and criteria applying to the VTC scheme be reviewed particularly regarding references that the "VTC shall be on training. The grant is conditional on the centre being associated with a sheltered workshop to which the trainees could progress on the completion of the course".

Sheltered workshops are not in line with current national policy on training and the New Directions Programme for adult day services.

This review should be done in consultation with the HSE New Directions Programme manager and the National Implementation Group for New Directions under the Transforming Lives Programme of the Department of Health.

Q6: 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)?

While significant progress has been made regarding the provision of services to children with special education needs and disabilities, it is critical that progress continues to be made over the 2016-2018 period. Sections of the EPSEN Act should be progressed on a non-statutory basis, in key areas, such as, Individualised Education Plans. In addition, consideration should also be given to individualised support plans and care plans, which should be reviewed annually, as well as, the introduction of transition planning for children and young people with disabilities to maximise the supports required as they move from pre-school to primary; primary to secondary and further education and training, and secondary/further education and training to third level and/or the world of work, and/or a New Directions Programme as set out in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (2015 - 2024).

Consideration should also be given as to how best facilitate participation by pupils with disabilities in an enabling learning environment. This would include, inter alia:

- Differentiating between the learning support needs of a child; the care support needs of a child and other supports that a child may need to participate in an inclusive way within the life of the school and re-directing resources accordingly
- Currently, there are approximately 55,000 students requiring support; 30,000 requiring care needs (including those attending special schools) and approximately 12,000 SNAs and 7,000 resource teachers in the system. In this regards, the National Disability Authority is of the view that the focus and emphasis should be on what the child can do, with the right enabling supports, rather than on what s/he cannot do. By 'enabling' supports is meant an approach that maximises the opportunity for a child to become progressively more independent, in line with their capacity and requirements
- The National Disability Authority suggests that the Department of Education and Skills might consider reviewing the requirement for a diagnosis of disability for Special Need Assistants, and move towards a system that would be based on the individual's need for appropriate enabling supports. By 'enabling' supports, the National Disability Authority means those that would maximise the opportunity for a child to become independent over time, in line with their capacity and requirements. This would also be in line with the NCSE's working group report on the proposed new model for allocating teaching resources for students with special educational needs in mainstream schools and which is being rolled out on a pilot/voluntary basis. Such an approach will provide the greatest level of Special Need Assistant support to those with the greatest need
- The National Disability Authority also suggests that there should be a link between SNA support to individualised planning for each pupil, especially to develop independence skill is operating effectively in practice as detailed in action 1.4 of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (2015 – 2024)
- The National Disability Authority is supportive of the Passport Initiative introduced by the Department of Education and Skills. The National Disability Authority is of the view that the Department of Education and Skills should consider the use of this system across all levels of education, from pre-school to primary; primary to secondary; and secondary to further education and training

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Q7: 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?

Transitioning

The Department of Education and Skills should develop with the NCSE a comprehensive programme to facilitate transitioning for children and young people with disabilities in line with the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (2015 - 2024) which would include:

- Protocols for cross departmental co-operation between the Department of Education and Skills, SOLAS, the Dept of Health and the HSE need to be implemented urgently to ensure the effective transition of young people with disabilities to post-secondary/further education and training destinations of their choosing

