



MIDDLETOWN  
CENTRE FOR AUTISM

**Middletown Centre for Autism:  
Business plan 2021-2022**

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Agreed by DE		

## **Covid 19. The continuing impact of the Coronavirus pandemic.**

The impact of Covid 19, the coronavirus pandemic will have a significant impact on the delivery of services during 2021-2022 and the achievement of agreed business plan targets. Following instruction from the NI Executive and the Irish Government, the Centre's staff commenced working from home on 23 March 2020. This development had a significant and immediate impact on the delivery of services from that date. It is anticipated that some form of social distancing and the use of other regulations to control the Covid pandemic will remain in force for the academic year 2021 – 2022.

### **Training Services**

All face-to-face training programmes were suspended from 23 March 2020. The Centre's training Department has developed an online training programme which replaced all planned face to face programmes scheduled to be delivered for in the 2019-2020 academic year.

The Centre substantially upgraded and developed its capacity to deliver a range of its services on line: it plans to deliver 70% of all training online during 2021 – 2022. It plans to deliver 30% of its training on a face-to-face basis at geographically distributed centres throughout Ireland and N Ireland if circumstances permit this form of delivery.

In addition, the Centre has developed the capacity and skills to offer webinars utilising both the Centre's specialist staff and internationally recognised autism experts to deliver sessions catering for up to 3000 online attendees weekly. The Centre has also developed its capacity to offer podcasts for use by parents, children and professionals and will continue to offer these throughout 2021 - 2022.

### **Learning Support and Assessment services.**

The full learning Support and Assessment service was adversely impacted on in 2020 – 2021, through school closures, the inability of MCA staff to complete home visits for referred children and travel restrictions.

The normal full service for referrals, whole schools and schools taking part in the Centre's accreditation programme has been adapted to enable it be delivered within the parameters permitted by Covid regulations in both jurisdictions. This version of the programme has provided support to referred children and young people and their families via technology and face to face school and home visits when permitted. LS&A meetings, Support and Supervision, Peer Support and multiagency and multidisciplinary meetings are all online. Learning Support Plan, Interim and final meetings are also taking place as normal but on an online forum. It is anticipated that the LS&A service will have to be similarly adapted in 2021 -2022 to fit within continuing Covid regulations in both Ireland and N Ireland.

The Learning Support specialist staff, training and research staff have at the request of the funding Departments, been developing and have disseminated a significant volume of supportive and educational resources on social media platforms e.g., Twitter, Facebook and the Centre's website to provide support to children, parents and professionals with remote learning. It is planned that this volume of engagement will increase over the duration of the Covid 19 pandemic and throughout 2021 – 2022.

These resources are and will continue to be available on the Centre's website and via its social media platforms.

# 2021-22 MCA Business Plan

## Section 1: Introductory narrative

### Northern Ireland

Throughout 2021/22 the Centre, in collaboration with DE and EA will work to shape and support educational policies, with a view to improving the educational attainment of children and young people and their parents and provide support for the educational professionals who work with them.

This commitment links the Centre's work to DE strategic priorities 4 and 7 and to CYP outcomes 1 to 8.

#### **Priority 4: Support those who need more help with learning**

Working with health & education partners, we deliver high quality services for children & young people, including those with Special Educational Needs

#### **Priority 7: Support and develop our education workforce**

We develop and deploy teachers, other education professionals and support staff effectively, promoting high standards and leadership and improving health & wellbeing

**Links to Draft PFG outcome:** Our children and young people have the best start in life.

Links to the Department of Education's Strategic Priorities (Annex A) and the Children and Young Peoples Strategy (Annex B) are provided against each action.

### Ireland

The Centre will throughout 2021-2022 will work in Collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills, NCSE, HSE and schools to deliver services which support the DES **Statement of Strategy 2019-2021 and Action Plan for Education**.

The Centre has a particular focus on Goal 2: **We will advance the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage and learners with special educational needs in order to support them to achieve their potential.**

These commitments to both N Ireland and Ireland will be delivered through:

- A training service
- A learning support and Assessment Service
- A research and Information Service.

