

COMMITTEE ON THE PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

Report on Schools Admission Policy

TOGETHER WITH THE MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS, OFFICIAL REPORT
AND PAPERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE SUB-GROUP AND COMMITTEE

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Committee on the Programme for Government

1. On 24 November 2006, following a direction from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Peter Hain MP, the Business Committee established a Committee on the Programme for Government to agree priorities for a restored Executive and to make preparations for restoration. The Secretary of State directed that the Committee should, initially, be chaired by the deputy presiding officers, Mr Jim Wells and Mr Francie Molloy.

Membership

2. The Committee has ten members with a quorum of six, with at least one representative present from each party on the Committee. The membership of the Committee since its establishment on 24 November 2006 is as follows –

Gerry Adams MP
Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Mark Durkan MP
Sir Reg Empey
Michelle Gildernew MP
Martin McGuinness MP
David McClarty
Ian Paisley Jnr
Margaret Ritchie
Peter Robinson MP

3. At its meeting on 27 November 2006, the Committee agreed that deputies could attend if members of the Committee were unable to do so.
4. The Committee met on eight occasions between November 2006 and 22 January 2007. At the first meeting on 27 November 2006, the Committee noted the direction from the Secretary of State dated 23 November 2006 that a Committee on the Programme for Government should be established to agree priorities for a restored Executive and to make preparations for restoration. (A copy of the direction issued by the Secretary of State is attached at Appendix 6).
5. The Committee agreed to consider the Ministerial Code, Victims and Survivors issues and the Lifetime Opportunities strategy and to set up sub-groups to consider and report back on –
 - Economic Issues
 - Workplace 2010 and Public Sector Job Location
 - Policing and Justice Issues
 - Schools Admissions Policy

- Review of Public Administration and Rural Planning
- Comprehensive Spending Review; Programme for Government; Rates Charges and Water Reform

Sub-group on Schools Admission Policy

6. The Committee agreed the sub-group's terms of reference on 4 December 2006. The sub-group submitted its report on 17 January 2007. The Committee considered the report on 22 January 2007 and noted that further work was required on a number of issues relating to the policy on schools admission and the pupil profile, pending restoration of the Institutions and to inform an incoming Executive.

Approval of the Report and Further Action

7. The Committee agreed to print the report and to write to the Secretary of State asking him to take action urgently on a number of the recommendations in it. A copy of the letter, which was sent to the Secretary of State on 22 January 2007, is attached at Appendix 7.

Sub-group on Schools Admission Policy

Membership and Terms of Reference

Membership

The sub-group has 6 members with a quorum of 4 and with at least one member from each of the four parties represented on the Committee on the Programme for Government. The membership of the sub-group since its establishment on 27 November 2006 is as follows:

Dominic Bradley (SDLP)
Jeffrey Donaldson MP (DUP)
Barry McElduff (SF)
David McNarry (UUP)
Caitríona Ruane (SF)
Sammy Wilson MP (DUP)

The Committee on the Programme for Government agreed at its meeting on 11 December 2006 that the sub-group on Schools Admission Policy would be chaired by a member from Sinn Féin. Sue Ramsey was nominated as Chairperson by Sinn Féin on 12 December 2006 but was subsequently replaced by Willie Clarke. Jim Wells chaired the meeting of 8 December 2006. Sue Ramsey chaired the morning session of the meeting of 15 December 2006. Willie Clarke chaired the afternoon session of the meeting of 15 December 2006 and the meetings of 22 December 2006, 8 January 2007, 12 January 2007 and 16 January 2007.

The Committee on the Programme for Government agreed that deputies could attend if members of the sub-group were unable to do so.

Terms of Reference

On 4 December 2006 the Committee agreed the terms of reference, set out below, for the sub-group

1. To examine the proposed new post-primary admission arrangements including:
 - The Pupil Profile
 - The Admissions criteria* for over-subscribed schools including any specific number or combination of criteria to be included and whether the criteria should be applied in a specific sequence
2. To identify any other appropriate arrangements that may be considered.
To report to the Committee on the Programme for Government by 10 January 2007. This date was subsequently revised to 17 January 2007.

***Note:** In the consultation document on new admissions arrangements the criteria were grouped under the broad categories of

- Family-Focused Criteria;
- Community-Based Criteria;
- Geographical Criteria; and
- Tiebreakers.

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Recommendations	4
Introduction	7
Consideration of Issues	
■ Schools Admission Policy	9
■ Pupil Profile	21
Appendices	
Appendix 1: Minutes of Proceedings	31
Appendix 2: Minutes of Evidence	61
Appendix 3: Written Submissions	143
Appendix 4: Other Papers Considered by the Sub-Group	347
Appendix 5: Papers submitted by the Parties of the Sub-Group	379
Appendix 6: Direction from the Secretary of State	399
Appendix 7: Letter to the Secretary of State	403

Executive Summary

Schools Admission Policy

1. Grammar schools are currently able to select pupils based on their grade received in a transfer test commonly known as the 11+. Secondary schools cannot select pupils on the basis of ability. Children who wish to attend a grammar school sit the 11+ in their final year at primary school and receive a grade from A – D. If a school is over subscribed, it applies additional admissions criteria set by its Board of Governors.

The new admission arrangements

2. The new admission arrangements proposed by the Department of Education are based around a number of key principles and allow for an open menu of admission criteria that all schools can apply if they are oversubscribed. The detail on the admission criteria will be set out in regulations, which the Department intends to consult on early in 2007.
3. The sub-group considered the admission arrangements at its meetings on 22 December 2006 and 8 January 2007.
4. The sub-group noted that, as a result of section 21 of the Northern Ireland (St. Andrews Agreement) 2006, academic selection was not prohibited and there was a lengthy discussion on the use of academic selection as an admission criterion. However, while the sub-group was opposed to the 11+ and did want to see a workable, realistic replacement for it, the members were not able to reach agreement on its continued use as part of the admission criteria. The members of the sub-group were however interested in obtaining further information on transfer systems at the age of 14 and agreed that there should be further research on the operation of the Dickson plan in Craigavon and on transfer arrangements at age 14 elsewhere in Europe.
5. The sub-group also agreed that there should be an additional principle that “there is a need to ensure equality of opportunity for every child and in particular the need to take account of difficulties faced by newly arrived families and ethnic minorities”, but did not reach consensus on the admission criteria overall as there were differing views on the weight and relevance which should be given to these, particularly to the geographically based criteria.
6. The sub-group also considered if the criteria should be applied in a consistent manner across Northern Ireland or whether their application should be flexible and open as proposed by the Department but could not reach consensus on this matter. There was agreement, however, that additional research and modelling would be required to show how the criteria would interact and operate in practice.

7. The sub-group also noted and agreed with the comments made by a number of the groups who submitted evidence to it, that the use of the term “parental choice” was misleading and considered that it should be replaced with the more accurate term of “parental preference”.
8. The sub-group was extremely concerned about the delay in resolving the post primary admission arrangements to schools for children in Northern Ireland and the uncertainty and confusion this was creating for teachers, parents and pupils. It has recommended that as a key priority an incoming Executive should reach a decision on the schools admission policy.

Pupil Profile

9. According to the Department of Education, the new transfer arrangements to post primary schools will be based on parental choice for a particular post primary school or schools. Parents will have access to a range of information to assist them in making this choice including
 - Pupils visiting post primary schools in P6 year;
 - Receiving information packs from a range of schools;
 - Parents and children attending open days / evenings; and
 - Informal discussions with post primary schools.
10. Parents will complete a transfer form indicating their choice(s) of post primary school(s). If a school has more applications than places it will apply the admission criteria. The process will allow for appeals. The pupil profile is intended to be a key element of informed parental choice and will replace the annual report to parents by providing information in a standardised format. There have been a number of trials of the system that have been evaluated by BDO Stoy Hayward.
11. At the meeting on 12 January 2007, the sub-group considered a number of issues relating to the pupil profile including its use as a means of academic selection; its manageability for schools and teachers; the relevance for parents and pupils; the content of the profile; sharing the profile with schools; the cost and delivery of the ICT solution and the timetable for introduction.
12. The sub-group considered if the pupil profile should be revised to include academic ability and used for academic selection but was unable to reach agreement on this.
13. It heard, and received, evidence from a number of groups about many issues relating to the pupil profile which it carefully considered and as a result had major concerns about many aspects of the profile. It was not convinced that sufficient evidence had been provided by CCEA or the Department of Education to support their view that the pupil profile could be up and running by September 2007.
14. Nor did it believe that the proposed system was properly supported with the full range of resources it required (including ICT, additional reporting time and advanced training for teachers, and educating parents) for it to be of meaningful use to teachers, parents and pupils. It has made a number of recommendations designed to address the weaknesses in the content

of the pupil profile; improve its manageability for teachers and schools and make it more relevant to parents and pupils.

15. The sub-group asks the Committee on the Programme for Government to note that it has considerable doubts that the pupil profile can be delivered in an effective and efficient format in the manner and timetable proposed by the Department of Education and CCEA. It calls on the Committee to ask the Secretary of State to take action urgently to address its concerns.

Recommendations

1. **The Committee on the Programme for Government should write to the Secretary of State now asking him to take action immediately on recommendations 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 18, 20 and 21.**

On the schools admission policy the sub-group recommends that:

Principles of the schools admission arrangements

2. **‘The need to ensure equality of opportunity for every child and in particular the need to take account of difficulties faced by newly arrived families and ethnic minorities’ should be added to the principles. (paragraph 17)**
3. **The words ‘and additionally’ should be removed from the principles. (paragraph 17)**

Academic selection as an admission criteria

4. **Further research should be commissioned urgently on the experience of transfer at age 14 including the Dickson Plan in Craigavon and elsewhere in Europe. This should include an assessment of the resource implications of restructuring schools to accommodate such a system, including as an area based solution. (paragraph 32)**
5. **As an immediate priority an incoming Executive should reach a decision on schools admission policy. (paragraph 32)**

The definition of the proposed criteria

6. **The Department, as a matter of urgency, should conduct independent research and carry out exploratory modelling on the interaction between the proposed criteria. It should then consult widely on the criteria as soon as possible. (paragraph 47)**

The intervention powers to prevent misuse of admission criteria

7. **The current independent appeal system operates well and following the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, and the disbandment of the Education and Library Boards, this system should continue and involve, where appropriate, skilled professionals. (paragraph 55)**

Admission arrangements for special needs

8. **Some of the proposed additional funding for education, recommended by the sub-group on Economic Issues in its report, should be allocated to special needs and that special needs education should be appropriately resourced. (paragraph 69)**

Other issues

9. **In the new single Education and Skills Authority there should be provision for a representative parental voice forum, including capacity building for parents, and that the Department should update members of the sub-group on progress in this area as soon as possible. (paragraph 76)**
10. **The Department lays out clearly how the admission criteria and pupil profile will be impacted on by the proposed changes in education policies such as: transport arrangements; collaborative arrangements; the entitlement framework; specialist schools and the Independent Strategic Review of Education and recent legislation, including that arising from the Northern Ireland (St Andrews) Agreement Act 2006. (paragraph 76)**
11. **The Department should examine what impact the admission criteria and pupil profile will have on Dickson area schools and see what flexibility there would be for this and other local arrangements. (paragraph 76)**
12. **The term ‘parental choice’ should be changed to ‘parental preference’ to reflect the reality which will pertain after the proposed changes. (paragraph 76)**