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- Structured systematic transition planning process in operation involving all key stakeholders as detailed in action 1.9 (b) of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (2015 - 2024)
- A smooth and planned transition for every child with a disability from pre-school to primary school to secondary school to further and/or higher education. This will support young people with disabilities to remain in school. In 2011, over one third of young adults (aged 25 to 29) with a disability left school before completing second level compared to one in six of young adults with no disability (Watson, D. , Nolan, (2011) A Social Portrait of People with Disabilities in Ireland. The Department of Social Protection, Dublin Ireland and the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin, Ireland).
- Research indicates a close link between education levels, employment chances, and income earned over someone's lifetime. Lower rates of employment reflect lower levels of education for people with disabilities in comparison to their non-disabled peers
- Planning ahead and transition management are key elements in supporting children and young people with disabilities to develop their capacity, to complete their education and to provide them with the qualifications, skills and confidence to obtain employment and to participate in mainstream society. The UK 'Getting a Life' project, as part of the 'Getting Employment Now' programme, focused on helping young people with disabilities to plan ahead for future lives and careers after school. Results from this programme show that a focus on employment and career planning needs to start as early as age 13 or the first year of post-primary school, rather than, leaving it to the last year or two of school life. (UK Department of Health, (2009) Valuing People Now: a new three-year strategy for people with intellectual disabilities). In this regards, the National Disability Authority advises that the Department works with NCSE and schools as set in the Comprehensive employment Strategy (2015-2024):
- Enhancing the role of school guidance counsellors to support transition planning and progression for students with a disability
- Providing guidance and training for guidance counsellors
- Presenting opportunities to students with disabilities to progress and develop skills and competencies
- Ensure that Education and Training Boards are enhancing services to support persons with disabilities.
- Ensuring students with disabilities in mainstream and special schools have access to Transition Year and are supported to benefit from same
- Ensuring that young persons with disabilities are encouraged to take part in work experience during their school years, particularly paid work
- Promoting positive expectations e.g. ensuring that all schools are actively promoting further education and training supports for persons with disabilities to parents, students and teachers including distributing the guidelines produced by the NCSE
- Ensure joined up working between Dept Ed, Dept Social Protections, HSE and schools for effective transitions in schools and from school to post school options, and to include opportunities to experience training, work experience and job sampling
- Empowering children and young people to maximise their potential through positive engagement with parents
- Recent research shows that parents of children with learning/intellectual disabilities and parents of children with emotional or behavioural difficulties are less likely to expect their child to transition to further education compared to parents of children with no disabilities. (Banks, J., Maître, B., McCoy, S. and Watson, D. (2016) Parental Expectations of Children with Disabilities, Economic and Social Research Institute)
- Low parental expectations may also be linked to the limited educational opportunities that they perceive for children with disabilities. The 2011 Census showed that only 16% of all people with disabilities had achieved an Upper Secondary Level Education. The Department of Education and Skills should continue to promote the equality of educational opportunity at all educational levels with targeted accessible information for parents
- Parental expectations have a significant impact on children and young people's academic outcomes. Low parental expectations can result in poor social and educational development for children and young people with disabilities. (Banks, J., Maître, B., McCoy, S. and Watson, D. (2016) op.cit).

•It is important that schools provide parents of children with disabilities with regular feedback on their child's development. These feedback sessions should also provide parents and schools with the opportunity to discuss a child's ability, the parents' expectations for their child, the child's educational and social progression and any difficulties/challenges the child maybe experiencing

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Q8: 4. How should success on achieving our strategies be measured.

Key performance indicators, inputs and outputs are all useful measurement indicators on a short term annualised basis for looking at the operational elements of a strategic plan over a given period of time. However, it is critical that such measurements also feed into how outcomes are achieved for individuals participating in education and learning. This requires both a short term measurement and a longitudinal measurement so that children can be tracked from early years education right through to when he/she leaves formal education settings.

This would also be useful in informing how and if resources committed to special needs education are making a difference. When one examines longitudinal studies, such as, Growing up in Ireland and other research conducted by NCSE on special education provision and by the ESRI on further analysis of the Growing up in Ireland data on students with special educational needs, it highlights the importance of data and having longitudinal studies in place that can inform how children vulnerable to underachievement are progressing.

The National Disability Authority advises that the Department examines how outcomes for learners vulnerable to underachievement can best be monitored and evaluated to ensure that individual's needs are being met and how this measurement could be part of an outcomes framework for individuals over a longer period of time.

In addition, the establishment of a system that can link data across the different levels of education and learning would be important, for example, ensuring that Solas and the Educational Training Boards are capturing data/numbers of learners with disabilities in the system. How these learners are progressing? What educational supports are in place etc.

The success of the Department's Strategy, specifically, in relation to special education, is dependent on working with others, including parents; primary care services; NEPS, NCSE etc and other departments and agencies. It is important therefore, that there is a measurement on how effective the protocols are between these partners in education and how in practice a whole of government approach is working for the individual with special educational need. Such an evaluation should include feedback from both students and parents.

