St. Joseph’s Centre for the Visually Impaired

Strategic Plan 2011-2015

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1.0 Preface

It is a truism that the only constant is change. We live in a rapidly changing world, and the pace of change seems to gather momentum each year.

Given the economic environment in 2010, there is no doubt that change brings challenges. But it also brings opportunities. We need to seize the opportunities presented by the changing environment in which we operate so as to position St Joseph’s Centre as a place of best practice by way of a caring and professional service offering; that is the challenge facing us in the years ahead. It is a challenge of renewal, a challenge of leadership, a challenge of excellence. This Corporate Strategy outlines how we intend to meet these challenges.

The key objective for the provision of services for people with visual impairment and other disabilities (MDVI) is the excellence of service delivery. And the key to service delivery is people. People, too, are the key to the implementation of this Corporate Strategy. That is why a recurring theme of this document is the importance of quality HR policies and appropriate HR investment so as to achieve this plan’s objectives.

Brian Allen,
October 2010.
2.0 Introduction

St. Joseph’s Centre for the Visually Impaired was re-constituted in 2008 from a Trust to a limited company by guarantee with no share capital. It is a registered charity and operates as a not-for-profit organisation operating under the auspices of a Board of Directors in partnership with the Health Service Executive and the Department of Education and Skills. Operating income in 2009 was in the order of €7.3m; the average staff complement is 130.

The main stay of the services for the visually disabled and multiple disabled (MDVI) children and young people provided by our Centre includes pre-school and early intervention services, FRC, primary and secondary schools, vocational department, residential services, therapy services and nursing, ophthalmic services, a professional training department, a national Braille production centre and a library. In 2008, our Centre also added a new horticulture and pet therapy unit (the ‘Sense and Grow’ Centre).

The corporate strategy presented here emerged from a formal process which was managed by the Centre’s senior management group. The views of stakeholders - staff, board members, clients and parents, were gathered through an iterative process of consultation over the period July to October 2010.

It was agreed that this strategy would cover the five year period 2011 to 2015, which, in the current economic climate, could be considered a long-term perspective. However, the sub-strategies specified in the corporate strategy apply only to the first three years. This is because we intend to undertake a major mid-term evaluation, which will allow for refocusing as appropriate in the light of experience after two years.

The strategy is framed in the context of a critical evaluation of our Centre’s current broad range of services. An on-going process is to evaluate our current range of services and generate criteria by which our Centre will retain/ develop or divest itself of activities as appropriate. The strategy is presented under five headings:

a. Financing Our Future
b. Our Centre’s Business
c. Performance through its People
d. Capital Infrastructure Plans
e. Support Strategies

Each section is presented in a consistent format; a brief introduction is followed by the delineation of the objectives of that section of the strategy and the sub-strategies (termed ‘activities’) designed to realise those objectives.

These strategies are preceded by a statement of our Centre’s vision and core values and by an environmental analysis which highlights some of the most significant business and regulatory issues facing the services in its provision for the MDVI community during the lifetime of this strategy.

Within this document the term multiple disability/visual impairment (MDVI) is used to describe the category of disability that characterises the children and young people at St Joseph’s. MDVI usually encompasses a multiplicity of impairments.
3.0 Our Vision and Core Values

Vision

Our vision is to provide a supportive and inclusive learning community where disability does not create a barrier to the fulfilment of aspiration or ambition.

Values

The values of the organisation provide a framework within which services are provided and these stem from its founding ethos from Antonio Romini’s emphasis on developing the whole person. In respect of the children and young people, parents/guardians and staff, our Centre is committed to human equality, dignity, diversity and mutual respect. Within a culture that places value on learning and research, our Centre encourages all staff to advance their professional development and critically reflect upon their practice. Decision making is accountable and transparent, based upon a belief that it is most effective when all relevant persons are consulted on issues that impact on the day to day running of our Centre. Planning and interactions with children and young people demonstrate sensitivity, integrity and concern for their personal safety and well-being, emphasising the unique attributes that each possesses. Our Centre values the contribution that parents/guardians and external partners make to maintaining high quality services; staff work with compassion and sincerity to nurture and sustain these important relationships. Our values permeate all aspects of our Centre’s work, seeking to build and sustain an enduring culture of friendliness, compassion, reflection and innovation.
4.0 Environmental Analysis

This analysis focuses on the aspects of our Centre’s environment that will impact on its business over the next 5 years but operate outside the immediate control of management. The areas discussed include the economic context and the legislative and regulatory parameters that provide a framework within which services operate.

