

## **Focused Policy Assessment: Data on Special Needs Assistants - Draft Terms of Reference subject to agreement by NCSE.**

### **Title**

Improving the data availability and predictability of Special Need Assistant (SNA) allocation needs.

### **Context**

The Government decision on the 03/07/2015 agreed that a review of the SNA scheme would be carried out to ensure that the scheme continues to meet its objectives and that resources are being utilised effectively and efficiently, in line with the guidelines. The terms of reference for this review are to be agreed between the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). The Government also noted that the DES and the NCSE would endeavour to ensure that resources would only be allocated in cases of assessed need, including by making efforts to minimise the number of posts allocated.

In addition to the terms of the Government decision, discussions at the Cabinet Committee on Social Protection suggested that the review should seek to establish a better understanding of the factors driving increased demand for SNA support and the means by which these factors may be recorded and reported in the future. The availability of robust and reliable data in a timely manner is key to understanding of the drivers of demand and improving the capacity to make future projections.

The timelines around the availability of data and the submission of SNA funding requirements is not currently aligned with the Government's budget calendar. In addition, the level of detail in the data is not sufficient to analyse the various drivers of demand or to make future needs projections.

In 2011 the DES published a Value for Money (VFM) Review of expenditure on the SNA scheme. The main findings of the review in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, were that the scheme:

- Could achieve its objectives and the associated level of output with fewer inputs;
- Is effective in assisting schools to meet the care needs of students with disabilities but is compromised by the inappropriate expansion of the role and the identified over-allocation of SNA posts; and
- Continues to be relevant to enable schools to meet the additional care needs of some students with disabilities but the role of the SNA is not well understood. Schools, parents and professionals seem to consider that SNAs may be used for administrative, pedagogical, behavioural management and therapeutic duties.

The 2011 VFM review also set out a range of performance indicators and performance measures that should be used to monitor the operation of the SNA scheme in to the future (see Appendix 1).

This Focused Policy Assessment (FPA) comprises a data review involving the identification, analysis and evaluation of relevant data. The review will be led by the IGEES Unit, Department of Education and Skills. This FPA is likely to be a pre-cursor to an NCSE-led review which will, if considered necessary, consider the model of allocating SNAs and make recommendations on whether an alternative model might provide for better outcomes for children. More detail on this will follow the conclusion of the FPA.

The aims of the Focused Policy Assessment are therefore to identify the data needed to report on the performance indicators set out in the 2011 VFM and to review any emerging trends. These additional data can then be used to inform the development of a model to estimate likely future demand and costing that demand for SNAs.

### Objective

- (1) Identify, collate and evaluate all available data underpinning the scheme in relation to performance indicators for the SNA scheme as set out in the 2011 Value for Money Review.
- (2) Identify what is required to develop the forecasting capacity of the Department and the NCSE in order to anticipate the level of demand and cost<sup>1</sup> of future SNA requirements.
- (3) Provision of this data to be aligned with the planning needs of the Department, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the NCSE with specific reference to the annual budgetary process.

### Terms of Reference

1. Identify, collate and review all baseline data relevant to SNA provision during the period 2007 to date in order to establish drivers (e.g. disability types and disability prevalence) and levels of growth in demand under the scheme. This will include the availability of a time series on pupils and SNAs in both primary and second level, inflows and outflows within the scheme, the average duration of SNA provision for pupils, provision of SNA support from transition from primary to second level and other relevant datasets that are informative with respect to the historic drivers of the scheme. The level of detail of the data significantly improves in the 2011/2012 period and beyond. This limitation will mean certain pieces of analysis will be limited to the 2011/2012 and beyond.
2. Develop a trend analysis of inputs and outputs from the scheme over the last 8 years “using available data for the performance metrics” set out in Appendix 1 of this report<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Costings will be based on assumptions about the cost of an average Special Needs Assistant currently.

<sup>2</sup> The limitation in the data which is referenced above may prevent all metrics being analysed over an 8 year period

3. Development of a spreadsheet model with relevant stakeholders to estimate demand and costing that demand having regard to Budgetary timeframes.

The first draft of the report is to be submitted no later than end-February 2016.

### Potential Outputs

Having regard to the terms of reference, the potential outputs are:

1. A Data inventory that will collate the relevant data on special needs and highlight growth trends;
2. Agreement on an arrangement of timelines for provision of data that addresses the information needs of the relevant funding organisations;
3. Analysis of metrics associated with Activities, Outputs, Results<sup>3</sup> and Impacts as suggested in the 2011 VFM report (Appendix 1), as updated; and
4. A spreadsheet model will be developed that uses past trends and other satisfactory models in the Education sector (e.g. GAM model) to estimate allocations.
5. A more detailed understanding of the aggregate pupil (e.g. disability type) and school characteristics (i.e. special or mainstream) which materially influence demand, the intensity of resource allocation needs and costs.

### Data Sources

1. NCSE data on Special Needs
2. Health Research Board data on disability prevalence
3. Dept. of Education data on Special Needs
4. CSO Census (2006 and 2011), National Disability Survey (2006) and Growing Up in Ireland Survey
5. NEPS

### Project Governance

The FPA will be overseen by a technical group to include 1 member from NCSE, 3 members from DES (1 policy, 1 evaluator and 1 data specialist), 2 members from DPER (1 Vote, 1 CEEU) 1 independent member from the Health sector and a Senior Special Educational Needs Organiser (SSENO) to advise on interpretations of the data. The independent member should be working in the area of disability and will add an informed but neutral view on the report's conclusions and recommendations.