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Q9: 5. Comment on any issues relating to the continuum of education and skills, in addition to your particular area of interest and/or expertise

- The Department of Education and Skills should establish a mechanism to examine the learning emerging from the new ECCE-disability programme AIM, being introduced by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in September 2016. Such learning regarding the methods of support for children with disabilities in mainstream pre-schools settings, could inform a review of how best to support children with disabilities in transitioning to primary schools and perhaps provide an opportunity to re-examine the current range of supports being provided by Department of Education and Skills and, in particular, the role of SNAs. The review could also see how best the resources in this area could be used differently in supporting a child-centred approach and maximise the potential of the individual child to progress towards independence and active participation in school life in line with the child's abilities
 - The National Disability Authority welcomes the introduction of measures to provide young people with disabilities with supports to transition to further education and training opportunities. The National Disability Authority advises that more detail and clarity be given regarding these supports and how they will provide young people with disabilities with a pathway not just to further education but also to employment building on specific actions in the Comprehensive Employment Strategy
 - As highlighted, in Section 3 of the consultation template, the development of protocols for effective working with and co-operation between the Department of Education and Skills, the HSE and the relevant agencies needs to be implemented urgently to ensure the seamless transition of young people with disabilities to post-secondary/further education and training options/destinations of their choosing
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Q10: 6. Any other observations that you would suggest the Department should consider in the formulation of our strategy for education and skills 2016 - 2018

It is critical that this Statement of Strategy and annualised business plans of the Department of Education and Skills are aligned and linked in with other cross-cutting strategies and national policies, such as:

- The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2016 – 2019)
- The Comprehensive Employment Strategy (2015-2024)
- Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014)
- Transforming Lives – Value for money and Policy Review of Disability Services (2014)
- New Directions (2012)
- Progressing Disability Services, 0-18 (2009).

This alignment will bring coherence to the service provision and positively contribute to achieving better outcomes in the lives of children and young people with disabilities. This alignment would also underpin and strengthen a whole of government approach that is necessary to achieve the objectives of this Statement of Strategy and to provide comprehensive, streamlined and inclusive educational services for children and young people with disabilities.

In addition, the Department of Education and Skills needs to proactively engage with other Departments and statutory agencies to address issues that impact on educational achievement of children and young people with disabilities, in areas, such as those set out in the CES including:

- Assessment and guidance – linking school guidance counselling with a career focus and sharing this information with provider of Life Supports within the HSE.
- Post school training and further education - developing national and local protocols between service providers of education and health/social support providers to ensure appropriate options are presented to the learner with disabilities.
- Access – ensuring post school courses accommodate students with disabilities and that there is access to appropriate courses that build an individual's skills and confidence. In addition, the Department of Education and Skills should develop an access to support for job placement for young people with disabilities, in conjunction with Intreo, and work with the Department of Social Protection to encourage employment through the Support Employment model of job coach and support.

Q11: 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).

- The National Disability Authority welcomes the measures set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government on prioritising early years. The Programme mentions the long term impact of lower pupil teacher ratios as a major factor in child outcomes. The National Disability Authority would see pupil teacher ratios as one aspect of quality of early years provision but, so too, are factors like teachers' education and teachers' capacity
- The Department's Inspectorate will have a key role in highlighting good practice in learning and teaching in Early Childhood Care and Education settings once their inspections of this sector are commenced. The National Disability Authority would particularly welcome the Inspectorate highlighting good practice in learning and teaching in early Childhood Care and Education settings, relating to children with disabilities, as little is known about this, in an Irish context. The Department, through the Higher Education Authority, has an important role in ensuring that teachers have the skills to meet the needs of children with disabilities in early years (Early Childhood Care and Education sector and primary sector)
- The National Disability Authority welcomes the Programme for a Partnership Government's commitment to In-School Speech and Language Therapy. However, the National Disability Authority would advise that while Speech and Language Therapy might be an ideal place to start, there is likely to be a benefit to closer working between schools and the range of clinical services across disability and mental health
- Research consistently shows that transition points in the education system are challenging for all children and families but that they are particularly difficult for children with disabilities. Given that the AIM programme has now been established in the Early Childhood Care and Education sector it would be a particularly opportune time for the transition arrangements from Early Childhood Care and Education sector to the primary sector to be examined and further strengthened

Q12: 1(b) How should progress on Prioritising Early Years be measured?

