

Consultation Paper - Statement of Strategy 2016-2018

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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

Principle 5 of the National Council for Special Education's policy advice paper "Supporting Students with Special Education Needs in Schools" (2012) states:

"Available resources are used to maximum effect to drive improved outcomes for children; State services work together to achieve this."

At the present time one of the key difficulties for students with intellectual disabilities in both mainstream and special schools is a lack of a coordinated whole-of-Government approach impacting in a range of ways on their participation in educational opportunities. For example, where there are nursing supports required for children and students to participate in education, there is currently a lack of agreement about whether this should be funded through Health or Educational spending, leading to a lack of clarity and a lack of appropriate resources being allocated. Consequently students whose medical needs require nursing support in order to attend school or college are experiencing absences or reduced attendances when the required nursing supports are not in place. Students who require nursing supports on transport in order to be able to travel to school are also experiencing a similar lack of cross-departmental agreement.

Research by the National Council for Special Education highlights the lack of a consistently implemented coordinated approach:

"Children with particular disabilities and/or special educational needs may require ongoing access to therapeutic services, including speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, clinical psychology and child and adolescent mental health teams. While there are examples of sustained co-operative practice between health and education professionals (HSE, 2013), serious concerns have been expressed about the uneven nature of provision throughout the country, limited access and long waiting lists (HSE, 2009; NCSE, 2013).

(Rose et al, 2015)

The experience of difficulties as outlined above in relation to cross-departmental approaches has been confirmed in a recent internal consultation with National Federation member organisations (April 2016). Through this consultation issues raised included a lack of clarity in relation to Departmental responsibility for nursing support for students with ID and complex medical needs to attend school along with issues in relation to continuity of support at transition from special school to school-leaver provision, and supports for children with significant behavioural support needs. In relation to the transition from special school for children with the most complex level of need, for example, children who were receiving 2:1 support on 31st July through the Department of Education, have received an allocation of less than 1 WTE on 1st August in spite of no change occurring in their support needs.

In relation to behavioural supports the following example was provided [REDACTED] diagnosis [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Dilemmas arose between the school authorities (Department of Education and Skills) and the Patron (HSE funded) as to pursuing the appropriate services for the pupil and indeed, when the appropriate services were identified as to who's overall responsibility it was. The child and family have been left distraught and appear to 'fall between the two'.

Similarly, for school-leavers and mature students with ID there is a need for a collaborative approach between the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Skills to ensure that funding provided to a person with an intellectual disability can be flexibly employed to provide support for their participation in mainstream 3rd level education, where that is the preference of the individual.

Improved cross-departmental working is required to ensure that the needs of children and students at all levels with special educational need are fully catered for by a whole-of-Government approach. Enhanced collaboration between Department of Education and Skills; Department of Health; Department of Children and Youth Affairs; and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport is essential to ensuring equality of access to education, and meaningful inclusion and integration for children and students with intellectual disabilities. There is a particular need for cooperation in supporting participation in education for those who have significant medical needs. It is also vital that there is engagement between the National Educational Psychological Services, the Inclusion Support Service, the National Council for Special Education and the HSE to coordinate the response to children with a range of complex needs, including where there is a need for positive behavioural support. There needs to be clarity of role for each agency involved to ensure that families are well supported.

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

- On page 86 of the Programme for Government a range of cross-departmental measures including HSE Speech and Language Therapists are listed as part of an additional €500 million investment in education. This additional investment should also include nursing supports to allow children with complex medical needs to attend school (and where necessary provide support on school transport) so that children who have significant medical needs do not continue to be excluded from their educational entitlement, or have reduced days of inclusion in school due to a lack of essential nursing support, and positive behavioural supports.

- There is a need for further focus on transition planning for children moving beyond secondary school. Post-primary resource teachers need training in supporting families through the transition period and the Inclusion Support Service may have a role in providing training for support teachers in this role. There is a need for clarification on the role of the support teacher, school and wider support services in planning for this transition. Additional resources may be required to address transition planning and there is a need for clear planning, process, roles and a timeline within the school cycle for each child to have planning in place. The recent publication in 2016 of transitional guidelines for schools and for parents/guardians by the NCSE is a welcome development.