The proposed members are:

- NCSE – Niall Feeney, Gerard Hogan (Senior Special Educational Needs Organiser)

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<sup>3</sup> The metrics for four potential performance measures: *“the success of schools in meeting students additional care needs”*, *“Improvements in systems and procedures including ICT, NCSE and DES processes”*, *“Extent of compliance with SNA circulars regarding deployment of resources”* and *“Improvements in classroom management”* will be excluded from this analysis. The qualitative performance measure of *Success of schools in meeting student’s additional care needs* is a specific metric that can only be robustly and fairly measured by a Special Education expert rather than a general educational analyst. The qualitative performance measure of *improvements in systems and procedures Extent of compliance with SNA circulars regarding deployment of resources and improvements in classroom management* would require additional qualitative data collection and assessments based on the change in efficiency and effectiveness of systems and procedures. It is envisaged that the analysis section will not go into such detail in order for the report to be produced in the 4 to 5 month period suggested above.

- DPER – John Burke/Sighle de Barra and Laura Watts
- DES – Catriona Hanevy, Evan Coady and Nicola Tickner
- Independent – D/Health or HSE

### Timelines and Meetings

The first draft of the Report will be available by end-February 2016. It is envisaged that the Technical group meet at least 4 times over the course of the project. The first of these meetings will be administrative in nature, in that it will be introductory and the other meetings will involve technical and consultative discussions about the direction/methods used for modelling, the need for new data and other issues linked to the development and completion of the report. One of the initial meetings of the technical group should focus on approving a more detailed document setting out the methodology for the FPA. This would address issues such as the indicative model of demand). This model of demand will be informed from past trends, demographics, prevalence of disability in the relevant age groups, etc. The CEEU will provide a technical assessment regarding the quality of the FPA at the first and final draft stages.

## Appendix 1 - Performance Indicators of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme

<b>Individual Components of the Programme Logic Model</b>	<b>Performance Indicators</b>	<b>Potential Performance Measures</b>
<p><b><u>DES Strategic Objective</u></b></p> <p><i>Providing a range of resources and support for students with special educational needs.</i></p>	<p>Number of students with special educational needs in different school sectors.</p>	<p>Ratio of students with special educational needs who are/ are not attending school.</p>
<p><b><u>Programme Objective</u></b></p> <p><i>The provision of a system of additional care support within educational contexts for students with special educational needs.</i></p>	<p>Number of students with special educational needs who require and have been allocated SNA support per school sector.</p>	<p>Establishing the extent to which the additional care support that has been allocated through ongoing monitoring and review processes.</p>
<p><b><u>Inputs (Budget)</u></b></p> <p><i>Human and financial inputs to SNA Scheme</i></p>	<p>Overall cost of programme including no. and grade of staff involved in admin of SNA scheme</p>	<p>1. % change in the costs of SNA Scheme annually</p> <p>2. Ratio of SNA scheme costs to Special Education/DES budgets</p>
<p><b><u>Activities</u></b></p> <p><i>Application, Allocation and Review Processes</i></p>	<p>1. No of applications processed</p> <p>2. No of successful applications</p> <p>3. No and % of schools applying and allocated SNA support in each sector</p>	<p>1. Timeliness of the process at each stage</p> <p>2. Improvements in systems and procedures including ICT, NCSE and DES processes</p> <p>3. Extent of compliance with SNA circulars regarding deployment of resources</p>
<p><b><u>Outputs</u></b></p> <p><i>Number of SNAs in different school sectors</i></p>	<p>1. Total no of SNA</p> <p>2. No of SNAs allocated per school sector</p> <p>3. Total no of schools allocated SNA support</p> <p>4. No and % of Schools allocated SNA support per sector</p>	<p>1. % change in total SNAs</p> <p>2. No. of SNAs per school sector</p> <p>3. SNA to pupil ratios by school type and by type of disability</p> <p>4. No of SNAs allocated per special educational need category annually</p> <p>5. Number of successful/unsuccessful appeals over time</p> <p>6. Average duration of SNA support by type of disability and by type of school</p>

<p><b><u>Results</u></b></p> <p><i>Number of students with special educational needs requiring additional care support who are being provided for</i></p>	<p>1. No of students with special educational needs allocated SNA support in each category of special education needs in each sector</p>	<p>1. % change in number of students with special educational needs per school sector</p>
	<p>2. The manner in which providing for students care needs is facilitating/not facilitating their educational placements</p>	<p>2. % change in number of students allocated SNA support per School sector annually</p>
		<p>3. Success of schools in meeting students additional care needs</p>
<p><b><u>Impacts</u></b></p> <p><i>Number of students with special educational needs who have been allocated SNA support and the number no longer requiring support</i></p>	<p>No of students with special educational needs who have been allocated SNA support and the no. that no longer require SNA support per school sector annually.</p>	<p>No of students with special educational needs who have been allocated SNA support and the no. that no longer require SNA support per school sector annually.</p>
		<p>Improvements in classroom management</p>

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