- Given the establishment of the AIM programme, in the Early Childhood Care and Education sector, it will be crucial that outcomes for children (or a sample thereof) who received support from the AIM programme are measured during the children's primary education. Given that good quality early education is associated with both short-term and long-term outcomes it will be important that the outcome measurement is longitudinal

Q13: 1(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As outlined in Section1 (a) above.

Q14: 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).

The National Disability Authority welcomes the provision of relevant educational programmes and supporting a more flexible approach to the availability of courses, giving people, especially early leavers and second chance learners, the opportunity to avail of courses on a part time basis, evenings, weekends etc. Such an approach would certainly benefit some learners with disabilities, who, because of the nature of their disability, may not be in a position to sustain a course full time. In this regards, the National Disability Authority advises that:

- A review of the Disability Access Route to Education Programme –DARE should take place. The current programme is available only for full time courses and not for any other programme/course being provided by the Third Level Sector. In addition, there is an upper age limit of 23 years of age in order to qualify for such assistance. The National Disability Authority is of the view that this does not facilitate people with disabilities who have the capacity for part-time rather than full-time study. Some adults with disabilities may return to study later in life. The current age limit is a barrier to people with disabilities who wish to further their education and enhance their skills and knowledge. This age restriction may also need to be proofed on age grounds under Equality legislation

The National Disability Authority welcomes the commitment to publishing a new update Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. In this regards, the National Disability Authority would like to see actions that would bring about positive attitudes to diversity and increase the education systems and schools to meet the needs of all learners through inclusive education. There are a number of issues relating to learners with disabilities that impact, including:

- Children with special education needs and disabilities are more likely to be bullied than children without disabilities. The Department of Education and Skills has implemented a number of recent anti-bullying initiatives and published reports on this topic. In 2014, The National Disability Authority produced a report on anti-bullying supports for children with special education needs and disability. This report identified good practice in different schools that created an inclusive learning environment and that prevented bullying. The National Disability Authority suggests that a network of forums is established that facilitates peer learning between teachers and a sharing of good practice in relation to effective anti-bullying procedures
- The National Disability Authority also suggests that the recommendations and principles that can underpin a whole school approach to the prevention of bullying behaviours be piloted, reviewed and implemented throughout schools as a matter of urgency
- International studies have raised concerns about the academic and social implications of inclusive policies on school engagement and successful learning and, in particular, on the ways in which friendships are formed between students with special educational needs and other students. The ESRI research on Educational engagement among children with special needs in mainstream schools (2012) shows that children with special educational needs like school less than their peers without special educational needs in mainstream schools. This research looked at the nature of peer relationships and academic engagement among people with special educational needs. Both academic engagement and social engagement play a central role in understanding the broader engagement of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. For students with special educational needs, it was found that “low levels of academic engagement and poorer teacher and peer relations play a central role in explaining their low levels of school engagement”. Inclusion cannot simply be a change in location from special school to mainstream school but something that involves a broader examination of the current school curriculum, methods of teaching and school environment

The National Disability Authority also welcomes the raising of the mandatory age for schooling to 17 years of age. In this regards, the Department of Education and Skills should link with the Department of Social Protection regarding the provision of disability allowance, currently provided at 16 years of age, with a view to examining this allowance as a financial support for a learner with a disability that may incur extra costs of education and training.

Q15: 2(b) How should progress on Tackling Disadvantaged be measured?

The National Disability Authority advises that measurements should include the following key drivers:

- Collaborative protocols and practices- between education, health, social services and other agencies. These need to work both at national and local levels
- Meaningful engagement with partners in education – parents and learners
- Leadership in schools in planning whole school inclusive approaches to learning, so that meeting the diverse needs of learners becomes an integral part of school planning
- Making school accountability more professionally owned as opposed to being focussed solely on inspections or externally imposed. This could include self and peer review on how inclusion is working in practice in the school
- Professional development for inclusive education – the Department in partnership with the Teaching Council should identify the competencies for initial teacher training/education and continuous professional development that enable teachers to have the attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure full participation by all learners in the classroom, including pedagogical approaches for all such as Universal Design for Learning

Q16: 2(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As outlined in 2 (a) above.