On the pupil profile the sub-group recommends that:

Manageability for schools and teachers

13. **The Committee on the Programme for Government agrees that, if time allows, the sub-group should visit a small number of schools involved in the pilot to ascertain the views of teachers and pupils. (paragraph 93)**
14. **The final report from BDO Stoy Hayward on the independent evaluation of the pupil profile is made available to MLAs and interested groups without delay. (paragraph 93)**
15. **Adequate resources are made available for schools and for the professional development of teachers to enable them to carry out the completion of the pupil profile. (paragraph 93)**

Relevance for parents and pupils

16. **The public is kept informed about the progress of the pupil profile through a wide range of media. (paragraph 100)**
17. **Consideration needs to be given as to how the pupil profile will be made accessible and easily understood by all parents. (paragraph 100)**

The content

18. **Further work needs to be done on the usefulness of the pupil profile as a guide given the potential for variation and interpretation in the meanings of the headings particularly on the levels of progression in literacy and numeracy; its manageability for teachers; and the opportunity for a child to comment on his/her own progression, achievements and aims for post primary education. (paragraph 107)**

Sharing the pupil profile with schools

19. **The receiving post primary school should automatically get a copy of the pupil profile to inform individual education plans for the child.** (paragraph 114)

Cost and delivery of the ICT solution

20. **The Department of Education should make available information about the cost and delivery of the ICT solution proposed for the pupil profile.** (paragraph 121)

Timetable for introduction

21. **The Department and CCEA should consider, as a matter of urgency, whether the timetable for the introduction of the pupil profile is achievable.** (paragraph 127)

Introduction

1. The sub-group on the Schools Admission Policy was asked to report by 10 January 2007. This date was subsequently extended to 17 January 2007.
2. The sub-group met on six occasions between 8 December 2006 and 16 January 2007. At the first meeting on 8 December 2006, the sub-group agreed a work programme and procedures for taking forward work on the consideration of the Schools Admission Policy. Decisions of the sub-group were taken by consensus and all of the recommendations set out in this report were reached on that basis.
3. The sub-group agreed to take oral evidence from a number of educational bodies and organisations. The transcripts of the oral evidence are included under Minutes of Evidence at Appendix 2. Organisations were also invited to make a short written submission to the sub-group setting out their views on the proposed schools admission policy.
4. The sub-group also agreed to invite a number of other educational organisations and bodies to make a full written submission. Written submissions were received from 22 educational bodies and organisations and these are included at Appendix 3.
5. Other papers considered by the sub-group included briefing papers provided by the Assembly Research and Library Services. Copies of the papers are attached at Appendix 4.
6. Papers provided by the four parties of the sub-group were also considered. Copies of the papers are attached at appendix 5.

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006

7. The sub-group received legal advice on the current statutory position. It noted that Article 28(2) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 prohibits the use of academic ability as an admissions criterion. Article 28(2) is not in operation. Article 1 of the Order provides the circumstances in which it will come into operation.
8. Article 1 was amended by section 21 of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, so as to provide that Article 28(2) comes into operation:
 - if Schedule 4 to the 2006 Act (repeal of the Northern Ireland Act 2000 which provides for suspension) comes into force, on such date as the Department may by order appoint. Such a Commencement Order would be subject to affirmative resolution by the Assembly ie a majority of Assembly members who vote, would have to vote in favour of the Order bringing the prohibition of academic selection into force. Such an Order cannot be amended – it can only be approved or negated.
 - Affirmative resolution of the Commencement Order would not require a cross-community vote. However, if a matter becomes the subject of a petition of concern, then under section 42 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the vote on that matter would

require cross-community support ie support of 50/50/50 or 60/40/40 of members voting, to bring the prohibition of academic selection into force.

- If there is no such Commencement Order, or the Assembly does not approve such an Order, academic selection is not prohibited.

Or

- if Schedule 3 to the 2006 Act (non-compliance with the St Andrews Agreement timetable) comes into force, Article 28(2) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 comes into force on the same date on which the Schedule comes into force. No Commencement Order is required – Article 28(2) prohibiting academic selection comes into operation immediately.
- Article 1(6) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 expressly provides that, in either case, Article 28(2) has effect only in relation to admissions on or after 31 July 2010.

Report to the Committee

9. The sub-group met on 16 January 2007 and agreed that this report should be submitted to the Committee on the Programme for Government.

Consideration of Issues - Schools Admission Policy

10. The sub-group met on 22 December 2006 and 8 January 2007 to consider the issues surrounding post primary admission arrangements.

Principles of the schools admission arrangements

In a paper to the sub-group, the Department of Education noted that the principles for the new admission arrangements should -

*“put the interests of the child at the centre of the decision-making process;
be transparent, consistent and easily understood by parents;
be based upon informed choice by parents and pupils;
be fair and free from any bias or indirect discrimination against particular groups or individuals; and
acknowledge that schools normally serve local communities.*

And additionally

*retain as much flexibility as possible, so that schools can reflect their local circumstances; and
ensure that the combined effect of the criteria does not result in postcode selection or social exclusion, and that it does not disadvantage pupils living in particular areas, e.g. rural areas, or pupils attending primary schools that are not given an appropriate degree of priority for admission”*

11. The sub-group considered the principles of the schools admission policy and the extent to which they had been met.
12. The sub-group received written and oral evidence from various groups (see Appendices 2 and 3). A number of these groups were broadly in agreement with the principles but some of the evidence provided to the sub-group noted some caveats such as the need to consider families who have migrated to Northern Ireland and ethnic minorities, suggestions that the use of parental choice could be misleading and the term “parental preference” may be more realistic and the impact of transport policy on parental preference. Other submissions noted concerns about postcode selection and that the focus should be on the welfare of the child rather than the welfare, ethos or tradition of the school.
13. The DUP believed that the primary principle should be that children are matched to schools which best enable them to develop to their full potential. The DUP did not believe that at post primary level schools normally serve local communities. For a variety of reasons children were far more mobile at this level and while some schools did primarily serve a local community many drew from a huge catchment area. The party further stated that not only should the transfer be based upon informed choice by parents and pupils but there should

also be an input from the receiving school. This would require the school to have some knowledge of the abilities of the child applying. The DUP stated that the principles conflicted and contradicted each other.

14. Sinn Féin advocated that schools admission arrangements should be child centred and that all educational decisions must be taken in the best interests of the child. These arrangements needed to be based on clearly understood criteria, which were uniformly applied. Parental choice, fully informed by teachers was a fundamental principle in all of this and any advice from teachers should be non-directive. It would be about providing the parent with the necessary information to make an informed choice. The party were supportive of the principles.
15. The SDLP broadly agreed with the principles of the schools admission arrangements and considered that all 7 priorities should be considered equally and that there was no need for ‘and additionally’ to precede principles 6 and 7. The SDLP stated that the principles needed to be expanded to take account of difficulties facing newly arrived families to Northern Ireland.
16. The UUP stated that the principles should put the interests of the child at the centre of the decision-making process, by ensuring that the child is placed in a post primary school best suited to her/his aptitudes, talents and abilities; be transparent, consistent and easily understood by parents and by schools; be based upon informed choice by parents, facilitated by pupil profiles being provided to post primary schools and post primary schools providing parents with a statement of advice; be fair and free from any bias or indirect discrimination, ensuring that the criteria did not result in postcode selection, social exclusion or disadvantaging of ethnic minorities; acknowledged that many schools serve local communities, and that some grammar, special needs, integrated and Irish medium schools serve wider communities; and should retain as much flexibility as possible, so that schools could reflect their local circumstances and educational ethos.
17. **The sub-group recommends that the following changes should be made to the principles -**
 - **‘The need to ensure equality of opportunity for every child and in particular the need to take account of difficulties faced by newly arrived families and ethnic minorities’ should be added to the principles.**
 - **The words ‘and additionally’ should be removed from the principles.**
18. The following proposals were made:
 - That the principle ‘acknowledge that schools normally serve local communities’ should be removed.
 - That an additional principle ‘pupils should attend the most appropriate school for their needs in order to maximise their development’ should be added.
 - That all the principles as amended should be accepted.The sub-group, after consideration, did not reach consensus on these proposals.

The admission criteria as proposed by the Department of Education

19. The admission criteria proposed by the Department of Education are:
- Sibling currently at the school,
 - eldest child,
 - feeder primary school,
 - parish catchment area,
 - nearest suitable school,
 - random selection tie-breaker and distance from home to school as tie-breaker
20. There was a variety of opinions on the criteria across those who submitted or gave evidence to the sub-group. However of those who commented on the use of tie-breakers, most considered that the random tie-breaker would be fairer than the proximity to school tie-breaker. Concern was expressed by some of the groups about the lack of information on how individual criterion would interact with, and perhaps change the impact of, other criteria. There was also apprehension from some groups that the geographical criteria could lead to postcode selection e.g. house prices in areas perceived to have ‘good’ schools would be pushed up and as lower income families could not afford to buy in these areas, these children would loose out on access to ‘good’ schools.
21. The discussion by the sub-group on the admission criteria included detailed consideration of the geographical, the family focus and the tie-breaker criteria. The sub-group also looked at whether any additional criteria should be included; at the application of the criteria for Irish medium and integrated schools, children from ethnic minorities and the travelling community; and at the use of the criteria in border areas of Northern Ireland.
22. The DUP was of the view that the emphasis on geography was unacceptable and that all but two of the criteria were geographically based. The party considered that the criteria did not reflect the new political reality namely that academic selection was back on the agenda and insisted that it would not accept any criteria which did not include this. The party suggested some forms which academic selection might take and stated that if no agreement could be found on a statutory test to be used across the primary sector then academic selection, set by individual or groups of post primary schools which might wish to use it, might be considered. It stated that where a school choses to have academic selection as one of its criteria it should be allowed to do so. The party was content with sibling and eldest child as criteria.
23. Sinn Féin was of the view that catchment area and named feeder schools should be the main criteria applied. The geographical definition of a catchment area needed to be clearly defined. The attendance of a sibling could be another criterion, as could the fact of a parent or a guardian working at the school. In the event of a tie-breaker the party favoured random selection. In relation to Irish medium education, any community-based criteria should take account of the Irish language community. Similarly, flexible arrangements needed to be put in place for the integrated sector, Irish travellers and ethnic minority groupings. Admissions criteria should be applied as consistently as possible across the North. There might be value in additional modelling analysis in this area. Again, with a strong emphasis on schools working together in new collaborative arrangements, there needed to be proper provision,

including transport for children in border communities who may attend their nearest school in the other State.