## Section 2: Business Plan Commitments for 2021-22:

WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN	HOW WILL WE KNOW IF ANYONE IS BETTER OFF?	
	N Ireland	Ireland
<b>1. Providing Training Services</b>		
<p><b>1.1 The Centre will develop and deliver a comprehensive training programme for parents and siblings and professionals, offering training in the Centre and outreach programmes throughout Ireland and Northern Ireland by March 2022</b></p> <p>The centre will provide <b>1000</b> training opportunities for parents in N Ireland by March 2022.</p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 4: Support those who need more help with learning</i></p> <p><i>Links to Children and Young People's Strategy Outcome 3 &amp; 6.</i></p>	<p>The Centre will evaluate its training programmes and will aim to have a satisfaction rating of 80-90 % in categories 4 (very Good) and 5 (excellent). The Centre will use as a baseline, data collected for 2021- 2022.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The centre will provide 7000 training opportunities for parents in Ireland.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.2 The Centre will develop and deliver a comprehensive training programme for professionals, offering training in the Centre and outreach programmes throughout Ireland and Northern Ireland by March 2022.</b></p>	<p>As above.</p>	<p>The Centre's professional training programme will provide <b>7000</b> differentiated training opportunities for professionals in Ireland. This will include Training required by the NCSE and training required by DES to support the planned increase in new autism classes and autism units which will</p>

<p>The Centre’s professional training programme will provide <b>3300</b> differentiated training opportunities for professionals in N Ireland.</p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 7: Support and develop our education workforce.</i></p> <p><i>Links to NI Children and Young People’s Strategy Outcomes 3 &amp; 6.</i></p>		<p>come onstream during 2021 – 2022.</p> <p>The Centre will provide online training sessions and access to information via the Centre’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).</p>
<p><b>Outcome based measurement for training services.</b></p>	<p>Short-term and medium-term follow-up with participants of training to monitor impact of training added value in personal / professional lives involving autistic family members and service users.</p>	
<p><b>1.3 The Centre will continue to work with the University of Limerick (max of 60 Graduate Places) and Stranmillis University College (15 places) to build on current accreditation secured for its training programmes and to ensure that educationalists on the Island have access to a broad and balanced range of research based higher education CPD opportunities by March 2022.</b></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 7: Support and develop our education workforce.</i></p>	<p>90% of applicants graduate from these programmes.</p> <p>MCA will develop evaluation to measure the % of applicants who report that the training has been useful to them within the 1<sup>st</sup> 6months since achieving the qualification.</p>	

<p><i>Links to Children and Young People's Strategy Outcome 3 &amp; 6.</i></p>		
<p><b>Outcome based measurement for Post Graduate Training Programme.</b></p>	<p>Short-term and medium-term follow-up with graduates reflect added value in personal / professional lives involving autistic family members and service users.</p>	
<p><b>2. Provide Learning Support and Assessment Services</b></p>		
<p><b>2.1 The Centre will deliver a Learning Support and Assessment Service for referred children and young people in N Ireland (60 referrals from Education Authority) and in Ireland by March 2022.</b></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 4: Support those who need more help with learning</i></p> <p><i>Links to NI Children and Young People's Strategy Outcomes 1, 2 &amp; 3.</i></p>	<p>70% of children &amp; young people referred to service who are considered to have significantly improved in areas they previously found difficult within a school environment.</p> <p>70% of children &amp; young people referred to service whose parents/carers report have significantly improved in areas they previously found difficult in the home environment.</p>	<p>In Ireland deliver trans- disciplinary assessment and learning support to a minimum of 12 children and young people per annum following referral.</p>
<p><b>2.2 The Centre will continue to develop its whole school referral programme, working with up to 3 schools this year. Complementing this work, the Centre will support the Education Authority through working co-jointly on a cross agency basis by March 2022.</b></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 4: Support those who need more help with learning</i></p>	<p>90% of schools who undertake the whole school approach will report an improvement in relation to the learning journey of Autistic Children &amp; Young People within their school.</p> <p>75% of school staff involved in the Whole School Programme will report an improvement in relation to the learning journey of Autistic Children &amp; Young People within their school.</p> <p>75% of school staff involved in the Whole School Programme will report an improvement in relation to their continued professional development.</p>	<p>NA</p>