Q17: 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 National Disability Authority welcomes the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to strengthening the parental choice and diversity in the school system through the provision of new forms of multi-denominational, non-denominational, and, denominational education in line with parents wishes and choices. Learners with disabilities have multiple identities in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin, members of the Traveller community and religious beliefs. It is important that parents of children with special educational needs can participate in an educational environment which best reflects the diversity within their communities
- The National Disability Authority sees it is critically important that proposed Schools Admission and Excellence legislation is introduced as a priority and in place for the 2017-2018 school year. This would be a positive move towards addressing some of the issues pertaining to children with disabilities having access to local schools and offer some balancing in the profile of schools that currently have high concentration of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, while others do not
- Consideration should also be given to providing more flexibility to students in special classes. The National Disability Authority notes a significant rise in the provision of special classes both at Primary and Secondary levels most of which are related to Autism. The report Understanding Special Class Provision in Ireland (2014) published by the ESRI and Trinity College Dublin, highlights the major increase in special class provision but also a wide variation in how such classes are managed at Primary and Post Primary levels. In some cases, particularly at Primary level, the teacher plays a significant role, whereas, at Post Primary levels it appears to be more responsive to the parent and pupil. The National Disability Authority advises that a more flexible approach is developed, as allocation to a special class can be a relatively permanent arrangement and this has implications for how a student may progress to further education, training and potential employment
- The National Disability Authority welcomes the proposal in the Programme for a Partnership Government on assessing progress regarding new investments in areas, such as, teacher-pupil ratio, speech and language interventions etc. It is also proposed that “parents should be able to receive annual reports on how their school is doing”. In this regards, it is important to clarify what is intended here and what options are being considered for standardised testing. Attainment can often be seen in how learners have attained grades or levels on more formal, standardised assessments or examinations. The National Disability Authority is of the view that it is important that expectations of all learners be raised and low attainment addressed. So in closing the gap between high and low achievers it is not about lowering standards but maintaining high expectation for everyone in receiving a quality education which is measured on both attainment and achievement (such as effort, learning, capacity, resilience etc). UNESCO (2004) Education for All: The Quality Imperative states:

"Quality must be seen in light of how societies define the purpose of education. In most, two principles are at stake: the first is to ensure cognitive development of learners. The second emphasises the role of education in nurturing the creative and emotional growth of learners and in helping them to acquire values and attitudes for responsible citizenship. Finally, quality must pass the test of equity: an education system characterised by discrimination against any particular group is not fulfilling its mission".

Q18: 3(b) How should progress on Diversity and Choice for Parents be measured?

- Monitoring the admissions policy of schools and the actual numbers of children and young people with disabilities attending
- Annual reports that include quality measures in line with UNESCO

Q19: 3(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As outlined in 3(a) above.

Q20: 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).

- The National Disability Authority recommends that the national digital strategy is an inclusive strategy that takes the needs of teachers and students with disabilities into account with the provision of accessible materials/resources, as well as, Assistive Technology
 - In establishing a pool of experts in assisting school initiatives that designers and other stakeholders are included who have expertise in Universal Design. The National Disability Authority has found that having diverse fields of expertise brings a more holistic view of issues and needs of people of any age, size ability or disability that have a very positive impact on the teaching and learning of all students
 - The National Disability Authority recommends that continuous professional development for all teachers needs to embrace Universal Design, as well as, Universal Design for Learning
-

Q21: 4(b) How should progress on Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools be measured?

Auditing by the Department and the Teaching Council of continuous professional development programmes to see the uptake of Universal Design modules.

Universal design is included as part of procurement of materials and equipment and that follow up auditing of schools regarding the provision of accessible materials and equipment to maximise the participation of learners with disabilities in both learning and the life of the school.

Q22: 4(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As outlined in 4 (a) above.