24. The SDLP stated that the sibling currently at school and eldest child were important criteria as they help keep families together and support the child-centred aim of the principles of the schools admission arrangements. The criteria feeder primary schools, parish and catchment area were interrelated and that in practice there was little need for distinction between these three admission pools and that feeder primary school could adequately cover all three. It was important that feeder primary schools were not narrowly defined and that they were not based on cherry-picking. The party believed that random selection within a catchment area should be the only tie-breaker criterion and was opposed to a system of creating (or exacerbating) a 'postcode lottery' or any differential opportunities for urban and rural populations. Catchment areas around all post primary schools would therefore need to be widely defined. The SDLP considered the criteria of nearest suitable school particularly applicable in relation to Irish medium and integrated post primary schools and was opposed to the use of proximity from home to school as a tie-breaker as this could result in a postcode lottery.
25. The UUP stated that the criteria should be sibling currently at the school; eldest child; feeder primary school; catchment area; nearest school appropriate to the child's aptitudes, talents and abilities. The UUP also stated that in the event of over-subscription, schools should also have the option of using fair and consistent academic criteria (approved by the Minister) in order to enable the child to be placed in the post primary school best suited to his/her aptitudes, talents and abilities and that schools should have the freedom to employ additional criteria e.g. parent was a past pupil, parent or guardian teaching at the school. The party also indicated that it was in favour of feeder primary schools and noted that historically some feeder primary schools were not in a school's catchment area, and that this might present some difficulties.

Academic selection as an admission criterion

26. The sub-group noted the advice on the current legal position in relation to academic selection (page 7) and the implications of this for transfer to post primary schools.
27. The evidence considered by the sub-group during its deliberations on this issue fell largely into two opposing sets of opinions –1) those who did not agree with academic selection in any form or at any age; and 2) those who felt there was merit in retaining academic selection. Amongst the latter group, there were varying opinions on the age at which academic selection should be used. There was some opposition to academic selection at 11 years of age with a number of groups suggesting that, if it were to take place, it would be better at ages 14 or 16 years of age.
28. The DUP referred to the legal position and highlighted the problems that would arise if there were no agreement on academic selection. The party also made reference to the response to the household survey where the majority of those who responded was in favour of retaining academic selection and stated that the party was of the view that parents should be able to opt in or out of academic selection, with schools able to set their own tests. This would allow for parental choice to be exercised. If there were a suitable replacement, the DUP would

agree to the end of the 11+. The party indicated that it would like to see further research into the possibility of selection at 14 and referred to the Dickson system.

29. Sinn Féin was opposed to academic selection in any form and stated that there was a direct link between academic selection and the long tail of under-achievement. The party believed that academic selection failed the majority of young people and contributed to low self-esteem on the part of many children who were not selected. The party stated that academic selection was socially divisive and it should not be introduced under any guise - for example, entrance exams and Computer Adaptive Testing were not acceptable. Sinn Féin's position was that the arrangements should be child-centred. The party also noted that in socially deprived areas only a small number of children passed the 11+. The party noted the evidence on the possibility of deferring the decision making on transfer to age 14 and agreed that further research on this would be helpful.
30. The SDLP was opposed to academic selection on the grounds that it was educationally unsound, socially divisive and detrimental to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The party had campaigned for an end to academic selection since its inception. The party wished to see an end to the 11+, and all forms of academic selection, which have had a detrimental effect on the primary school curriculum over the years. It favoured parental choice informed by an improved pupil profile and urged CCEA to make the necessary changes to make it more relevant. The SDLP noted that the issue of transfer at age 14 was of interest as children at that age were more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, had benefited from three years of post primary education and were more capable of making decisions affecting their future.
31. The UUP was of the view that, without academic selection, many secondary schools would struggle with falling numbers as parents tried to access a grammar school education for their child. The party indicated that it was in favour of schools having the option of academic selection in the event of over-subscription and noted that some secondary schools already streamed children. The UUP would accept the removal of the 11+ if there were a suitable, realistic, workable alternative. The party stated that as an alternative system, the Dickson plan could not be ignored. It also pointed out that there were indications in the Independent Strategic Review of Education that the education system could move in this direction in the future.
32. The sub-group agreed that it was opposed to the 11+ and wants to see a workable realistic replacement for it. [The SDLP and Sinn Féin stated that they agreed to this on the basis that it allowed for an open-ended debate on post primary transfer arrangements and did not imply continuation of academic selection]. **The sub-group recommends that**
 - **Further research should be commissioned urgently on the experience of transfer at age 14 including the Dickson Plan in Craigavon and elsewhere in Europe. This should include an assessment of the resource implications of restructuring schools to accommodate such a system, including as an area based solution.**
 - **As an immediate priority an incoming Executive should reach a decision on schools admission policy.**

33. The sub-group noted that while some of the parties continued to oppose academic selection, very little research had been conducted into alternatives to the 11+ that would be available to an incoming devolved Minister in the event of academic selection not being prohibited. Sinn Féin and the SDLP stated that they were clearly on the record that there was no need for research on academic selection at any age as there was no need for an alternative to the 11+.
34. The following proposals were made:
- That there should be a debate in the Assembly on post primary transfer arrangements as a result of section 21 of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006.
 - That there should be a debate on post primary transfer arrangements.
 - That in the light of academic selection continuing to be part of the admissions policy, detailed consideration should be given to the safeguards which need to be put in place to ensure that the interests of the child are at the centre of the decision-making process.
 - That the sub-group is opposed to the 11+.

The sub-group, after consideration, did not reach consensus on these proposals

The open menu approach

35. The sub-group considered:
- The question of whether admission criteria should be applied centrally and uniformly across Northern Ireland or whether schools should be allowed to choose from an open menu.
 - The degree to which one or more of the admission criteria should be compulsory.
 - The effects of applying criteria in a particular order.
 - The interdependence between criteria.
36. The opinion of the evidence received by the sub-group fell largely into two categories with one set supportive of the open menu approach because it allowed post primary schools to be flexible and responsive to the local community. Those in the other category generally believed there should be a compulsory order of criteria applied consistently across Northern Ireland. For those who would like to see a consistent approach, there was some agreement that the order should be family focused criteria followed by the geographical criteria and then the random selection tie-breaker.
37. The DUP favoured the open menu approach since it permitted individual schools to tailor entrance to their own local and educational circumstances.
38. Sinn Féin considered that the admission criteria should be set centrally and applied as consistently as possible across the North.
39. The SDLP believed that the list of criteria should be centrally agreed and uniform for all schools with built in flexibility for Irish medium and integrated post primary schools. This uniformity would increase public confidence by presenting both parents and schools with a transparent and readily comprehensible process. A uniform and centrally agreed list of

criteria would also help prevent instances of unfair exclusion and promote equality of opportunity for all pupils and schools.

40. The UUP stated that schools should be allowed to choose from a menu of admission criteria, and to determine the order in which the criteria were applied. It considered that the open menu approach would maximise the potential for schools to respond to community needs and to reflect their educational ethos.

The definition of the proposed criteria

41. The issues considered by the sub-group were:
- The clarity surrounding the definitions of the admission criteria for both parents and post primary schools.
 - The ease of application by post primary schools.
 - The application of the criteria in a coherent manner between post primary schools across Northern Ireland.
 - The degree to which the proposed criteria would lead to postcode selection.
 - The extent to which the distance tie-breaker could discriminate against pupils in rural areas and / or integrated schools.
42. The evidence suggested that more research and modelling were required on how the criteria would interact and that the measurement of distance would be very important. There was some evidence suggesting that care was needed with the definition and application of the feeder primary school criterion – that if a post primary school had too many feeder primary schools on its list, this criterion would become of little use as a selection tool. Many of the Education and Library Boards noted that the geographical criteria, such as parish, needed to be tightly defined to avoid legal challenge at the application stage.
43. The DUP noted that there were different views as to what were feeder primary schools or how a local school should be defined in the event of three different schools serving a similar area, or how children living in rural areas might be protected against marginalisation, and indicated that the criteria were wide open to interpretation. The party believed this was deliberate to divert attention to the fact that in practice, there would be little choice permitted and that children would be corralled into all ability local comprehensives. The DUP had concerns that the criteria were too geographically based and were also of the view that the definitions needed to be clarified as they meant different things in different contexts and that overall they did not back up the aim of putting the interests of the child at the centre of the decision making process.
44. Sinn Féin considered that the definitions needed to be clear, easily understood and easily applied; that there needed to be maximum transparency and that the tie-breaker definitions needed to be clear and applied in such a way as to remove any notion of potential discrimination e.g. against rural areas. The party also stated that there should be special provisions for Irish medium and integrated schools and for Irish travellers and ethnic minorities. It was also of the view that advice from primary school teachers should be non-directive.

45. The SDLP believed that certain criteria required expansion and more detail to ensure that they were applied uniformly and with equality in all schools. The family criteria should make extra provision for single-sex schools ie to prevent exclusion of a son or daughter who was not the eldest member of their immediate family and the criterion of ‘eldest child’ should automatically include the oldest boy or girl if the application was to a single-sex school. The party stated that there must also be more clarification on how children were related within a family. Foster children and half-brothers or sisters must be included in this criterion without discrimination. Special consideration should be given under extraordinary circumstances to children in care as their educational experience tended to be very poor. The party noted that feeder primary schools were important in relation to defining the catchment area, would help avoid a postcode lottery and assist grammar schools to maintain their current catchment area.
46. The UUP believed that inevitably the existing proposals would lead to postcode selection, that pupils in rural areas or on the periphery of urban centres would be disadvantaged and that both proposed tie breakers of random selection or proximity of home to school were inherently unjust. The party stated that the principles were to put the interests of the child at the centre of the decision making process but that the definitions did not back this up. It felt that allowing schools to apply academic selection particularly when overscribed, would help to address parental needs.
47. **The sub-group recommends that-**
- **The Department, as a matter of urgency, should conduct independent research and carry out exploratory modelling on the interaction between the proposed criteria. It should then consult widely on the criteria as soon as possible.**
48. The sub-group, after consideration, did not reach consensus on the following proposal-
- That the admissions policy as outlined will not lead to a situation where the interests of the child are paramount and the criteria will only result in children being channelled to a local school regardless of whether it is best suited to their needs.

The intervention powers to prevent misuse of admission criteria

49. The sub-group considered the issues surrounding the intervention and appeal powers.
50. The evidence from those who made submissions to the sub-group indicated that the role of the proposed Education and Skills Authority, in ensuring no direct or indirect discrimination, would be vital. There was some suggestion in the evidence that a central body, which could include the social partners, could have a role to play in the application and oversight of the application of the criteria.
51. The DUP was content with the current arrangements for appeals and that the system currently used should be carried over from the Education and Library Boards to the Education and Skills Authority. The party noted that it was not always necessary to have educational psychologists involved in appeals but did not disagree that they could provide important input for certain types of case.