**Economic and social environment**

Since 2008, the global economy has experienced a collapse not seen since the great depression of 1929. The start of the decline in the global economies can be traced to the banking sector in the United States. The major events are well documented, from Bear Sterns, to the collapse of Lehman Brothers, and the bail-out of AIG, among others. The cost to the US federal government amounted to trillions of US dollars as they sought to prevent the total collapse of their economy. The EU experienced a lagged effect with the German, French and British economies all going into recession about six months after the US with the smaller economies of Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland experiencing unprecedented levels of economic decline. The €110bn 3-year loan facility provided by the EU to Greece is the most significant development during this period.

As a small open economy, Ireland is very dependent on the wellbeing of the global economy. With the economic issues in the EU, the Irish government has had the deal with the perfect economic storm with a level of decline not seen since the foundation of the State. Its bail-out of the banking sector alone accounting for nearly €40bn (Anglo Irish Bank being €30bn of this). As of October 2010, it appears that the Government will attempt to extract nearly €15bn from public spending over the period 2011 to 2014. With €5bn of this to be extracted in 2011, the level of public funding available to agencies of the State will be considerably reduced.

As the largest elements of Government spending, both the Irish health sector (Health Service Executive) and the education sector budgets will be first to experience a reduction. As the Croke Park Agreement provides for government policy to maintain salaries, any reductions must come from non-pay monies or grant monies.

For our Centre, as a non-pay grantee of the HSE, the implications are that funding will be under threat. As of now, this strategic plan is being devised on the basis that state funding is being maintained. However, it may need to be re-visited if funding levels change.

**Legislative and policy framework**

Legislation prescribing policy and practice in respect of working with children and young people with a visual impairment is principally provided under the umbrella of the National Disability Strategy [NDS] (2004). The NDS provides the strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with a disability in Ireland. Two interconnected legislative strands have specific relevance for St Joseph’s. The Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act [EPSEN] (2004) makes provision for children aged up to eighteen and specifically covers practice within the pre-school, primary and post-primary settings. EPSEN fits into an existing legislative framework that includes the Education Act (1998). The Disability Act (2005) is concerned with the provision of health and education assessment and services to persons with a disability to support them in their school, social, community and home settings. The Sectoral Plan for the Department of Health and Children (2006) sets out detailed arrangements for the proposed implementation of Part 2 of the Disability Act which relates to independent assessments and an independent redress mechanism. The Health Act (2007) established a statutory obligation for the registration and inspection of residential services, including those for people with disabilities. The setting of standards and the associated inspection process is the responsibility of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)
5.0 Key Themes

Like any not-for-profit organisation, there is a finite level of resources available to our Centre to deliver its services. Therefore, it cannot expect to be able to deliver a broad range of services to the standards of excellence that we would be capable of delivering given the appropriate resources. Therefore, to ensure the effective and efficient use of its resources, and as part of this strategic process, following consultation, it has been decided to focus on five key service delivery themes it intends in developing and maintaining a centre of excellence. The themes are:

• to be the a national provider of educational services to the children and young people of Ireland who are blind, partially sighted or MDVI

• to provide life-enhancing preschool, primary and post primary education and vocational services both on campus and a range of services in/at satellite resource centres;

• to maintain and further develop a world class braille, large print and digital formats production facility;

• to provide high quality residential care for children and young people by developing and enhancing its services to reflect the changing needs of students.

• to ensure that the quality of the client experience is supported through state of the art facilities by continuing to pursue a national centre and additional satellite centres.
5.0 Corporate Goals and Related Objectives

Over the period of this strategy, our Centre intends to further develop its services so as to become the national centre for the provision of services to children and young people who are blind, partially sighted or MDVI.

In order to achieve this, the key corporate objectives and related sub-strategies are set out below under the following headings.

- Financing its Future.
- Our Centre’s Business.
- Performance through its People.
- Capital Infrastructure Plans. Ok –
- Support Strategies.

Financing of its Future

Given the economic environmental analysis above, the key objective for our Centre in the short to medium term will be its financial stability. Given the financial structure of our Centre with 75% of the total expenditure going towards pay-costs, and with a Government policy of no salary reductions for 2011, any reduction beyond 5% in our funding will have a serious adverse effect on our ability to continue to deliver services as they are currently constituted.

St Josephs will be robust in its defence of it budgetary position on behalf of all blind, partially sighted and MDVI children and their families.

However, if financial turmoil continues it would be prudent to explore other avenues and react accordingly and pursue alternate financial strategies.

A key objective of this strategic plan will be to develop a number of scenarios that will facilitate decisive responses to certain levels of net income over the first and second years of this plan.

A second and complementary objective is to have sufficient reserves in place to ensure liquidity and solvency of the organisation.

To achieve this, we will:

- build a number of scenarios for different levels of income;
- develop an annual value for money (VFM) review programme to ensure that all areas of expenditure are examined on a three year cycle;
- as part of the VFM review to examine cost reduction/ value add opportunities;
- put procedures in place to closely monitor cash flow to ensure adequate levels of liquidity;
- examine possible commercial opportunities to raise income;
- further develop internal management reporting structures to support decision making processes with greater use of MIS systems; and
- prepare a rolling infrastructure plan so as to secure adequate capital monies. This will be in conjunction with a bi-annual budget for capital expenditure to be managed by sub-committee of the management team.
Our Centre’s Business

Our Centre’s main business areas are each set out below including a general description of the service, the main strategy for each service over the period and the related objectives and activities.

1. Assessment Service

This service was introduced in 2005 at the request of the HSE. It should be noted that no additional funding has or is being supplied to offer cover the cost of this facility. There is one co-ordinator employed full time. It offers an interdisciplinary process through which the needs and abilities of a child or young person with a blind, partially sighted or MDVI are identified.

Objectives

- to extend the services to include an outreach element;
- to create ties with local professional groups to offer a portion of the assessment process more locally; and
- more complex assessments will require the expertise of an interdisciplinary team and will have to take place in St. Joseph’s.

Activity

- Identify partner facilities to offer outreach services.
- Secure extra funding to ensure the continuation of the “assessment of need” process provided for the HSE.
- A key objective will be to achieve a neutral budget [Year 2].
2. Pre-school and Early Intervention Education

The pre-school was adopted as a service on the campus in 1999. It has five members of front-line staff with one part-time bus driver. Student numbers, on a weekly basis, can be up to 40 children per week. The service provides specialised support and skills to children who are blind, partially sighted or MDVI from birth to six years of age in partnership with their families. The facility offers a holistic approach to the education of the young child as well as support, information and guidance to families and external agencies. The pre-school will have an increase of approximately 10%-15% in student numbers year on year and thereafter (Please note HSE funds 75% of the Pre-school budget leaving balancing funds to come from fund raising).

Objectives

- to add capacity to meet the increase in demand for the service (initial increase of 10% to 15% within two years, and review in year three); and

- to increase the integration with our Centre’s other services (MPC, Learning Tree and crèche) in line with the new resourcing model. In turn, the Learning Tree to offer services that will allow for greater integration with a mainstream crèche (Year 1).

Activity

- Seek an increase in positions to meet demand. A strategy will be required if there is a waiting list for entry to the pre-school.

- As part of the process of encouraging integration appointment of Integration liaison person in the crèche that will support children, parents and staff with integration with the crèche.

- to extend outreach services to include the West and Northwest of Ireland with particular emphasis on early intervention services (Year 2 and Year 3).

Activity

Form strategic networks with vested interest groups. This should include parents, local service delivery and relevant professionals.
3. Primary Education

St. Joseph's Primary School for Children with Visual Impairment is the Republic of Ireland's only designated National School for learners with a sight loss. The ethos guiding our work is that every child is unique and should be given the opportunity to learn in an inclusive and positive environment where ability, not disability, is central. We support children with a visual loss, some of whom also have additional support needs including learning difficulties, autism as well as profound and complex needs. The primary school entered its current building in 1960, student numbers have been growing steadily from around 27 to its current figure of 44. This level of growth is expected to increase if not accelerate.

Pupils follow a broad curriculum where all are given opportunities to participate in a wide range of learning activities. Experienced members of staff work to ensure that all pupils receive an appropriate and challenging education which helps prepare them to live as independently as possible. The primary school is funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

Objectives

- to build closer links with the Department of Education and Skills Visiting Teacher Service; and

Activity

Engage with DES in formalised meetings with the Visiting Teacher Service on an annual or bi-annual basis to discuss areas of common interest [Year 1].

- to develop a post-primary pathways to students who are MDVI;

Activity

Objective

- to develop alternative models of primary schooling for children with a visual impairment and those who are MDVI;

Objective

- To engage with stakeholders with regards to a feasibility study into the development of an appropriate post-primary provision for young people who are MDVI including general learning difficulties [to be completed by the end of Year 2].

Activity

- To engage with key stakeholders with regards to a research project into alternative models of primary schooling for pupils with a visual impairment/MDVI, different from the special or mainstream model to support learners in large urban centres outside of the Dublin catchment area..

- to engage in blue skies thinking with regard to future service provision at St Joseph's primary school.

Activity

To research innovative models of special school working from across Europe to establish if there are new modes of operation which might develop the service at St Joseph's primary school. [to be completed by year 5].
4. Secondary Education

Opened in 1982, the secondary school facility, Pobalscoil Rosmini, is adjacent to the main Centre campus. It operates as a second level community school where sighted, blind and partially students are educated alongside each other. It has 40 staff and 330 students of which 10% are visually impaired. While the governance structures differ from the activities on the Centre campus, the focus for St. Joseph’s is to provide a route for its children to progress to this level.

Objectives

- to develop a model of shared service use with St Joseph’s with respect to mobility training, nursing services, continuing professional development and the use of the campus;

- to use Pobalscoil Rosmini as a test bed for future developments in the services offered by St. Joseph’s, for example, staff development.

- to establish a process and associated protocols for the transition of children moving from primary to secondary and third level or vocational.

Activity

To maintain and develop governance arrangements and on-going liaison on student welfare issues.

To establish methodologies for using Pobalscoil Rosmini as a test bed. [Pilot a study in year 1 and expand in year 2 to year 3].
5. Vocational Training

This service was introduced in 1998. It has 5 members of staff and 11 students aged 16-23 years. For students aged sixteen or over, accredited vocational training programmes are provided via FETAC and ASDAN, together with opportunities for work sampling in a range of on-campus or off-campus activities. The students who typically have a disability additional to their visual impairment have usually completed the special education cycle in secondary school and in addition to their visual impairment have an additional disability. Future developments include a movement away from vocation-led model to one which focuses upon life enrichment activities and experiences and preparation for adulthood.

Objectives

- to develop a life enrichment and adult preparation programme that moves away from a vocation-led model of service delivery;
- to develop the programme to embrace a 24 hour curriculum by harmonising the work undertaken in the life enrichment programme and relevant residential houses;
- to integrate the services provided for young people in the 16+ age category to provide a more coherent, consistent and holistic experience across the Centre; and

Activity

Create a discussion forum whereby all departments are consulted on the needs of young people who are blind, partially sighted or MDVI and have completed their formal education cycle.

Provide continuing professional development opportunities for relevant staff members relating to issues such as learning and teaching.

(Extend) the present and future service for students with a visual impairment who are being educated in mainstream schools to attend the campus over the summer months, similar to other international schools such as the Texas School for the Blind.
6. Family Resource Centre (FRC)

The FRC organises a yearly calendar of events across a range of educational, therapeutic and social activities in addition to an extensive outreach programme for vision impaired children, their families, educators and carers throughout Ireland.

Objectives

- to further extend the range of services offered by the FRC and integrate parents into the fabric of our Centre;

- to extend the services to offer specific additional services, such as library for both parents and children, technology transfer and a mobile centre to support the parents and children with a visual impairment; and

- to establish St. Joseph’s library with public library status.

Activity

- Re launch current service and additional services of a mobile library.

- To create an open-door policy through developing a drop-in centre model for parents of children who are MDVI who share a common interest.

- Further enhance the range of services offered by the FRC to promote its family-friendly philosophy.
7. National Braille Production Centre (NBPC).

The NPBC opened on campus in 2000. It has on average 20 full time equivalent staff. With the same level of staffing, production over the last three years has almost doubled from 1,300 fully transcribed school textbooks to 2,840. In the same period of time the number of children availing of the service has increased from 300 to 500. The NBPC meets the needs of blind and partially sighted children and young people attending either mainstream or special schools by providing educational materials in a format that suits their particular requirements, mainly braille, large print or digital formats such as DAISY. Materials are transcribed into accessible formats following recognized European and International guidelines.

Objectives

- To consolidate the relationship with the Department of Education and Skills.
- To continue to promote braille as a vital tool in the education of blind children and young adults. This includes paper-based braille and digital braille which are considered to be interlinking, depending on each individual’s priorities.
- To promote the use of alternative technologies to braille such as the Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) format and to develop internal capacity to support this objective.
- To provide LP readers with copyright-approved alternatives to paper based large print books.
- To introduce and phase in UEB (Unified English Braille) which is a new standard in braille that will affect readers, producers and reproduction of braille books.
- To adapt new production technologies so as to achieve even greater internal efficiencies.

Activity

- Maintain the on-going relationship with the Department of Education and Skills by continued annual reports, relevant statistics and annual/bi-annual meetings.
- Emphasize and promote role and importance of braille in all communications with stakeholders and through braille-related events on campus and via outreach facilities (online bookshelf, Cork premises.)
- Develop existing and introduce new technologies such as the online bookshelf.
- Further develop relationships with publishers/Copyright Licensing Agency and to lobby them on behalf of blind or partially sighted children.
- Forge closer links to UKAAF, UK Association for Accessible Formats, evaluate extent of changes and implications of UEB in advance.
- Inform the DES on the new standards and their implications. This will also be done via the continuing co-operation with the VTVI service.
8. Residential Service

An independent residential service was established in 1995. This presently consists of six houses situated in the local Drumcondra area which are available to students from Sunday evening through to Friday afternoon during term time. It is staffed by teams of professional social care workers, namely 32 members of staff. Currently, the service makes provision for 32 children and young people.

Objectives

- to meet new HIQA standards, for both child care and residential services;
- to meet the changing needs of the students that are being admitted to St Joseph’s, specifically children who are MDVI;
- to establish a plan around offering respite service. This service will be extended to parents of children who do not current have children attending St Josephs.
- to implement the findings of the 16+ review currently under way;
- to extend the academic year into the summer period; and
- to critically review current residential properties’ infrastructure in light of HIQA standards.

Activities

- To produce a framework document to establish the capabilities of St. Joseph’s to offer residential services for children who are MDVI and the production of an implementation plan [18 months].
- To create a cross campus group with the purpose of developing an implementation plan in line with the new HIQA standards and within relevant legislation guidelines [two years].
10. Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy and Physiotherapy

Our Centre has two full-time professional occupational therapists and two speech and language therapists and a physiotherapist. On average over 50 children avail of this services each year. There is an increasing demand upon therapy services in line with increasing needs of clients/pupils who have complex needs. The expectation is the demand will increase in line with other departments.

Objectives

- to increase the range of services offered within therapies across campus;
- to provide for a permanent position of a behavioural psychologist in order to meet the changing needs of the clients;
- to provide additional physiotherapy provision due to the increased demands of children who are MDVI; and
- to establish alliances with both national and international universities to create an internship programme. The areas of interest are a) speech and language b) physical therapist and c) occupational therapist.

Activity

- The introduction of additional therapies, encompassing play music and drama.
- To impress upon the HSE the need for a behavioural psychologist and seek funding within 12 months for a new position.
- To develop strategic alliances with higher education institutions in order to create a programme that will attract interns to train at St. Joseph’s.
11. Animal Assisted Therapy and Horticulture, The ‘Sense and Grow’ Project

The services were established in 2007; the staffing complement is 2.7 full time equivalents. Created within a safe and stimulating farm-like setting, these facilities are enjoyed by a great many children and young people across the Centre campus. In addition, other vulnerable members from the wider community such as the elderly and disabled have found solace in the tranquility of the gardens and observed the behaviour of the animals and birds that are housed within the setting. Children who are partially sighted, blind or MDVI, many of whom are tactile defensive or experience sensory deprivation, are able to handle animals, hear their calls, smell the fragrances and taste the fruits that are available in a friendly and supportive setting. From an educational perspective, the environment provides the opportunity for children to undertake practical tasks that have relevance to their curriculum. The setting also provides a realistic work environment for older students engaged in work-sampling activities within their vocational programme.

Objectives

- to expand the service in ways that will be of therapeutic and educational value to children and young people with different levels of cognitive and physical/sensory abilities;
- to provide opportunities for other organisations to make use of the facilities; and
- to become a centre of excellence in the field of animal therapy, specifically as it applies to children who are disabled, including those who are visually impaired.

Activity

- Working with other experts in the field, to explore different activities and strategies that might enhance the service presently offered.
- To ascertain from different professional groups on the St. Joseph’s campus how the service might further enrich the lives of different groups of children and young people.
- To develop a range of realistic work scenarios that would be relevant to students engaged in the vocational programme.
- Through publicity, to celebrate the work of the service and seek ways of developing a viable income stream that will assist the service to become cost neutral.
11. Animal Assisted Therapy and Horticulture,
The ‘Sense and Grow’ Project

The services were established in 2007; the staffing complement is 2.7 full time equivalents. Created within a safe and stimulating farm-like setting, these facilities are enjoyed by a great many children and young people across the Centre campus. In addition, other vulnerable members from the wider community such as the elderly and disabled have found solace in the tranquillity of the gardens and observed the behaviour of the animals and birds that are housed within the setting. Children who are partially sighted, blind or MDVI, many of whom are tactile defensive or experience sensory deprivation, are able to handle animals, hear their calls, smell the fragrances and taste the fruits that are available in a friendly and supportive setting. From an educational perspective, the environment provides the opportunity for children to undertake practical tasks that have relevance to their curriculum. The setting also provides a realistic work environment for older students engaged in work-sampling activities within their vocational programme.

Objectives

- to expand the service in ways that will be of therapeutic and educational value to children and young people with different levels of cognitive and physical/sensory abilities;
- to develop links with other organisations working in the field of animal therapy and with horses to extend the knowledge of staff;
- to provide opportunities for other organisations to make use of the facilities; and
- to become a centre of excellence in the field of animal therapy, specifically as it applies to children who are disabled, including those who are visually impaired.

Activity

- Working with other experts in the field, to explore different activities and strategies that might enhance the service presently offered.
- To ascertain from different professional groups on the St. Joseph’s campus how the service might further enrich the lives of different groups of children and young people.
- To develop a range of realistic work scenarios that would be relevant to students engaged in the vocational programme.
- Through publicity, to celebrate the work of the service and seek ways of developing a viable income stream that will assist the service to become cost neutral.
12. Training, Continuing Professional Development and Research

St. Joseph’s will continue to provide mandatory training to its staff in compliance with regulatory frameworks. Additionally, staff working at all levels in our Centre should have the opportunity to extend their knowledge and skills regarding visual impairment. Our Centre presently provides a successful course in Grade 2 English Braille at FETAC Level 5. Working in conjunction with the University of Worcester, St. Joseph’s offers a Certificate in Higher Education in Visual Impairment (Level 6 HETAC equivalence). Six members of staff are presently engaged in a postgraduate course in teaching and learning under the auspices of the University of Worcester. Capitalising upon the experience, knowledge and academic standing of staff engaged in the teaching of academic awards, our Centre should develop a more extensive portfolio of CPD opportunities within the wider field of visual impairment, forging alliances with university departments in Ireland.

Objectives

- to ensure that all staff complete relevant courses associated with mandatory areas of service delivery;
- to ensure that staff working at all levels have access to introductory courses relating to visual impairment;
- to extend the range and scope of existing professional courses;
- to develop a CPD centre that provides a programme of short courses, seminars and workshops in the field of visual impairments to raise the profile of St. Joseph’s as a centre of excellence;
- to form alliances with other academic institutions in Ireland to develop and teach courses relating to the wider field of visual impairment; and
- to undertake research and publish outcomes on good practice within St. Joseph’s and on visual impairment-related areas across Ireland and wider afield

Activities

- Make contact with Higher Education providers to explore the contribution St. Joseph’s staff could make to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.
- Explore the possibilities of collaboration with other organisations to undertake research of value to the future development of St. Joseph’s, including MDVI Euronet.
- To develop a framework for a CPD Centre with a programme of short courses, seminars and workshops for parents and other interested professionals.
- Explore the possibility of offering a summer school on orientation and mobility using the University of Worcester Diploma format (derived from the Cert HE validation). This would have both an academic and practical focus.
Fundraising Department

State funding is not sufficient for the services we are expected to deliver. The balance is raised through fund raising. However over the last two years the fundraising department has been severely affected by the recession.

Objectives

- **Strand 1**: Increase Small Donations Small amounts which equates to large volume. This includes Direct Debits. The strategy should be to back fill each year to maintain the volume.

- **Strand 2**: Large appeal, Building Appeal. This will be based on the new building project. A separate implementation plan will be agreed prior to the start of fundraising; and

- **Strand 3**: Events management with external staff hired on ad hoc basis.

- **Strand 4**: Use the premises to assist in fundraising activities. i.e. hire of premises, fields etc.
Performance through its People

An essential element of improving the overall professional standards, skills and training of the staff for the centre will be communications. It will inform the process of identifying both the overall skills gaps to be addressed and ensuring that staff are actually achieving those goals. Communications will also be essential in setting the context for this work and ensuring that staff understand why it must be done.

Capital Infrastructure Plans

At this point the feasibility study that is being undertaken to determine the practicality of proceeding with this project does not require communications support. If it is decided to proceed we will need to put a comprehensive community relations programme in place. This will include communications plans to address the other important audiences. These will be absolutely essential to the success of the project and their early definition and implementation will be key.

Support Strategies

Introduction of Quality Standards

The most logical course of action is to ensure that the communications activities outlined above that deal with the strategic direction of the centre and the professional standards also address the need for the introduction of quality standards. Once the need for a quality standard has been established through communicating the benefits of this to the staff, buy in to the process of acquiring those standards will be substantially more straightforward.

Research Paper

At this point it is not clear whether the research project requires communications support in terms of securing test subjects or information. What is clear is that a project of this size will require substantial communications support for dissemination of its results.

Re-branding

The Centre is advancing a major re-branding exercise of the organisation. A separate Communications Plan will need to be developed for the roll-out of the new name and identity. This plan will incorporate all communications from the organisation including the re-design and update of all collateral, print and online. This is the single most important communications activity for the Centre in this Business Strategy and will be outlined in detail in a separate document.

Communications Response to the Business Strategy

The Communications Strategy for St Joseph’s Centre for the Visually Impaired will operate in order to support the Business Strategy as outlined in the rest of this document. Any communications activity undertaken will either be driven by, or react to, the progress of the Business Plan.

Corporate Goals and Objectives

Financing its future

It is clear from the work that has to be undertaken in order to secure the finances of the centre that there are a number of communications tasks central to the process. For example, the majority of the funding comes from Government and it is very likely that, at the very least, Government will attempt to reduce the funding to all third party organisations, including St Joseph’s. Consequently, under this heading, consistent and effective lobbying will be essential. Our communications activity will also have to support the centre’s fundraising activity. This does not mean simply publicising fundraising events but will also refer to the networking that will need to be undertaken with corporate sponsors, particularly in order to secure sufficient reserves to ensure “the liquidity and solvency of the organisation.” One of the key areas that must also be supported is ensuring that internal audiences (Staff, Board, etc) are updated in a timely and effective manner. This will cover the areas of cost reduction and value added opportunities as well as the scenarios for the different levels of income.

The Centre’s Business

The Centre has divided its business into 12 separate services to be accessed by its various client groups. While it is possible that many of these services will be accessed repeatedly by the same individuals, it is clear that the target groups are ultimately quite diverse. Consequently, each of the service areas will require customised communications support in order to most effectively target its customers. Those communications supports will factor in the messages to be communicated, the most appropriate routes or media through which they will be communicated and the available budgets.
Performance through its People

Our Centre commits itself to develop the professionalism of its staff. Over the life of this plan, the key areas of development will be associated with:

- Resource Model (See appendix 2 and appendix 3)
- MDVI
- Braille
- Residential Care
- MDVI Euronet
- Management Development

Objectives

- to establish the feasibility of the project, in its entirety, on the existing campus or to have a phased building plan;
- if this receives positive support, to institute an implementation plan with related funding; and
- if this receives a negative response, to create a rolling infrastructure plan so as to maintain the fabric of the existing facilities.

Supporting Strategies.

In addition to the above strategies for the core business areas over the period 2011 to 2015, our Centre will also develop a number of supporting strategies including:

- Introduction of a quality standard, the preferred choice being the “Excellence Award” awarded by EIQA. This award is used widely in the public sector. This will take up to one year to complete.
- A research paper in the area of child blindness and the related educational, health and societal issues. See recommendation of NCSE (2009) report
- Rebranding Exercise. As our Centre is the unique national body for the provision of education and care to children and young people with visual impairment and multiple disabilities in Ireland, it is imperative that it promotes its service, mission and core values to the wider community. To assist with this process, our Centre will carry out a re-branding project with a related promotional campaign.

Capital Infrastructure Plans

St. Joseph’s Centre has strived to build a national centre on the grounds of St. Joseph’s. It was thought that the new national centre would be part of the “Programme For Government”. However, this has not come to fruition. As part of the original project the Rosminians sought and received full planning permission for the development. It was intended that the original project would also be funded from other monies from the sale of lands by the Institute of Charity. St. Joseph’s Centre for the Visually Impaired Ltd. is not in a position to start this build without external funds and as of October 2010, it would appear unlikely that these funds will be readily available. Given the importance of the national centre project, it is a key objective during the first two years of this plan to achieve the following:
Resource Model

The Resource Centre model of service delivery has been evolved to respond to the increasingly complex and challenging behaviours of children and young people who are referred to St Joseph’s. Given the government’s legislative commitment to the increased use of mainstream education provision for partially sighted and blind children in Ireland, St Joseph’s has developed a range of specialist and in some instances, unique services that are responsive to the needs of children who are multiply disabled and visually impaired (MDVI). Working at all levels, the staff are the most important resource and this includes visiting professionals. The Resource Centre is committed to a needs-led philosophy in which creating a meaningful partnership with parents/guardians is very important.

At the hub of the Resource Centre are the support services such as therapies, assessment, Braille production and IT support. In different although complementary ways, these services provide the resources, both material, technical and personal required by ‘front line’ staff engaged in delivering learning in different educational and care settings both on and off the campus. Such learning should be purposeful and relevant to developing the social, emotional, physical and cognitive needs of children and young adults to enable them to make optimal use of their talents and attributes.

An important characteristic of a Resource Centre is the capacity to deliver services both within the administrative centre and at a range of satellite centres located in strategic locations around Ireland (e.g. Cork, Donegal). This outreach capability enables services to be delivered at the point of need. Working in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations, the Resource Centre is a nation-wide facility able to provide a diverse and flexible range of services for children and young people who are partially sighted, blind or MDVI and their parents/guardians within a legislative framework that is responsive to changing social and economic challenges.