<p><i>Links to NI Children and Young People's Strategy Outcomes 1, 2 &amp; 3.</i></p>		
<p><b>2.3 During 2021/22, the Centre will pilot an accreditation scheme for schools who have invested in a whole school referral programme. This pilot will take up to 3 years.</b></p> <p>2 schools will fully achieve accreditation by 31 March 22.</p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 4: Support those who need more help with learning</i></p> <p><i>Links to Children and Young People's Strategy Outcome 3 &amp; 6.</i></p>	<p>100% of schools who achieve accreditation will report an improvement in relation to the learning journey of Autistic Children &amp; Young People within their school.</p>	<p>NA</p>
<p><b>Outcome based measures for Learning Support and Assessment Services.</b></p>	<p>MCA will work with the DE Policy Team to produce an Outcomes Based Accountability Scorecard in relation to the work of the centre.</p>	
<p><b>3. Provide Research and Information Services</b></p>		
<p><b>3.1 Develop and deliver an island wide research and information programme focused on the needs of parents, professionals and priorities identified by the funding Departments by March 2022, comprising of:</b></p> <p>Compile and disseminate 3 Research Bulletins</p> <p>Development of two resources for teachers</p>	<p>Research Bulletins accessed by over 1000 people via website. The Centre will develop an evaluation to measure the % of them reporting that this was useful to their practice or research.</p> <p>Teachers Resources disseminated to 100% of schools.</p> <p>10 % of increased reach and engagement to MCA online resources on Facebook.</p> <p>The Centre will provide four webinars addressing relevant issues in the first quarter of 2021; a further two will be provided in the second quarter</p>	

<p>Continuous development of online resources, webinars and podcasts on key topics arising from the Centre’s research and training programmes</p> <p>A research project to identify the impact of Covid on the education of children and young people with autism.</p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 4: Support those who need more help with learning.</i></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 7: Support and develop our education workforce.</i></p> <p><i>Links to Children and Young People’s Strategy Outcome 3 &amp; 6.</i></p>	<p>and these will be phased out as face to face engagement is re-established in September – October 2021.</p> <p>10% increased reach and engagement to MCA webinars. 10 % increased listens to MCA Podcasts.</p> <p>(these should be use data collected in 20/21 as a baseline)</p>
<p><b>3.2 The Centre will provide an online autism information and advice service for parents and professionals.</b></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 4: Support those who need more help with learning.</i></p> <p><i>Links to Children and Young People’s Strategy Outcome 3 &amp; 6.</i></p>	<p>The Centre will develop an evaluation to measure the % of callers to the helpline reporting that their query was answered satisfactorily.</p>
<p><b>3.3 Deliver international Conference by April 2021.</b></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 7:</i></p>	<p>70 % of 2000 delegates reporting that the conference was useful to them in their personal and/or professional interaction with Autistic Children &amp; Young People.</p>

<p><i>Support and develop our education workforce</i></p> <p><i>Links to Children and Young People’s Strategy Outcome 3 &amp; 6.</i></p>		
<p><b>3.4 Complete independent external evaluation of the Centre’s work by July 2021.</b></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 4: Support those who need more help with learning.</i></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 7: Support and develop our education workforce.</i></p>	<p>The Centre will publish the independent Mills report on quality of the Centre’s services, the experience of users and benchmarked against appropriate international comparators. Final report available by July 2021.</p>	
<p><b>3.5 working with DES and the NCSE</b></p>	<p>NA</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.The Centre will work with the NCSE to implement the three recommendations detailed in NCSE Policy Advice NO. 5 “Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Schools” and such other work programmes that will be agreed with NCSE to support its Inclusion Programme.</li> <li>2. The Centre will commence in April 2021 a formal review and updating of the list of evidence informed educational interventions for ASD as detailed in the NCSE Policy advice of 2016.</li> <li>3. The Centre will work with DES to develop and support the implementation plan for implementing “<i>Supporting Students with Autism: Good Practice Guidance for Schools</i>” throughout Ireland.</li> </ol>
<p><b>4. Improving the wellbeing of children and young people</b></p>		