52. Sinn Féin stated that currently Education and Library Boards administer an Independent Appeal Tribunal System and that this type of arrangement should be retained following the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority and the dissolution of the Education and Library Boards. The party stated that there was an absolute requirement for an independent system, which would have the involvement of skilled professionals, including educational psychologists when appropriate.
53. The SDLP believed that such powers must be defined within the Education Reform Act and that the current appeals procedure was effective. There was a need for the Department to have the power to ensure that schools were operating the admissions criteria in an inclusive way, which did not disadvantage applicants on social, geographical, racial, or cultural grounds. The party stated that the advantage of a fully uniform system was that it was possible to have a central appeals body, which could consider complaints about the way the procedures were operated, or to consider pleas for entry to a school due to special circumstances.
54. The UUP was of the view that intervention powers must recognise and respect the freedom and autonomy of schools to reflect their local circumstances and educational ethos and that the appeals procedure must be robust, accessible and transparent. The party was concerned about the designation of feeder primary schools, and noted the scrutiny role which the Department of Education would have in relation to this.
55. **The sub-group recommends that-**
- **The current independent appeal system operates well and that following the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, and the disbandment of the Education and Library Boards, this system should continue and involve, where appropriate, skilled professionals.**

The provision for sectoral schools such as integrated schools and Irish medium schools

56. The sub-group gave consideration to the issues surrounding the impact of the new admission arrangements on sectoral post primary schools.
57. The evidence was, in the main, focused on the requirements of the Irish medium and integrated school sectors and noted that post primary secondary schools in these sectors often required wide catchment areas. With respect to Irish medium schools, there was evidence submitted to suggest that the definition of community should be flexible enough to include any Irish speaking community.
58. The DUP stated that given that the earlier principles emphasised consistency and putting the child first free from bias, it seemed contradictory to have special arrangements for particular schools and it was opposed to the introduction of special arrangements for favoured sectors. The party advised that if special arrangements were put in place for Irish medium and integrated schools then these provisions should also apply to grammar schools serving rural areas.
59. Sinn Féin stated that the definition of community based criteria needed to be sufficiently flexible to incorporate or identify the Irish speaking community in a given area. This may go

beyond defined catchment area boundaries, which applied in other circumstances. It was important to support a child who had attended Irish medium primary provision and who was transferring to a post primary school. They should be accommodated in the nearest post primary school with suitable Irish language provision. The party also noted that integrated post primary schools may wish to use attendance at an integrated primary school as a criterion. Flexibility needed to be built in to accommodate the needs and requirements as identified by the integrated sector. For both the Irish medium and integrated sectors, the feeder school criterion should be used. The special requirements of Irish travellers also needed to be accommodated.

60. The SDLP stated that it considered the criterion of nearest suitable school, in relation to Irish medium and integrated post primary schools, was particularly applicable as the availability of schools in these sectors was limited by comparison to the availability of schools in other sectors. Sectoral schools would be further protected by the ability to define their own feeder primary schools within their catchment areas.
61. The UUP noted that in some areas, the introduction of new Irish medium and integrated schools plus falling roll numbers created difficulties for traditional schools. There was, in addition, a need to ensure that the system was not open to abuse.
62. The sub-group, after consideration, did not reach consensus on the following proposal-
 - That the provision for sectoral schools such as Irish medium and integrated schools should also apply to grammar schools serving rural areas.

Admission arrangements for special needs

63. The adequacy of provision for pupils with special needs was discussed by the sub-group which considered evidence from the Department that the post primary placement of children with special educational needs would take place outside the constraints of the normal transfer system. Others who gave evidence to the sub-group welcomed the fact that the Department would retain the procedures relating to compelling individual circumstances.
64. The parties noted that the sub-group on Economic Issues, in its report to the Programme for Government Committee on the Chancellor's Economic Package and on Alternative Proposals, had included a recommendation for an additional £20m per annum to be allocated to education, with particular reference to special needs education, early years development, educational underperformance and teacher training.
65. The DUP noted that it was content with the arrangements for post primary transfer made by the Department for the placement of children with special educational needs. The DUP supported the provision of additional funding for special needs education and believed that it should be adequately resourced.
66. Sinn Féin stated that there was a need for much greater investment in support arrangements for children with special needs. Special education required major development. Special schools had an important contribution to make to raising standards of achievement of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. There was an urgent need for a clear vision for special educational needs, not least because of the growing number of statemented

pupils. Again, parents must be given the fullest possible information and high levels of support to inform their decision. This decision may involve sending their child to a special school or it may involve sending their child to a mainstream school. The party also noted that the Department of Education had observed that there was considerable support for the view that the word ‘special’ should not be included in the title of a special school. Of crucial importance, was the need to provide the necessary resources and to employ more educational psychologists so that the earliest possible intervention and diagnosis could take place. It was a proven fact that delaying the process of special educational needs statementing could do severe damage to the child’s educational development.

67. The SDLP believed that arrangements for special needs pupils were sufficiently protected by the statementing process and that the current SENDO legislation would continue to protect special needs pupils. The absence of any criteria that might contravene the legislation meant that no special needs pupil could be excluded by the new process.
68. The UUP noted the recommendation from the sub-group on Economic Issues on funding for education and stated that special needs education should be adequately resourced.
69. The sub-group welcomed the proposal on additional funding from the sub-group on Economic Issues and **recommends that some of this funding should be allocated to special needs and that special needs education should be appropriately resourced.**

Other issues

70. The sub-group deliberated on a number of other issues including the question of whether there should be a ‘parental voice forum’; the coherence between the schools admission policy and other key educational policies and the impact of the admission policy on Dickson Schools.
71. In considering the evidence provided to it, the sub-group noted the number of organisations who expressed concern at a lack of coherence between the various educational policies and the proposed admission criteria. It noted the comment by the Department that the Minister would determine the way in which the parental voice would be established.
72. The DUP was supportive of the parental voice proposals and did not feel that the Department had provided clarity on the impact on Dickson schools.
73. Sinn Féin stated that there should be investment in the development of the capacity of parents to articulate their views and to play a full partnership role in the education of their children. There needed to be coherence between schools admission policy and other key education policies including transport provision and collaborative working arrangements between schools. It was not desirable nor in the best educational interests of the child to be travelling long distances to school. The party stated that there was a strong belief among educationalists that delayed entry to formal education at primary level would serve the best interests of the child. The 11+ and current transfer procedure distorted the entire primary school system / curriculum and there needed to be fresh thinking about the appropriate age for children entering formal education.

74. The SDLP believed that the Dickson schools would be helped by the proposed admissions policy. As with sectoral schools, the establishment of catchment areas, as defined by feeder primary schools and a set list of admission criteria, would protect their intake. The SDLP wanted the admission policy to have full coherence with policies such as funding, transport and collaboration. The party believed that to achieve collaboration between schools, sufficient departmental level funding was required. This would entail up-front costs for the government but the long-term gain from such investment would be immeasurable. It was also vital that provision be made in policy formulation for adequate home to school transportation across the board. This promise was crucial for preventing the exclusion of pupils from rural areas.
75. The UUP stated that a parental voice forum should have a statutory role in assisting the review of the workings of the transfer procedures; that communities presently served by the Dickson schools should be given the option of retaining their existing framework and consideration should be given to allowing groups of schools in other areas to opt into a Dickson arrangement. The party further stated that the Department should urgently provide stakeholders and elected representatives with an assessment of the impact of the Independent Strategic Review of Education upon transfer procedures.
76. **The sub-group recommends-**
- **In the new single Education and Skills Authority there should be provision for a representative parental voice forum including capacity building for parents and that the Department should update the sub-group on developments in this area as soon as possible.**
 - **That the Department lays out clearly how the admission criteria and pupil profile will be impacted on by the proposed changes in education policies such as: transport arrangements; collaborative arrangements; the entitlement framework; specialist schools and the Independent Strategic Review of Education and recent legislation, including that arising from the Northern Ireland (St Andrews) Agreement Act 2006.**
 - **The Department should examine what impact the admission criteria and pupil profile will have on Dickson area schools and see what flexibility there would be for this and other local arrangements.**
 - **The term ‘parental choice’ should be changed to ‘parental preference’ to reflect the reality which will pertain after the proposed changes**

Consideration of Issues - The Pupil Profile

77. According to the Department of Education, the new transfer arrangements to post primary schools will be based on parental choice for a particular post primary school or schools. Parents will have access to a range of information to assist them in making this choice including
- Pupils visiting post primary schools in P6 year;
 - Receiving information packs from a range of schools;
 - Parents and children attending open days / evenings; and
 - Informal discussions with post primary schools.
78. Parents will complete a transfer form indicating their choice(s) of post primary school(s). If a school has more applications than places it will apply the admission criteria. The process will allow for appeals.
79. The pupil profile is intended to be a key element of informed parental choice and will replace the annual report to parents by providing information in a standardised format. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) provided the following timetable for the introduction of the pupil profile:

Academic Year	Pupil Profile in for Year Groups
2007/08	Yrs 1 and 5
2008/09	Yrs 2, 6, 8, 9
2009/10	Yrs 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12

80. At its meeting on 12 January 2007, the sub-group considered a number of issues relating to the pupil profile including using it as a means of academic selection; its manageability for schools and teachers; the relevance for parents and pupils; the content of the profile; sharing the profile with schools; the cost and delivery of the ICT solution and the timetable for introduction.

Pupil profile as a means of academic selection

81. The sub-group gave detailed consideration to the use of the pupil profile as a means of academic selection and took note of the evidence provided to it. Some of the evidence was opposed to the pupil profile being used for this purpose and pointed out that it was not designed to be used in this way. Concern was also expressed at the possibility of litigation if the pupil profile was used for selection purposes. Some of the Teachers Unions mentioned that teachers would be very uncomfortable if they were asked to complete pupil profiles that would then be used as a tool for selection. Others who provided evidence to the sub-group did feel that the pupil profile could be used as a tool for academic selection with one group making reference to the use of Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT).

82. The DUP believed that the pupil profile as a means of academic selection should be looked at immediately as an option but recognised that to protect teachers any academic assessment should be externally based. The DUP noted that CAT tests were suggested as an option and may answer many of the objections made against the 11+ in that they would not be high stakes i.e. dependent on performance on only two half days, would not be open to tutoring and would tie in with the normal curriculum.
83. Sinn Féin agreed with the concept of the pupil profile but stated that it must not be used for the purpose of academic selection. The party stated that the aim of the pupil profile was to provide an analysis of the pupil's progress and to inform the parents but that it was not designed to be used as a tool for selection.
84. The SDLP was against the use of the pupil profile as a means of academic selection. The party stated that the current form and logic of the profile made no sense if it was to be used as a selective tool as it was meant to be a tool for giving feedback to the pupil, to the parent and so that the teacher could adjust the learning approach for the pupil.
85. The UUP stated that the pupil profile should be revised in order to record the academic ability of the child on the basis of fair and consistent standards. This record would help inform post primary schools in developing the child's aptitude, talents and abilities and could be used by post primary schools in the event of over-subscription.
86. The sub-group, after consideration, did not reach consensus on the following proposal-
- That the pupil profile should be revised in order to record the academic ability of the child on the basis of fair and consistent standards.

Manageability for schools and teachers

87. The main issues considered by the sub-group included the manageability of the pupil profile, as it currently stands for schools and teachers and the question of whether the pupil profile could be delivered without additional resources or time allowance for schools and teachers.
88. The Department noted that manageability for schools was a key priority. Other evidence indicated that there was some apprehension among stakeholders on the time taken to complete the profile, the timing of the tests and on the availability of the ICT resources required to complete them. The Irish medium sector had some concerns about the ability of the pupil profile to assess proficiency in Irish language literacy. The sub-group also considered information provided by the CCEA on some of the outputs from the pilot undertaken by BDO Stoy Hayward which indicated that 84% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the pupil profile report provided them with a clear description of their child's progress throughout the school year; that an additional pupil profile report at a mid point in school would be beneficial to allow for remedial action to be taken; that parents were confused about the purpose of the profile as they were unsure whether it replaced the current 11+ or was to be used to support an application to a post primary school and that there also needed to be a greater level of communication with parents about the pupil profile.
89. The DUP stated that the evidence from the Teachers Unions was that the pupil profile was not manageable for schools and teachers and that it took an inordinate amount of time to

complete. There were concerns that teachers were not capable of dealing with the IT component even if they had the hardware, which many did not. The party believed that the manageability for schools and teachers was questionable and that additional resources would be required for teacher training as well as extra time allowance to complete the pupil profile.

90. Sinn Féin noted that teachers had expressed concerns because the profiles were not yet fit for purpose, there were problems with presentation and that teachers' concerns about the concept of awarding 'scores' and about the length of time which it took to complete the profile needed to be factored in.

91. The SDLP stated that, as it stood, the pupil profile was not a manageable tool for either schools or individual teachers and that the responses from the Teachers Unions reflected that, at present, teachers were increasingly dissatisfied with the level of resources available to them in formulating the pupil profile. The party noted that the profile needed considerable honing to be manageable, that the hardware required to complete the profile was not available to all schools and that teacher training would be required.

92. The UUP noted that the information on the trials of the pupil profile did not show any proven or conclusive results; the profile had evolved during the trials and there was uncertainty about which of the pupil profiles the pilot results related to; there was no information about whether other types of pupil profiles had been considered; there was limited information about the responses from teachers; the technology would be unfamiliar to them and they would therefore require advanced training. In addition, the sub-group had not had an opportunity to hear from those directly involved in the pilots ie the teachers and pupils. The party stated that resources, training and a realistic timetable to facilitate the introduction of the pupil profile must be provided and that the full results of the pilots must be made available as soon as possible.

93. **The sub-group recommends that-**

- **The Committee on the Programme for Government agrees that, if time allows, the sub-group should visit a small number of schools involved in the pilot to ascertain the views of teachers and pupils.**
- **The final report from BDO Stoy Hayward on the independent evaluation of the pupil profile is made available to MLAs and interested groups without delay.**
- **Adequate resources are made available for schools and for the professional development of teachers to enable them to carry out the completion of the pupil profile.**

Relevance for parents and pupils

94. A number of issues were considered by the sub-group including:

- The extent to which the pupil profile provided the information parents needed to enable them to make decisions on post primary schools for their children
- The provision of the information in a format/ language that parents could understand
- The extent to which a child had input into the pupil profile.

95. The evidence provided to the sub-group on the trial by CCEA indicated that there was a high degree of parental acceptance of the pupil profile although parents were still confused about its purpose. Other evidence broadly welcomed the pupil profile while expressing a worry about undue parental influence on teachers completing it.
96. The DUP stated that, as it currently stood, the pupil profile would be totally subjective documents with little consistency possible between teachers, let alone schools, and that they would therefore be of little use to parents. The DUP further stated that some of the headings in the profile would not be understood by parents. It noted that the CCEA had admitted that it would have to train parents in how to use these and the party had serious concerns about the usefulness of these reports and their accessibility to parents who themselves had educational difficulties. Even though the CCEA indicated that there would be levels of progression to guide teachers in relation to their comments, these would only be set for 3 out of the 17 categories on the report and even then the levels of progression would be open to interpretation.
97. Sinn Féin stated that the purpose of the pupil profile was to serve as an aid to parents and children in the process of choosing the most appropriate pathway; it should be used as an analysis of pupil progress and not as a precursor to academic selection and pupils and parents needed to be centrally involved in the whole process. The party made reference to the Report Card Template used in the Republic of Ireland, which recorded the child's social and personal learning, provided guidance on next steps and referred to the child as a learner and thus made that format more relevant for the parent and the child.
98. The SDLP stated that the current model for the pupil profile was equally inadequate for parents and pupils in terms of providing them with the information sufficient to make decisions about their child's future. The summative pupil profile provided information on the pupil's development between years 4 and 7 in terms of reading and mathematics. While the charts were visually helpful, it would be beneficial to include a brief explanation of the overall findings. This would help make the charts more comprehensible to parents. The provision of comment banks would be a helpful addition so long as they did not in practice act as hindrance to the process. These would help to make the pupil profiles more comparable across the board and would assist teachers and primary schools involved in compiling the profiles. Furthermore, the provision of understandable and detailed comments would guarantee that the pupil profile would act as a useful tool for parents and pupils.
99. The UUP stated in that order to adequately determine the relevance of the pupil profile for parents, the results of the pilots must be made available to stakeholders and representatives. The party was concerned that the first set of pupils to go through the pupil profile process would, in effect, be 'guinea pigs' and that some allowances must therefore be made for them.
100. **The sub-group recommends that-**
- **The public is kept informed about the progress of the pupil profile through a wide range of media.**
 - **Consideration needs to be given as to how the pupil profile will be made accessible and easily understood by all parents.**

The Content

101. The discussion about the content ranged across a number of issues including the degree to which it was fit for purpose and its usefulness as a guide if there were variations in the meaning of its content within, and across, schools in Northern Ireland. The usefulness of CATs as a component of the pupil profile was also considered.
102. The sub-group, in its consideration of the evidence, noted that some concern had been expressed about the inclusion of class or Northern Ireland averages in the profile. The sub-group also noted the evidence given to it by the Association for Quality Education which advocated the use of CATs and that the literacy and numeracy tests proposed by the CCEA in the pupil profile, were based on computer based diagnostic assessment.
103. The DUP stated that it was concerned that the usefulness of the pupil profile as a guide to parents would be undermined by the variation in interpretation of meaning between schools. The party had particular concerns about variation in the level of progressions in the literacy and numeracy sections of the profile. It recognised that there was insufficient information and research available to the sub-group on CATs but felt that they should be given consideration as a possible means of addressing ‘high stakes’ academic testing.
104. Sinn Féin stated that the success of the Report Card Template, which was structured into three components and which was used in the rest of Ireland, should be looked at. This provided information on- the child as a learner with reference to curriculum subjects and/or areas; the child’s social and personal development; the next steps in learning and/or advice for parents on supporting learning. In relation to Irish medium education, Sinn Féin stated that the pupil profile needed to reflect the characteristics of immersion education. It also needed to take into account that assessment of literacy and numeracy in Irish medium education was problematic.
105. The SDLP stated that it would welcome the opportunity for pupils to include their own comments on their profiles. These could come in the form of sections where a pupil might list their extra-curricular activities or personal interests, their own assessments of their strengths and weaknesses, their future learning intentions as well their aims for post primary education. The party noted that CATs could be a useful tool to track the development of knowledge but that they should only be used as a formative tool and it was not aware of CATs being used in other countries for high stakes type selection. If CATs were used as a tool for selection, it would be possible for parents to buy the software, coaching would still be possible and this would lead to disadvantage for some children.
106. The UUP stated that the professional judgement and experience of teachers were an important part of the pupil profile and that this should be supported by a record of the academic ability of the child on the basis of fair and consistent standards. The party noted the inclusion in the pupil profile of computer based diagnostic testing. It had concerns about the development and application of CATs . It felt that the sub-group was being asked to put its faith in a system which was unproven and it needed more information on which to base such an assessment particularly from those most affected – the teachers and pupils.

107. The sub-group agreed that it was not happy with the content of the pupil profile **and recommends that-**
- **Further work needs to be done on its usefulness as a guide given the potential for variation and interpretation in the meanings of the headings particularly on the levels of progression in literacy and numeracy; its manageability for teachers; and the opportunity for a child to comment on his/her own progression, achievements and aims for post primary education.**
108. The sub-group, after consideration, did not reach consensus on the following proposal:
- That development of the pupil profile needs to reflect the characteristics of immersion education, including taking into account problems in assessing literacy and numeracy in Irish medium education.

Sharing the pupil profile with schools

109. The sub-group deliberated on this issue and looked at whether post primary schools should automatically get a copy of the pupil profile. It considered evidence that largely fell into two categories; the first, which did not feel the pupil profile should be shared with post primary schools whilst the second group considered that it should be. However, this group was divided on whether it should be shared for use as a tool for selection.
110. The DUP stated that sharing the pupil profile with schools was essential but the profile needed to be more robust and objective than at present otherwise it would be of limited value to both the receiving school and the parents.
111. Sinn Féin stated that there should be a free and open approach with respect to sharing the pupil profile with receiving schools where this was used to inform individual education plans for the child but that the pupil profile must not be used for the purpose of selection.
112. The SDLP stated that parents should not be prevented from voluntarily providing prospective schools with their child's pupil profile. The profile was intended as a tool to allow parents to make an informed decision about their child's educational future. It was therefore the parents' prerogative to use the profile in any way which assisted their decision making process. The SDLP emphasised that prospective schools should not automatically receive a copy of the pupil profile as this could result in the profile being used by post primary schools as a tool for selection. The party was opposed to the pupil profile going to a school before the transfer of the pupil to that school had been agreed.
113. The UUP stated that a post primary school should automatically receive a copy of the pupil profile of a child seeking to transfer to that school. The party also considered that in the event of over-subscription, schools should also have the option of using the pupil profile (revised to include a record of academic ability) in order to enable the child to be placed in the post primary school best suited to her/his aptitudes, talents and abilities.
114. **The sub-group recommends that-**
- **The receiving post primary school should automatically get a copy of the pupil profile to inform individual education plans for the child.**

Cost and delivery of the ICT solution

115. The sub-group discussion centred on the degree to which the ICT solution would increase the manageability for schools and teachers and the question of whether the ICT solution could be delivered in time.
116. When looking at the evidence, the sub-group noted the comments from the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) that there was a presentational problem with the boxes and graphs and insufficient hardware to carry out the computer based diagnostic tests. The sub-group also noted the INTO comment that CCEA was proposing that a bus, loaded with computers, would be driven around schools to allow pupils to do the computer based tests.
117. The DUP stated that the CCEA could not guarantee delivery and that it was particularly worrying that it was contemplating carting busloads of computers around schools with no indication as to the programme for teachers training.
118. Sinn Féin stated that it would need further information from the Department of Education and CCEA on the cost and delivery of the ICT solution.
119. The SDLP stated that it had concerns about the ICT solution and would need further detail on the practicalities, costs and timescale for the delivery of the ICT solution.
120. The UUP stated that schools were being asked to take on new technology, that time would be required to put this technology into place and train teachers in its use. It questioned whether the computer hardware and software had been proven and noted that the sub-group had not been given any information about the technology or other technical options.
121. **The sub-group recommends -**
- **That the Department of Education should make available information about the cost and delivery of the ICT solution proposed for the pupil profile.**

Timetable for introduction

122. The sub-group considered the timetable as laid down for the introduction of the pupil profile (see paragraph 79) and noted that some of the evidence received by the sub-group indicated that stakeholders did not feel that the pupil profile would be ready on time. However, some of the Teacher Unions indicated that if it were not all finalised, they would still be able to work with what was available.
123. The DUP believed that the timetable for the profile, which was meant to start in September 2007, was totally unrealistic.
124. Sinn Féin stated that it was not content that the timescale as indicated by CCEA was achievable.
125. The SDLP indicated that the party was not confident that the pupil profile would be delivered for the new academic year of 2007/2008.
126. The UUP had concerns that the information from the pilots was not available and that there was therefore no indication of what adjustments were required to make the pupil profile fit

for purpose and whether those adjustments could be made in time for the planned introduction to schools. The party also wanted to see a report on the overall performance of the pupil profile and noted that in the absence of such a report no judgement could be made on whether the system would live up to expectation.