- Under Goal 3 of the Statement of Strategy 2015-2017 it is stated that:

"We will further develop policy and programmes to support learners with special educational needs and disabilities in participating and progressing across the continuum of education"; and "We will promote access to higher education for disadvantaged groups and put in place coherent pathways from second level education, from further education and training and other non-traditional entry routes."

In order to ensure equality of access for people with intellectual disabilities who wish to access inclusive 3rd level education (including in universities, institutes of technology, further education and training schemes) there is a need for further support and funding provision so that inclusive individualised programmes such as the 'Going to College' pilot project which took place in the National University of Ireland, Galway; and the Inclusive Learning Initiative currently underway in Maynooth University can be made available to all students who wish to access 3rd level education. The 'Going to College Project' and the Inclusive Learning Initiative have provided significant evidence of reciprocal benefit to the educational institute and the student included. Students with intellectual disabilities require their funding supports to be flexible and eligible to be used for supporting attendance at education settings, whilst universities and other third level institutions must receive funding supports for students with ID, to provide equality of access since these supports are provided for students with other kinds of disability.

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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)?

- The National Federation warmly welcomes the National Council for Special Education's proposed model for Allocation of Teaching Resources for Students with Special Educational Needs, and its focus on needs-led rather than diagnosis-led allocation of resources. The focus on multi-year funding within this model is also welcomed, as is the focus on meaningful inclusion in mainstream classes and the whole-school approach rather than a withdrawal model. The National Federation calls for implementation of this policy as a matter of priority.

- There is a need for greater focus on how the inclusion of parents in a partnership approach can be effectively put into practice in line with international best practice and the EPSEN Act. Collaborative working with families should be enhanced.

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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?

Respondent skipped this question

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

A 2015 National Council for Special Education research report revealed, that in spite of substantial progress made in recent years, significant barriers remained in the development of inclusive learning environments up to second level, including:

"inadequacy of current assessment procedures to access resources; limited access to therapeutic services; insufficient teacher knowledge and expertise; inconsistencies in development and implementation of IEPs; exclusionary clauses in school enrolment policies"
(Rose et al, 2015).

Success in achieving the strategies should be measured, amongst other ways, by full equality of access to all levels of education – from preschool to 3rd level, to all citizens, including people with intellectual disabilities.

People with intellectual disabilities and families should be involved in all local, regional and decision making mechanisms that contribute to the development of national policy strategies and frameworks, including those developed within the Strategy being drawn up by the Department of Education and Skills

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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

Respondent skipped this question

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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

A focus on life-long learning; equality of access and inclusion; the importance of realising and maximising potential; and education as a supporting feature of living a 'good life' should receive central focus alongside the economic considerations of education in terms of employment and job opportunities. This will help us to build a more inclusive, citizen-led society. Inclusive education at every level reflects the values of an inclusive society, and vice versa.

The National Federation warmly welcomes the Programme for Government's focus, on page 5, on improving the lives of people with disabilities:

"As part of our commitment to equality of opportunity, we will support people with disabilities in maximising their potential, by removing barriers which impact on access to services, education, work or healthcare. A particular focus will be placed on supports at key transition points – going to school, progressing to further training or education, commencing employment, or moving in to a new home. In recognition that personalised budgets provide an individual with more control in accessing services, giving them greater independence and choice, we will devolve budgets to the person so they may shop beyond traditional service providers to better fit their needs."

A Programme for Partnership Government, 2016; p.5

In the formulation of a Strategy for Education and Skills 2016-2018 we strongly recommend that the vision of the Programme for Government in relation to supporting people with disabilities as set out above, is a key driver of the Strategy, and that the full participation of people with intellectual disabilities is a priority within the achievement of this vision, so that the aim set out on page 10 of the strategy can be realised:

"We want an Ireland where everybody is given the opportunity to succeed, where nobody is left behind"

A Programme for Partnership Government, 2016; p.10

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

- It is essential that the appropriate supports and resources are put in place to ensure that children with special educational need can fully participate in the early years educational opportunities available to all children, including the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme.
- An issue identified by our member organisations has been the funding of special pre-schools, some of which have experienced sharp decreases in funding over recent years. For some children, the role of the special pre-school can be seen to benefit the development of skills and capacities that facilitates children attending mainstream schooling and in the longer term can lead to reduced disability funding in later life as potential is maximised and the need for support reduced. Our members have been asked in some cases to take responsibility for the running of such special pre-schools, but the funding has been the source of dispute in relation to Departmental responsibility, leaving our members without adequate and appropriate resources to maintain this provision.

