Barnardo’s NI is the largest children’s charity in Northern Ireland. We work with more than 8,000 children, young people and families in almost fifty services and sixty schools across communities in Northern Ireland. Our services range from child protection to family support, work with children in care and leaving care, disabled children and with young people at risk of offending. Many of the children and young people we work with are at risk of or have already become disengaged from the education system.

Education is one of the most important factors in a child’s development, promoting well-being, providing life skills, fostering citizenship and preparing for future employment. Barnardo’s NI therefore welcomes this DUP consultation on education and has addressed those questions where we believe our input would be most helpful. In preparing our response we have drawn on the experience of Barnardo’s staff working in schools and also in services with young people experiencing difficulty within the formal education system.

1) What areas within education do you believe should be prioritized over the next few years, and why?

Low educational attainment: One-fifth of children in Northern Ireland leave primary school unable to read and write to the required standard while two-fifths leave with poor numeracy skills.\(^1\) Furthermore, twenty per cent of school leavers lack basic literacy and numeracy skills.\(^2\)

Low educational attainment is of particular concern in relation to looked after children. In 2008/09 for Key Stage 2 assessments, 34% and 37% of eligible looked after children attained Level 4 or above in English and Maths respectively, in comparison with 80% and 81% respectively of the general school population; while 61% of children in care achieved at least one GCSE Grade A*-G compared with 99% of the general population\(^3\).

The improvement of literacy and numeracy standards within education is a crucial and key element in improving overall educational attainment and consequently long term poverty and disadvantage.

School readiness: Too many children arrive in school not ready or able to learn, providing schools with a considerable challenge. This challenge continues as children progress through school and beyond, resulting in children from disadvantaged backgrounds being over-

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\(^1\) The Education and Training Inspectorate Chief Inspector’s Report 2006-2008
represented amongst those failing to achieve literacy and numeracy skills, qualifications, access to further or higher education and employment.

Parents have a key role to play in improving literacy and numeracy standards in the early years and throughout all stages of their children’s education. They are crucial in promoting the language and cognitive development essential for children to engage in and enjoy learning. It is therefore essential that parents are encouraged and supported to take on a meaningful and effective role in engaging with their child’s education (please also refer to Barnardo’s NI Ready to Learn programme at Question 7).

**Primary school provision:** A recent report from the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate⁴ found that the overall quality of provision in primary schools was not good enough in one third of schools; that standards attained were not good enough in one quarter; that there was too significant a variation in the standards of literacy and numeracy attained; that the quality of teaching was in need of improvement in one lesson in every five; that the quality of planning was inadequate in one school in every ten; and that the quality of principals’ leadership is an area for improvement in one quarter of schools. Addressing these areas highlighted in the Chief Inspector’s report should be a priority in order to consistently improve literacy and numeracy standards and ensure children are suitably prepared to make the transition into secondary education.

**Special Educational Needs:** A key priority should be ensuring that families with disabled children get the level and kind of educational support that is most effective for their child. Parents and disabled children who use Barnardo’s services have expressed serious concern that the limited access and rights they have to additional support within the educational system would be removed if the proposals in the ‘Every School a Good School – The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion’ were to be implemented, for example the proposed phasing out of legally binding Statements and their replacement with Coordinated Support Plans (CSP). Barnardo’s NI is concerned that the proposed new system will create further barriers and longer delays in meeting the needs of children with the most serious Special Educational Needs.

**Early Years:** If we compare current early years investment in Northern Ireland to Britain the investment per child here is £630 compared to £2000 per child in Britain⁵ and this must be urgently addressed. Disadvantaged children benefit most from early support that has both an educational and social focus and where parents are supported. However the Draft Department of Education Early Years Strategy seems to focus on children aged 3-6 years and on their learning attainment.

It is Barnardo’s view that for an early years strategy to be effective it needs to recognise that learning starts before birth and that from pre-natal through to six years is a critical time in a child’s life. The support that parents and children need during this time cannot be simply focused on literacy and numeracy attainment.

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⁴ The Education and Training Inspectorate Chief Inspector’s Report 2006-2008
**Early intervention:** The issue of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) also needs to be prioritised so that young people can be identified at an earlier age. Children from poor homes are more than a year behind their peers in their vocabulary by the time they start school and this gap widens through school. They are also five times more likely to be excluded from school than children from more advantaged backgrounds. These factors all increase the chances of children becoming young people NEET in the future.

Research by Barnardo’s with young people NEET found the majority had left school with few qualifications and many had been excluded. Disengagement tended to be a cumulative process, starting with difficulties in primary school and becoming entrenched by negative experiences in secondary school.

Even the most intensive model of intervention saves money in the long term, as well as helping young people to resolve the issues that distract them from learning. Timely intervention in the early years and at school before disengagement and disaffection set in can have a positive impact on NEET numbers.

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**Policy Recommendations:**

- The implementation of pilot programmes of proven practice models to address the literacy and numeracy deficit in schools in Northern Ireland.

- A greater focus on raising standards in primary education, including the low level of funding and the pupil-teacher ratio, strong leadership, encouraging greater parental involvement and placing a greater emphasis on early intervention and literacy and numeracy.

- Priority investment should be given to Early Years; the Department of Education Early Years Strategy must take a strong cross cutting and cross departmental approach in order to achieve the best social, health and educational outcomes for the most vulnerable children.

- Reducing the numbers of young people not in education, employment and training should be a priority area within education. A Northern Ireland NEET Strategy should incorporate development of a specific pre-NEET prevention programme that works with primary and

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7 Evans, J. (2010) Not present and not correct: Understanding and preventing school exclusions, Barnardo’s
post-primary school children, aged 9 to 11 and 12-14 respectively, who are identified as being particularly at risk of becoming NEET.

- The proposals in ‘Every School a Good School – The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion’ should not be implemented in their current format; before any changes are made there is a need for further discussion leading to the production of more detailed proposals.

2. Are there opportunities for the Department of Education to stop doing things, or for funding on specific elements to be reduced or suspended for a time? Do you have ideas around how better use can be made of existing resources?

It is important in any decision-making on areas to cut that the Department of Education is guided by the principles of freedom, fairness and responsibility\(^\text{10}\) and does not disproportionately hurt disadvantaged children.

The need for intelligent funding and smart investment is crucial at a time when public sector funding is facing significant reductions. Across all government departments, including education, priority needs to be given to targeted, timely interventions which will prevent more costly interventions being needed at a later stage.

This is an opportunity for the Department of Education to strategically review what is effective at achieving the best outcomes for children, particularly the most disadvantaged children, and invest available resources accordingly.

_Policy Recommendation:_

Barnardo’s NI believes the following series of principles adapted from the Comprehensive Spending Review Framework are a useful guide for all government departments, including the Department of Education, to ensure decisions about spending are in the best interests of the most disadvantaged children and young people:

- Are poor families or vulnerable children the main beneficiaries of this activity?
- Will cutting back on this activity cause greater pressure on other local services?
- Will cutting back on this activity cause greater problems for the future that will cost more?
- Could this activity be better packaged with others to avoid duplication and deliver a more holistic service?
- Could this activity be provided more effectively and for greater value for money by non-

\(^{10}\) As set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review Framework
statutory providers?
- Does this service or programme represent the best investment for the best social return?

3. What is your view on investing a greater proportion of the education budget on the pre-school years? How could the impact or success of any extra pre-school funding be judged? What is your view of investing a greater proportion of the education budget in primary schools?

Please also refer to our response at Question 2 in relation to intelligent funding and smart investment. The early years of a child’s life are crucial in determining how well s/he will do in terms of health, education and future employment. It is therefore critical that we focus resources and intervention in those earliest years to prevent children failing to achieve their full potential and developing difficulties later in life.

**Policy recommendation:**
- Commit to prioritizing early intervention strategies by allocating 3 per cent of the budgets from health, education and youth justice to early intervention initiatives.

4. Are you aware of specific programmes or projects locally or internationally which would bring improvements and prove cost-effective? Do you have experience of successful early intervention programmes?

Barnardo’s NI, like other voluntary and community sector organisations, has extensive experience in delivering a range of successful projects and early intervention programmes which aim to support vulnerable children and young people facing barriers to participation in education and also training and employment.

Our broad range of evidence-based education work includes coordinating extended schools clusters, schools counselling, literacy and numeracy programmes, skills training, work experience, confidence building, social and emotional skills development, restorative practices, advice services and family support.

We have included a few examples of effective programmes below but if it would be helpful, Barnardo’s NI are happy to meet with DUP members to discuss a full range in more detail and to organise visits to some of Barnardo’s direct services.
**Extended schools:** There are major benefits to be gained from engagement in extended schools. The NI Extended Schools programme is focused on improving educational outcomes, reducing barriers to learning, and providing additional support to help improve the life chances of disadvantaged children and young people.

Barnardo’s Schools Programme and the Full Service Community Network operate in extended schools clusters in West Belfast, reaching over 4,500 children in disadvantaged areas. We are also based in Tullycarnet primary school in East Belfast operating a Family Project which also provides a range of extended schools activities to local children.

The recent evaluation of extended schools in Northern Ireland by the Education and Training Inspectorate\(^\text{11}\) found that in almost all cases where extended schools are serving disadvantaged communities effectively, significant improvements are evident in the educational outcomes and the personal and social well-being of pupils. There is considerable evidence of raised attainment, increased pupil and parental engagement with learning and improved links between families and schools.

**Restorative practices:** When used in schools, restorative practices include pupils taking responsibility for their own actions and realising the impact their behaviour has on others in order to improve the learning environment and create a positive school ethos for teachers and pupils. Restorative practices have been used successfully in the USA and Europe, including other parts of the UK. In Barnardo’s experience the application of restorative principles in schools in Northern Ireland motivates disaffected pupils, helps improve absenteeism and reduces the need for suspension and exclusion.

**Parenting support:** Parenting is very rewarding but it can also be demanding and at times difficult. Good parenting and the capabilities it builds in children is essential to improving their health, educational attainment and life chances. Barnardo’s parenting support programmes are based on the fact that the family environment heavily influences these outcomes.

Randomised control group evaluations of models of support such as *Incredible Years*, which has been implemented across a number of Barnardo’s services in Northern Ireland, found that these programmes reduced parental depression, increased parental self-confidence, positive family communication and reduced conduct problems in children’s interactions with parents.

This programme for parents with children with diagnosed disruptive behaviour costs an average of £1,344 to improve a child’s behaviour to below clinical levels of disruptiveness. This is very cost-effective when compared with the extra £60,000 that an individual with conduct disorder has cost public services by the age of 28\(^\text{12}\).

**NEET prevention and intervention:** A recent Audit Commission Report estimated that the total financial cost to the economy and the Exchequer of each NEET young person is £160,000.

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\(^{11}\) ETI, An Evaluation of Extended Schools, July 2010

Even if we only calculate the costs of the 3,000 core NEET young people aged 16 – 19 in Northern Ireland then it represents a total cost of £480 million to the NI economy.

Or to put this more positively if we intervene and re-engage NEET young people then we can save £81,000 over the lifetime of an average young person who is NEET. Again if we just apply this to the 3,000 16 – 19 year olds who are core NEET we can save £243m over a generation of NEET young people in Northern Ireland.

Barnardo’s NI provides two main types of service for young people who are, or have recently been NEET, as well as groups who without our intervention are at risk of becoming NEET:

- **support services for vulnerable young people facing barriers to participation**
- **vocational training and work-based learning services**

**Dr B’s Kitchen** is a Barnardo’s project in Belfast which trains young people with learning disabilities or support needs to gain industry recognised qualifications in all aspects of catering, including food preparation and front of house skills. Staff focus on confidence building with the young people in order to help turn around their attitudes to learning and they are given the opportunity to obtain literacy and numeracy qualifications. At least 83% of these young people go into sustained further education, training or employment.

The **Newry Adolescent Partnership (NAP)** and **Armagh and Dungannon Adolescent Partnership (ADAP)** provide support services for children and young people aged between 13-18 years who are at risk of offending, of being looked after, involved in anti-social behaviour, misusing substances and experiencing difficulty within the formal education system. An educational support worker provides one-to-one programmes based on individual need in order to maintain mainstream placement, encourage re-engagement with education/training and/or provide opportunities to achieve accredited qualifications.

The **School Age Mothers (SAM) Programme** offers holistic support to young women in school to help them complete their education. Operating regionally, the Department of Education funds their childcare, enabling many young mothers in Northern Ireland to continue at school and gain qualifications. The programme also works in conjunction with **Barnardo’s Advice Service** which liaises with various professionals, including Educational Welfare Services, to address financial hardship issues so that young women can remain in education.

5. **Do you have a view on the value of parenting programmes?**

Please refer to our response at Question 4 in relation to parenting support.
6. Are there measures which could be taken to enhance discipline in our schools?

The use of restorative practices can be very effective in improving discipline in schools. Staff can be trained to help pupils use negotiation and mediation techniques and schools can also involve parents wherever appropriate. Improving the links between home and school and also the use of parent and pupil contracts can be helpful. Restorative Conferences can be undertaken for the most serious behaviour with the view to keeping the young person in the school community.

7. Do you have suggestions how numeracy and literacy levels can be improved?

Extended Schools: A greater investment in extended and full service schools could make further improvements to the already positive outcomes being achieved (Please refer to the point on Extended Schools at Question 4).

Chicago Reading Framework: It is important to learn from international evidence-based literacy and numeracy programmes which have been successfully implemented in previously failing schools. In relation to literacy for example, the previous Director of Reading for the Chicago Public Schools Dr Tim Shanahan developed the Chicago Reading Framework across 600 schools with 437,000 pupils (of which 85% were low income) and 26,000 teachers. More than two thirds of pupils were below the required reading standards, however as a result of the new intervention the first significant gain in several years was achieved, with 75% of schools (450) showing improvement after one year and the lowest performing schools equaling the top schools in achievement gains. This was achieved without any new money being attached but by replacing ineffective teaching methods.

The Chicago Reading Framework emphasises three critical steps schools can take to improve achievement:

- Securing adequate amounts of instructional time for the teaching of reading and writing, i.e. a minimum of 2-3 hours per day on literacy teaching.
- Ensuring the teaching of all essential aspects of literacy i.e. word knowledge, fluency, comprehension and writing, each of these categories taught for 30-45 minutes per day.
- Providing ongoing monitoring of pupil learning to allow for appropriate adjustments to teaching.

Dr Tim Shanahan is currently Professor of Urban Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago where he is Director of the Center for Literacy. He is an internationally recognised reading researcher with extensive experience with children in Head Start, children with special

13 [www.shanahanonliteracy.com](http://www.shanahanonliteracy.com) for more information.
needs, and children in inner-city schools. His research emphasises reading-writing relationships, reading assessment, and improving reading achievement.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Ready to Learn:} As outlined in our previous point about school readiness at Question 1, many children are not ready to learn when they arrive at primary school. Barnardo’s NI has developed and recently implemented a pilot ‘Ready To Learn’ programme working across nine schools in disadvantaged areas with primary one children, and we are comparing outcomes with seven schools who are operating as a control group. This represents a significant investment of £2m in early educational attainment. Drawing on evidence-based research, the programme will provide high quality learning opportunities focusing on key literacy skills, complimenting the work being done within the curriculum and by engaging with parents.

\section*{8. How can primary school education be improved?}

\textit{Please also refer to our response/policy recommendations at Question 1 in relation to improving literacy and numeracy standards, school readiness, primary school provision, leadership and parental support.}

In addition, it is important that all teachers are suitably trained and supported to recognise that some children have multiple issues to deal with at home. These include poverty, domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and mental ill-health and not all teachers are equipped to deal with this or understand the backgrounds of the children they are working with. In our experience of working extensively in Northern Ireland’s schools, teachers often worry about children and have nobody to share their concerns with. They therefore welcome multi-disciplinary teams in place in schools through full-service and extended schools programmes which enables them to discuss the issues and refer children on to the appropriate supports.

\section*{9. Do you have views on incentivising the performance of staff in our schools?}

The use of Restorative Practices in schools provides a common framework to work to in terms of behaviour management, which in turn can have a positive impact in bonding staff teams. If it would be helpful, Barnardo’s NI can provide some more detailed information on the use of restorative practices in schools.

10. Do you have any views on the current curriculum?

Acknowledging that most young people will have relationships and families at some point, it would be helpful if there was more emphasis on particular life skills within the post primary curriculum, for example:

- Positive relationships
- Child care and child development
- Budgeting
- Work preparation

11. What actions should be taken to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training?

*Please also refer to our responses at Questions 1 and 4.*

It is overwhelmingly vulnerable and disadvantaged young people who choose to abandon their education early and are at risk of becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training), of whom 50% are likely to move into long term economic inactivity. Early intervention works better and costs less than crisis intervention.

Barnardo’s NI has considerable experience delivering a wide range of support services and opportunities which can help young people overcome barriers to education, employment and training, and prevent young people from becoming NEET. Our experience of working with thousands of young people who have disengaged from mainstream education points to the need for far wider access to applied vocational learning and in particular the opportunity to learn in the workplace.

To keep young people engaged over a substantial period of time they need access to advice on working and learning options and other services which will support them back into participation. Without this support the expansion of participation options will simply not have the intended effect.

**Policy Recommendations:**

- Commit to a fully resourced NI NEET Strategy which addresses young people currently NEET and has a clear prevention programme.

- The support needs of the NEET population should be mapped and a subsequent growth in services planned to enable their participation in learning.

- Alternative work-based learning and vocational pathways (including apprenticeships) should be made widely available as a positive option for the many young people aged 14-19 whose
potential is not unlocked by mainstream education, particularly in areas of economic decline.

- A NI NEET Strategy should include preventative and support structures and specifically identify vulnerable young people who face ‘super barriers’ to participation, such as those in care or custody, young parents, young homeless people, disabled young people and those with mental ill-health.

12. How can apprenticeship training be improved?

Apprenticeships offer an opportunity to many young people to develop a career in a wide range of trades, organisations and workplaces. However, many of the most disadvantaged young people in Northern Ireland do not take up apprenticeships or training, and where they do participate these often fail or breakdown.

Young people currently must find their own employer under ‘Apprenticeships NI’. DEL does not keep a list of employers that apprentices can use. They advise people to contact their local Jobs and Benefits Office / Job Centre / Careers Office. Barnardo’s NI is concerned that this process favours those from more advantaged backgrounds who can access potential employers through existing family contacts.

The number of apprentices from the main regions of Northern Ireland varies significantly. Apprentices residing in Belfast and in the Northern region of Northern Ireland make up the greatest share of apprentices at 21% and 26% respectively. Apprentices from the North West region of Northern Ireland make up the smallest share at 9%.

Current statutory programmes aimed at providing training for 16 - 24 year olds to give them the tools and skills they need to progress into employment and/or an apprenticeship are not delivering for many young people, particularly those who are ‘core’ NEET. One quarter of young people drop out of Training for Success for example without completing the programme and there is no monitoring of their next destination15.

‘Hard to reach’ young people (‘core’ NEET) often need personalised support, both to move into apprenticeships and to support them as they work through their apprenticeship to overcome any difficulties which impact on a successful outcome. Most are from disadvantaged communities and many face barriers to participation in education, employment and training. They tend to have low literacy and numeracy skills, no qualifications and have not developed the life skills needed to enable them to move directly into apprenticeships. Many of these young people have multiple, often complex needs and also chaotic family lives.

15 DEL, Training For Success - Leavers between 16-Mar-2009 and 14- Mar-2010
The current economic climate has made it increasingly difficult for would-be apprentices to find paid-for employment whilst completing their training. Employers have not been providing apprenticeships in the numbers that they had been in the past. The Programme-Led Apprenticeships (PLA) has had a take-up rate of almost 3,000, however half of these (1,500) are currently without an employer placement, and that has severely restricted participants’ ability to gather the work-based evidence that is required to achieve the NVQ element of their apprenticeship framework.

Policy recommendations:

- The development of a supported model of apprenticeship in Northern Ireland would help young people develop the life skills they need to sustain a training programme or apprenticeship and where needed, obtain basic levels of numeracy/literacy and/or required minimum qualifications prior to taking up apprenticeships. This supported model of apprenticeship would also aim to resolve any issues or problems which arise at early stages, therefore helping ensure the success of the apprenticeship.

- Financial incentives for employers to offer placements and more support for young people; and the development of stronger links and partnerships between schools and prospective employers.

13. What improvements would you like to see for those with special educational needs?

Please also refer to our response and policy recommendation at Question 1. In addition, improvements are also required in the following areas:

- Earlier detection of educational problems at nursery school and in P1-3.
- Reduced waiting time following referrals by schools for specialist support, for example, Educational Psychologists.
- Improved access to multi-disciplinary teams, i.e. speech therapy; physiotherapy and occupational therapy.
- Dedicated classroom assistants.

14. Are there any other examples of good practice in education you would like to highlight?

Barnardo’s NI has considerable knowledge and experience of good practice models across the field of education, however it has not been possible to detail these in full within a consultation
response. We would again reiterate our invitation to discuss the broad range of issues further and to facilitate visits to any of our services.