127. The sub-group agreed that it was not content with the proposed timetable for the introduction of the pupil profile and **recommends that the Department and CCEA should consider, as a matter of urgency, whether it is achievable.**

Appendix 1

Minutes of Proceedings

Friday, 8 December 2006 in Room 135, Parliament Buildings.

In the Chair: Jim Wells

Present: Dominic Bradley
Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Barry McElduff
David McNarry
Caitríona Ruane

In attendance: Debbie Pritchard (Principal Clerk)
Stella McArdle (Clerk)
Valerie Artt (Assistant Clerk)
Jim Nulty (Clerical Officer)
Tony Marken (Research and Library Services)
Eleanor Murphy (Research and Library Services)

Observing: Brian Crowe (UUP Researcher)
Eilis Haughey (SDLP Researcher)
Grainne McEvoy (SDLP Researcher)
Philip Weir (DUP Researcher)
Richard Bullick (DUP Researcher)

Apologies: Sammy Wilson MP

The meeting commenced at 9.41 a.m. in closed session.

1. The Chairperson informed the members that the BBC had asked to be allowed to film the beginning of the meeting. The DUP, SDLP and Sinn Féin were content but the UUP was not and as there was not consensus the request was refused.

2. **Apologies**

An apology was received from Sammy Wilson, MP. Members noted that deputies could attend sub-group meetings if members were unable to do so.

3. **Sub-group Procedures and Terms of Reference**

Members noted the procedures for the sub-group as determined by the Programme for Government Committee.

Following discussion the sub-group agreed by consensus that all evidence sessions would be public and recorded by Hansard and that all other meetings and parts of meetings would be closed.

Members agreed to accept the terms of reference for the sub-group, as determined by the Programme for Government Committee.

4. Declaration of Interests, Transitional Assembly Privilege and Sub Judice

Members noted that the Transitional Assembly's Standing Order 29(f) states that before taking part in any debate or proceeding of the Assembly, a Member shall declare any interest, financial or otherwise, which is relevant to that debate or proceeding, where such interest is held by the member or an immediate relative.

The following interests were declared by members:

Mr Bradley advised that he is on the staff of St Paul's High School, Bessbrook, a member of the Board of Governors of Bunscoil an Iúir, Newry, a member of NASUWT and receives payment as the editor of the education pages of the Irish language newspaper Lá.

Mr Donalson advised that he is a member of the Board of Governors of Parkview Special School.

Mr McElduff advised that he is a member of the Western Education and Library Board and of the Boards of Governors of St Patrick's Primary School, Garvallah, St Patrick's Primary School, Eskra and St Lawrence's Primary School, Fintona.

Members noted the information in relation to privilege as set out in paragraph 8 of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006.

Members noted the information provided with regard to sub-judice.

The meeting was suspended at 10.08 a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 10.20 a.m. in public session

5. Presentation by officials from the Department of Education

The sub-group took evidence from Dr Robson Davison, David Woods, Leslie Ashe and John Leonard representing the Department of Education.

The meeting was suspended at 11.40 a.m.

The meeting reconvened in closed session at 11.50 a.m.

6. Work Programme

Members discussed the draft work programme and agreed by consensus to invite a number of organisations to give oral evidence to the sub-group at the next meeting. A number of other groups should be asked to provide written submissions for members' consideration.

It was agreed that the Assembly's Research and Library staff would prepare a paper on the post-primary education system in the Republic of Ireland

7. Any Other Business

Members agreed that a press release should be issued following the meeting. The wording of the press release was agreed.

8. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

Subject to a decision by the Programme for Government Committee on future chairing arrangements, members agreed that the next meeting will be held at 9.30 a.m. on Friday 15 December 2006 in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings. A further meeting will be held at 9.30 a.m. on Friday 22 December 2006 in Room 144 Parliament Buildings.

The meeting ended at 12.16 p.m.

Friday, 15 December 2006 in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

In the Chair: Sue Ramsey

Willie Clarke took the Chair at 1.35 p.m.

Present: Dominic Bradley
Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Barry McElduff
David McNarry
Caitriona Ruane
Sammy Wilson MP

In attendance: Debbie Pritchard (Principal Clerk)
Stella McArdle (Clerk)
Valerie Artt (Assistant Clerk)
Jim Nulty (Clerical Officer)
Tony Marken (Research and Library Services)
Eleanor Murphy (Research and Library Services)

Observing Jim Falconer (SF Researcher)
Eilis Haughey (SDLP Researcher)
Grainne McEvoy (SDLP Researcher)
Philip Weir (DUP Researcher)

The meeting commenced at 9.43 a.m. in closed session.

1. **Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 December 2006**

The minutes of the meeting on 8 December 2006 were agreed subject to the following amendments:

At Item 4 - Mr Dominic Bradley's interests should read:

Mr Bradley advised that he is on the staff of St Paul's High School, Bessbrook, a member of the Board of Governors of Bunscoil an Iúir, Newry, a member of NASUWT and receives payment as the editor of the education pages of the Irish language newspaper Lá.

2. **Declaration of Interests**

The following interest was declared:

Mr Sammy Wilson advised that he is employed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

3. **Sub-Group Procedures**

The paper on revised sub-group procedures provided by the Committee for the Programme for Government was noted.

4. **Letter from the Secretary of State about the provision of information by officials**

Members expressed concern at the information supplied in paragraph four of the correspondence from the Secretary of State. Following a short discussion, Mr McNarry proposed that the sub-group should write to the Committee on the Programme for Government to draw attention to these concerns and ask that the Committee should relay these to the Secretary of State. The proposal was agreed by consensus.

Mr Jeffrey Donaldson joined the meeting at 9.50 a.m.

5. **Briefing Papers**

The paper on the post-primary education system in the Republic of Ireland was noted and it was agreed that additional information on the report card template and transitional year would be sought.

The issues paper was tabled and members were advised by the Chairperson that any additional issues for discussion, which members wished to add, should be forwarded to the Clerk by noon on Tuesday 19 December 2006.

The meeting moved to public session

6. **Evidence Sessions**

The sub-group took evidence from the following witnesses:

Session One

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers represented by Mr Mark Langhammer

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation represented by Mr Brendon Harron

The National Association of Schoolmasters and Women Teachers represented by Mr Seamus Searson

The Ulster Teachers' Union represented by Ms Avril Hall-Callaghan

Session Two

The Association for Quality Education, which comprises the Grammar Principals' Association, the Concerned Parents for Education and the Confederation of Grammar Schools' Former Pupils' Associations represented by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Mr Billy Young and Mr Marcas Patterson

The Governing Bodies Association represented by Mr Finbarr McCallion

The meeting was suspended at 11.45 a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 11.55 a.m.

Ms Caitriona Ruane joined the meeting at 11.55 a.m.

Session Three

The Association of Head Teachers in Secondary Schools represented by Mr Uel McCrea

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools represented by Mr Jim Clarke

A parental representative, Mr George Buckley

The meeting was suspended at 12.55 p.m.

Ms Caitriona Ruane left the meeting at 12.55 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 1.32 p.m. with Mr Willie Clarke in the Chair

Session Four

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment represented by Mr Gavin Boyd, Mr Robert Shilliday, Dr Charlie Sproule and Mr Richard Hanna

The meeting was suspended at 2.26p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 2.34 p.m.

Ms Caitriona Ruane rejoined the meeting at 2.34 p.m.

Session Five

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education represented by Mr Michael Wardlow

Session Six

The Department of Education represented by Mrs Dorothy Angus, Ms Irene Murphy and Mr John Leonard

The meeting was suspended at 3.14 p.m.

The meeting resumed at 3.30 p.m.

Session Seven

The Transferors' Representative Council represented by Reverend Dr Lee Glenny, Reverend Robert Herron and Reverend Ian Ellis

7. Any Other Business

Members agreed a press release to be issued following the meeting.

8. **Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held at 9.30 a.m. on Friday 22 December 2006 in Room 144 Parliament Buildings. A further meeting to discuss the sub-group's report to the Committee on the Programme for Government will be held at 9.30 a.m. on Friday 5 January 2007 in Room 144, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting ended at 3.59 p.m.

Friday, 22 December 2006 in Room 144, Parliament Buildings.

In the Chair: Willie Clarke

Present: Dominic Bradley
Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Barry McElduff
David McNarry
Caitríona Ruane
Sammy Wilson MP

In attendance: Debbie Pritchard (Principal Clerk)
Stella McArdle (Clerk)
Valerie Artt (Assistant Clerk)
Jim Nulty (Clerical Officer)
Eleanor Murphy (Research and Library Services)

Observing: Brian Crowe (UUP Researcher)
Grainne McEvoy (SDLP Researcher)
Jackie McMullan (SF Researcher)
Philip Weir (DUP Researcher)

The meeting commenced at 10.14 a.m. in closed session.

1. **Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 December 2006**

The minutes of the meeting on 15 December 2006 were agreed.

2. **Matters Arising**

The Clerk's letter to the Committee on the Programme for Government raising concerns about the information contained in the letter from the Secretary of State about the provision of information by officials was noted. Members also noted that the Committee on the Programme for Government had written to the Secretary of State to pass on these concerns and had asked for a reply by 3 January 2007.

Members noted the additional briefing paper supplied by the Assembly Research and Library Services on the post-primary education system in the Republic of Ireland.

3. **Written Submissions**

Written submissions provided by a number of organisations were noted.

4. Consideration of Issues

Principles of Schools Admission Arrangements

There was detailed discussion on the principles of schools admission arrangements as proposed by the Department of Education and the following proposals were made:

It was proposed by Mr Bradley that an additional principle *'there is a need to ensure equality of opportunity for every child and in particular the need to take account of difficulties faced by newly arrived families and ethnic minorities'* should be added.

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

It was proposed by Mr Donaldson that the words *'and additionally'* should be removed from the principles.

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

The meeting was suspended at 10.58 a.m.

Mr Donaldson left the meeting at 10.58 a.m.

The meeting reconvened at 11.21 a.m.

It was proposed by Mr Wilson that the principle *'acknowledge that schools normally serve local communities'* should be removed.

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. DUP and UUP supported the proposal and SDLP and SF objected.

It was proposed by Mr Wilson that an additional principle *'pupils should attend the most appropriate school for their needs in order to maximise their development'* should be added.

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. DUP and UUP supported the proposal, the SDLP considered that this was already covered in the principles and SF objected.

It was proposed by the Chairperson that all the principles, as amended, should be accepted.

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. SDLP and SF supported the proposal, the DUP considered that the principles were contradictory and not explicit and UUP objected.

Members then discussed the following key issues stating their party positions:

Admission Criteria as proposed by the Department of Education

The DUP was of the view that the criteria were too heavily based on geographical location and that where a school chooses to have academic selection as one of its criteria it should be allowed to do so. They were content with sibling and eldest child as criteria.

The SDLP indicated that it was content with sibling and eldest child as criteria, that feeder primary school, catchment area and parish should all be gathered together into one criterion and that random selection should be the tie-breaker rather than proximity to the school.

SDLP noted that nearest suitable school would be a particularly useful criteria for Irish medium and integrated schools.

Sinn Féin was of the view that catchment area and named feeder schools should be applied as the main criteria; then sibling and that parent/guardian working at the school should also be included; that random selection should be the tie-breaker rather than proximity to the school; that flexible arrangements should be built in to provide for Irish medium and integrated schools and for travellers and ethnic minorities; that catchment areas for border areas to allow children to go to the nearest schools should also be included and that criteria should be applied consistently across Northern Ireland.

The UUP indicated that it was in favour of feeder primary schools and noted that historically some feeder primary schools are not in a school's catchment area, that this may present some difficulties and post-primary schools should be given flexibility. The party was also of the view that siblings and eldest child should also be included and that to include other criteria would be difficult to manage. The UUP was supportive of the use of academic selection as an admission criterion with schools being given the opportunity whether to use it or not.

Academic Selection as an Admission criteria

It was proposed by Mr Bradley that academic selection should be discussed again at the next meeting. The proposal was agreed by consensus.

The Open Menu Approach

The DUP was of the view that there should be flexibility with decisions on admission criteria left to individual schools. The SDLP believed that there should be a set menu which should be applied consistently across schools. Sinn Féin agreed that the admission criteria should be set centrally and applied consistently by all schools. The UUP believed that there should be an element of autonomy for schools in applying the admission criteria.

The meeting was suspended at 12 noon

The meeting reconvened at 12.08 p.m.

Following a general discussion on the way forward members agreed that the Clerk would provide a summary of the written and oral evidence and that the Assembly Research and Library Services should be asked to provide a briefing paper setting out the models of academic selection currently in use elsewhere.

It was also agreed that each party represented on the sub-group should provide, by Friday 5 January 2007, a briefing paper setting out its views on the key issues, for consideration at the next meeting.

The sub-group agreed that the Clerk should request an extension to the reporting date from 10 to 17 January 2007 from the Committee on the Programme for Government.

5. **Any Other Business**

Members noted an invitation to a seminar on 12 January 2007 received from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and agreed that staff of the sub-group could attend.

6. **Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held at 9.30 a.m. on Monday 8 January 2007 in Room 135 Parliament Buildings, Stormont. The date of a further meeting to discuss the sub-group's report to the Committee on the Programme for Government will be decided at this meeting.

The meeting ended at 12.25 p.m.

Monday 8 January 2007 and Friday 12 January 2007 in Room 135, Parliament Buildings.

In the Chair: Willie Clarke

Present: Dominic Bradley
Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Barry McElduff
David McNarry
Caitríona Ruane
Sammy Wilson MP

In attendance: Debbie Pritchard (Principal Clerk)
Stella McArdle (Clerk)
Valerie Artt (Assistant Clerk)
Jim Nulty (Clerical Officer)
Eleanor Murphy (Research and Library Services)

Observing Brian Crowe (UUP Researcher)
Richard Bullick (DUP Researcher)
Grainne McEvoy (SDLP Researcher)
Jackie McMullan (SF Researcher)
Philip Weir (DUP Researcher)

The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. on Monday 8 January 2007 in closed session.

1. **Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 December 2006**

The minutes of the meeting on 22 December 2006 were agreed subject to the word ‘differences’ in the proposal by Mr Bradley in section four being amended to ‘difficulties’.

2. **Matters Arising**

Members noted that the Committee on the Programme for Government had agreed to the request by the sub-group to extend the reporting date to 17 January 2007.

The summary of written and oral evidence submitted to the sub-group on key issues was noted.

3. **Party Position Papers**

Party position papers on schools admission policy provided by the four parties of the sub-group were noted.

4. **Consideration of Academic Selection**

Members noted the following papers

- Advice on academic selection and the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006;
- Academic Selection - possible options and
- An over-view of post-primary transfer arrangements in other countries.

There was a detailed discussion on academic selection and members set out their party positions.

The DUP referred to the legal position and highlighted the problems that would arise if there was no agreement on academic selection as schools would be left to set their own selection criteria. The DUP also referred to the response to the household survey when the majority of those who responded was in favour of retaining academic selection. Parents could opt out of academic selection if they did not want their children to sit the tests and therefore there was parental choice in the present system. To make the system more voluntarily, schools could be allowed to set their own tests. This would allow for increased parental choice. If there was a suitable replacement, the DUP would agree to the end of the 11+.

Sinn Fein pointed out that many of the groups who responded to the sub-group's request for submissions, were opposed to academic selection. The party was opposed to academic selection because it was socially divisive, not in the best interests of the child, contributed to the long tail of underachievement, distorted the primary school curriculum and lead to low self esteem in a number of children. Sinn Fein's position was that the education system should be child centred and the child's best interests should be at the centre of this. The party also noted that in many socially deprived areas only a small number of children passed the 11+.

The SDLP noted that while the majority of respondents to the household survey were in favour of academic selection, while wanting an end to the 11+, the results had been distorted by a huge amount of lobbying. The party wished to see parental choice informed by an improved pupil profile and urged CCEA to make the necessary changes to make the pupil profile more relevant. The party would also wish to see an end to the 11+, and all forms of academic selection, which have had a detrimental effect on the primary school curriculum over the years.

The UUP was of the view that, without academic selection, many secondary schools would struggle with falling numbers as parents tried to access a grammar school education for their child. The party indicated that it was in favour of schools having the option of academic selection in the event of over-subscription and noted that some secondary schools already stream children. The UUP would accept the removal of the 11+ if there were a suitable, realistic, workable alternative. The consequences of the changes as a result of the St Andrews

Agreement Act 2006 made it vital that the Transitional Assembly considered the implications for post-primary schools admission.

Mr Donaldson left the meeting at 10.25 a.m.

Ms Ruane joined the meeting at 10.47 a.m.

The following proposals were made:

Mr McNarry proposed that *'there should be a debate in the Assembly on post-primary transfer arrangements as a result of section 21 of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006.'*

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. DUP and UUP supported the proposal and Sinn Fein and SDLP objected.

Ms Ruane proposed that *'there should be a debate on post-primary transfer arrangements.'*

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. Sinn Fein and SDLP supported the proposal and DUP and UUP objected.

Mr McElduff proposed that *'the sub-group is opposed to the 11+.'*

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. Sinn Fein and SDLP supported the proposal and DUP and UUP objected.

Mr Wilson proposed that *'the sub-group is opposed to the 11+ but wants to see a workable realistic replacement for it.'*

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed. Sinn Fein and SDLP stated that they agreed to the proposal on the basis that it allowed for an open-ended debate on post-primary transfer arrangements and did not imply acceptance of academic selection.

The Chairperson proposed that *'as an immediate priority an incoming Executive should reach a decision on schools admission policy.'*

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

Mr Wilson proposed that *'in the light of academic selection continuing to be part of the admissions policy, detailed consideration should be given to the safeguards which need to be put in place to ensure that the interests of the child are at the centre of the decision-making process.'*

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. DUP and UUP supported the proposal and Sinn Fein and SDLP objected.

The meeting was suspended at 11.30 a.m.

The meeting recommenced at 11.48 a.m.

Mr Donaldson rejoined the meeting at 11.48 a.m.

5. **Consideration of Issues**

Members discussed the following key issues stating their party positions:

Definition of Proposed Criteria

The DUP stated that the definition of the criteria was not clear and that the criteria were too geographically based. The party was particularly unhappy with the statement that ‘schools serve local communities’ and also recognised that all parties were concerned about the distance criterion in respect of rural schools. DUP was also of a view that the definitions need to be clarified as they meant different things in different contexts and did not back up the aim of putting the interests of the child at the centre of the decision making process.

Sinn Fein stated that advice from primary school teachers should be non-directional and that random selection, not proximity, should be the tiebreaker. The party agreed that the geographical criteria should be clearly defined and that there should be special provision for Irish medium and integrated schools and for Irish travellers and children from ethnic minorities.

The SDLP was concerned that family focused criteria should make provision for single sex schools to prevent the exclusion of a son or daughter who is not the eldest member of their immediate family. Foster children and half –brothers and sisters should be included in this criterion and children in care required special consideration. Feeder primary schools were important in relation to defining the catchment area, avoiding a post-code lottery and assisting grammar schools to maintain their current catchment area. The party favoured random selection as a tie-breaker.

The UUP stated that a statement of advice from the post-primary school would assist informed choice by parents. The party would favour an open menu approach which would allow schools to respond to the needs of the local community and protect their ethos. The controlling principle should be that the child is matched with the school that best suits its needs.

Ms Ruane left the meeting at 11.55 a.m.

Mr Donaldson left the meeting at 12.05 p.m.

Mr Wilson proposed that *‘the admissions policy as outlined will not lead to a situation where the interests of the child are paramount and the criteria will only result in children being channelled to a local school regardless of whether it is best suited to their needs.’*

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. DUP and UUP supported the proposal and Sinn Fein and SDLP objected.

Mr Donaldson rejoined the meeting at 12.08pm

The Chairperson proposed that *‘the Department, as a matter of urgency, should conduct independent research and carry out exploratory modelling on the interaction between the proposed criteria. It should then consult widely on the criteria as soon as possible.’*

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

Intervention powers to prevent the misuse of admission criteria

The DUP was content that the current arrangements for appeals should be transferred from the Education and Library Boards to the new Education and Skills Authority. .

Sinn Fein was content with the current arrangements subject to greater involvement of skilled professionals when appropriate.

The SDLP was of the view that the selection of feeder primary schools by post-primary schools should be open to scrutiny.

The UUP requested that the Department should be asked to give further information on how feeder primary schools would be designated and how lists created by post primary schools would be approved. The sub-group agreed that the Clerk should write to the Department asking for an urgent response regarding the role of the Department in relation to the selection of feeder primary schools under the proposed arrangements.

