

EDUCATION
COMMISSION
REPORT

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From: Sam McGuinness [mailto:sam_mcguinness@yahoo.com]
Sent: 05 March 2008 13:45
To: LEWIS, Pam; niblockj@btinternet.com; peter.robinson.mp@btinternet.com
Subject: Education and the Economy

Dear MLA Wilson and Minister Robinson

In November 2006 I was asked to be part of a group looking at the needs of the Northern Ireland economy in terms of how much the education sector provides the necessary skills.

The group was made up of teachers from different sectors, industrialists and engineers from QUB and UU.

The group met on six or seven occasions, and a report was written up and launched last year, but with the debate about selection dominating, it did not get the coverage we feel it merited. I attach a summary of the report, the full report and give a view below. We hope to relaunch the report.

The Minister for Education is getting in a knot about selection... she's fiddling on the shore while the truth is in the ocean beside her... the truth is that we don't have the 'decaying education system' that she claims... we have problems with literacy and numeracy, but perhaps they are more to do with the social background of the students who can't read and write than with a failure of some schools and teachers. At one extreme we have a relatively well-off, risk-averse society who will **not** encourage their bright children into entrepreneurial activities or even into science and engineering. As one end of the academic spectrum we produce far too many students of law, medicine dentistry and the like. At the other end we have a large tail of semi-literate, semi-numerate unemployed. As a result our projected economic and industrial future is anything but rosy. We are over-reliant on public-sector employment.

In a nutshell, the group urges the Minister for Education to emphasise Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics in our schools, to strongly and actively support the study of such subjects and to stop the persistent denigration of our education system, whenever the PISA reports put us so high up the world rankings. Build on what is already good.

I hope I have given an idea of where the focus of the group is. We don't have all the answers but we want a serious debate about the issues raised. A small group of the Education Task Force would be pleased to have the opportunity to clarify any of the issues raised and to answer any questions you might have.

I intend to email this to the Minister for Education.

Sam McGuinness

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