<p><b>4.1 Throughout 2021/22, the Centre, in collaboration with DE, EA and other children’s authorities, will work to shape and support educational policies with a view to improving the wellbeing of children and young people as outlined in the Children’s Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015, and this will be reported on in the Centre’s Annual Report.</b></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 3: Look after our children &amp; young people.</i></p> <p><i>Links to Children and Young People’s Strategy Outcome 1-8</i></p>	<p>The Centre will provide specialist advice, based on research, to the Department, EA, schools and parents to develop and deliver effective policies to improve the educational outcomes for children and young people with autism. It will provide in partnership with the EA a Learning support and Assessment service for children and young people with complex autism and will provide a comprehensive training programme for all educational professionals who work with children with autism.</p>	<p><b>N/A</b></p>
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**5. Development of Integrated and Irish Medium Education**

<p><b>5.1 Throughout 2021/22, the Centre will support DE in fulfilling its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Integrated and Irish Medium Education and will provide a report to DE when requested.</b></p> <p><i>Links to DE Strategic Priority 5: Improve the learning environment.</i></p> <p><i>Links to Children and Young People’s Strategy Outcome 3, 7, 8</i></p>	<p>The Centre will present and detail its services and work at The Irish Medium Schools (ISM) conference. It will include all IMS and Integrated schools in its marketing activities, will provide commissioned training when requested and will provide Learning Support and referral services for children referred from IMS and integrated schools.</p>	<p><b>NA</b></p>
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**6. Finance / Governance generic actions**

**Links to DE Strategic Priorities 7 (staff absence) and 8 (all other finance / governance actions)**

**Links to Children and Young People’s Strategy Outcome 3**

WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN	HOW WILL WE KNOW IF ANYONE IS BETTER OFF?
<p><b>6.1 Staff Absence</b> Throughout 2021/22, to work with DE to implement the Managing Attendance Strategy for the Education Sector and reduce absence levels.</p>	<p>Achieve an absence target of 6% of available working days in 2021/22 for the Centre’s staff.</p> <p>The Centre has gained access to the EA’s “Health Well” Hub for staff providing staff with support, education, signposting and information on a wide range of topics relating to health and wellbeing. This has been made accessible through attending Managing Attendance forum meetings. The Centre also plans to develop its own health and wellbeing policy and develop a framework of activities to support staff wellbeing with a focus on reducing potential causes of absence.</p>
<p><b>6.2 Accurate and Timely Accounts</b> By the required date, produce Annual Accounts which comply fully with key financial and compliance actions, as required of all NDPBs, in accordance with the Accounts Direction, the MSFM and relevant North South guidance.</p> <p>Submit the Review of Financial Processes consolidation pack by the required date.</p>	<p>Accounts prepared to a high standard that do not subsequently result in qualification for reasons that are within the control of the Chief Executive Officer.</p>
<p><b>6.3 Compliance</b> The Centre will comply fully with the governance and accountability requirements set out in the extant Management Statement and Financial Memorandum and related governance/financial guidance issued by DE (and DES).</p>	<p>Ensure full compliance with all required procedures and approval requirements required by DE and DES in relation to the delegated limits as set out in the Financial Memorandum, Business Cases, Economic Appraisals, Post Project Evaluations, Consultancy and Procurement, including the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure, Appraisal and Evaluation (NIGEAE), DoF guidance, Central Procurement Directorate (CPD)’s Guidance notes and guidance issued by DE and DES.</p>
<p><b>6.4 Pay Remits</b> Throughout 2021/22, to ensure that the pay remits align fully with public sector pay policy as detailed in relevant DoF guidance.</p>	<p>No breaches of Public Sector Pay Policy.</p> <p>The Centre will work with both Departments to resolve issues of recruitment and retention identified in 2019.</p>
<p><b>6.5 Budget Allocations</b></p>	<p>Budget contained with any underspend within the 1% limit with no overspend.</p>