Q23: 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 National Disability Authority welcomes the use of transition year to prepare students for the world of work and the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to work with industry and colleges to open up new programmes and opportunities for students in transition year. Students with disabilities should also be provided with the opportunity to avail of transition year both in mainstream and special schools. It is critically important that they are offered choice and have opportunities to try new things, build self esteem and resilience and are supported in positive risk taking. Such opportunities may provide a pathway for learners with disabilities to explore more mainstream options when leaving school and can result in a number of these learners being better prepared and capable of work
- The National Disability Authority's Centre for Excellence in Universal Design promotes the development of curriculum materials that teach students of all ages how to create innovative design solutions that will work for people of any age, size, ability or disability
- Teachers and students embrace Universal Design to enable them to teach and learn how to employ design thinking strategies in approaching everyday problems and how to improve experiences for all through creative and innovative design
- Universal Design projects, demonstrate practical links for students in their understanding of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)
- Enhance the role of the Transition Year Co-ordinator to plan a Transition Year, support and participation (including work place opportunities) for students with a disability, who wish to undertake Transition Year and to have work experience opportunities
- Research evidence shows that young people with disabilities who take part in work experience during their school years, and in particular, paid work, have a significantly higher employment rate. (Wehman P, Revell WG, Brooke V (2003). Competitive Employment: Has It Become the "First Choice" Yet? Journal of Disability Policy Studies, V14(3), pp 163- 173)

Q24: 5(b) How should progress on Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students be measured?

The inclusion of Universal Design as part of the curriculum and measuring, longitudinally, how it impacts on students' understanding of and application in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM).

Monitoring the uptake of Transition Year by students with disabilities in mainstream and special schools.

Q25: 5(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As outlined in Section 5 (a) above.

Q26: 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 National Disability Authority's research recommends the use of a Universal Design process as a participatory framework for stakeholder engagement including a 'briefing process' so that schools can better serve the needs and interests of the child, the family and the community
 - To break down barriers between mainstream and special educational needs, schools should be located on the one campus, or in close proximity, to encourage greater integration
 - This would be enhanced by an overall management structure with a shared vision and objectives for the campus to ensure the maximisation of key resources and provide shared play and social spaces including the wider community
 - The National Disability Authority recommends the development of national guidelines on shared educational campuses based on the principles of Universal Design
-

Q27: 6(b) How should progress on Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities be measured?

Audits and tracking of uptake and use of educational assets nationwide.

Q28: 6(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

- Ensuring educational assets being made available to the wider community are accessible, so that people with disabilities can avail of and participate in any community activities
 - Adopting a Universal Design process for the participatory framework to enhance the use of educational assets
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Q29: 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 National Disability Authority welcomes the proposed review of the annual expenditure on special education provision and how best to maximise access for learners with disabilities. In this regards, the National Disability Authority is of the view that the focus and emphasis should be on what the child can do, with the right enabling supports, rather than on what s/he cannot do. By 'enabling' supports is meant an approach that maximises the opportunity for a child to become progressively more independent, in line with their capacity and requirements. In relation to same, consideration should be given to the reality that certain learners with disabilities can find it challenging to sustain their learning when there is a break in provision, such as, the summer months, and when they are out of a structured learning environment. Where efficiencies are achieved through this review resources could be provided for a continuum of a structured education provision for those children who require this because of the nature of their disability
- The National Disability Authority also welcomes the proposed engagement with stakeholders regarding progressing sections of the EPSEN Act on a non-statutory basis. The development of independent educational plans, transition planning, individualised care plans are important to be progressed so as to maximise the range of enabling supports for learners with disabilities
- The proposed new model of in school speech and language therapy is to be welcomed and a more collaborative approach involving teachers, parents and primary care services in dealing more effectively and managing the educational and social issues consequential to speech and language difficulties in children with disabilities. The National Disability Authority is aware of significant challenges in delivering on such a model within the ECCE- Disability programme. Even with additional professional posts provided, there are gaps in certain parts of the country and it would be important to learn from the ECCE- Disability experience as to how best to address some of these issues. In this regards, it is critical to have robust and effective protocols in place between the Department of Education and the HSE to ensure that the proposed new model can be successful
- The proposed additional resources in the National Educational Psychologist services are to be welcomed. In this regards, it is critical that whole school approaches are maximised; school wide positive behaviour supports; instructional strategies are provided for teaching social skills and self management strategies and skills. It is also important that there is clarity and effective protocols as to the interfaces between Youth Justice system and NEPS, as well as CAMHS and NEPS. A critical emerging issue is mental health and, in particular, where people with disabilities also have mental health difficulties, it is really important that there is clarity for parents and schools what the wraparound services are that will be provided
- An area not addressed within the proposed plans under the programme for Government is the need to have a unified approach that reaches across education, health care and social care needs. Such an approach, should be in place for all learners with disabilities up to the age of 24 who need support beyond what is available through SEN supports. The Department of Education and Skills have a pivotal role in advancing such an approach with the Department of Health and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Q30: 7(b) How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?

Monitoring the use of resources within special education and the extent to which parents and young people with disabilities have a say and greater choice about the supports they may require and the extent to which those supports maximise the independence of the learner with disabilities.

Monitor the effectiveness of the protocols and practices between the relevant statutory bodies to ensure that learners with disabilities get the support and services they need.

Q31: 7(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As outlined in 7(a) above.

Q32: 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 National Disability Authority is of the view that the elements contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government could be enhanced by the inclusion of Universal Design, in the following manner:

- Engaging with educational institutions at secondary, further education and training, third and at continuous professional development levels on promoting the benefits of having universal design (Good design) as a key element in the curriculum for relevant professions. This is to ensure that both current and future engineers, architects, designers consider the needs of people of any age, size ability or disability from the start. An important element is how this is taught and the concept of Universal Design for learning is now seen as a key enabler for this transformation to happen
- Universal Design offers the opportunity to create graduates whose attributes will enable them to participate in a global economy and contribute to the social and cultural development of their own communities
- The National Disability Authority recommends that Universal Design is incorporated into the instruction, curricula and assessment for all Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths related educational courses

Apprenticeships have a role to play in building the skills and capacities of people with disabilities. The National Disability Authority suggests that the new model of apprenticeship should cover:

- A much wider range of skills and occupations across services, industry agriculture and construction
- A greater range of skill levels, from training in basic skills, to higher technological skills, through an on-the-job approach
- A range of durations, from short-duration apprenticeships (3-6 months) to the traditional 3 to 4 year apprenticeships or longer

In addition, the revised apprenticeship system could be managed and implemented as follows:

- SOLAS will have an oversight role in apprenticeships as the co-ordinating body for further education and training
 - National and local protocols should be developed around how schools and disability services can link into local Education Training Boards and to apprenticeship and on-the-job traineeship opportunities
 - The National Disability Authority would like to see a central focal point of advice for employers around any issues around employing people with disabilities, including apprentices or trainees, which could offer guidance around issues such as reasonable accommodation or other issues that arise on the job This should also be linked to the Employer support initiative funded under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy which is operated by ISME, IBEC and Chambers of Commerce (see www.employerdisabilityinformation.ie)
 - It would be useful to clarify an appropriate legal framework for apprenticeship and 'place-and-train' placements
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Q33: 8(b) How should progress on Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future be measured?

- Track the development and inclusion of Universal Design modules in educational programmes, and curricula and assessment
 - Examine existing programmes that provide students/graduates with disabilities in higher education with the chance to develop work related skills and experience, to assess the feasibility of developing similar provision across all Higher Education Institutes
 - Examine the possibility of developing an individualised ePortfolio system, with the aim of supporting successful transition from college to employment. This should incorporate access to a variety of individually-tailored disability and career-specific resources and supports as required
 - Track the development and establishment of disability and career specific resources and supports
 - Track the destinations of students with declared disabilities as they graduate from college. Undertake qualitative interviews with students on graduation to track and monitor their transition from college to employment
 - Implement a mechanism for students and employers so that they can provide feedback on effective measures and actions that provide them with skills that meet the needs of the future
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Q34: 8(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As listed in 8(a) above.