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

• In order that a child can attend their local school there is a need to ensure consistent implementation of policy across all schools so that the promotion of meaningful inclusion of children with disabilities and the implementation of whole school approaches ensures that all schools take responsibility for full inclusion and that there is not a development of schools with a particular expertise/focus on Special Educational Need. It is vital that families of children with disabilities have access to the full range of educational options available in their area.

• Under Goal 3 – Supporting Inclusion and Diversity, one of the outputs listed is “Progress on the divestment of schools and the establishment of new schools to provide a greater diversity of school types”. This Goal should also include engagement by the Department of Education and Skills with patrons of Special Schools to examine a range of issues that require consideration, including clinical governance, patronage of special schools in the context of mainstreaming policy, equality of access for children with complex medical needs, and supports for children with complex behavioural support needs. The National Federation of Voluntary Bodies would be happy to liaise with the patrons of Special Schools within its membership to facilitate such engagement.

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

The Programme for Partnership Government discusses, on page 91, the importance of focusing on the future needs, abilities and capacities of students. For young people with intellectual disabilities it is vitally important that expectations are set high from the outset so that the full potential of the person can be realised. The practice of developing and maintaining socially valued roles (as espoused in Social Role Valorization (SRV) theory and practice) across all domains of life including through education has been shown to have transformative outcomes in the lives of people with disabilities, demonstrating that low expectations have long been the source of limited life experiences and poor quality of life. Work undertaken by the National Federation members and many others has provided clear evidence in an Irish context that an individually focused, strengths-based approach will ensure that the creativity and capacity of people with disabilities is much enhanced and provides people with opportunities for meaningful participation in the workforce and in community life as valued and active citizens. Thus, the educational approach to inclusion of people with intellectual disability should be informed by an SRV approach.

An example of this kind of approach in action can be found at the following link:

http://www.fedvol.ie/_fileupload/Publications/Next%20Steps%20-%20The%20Journey%20So%20Far.pdf or by contacting the National Federation (091 792316) or Genio at www.genio.ie

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

Respondent skipped this question

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

There is a lack of available space accessible to wheelchair users in many communities. Where such spaces exist in educational settings, particular consideration should be given to providing opportunities for mainstream community activities that are inclusive of people with disabilities to take place in the evening-time or at weekends. A mapping of the available accessible facilities would be welcomed so that community groups could be informed about potential opportunities.

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

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

- A review process should be put into place to monitor implementation of the NCSE proposed model for Allocating Teaching Resources and to evaluate outcomes for learners with special educational needs.

• 3rd level educational institutions should be required to demonstrate that they are operating on the basis of full inclusion for all, including learners with intellectual disabilities. Evidence from fully inclusive 3rd level pilot programmes carried out in Ireland (such as 'Going to College' in NUIG and the Inclusive Learning Initiative in Maynooth university) has demonstrated clear benefits to the learner, peer students and the institution through inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities. In order to facilitate access for students with ID, a flexible approach to the level achieved on the QQI framework must be adopted, as well as in regulation relating to full/part time registration and flexibility for students with intellectual disability to complete programmes over a longer time-frame if necessary.

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

• Early implementation of the NCSE's proposed model for Allocating Teaching Resources for Students with Special Educational Needs should be prioritised.

• There needs to be recognition across all educational levels that people with disabilities – and people with intellectual disabilities in particular – have a right to access mainstream education and training. This is particularly relevant in the case of community-based educational programmes. Further work to ensure an understanding that all citizens in our society have a right to access education on an equal basis may be required for staff in mainstream settings as feedback from our member organisations supporting people who wish to access mainstream education and training has indicated that many education providers are suggesting that disability service providers should cater for training and education needs in specialised settings. All Further Education and Training opportunities through SOLAS should be open to students with intellectual disabilities, with the appropriate supports and timeframe to achieve their full potential.

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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).

Respondent skipped this question

Q33: 8(b) How should progress on Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future be measured?

Respondent skipped this question

Q34: 8(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Respondent skipped this question