<b>6. Finance / Governance generic actions</b> <b>Links to DE Strategic Priorities 7 (staff absence) and 8 (all other finance / governance actions)</b> <b>Links to Children and Young People's Strategy Outcome 3</b>	
WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN	HOW WILL WE KNOW IF ANYONE IS BETTER OFF?
Ensure that expenditure is contained within the agreed budget allocation with no overspend and an underspend of no more than 1% of the overall resource and overall capital budgets by year-end.	All resource budget and capital budget allocations utilised within the parameters set out by DE and DES.
<b>6.6 Prompt Payment</b> Throughout 2021/22, we will aim to maximise the payment of all non-disputed invoices within 10 working days of receipt of invoice and will ensure that 97% of all non-disputed invoices are paid within 30 days of receipt of invoice.	90% of all non-disputed invoices paid within 10 working days of receipt of invoice.  97% of all non-disputed invoices paid within 30 days of invoice date.  Progress reported monthly.
<b>6.7 Cash Management</b> Throughout 2021/22, to ensure the monthly drawdown of cash is within 5% of the monthly forecast requirement.	Monthly drawdown of cash is within 5% of the monthly forecast requirement.  Progress reported monthly.
<b>6.8 Cash Forecast</b> To provide a forecast of the 2021/22 cash requirement for the Spring Supplementary Estimates in line with the Department's timescale and ensure the total annual cash drawdown does not exceed the limit subsequently agreed at Spring Supplementary Estimates.	Annual cash drawdown does not exceed the limit set at Spring Supplementary Estimates.
<b>6.9 Effective Governance</b> Throughout 2021/22, to ensure effective governance through full compliance with all required procedures (as detailed in the Partnership Agreement / Management Statement, Financial Memorandum (MSFM), as appropriate) and related governance guidance issued by DE and DES.	All corporate governance decisions comply with Partnership Agreement and engagement plan or MSFM.  Draft Business Plan, in-year and end-year Business Plan updates provided to DE within set timescales.  Annual and Mid-year Governance Statements submitted and approved within set timescales.  All new board members receive corporate governance training within 6 months of appointment, and all

**6. Finance / Governance generic actions**

**Links to DE Strategic Priorities 7 (staff absence) and 8 (all other finance / governance actions)**

**Links to Children and Young People's Strategy Outcome 3**

<b>WHAT WE WILL DO AND BY WHEN</b>	<b>HOW WILL WE KNOW IF ANYONE IS BETTER OFF?</b>
	members to have regular (at least annual) review of their skills and knowledge.  An annual audit of Board skills and effectiveness completed by Centre.

## Department of Education (Northern Ireland) Strategic Priorities for 2021-22

<p><b>1. Make learning accessible to all</b></p> <p>We give all children and young people access to pre-school, school and youth education provision</p>
<p><b>2. Improve the quality of learning for our children &amp; young people</b></p> <p>We ensure that education provision is of a high quality and supports learning and progression</p>
<p><b>3. Look after our children &amp; young people</b></p> <p>We support and promote positive physical and emotional health and wellbeing and support high-quality affordable childcare</p>
<p><b>4. Support those who need more help with learning</b></p> <p>Working with health &amp; education partners, we deliver high quality services for children &amp; young people, including those with Special Educational Needs</p>
<p><b>5. Improve the learning environment</b></p> <p>We promote equality of opportunity, respect for others, good relations and inclusivity and we provide modern, sustainable educational settings which are fit-for-purpose and facilitate shared learning</p>
<p><b>6. Tackle Disadvantage and Underachievement</b></p> <p>We improve developmental and learning outcomes for all children &amp; young people, with a particular focus on those who are underachieving, at risk of underachieving, or disadvantaged</p>
<p><b>7. Support and develop our education workforce</b></p> <p>We develop and deploy teachers, other education professionals and support staff effectively, promoting high standards and leadership and improving health &amp; wellbeing</p>
<p><b>8. Effectively manage, review and transform our education system</b></p> <p>We deliver our corporate governance and finance responsibilities while seeking to improve efficiency, increase sustainability and introduce new ways of learning</p>

**Northern Ireland Children and Young People's Strategy Outcomes**

(in support of the Children's Services Co-operation Act (NI) 2015)

1	Children and young people are physically and mentally healthy
2	Children and young people enjoy play and leisure
3	Children and young people learn and achieve
4	Children and young people live in safety and stability
5	Children and Young People experience economic and environmental well-being
6	Children and young people make a positive contribution to society
7	Children and young people live in a society which respects their rights
8	Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted