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To all members of the Assembly and the Executive

Welcome back to all members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive following the summer break.

We, the undersigned, believe that a key and urgent priority for the Assembly and the Executive must be to reach consensus on growing an education system fit for the 21st Century.

In our view, quality educational outcomes for all must remain the immediate focus for the Executive and the Education Minister. This is best achieved within a reformed educational system in which children of all faiths or none, and regardless of ethnicity, cultural and social backgrounds, learn and are taught together in their local schools. This would make best use of scarce educational resources in a time of unprecedented reductions in public expenditure and would undoubtedly bring longer-term economic, educational and societal benefits to us all.

We believe that the above approach commands overwhelming public support as shown by the recent Ipsos MORI Attitudinal Survey and the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey. We also believe that there is broad political support as evidenced in the recent party manifestos.

We therefore call on the Executive and the Education Minister:

To establish a Commission in this Assembly term. This Commission should be charged with:

- Bringing forward recommendations to resolve all the outstanding issues in education
- Ensuring that these recommendations shape a system fit for the 21st Century in which all children learn and are taught together in their local area

These recommendations should aim to have the confidence of civil society and attract broad political support.

In the mean time, in light of the significant pressures on the education budget, we call on the Education Minister to take the following actions, as a matter of urgency:

- To establish an area based planning framework that includes local people as well as other educational stakeholders to plan education on the basis of demand and demonstrable need
- To ensure that all schools and communities are actively supported in developing local solutions which encourage meaningful sharing between and within schools
- To remove any impediments, legislative or procedural, that would hinder greater sharing in education



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