Mr Donaldson left the meeting at 12.17 p.m.

Mr McElduff proposed that *'the current independent appeal system operates well and that following the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, and the disbandment of the Education and Library Boards, this system should continue and involve, where appropriate, skilled professionals.'*

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

The provision for sectoral schools

The DUP was of the view that any provision for Irish medium and integrated schools should also apply to grammar schools serving rural areas.

Sinn Fein noted the need for flexibility for the Irish medium and integrated schools and believed that the community based criteria would meet this need.

The SDLP favoured flexible arrangements for Irish medium and integrated schools as provision for transfer from a primary school to a post primary school is limited in these sectors. The party considered that 'nearest suitable school' as a criterion would provide this flexibility.

The UUP noted that in some areas, the introduction of new Irish medium and integrated schools plus falling roll numbers created difficulties for traditional schools.

Mr Donaldson rejoined the meeting at 12.30 p.m.

Mr Wilson proposed that *'the provision for sectoral schools such as Irish medium and integrated schools should also apply to grammar schools serving rural areas.'*

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. DUP, SDLP and UUP supported the proposal and Sinn Fein objected.

Mr Wilson left the meeting at 12.35 p.m.

Admission arrangements for special needs

The Department's review of special needs provision was noted.

Mr McNarry proposed that *'the sub-group welcomes the proposal on additional funding from the sub-group on Economic Issues and recommends that some of this funding should be allocated to special needs and that special needs education should be appropriately resourced.'*

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

Miscellaneous

There was a general discussion on the various miscellaneous issues and a number of proposals were made.

Mr McNarry proposed that *'in the new single Education and Skills Authority there should be provision for a representative parental voice forum including capacity building for parents and that the Department should update the sub-group on developments in this area as soon as possible.'*

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

Mr Donaldson proposed that *'the Department should examine what impact the admission criteria and pupil profile will have on Dickson area schools and to see what flexibility there would be for this and other local arrangements.'*

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

Mr McNarry proposed that *'the term 'parental choice' should be changed to 'parental preference' to reflect the reality which will pertain after the proposed changes'*.

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

6. Any Other Business

Paper from Sub-group on Economic Issues

The paper from the sub-group on Economic Issues regarding a recommendation on additional funding for education was noted. Members agreed that the Clerk should inform the sub-group that a recommendation that some of this funding should be allocated to special needs would be included in their report.

Issues around Feeder Primary Schools

It was agreed that the Clerk would request further information from the Department of Education on issues around feeder primary schools.

Legal Advice on Academic Selection and the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006

It was agreed that further details of the legal position in relation to the implications of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 would be provided for the next meeting.

Press Release

Members agreed a press release to be issued following the meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 12.58 p.m.

The meeting was reconvened in closed session at 2.33 p.m. on Friday 12 January 2007

In the Chair: Willie Clarke

Present: Dominic Bradley
Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Barry McElduff
David McNarry

In attendance: Debbie Pritchard (Principal Clerk)
Stella McArdle (Clerk)
Valerie Artt (Assistant Clerk)
Jim Nulty (Clerical Officer)
Eleanor Murphy (Research and Library Services)

Observing Brian Crowe (UUP Researcher)
Jackie McMullan (SF Researcher)
Philip Weir (DUP Researcher)

7. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Catriona Ruane and Sammy Wilson MP.

8. **Matters Arising**

Paper from Sub-group on Economic Issues

Members noted the response from the Clerk to the sub-group on Economic issues.

Issues Around Feeder Primary Schools

The paper provided by the Department of Education on issues around feeder primary schools was noted. Members agreed that the Clerk should request further clarification from the Department on the proposed timetable on the provision of guidance to schools.

Response from CCEA regarding Legal Challenges to the Pupil Profile

It was agreed that the Clerk should request a response from CCEA regarding the possibility of a legal challenge to the proposed pupil profile as promised during the evidence session on 15 December 2006.

Legal Advice

Members noted legal advice on the implications of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006.

Consideration of Schools Admission Policy

Mr Donaldson proposed that *'the Department lays out clearly how the admissions criteria and pupil profile will be impacted on by the proposed changes in education policies such as: transport arrangements; collaborative arrangements; the entitlement framework; specialist schools and the Independent Strategic Review of Education and recent legislation, including that arising from the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006.'*

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

Schools Admission Criteria

There was a short discussion on a shift in focus from transfer at age 11 to age 14 and the references which had been made to this by a number of groups which gave evidence to the subgroup.

Mr Donaldson proposed that *'there has been substantial interest in the idea of transfer at age 14 and further research should be commissioned urgently on the experience of this system, including the Dickson Plan in Craigavon, and elsewhere in Europe. This should include an assessment of the resource implications of restructuring schools to accommodate such a system, including as an area based solution.'*

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

9. Consideration of the Pupil Profile

Members discussed the following key issues and set out their party positions.

Pupil profile as a means of academic selection

The DUP stated that this option should be looked at immediately and that the academic selection element should be externally based to protect teachers. CATs would be one option as they would seem to answer objections to the 11+ in that they would not be high stakes nor open to tutoring and would tie in with the normal curriculum. The party supported academic selection but would wish to see research undertaken into a good alternative to the 11+.

Sinn Fein agreed with the concept of the pupil profile but stated that it must not be used for the purpose of academic selection but should be used as an aid to parents in deciding a pathway for their child.

The SDLP stated that the party was against the use of the pupil profile as a means of academic selection as it had been designed to be used to inform the parent and teacher about a child's progress.

The UUP stated that there was insufficient information available in relation to its development, the feedback from teachers to the pilot schemes run by CCEA and the fall back position for children in the first years of its use if it did not live up to expectations. The pupil profile should be revised to record the academic ability of the child but further information was required on the options available to assess this.

Manageability for schools and teachers

The DUP stated that the evidence from teachers was that the pupil profile was not manageable for schools and teachers and that it took a considerable amount of time to complete. The party was concerned that some teachers were not capable of dealing with the IT component even if the computer hardware was available and that additional resources would be required for training and to allow teachers the extra time required to complete the profiles.

Sinn Fein stated that teachers had expressed concern that the profiles were not fit for purpose, that there were problems with presentation and that teachers were concerned about the awarding of scores and the amount of time it would take to complete the report.

The SDLP stated that the pupil profile was not at present a manageable tool and that it needed a considerable amount of honing to make it so. The party also stated that the hardware required to complete the profile was not available to schools and that teachers would require training on its use.

The UUP stated that more information was required on the results of the pilots on the profile but resources, training and a realistic timetable to facilitate its introduction must be provided. The party also stated that the results of the pilots must be made available to stakeholders and elected representatives as soon as possible.

Relevance for parents and pupils

The DUP stated that the pupil profiles would be totally subjective documents with little consistency between schools and that they would therefore be of little use.

Sinn Fein considered that the Report Card Template used in the Republic of Ireland, which recorded the child's social and personal learning and provided guidance on next steps, should be examined in more detail.

The SDLP stated that it still needed to be assured that the pupil profile would be adequate to allow parents to make an informed choice. The provision of comment banks would be a helpful addition as these could provide a basis for comparability.

The UUP stated that there was no proven information on the pilot schemes and it was not possible to determine the relevance of the pupil profile to parents until the results of these pilots was made known.

The content

The DUP stated that it was concerned that the usefulness of the pupil profile would be undermined by the variation in interpretation of meaning between schools. The party had particular concerns about variation in the level of progressions in the literacy and numeracy sections of the profile.

Sinn Fein stated that the pupil profile needed to reflect the characteristics of immersion education. It also needed to take account that assessment of literacy and numeracy in Irish medium education was problematic.

The SDLP stated that CATs were a useful tool to track development of knowledge and the party was not aware of similar tests being used elsewhere as a high stakes selection tool. The party considered that there should be an opportunity for the child's comments to be included in the profile.

The UUP noted the inclusion in the pupil profile of computer based diagnostic testing and had concerns about the development and application of these as there was no evidence provided to the sub-group that the use of this technology was proven.

Following further discussion on the content of the pupil profile, it was agreed that consideration of a proposal on this issue would be deferred until the next meeting.

Sharing the pupil profile with schools

The DUP stated that sharing of the profile with schools was essential but it needed to be more robust and objective than at present.

Sinn Fein stated that there should be a free and open approach with respect to sharing the profile but that it should be used to inform individual education plans for the child not for academic selection.

The SDLP stated that it was in favour of parents sharing the profile with schools if they wished but that it should not automatically go to schools as this could result in it being used for academic selection.

The UUP stated that it was in favour of schools automatically receiving a copy of the profile which could be used, in the event of over subscription, to enable the child to be placed in the post primary school best suited to its aptitudes, talents and abilities.

Cost and delivery of the ICT solution

Members discussed the ICT solution and agreed that they were concerned about the lack of information available on its cost and delivery.

Timetable for introduction

Members discussed the timetable for the introduction of the pupil profile and agreed that there were concerns around the proposed date.

The meeting was suspended at 3.40 p.m.

The meeting recommenced at 3.55 p.m.

The pupil profile as a means of academic selection

The following proposal was made:

Mr McNarry proposed that *'the pupil profile should be revised in order to record the academic ability of the child on the basis of fair and consistent standards.'*

There was not consensus and the proposal fell. DUP and UUP supported the proposal and Sinn Fein and SDLP objected.

Manageability for schools and teachers

Mr McNarry proposed that 'the Programme for Government Committee agrees that, if time allows, the sub-group should visit a small number of schools involved in the pilots to ascertain the views of teachers and pupils.'

The proposal was agreed by consensus.

The Chairperson proposed that *'the final report from BDO Stoy Hayward on the independent evaluation of the pupil profile is made available to MLAs and interested groups without delay.'*

The proposal was agreed by consensus.

The Chairperson proposed that *'adequate resources are made available for schools and for the professional development of teachers to enable them to carry out the completion of the pupil profile.'*

The proposal was agreed by consensus.

Relevance for parents and pupils

Mr Bradley proposed that *'the public is kept informed about the progress of the pupil profile through a wide range of media.'*

The proposal was agreed by consensus.

The chairperson proposed that *'consideration needs to be given as to how the pupil profile will be made accessible and easily understood by all parents.'*

The proposal was agreed by consensus

The content

Mr McElduff proposed that *'the development of the pupil profile needs to reflect the characteristics of immersion education, including taking into account problems in assessing literacy and numeracy in Irish medium education.'*

There was not consensus and the proposal fell Sinn Fein and SDLP supported the proposal and DUP and UUP objected.

Sharing the pupil profile with schools

The chairperson proposed that *'the receiving post primary school should automatically get a copy of the pupil profile, to inform individual education plans for the child.'*

The proposal was agreed by consensus.

Cost and delivery of the ICT solution

The chairperson proposed that *'the Department should make available information about the cost and delivery of the ICT solution proposed for the pupil profile.'*

The proposal was agreed by consensus.

The timetable

The chairperson proposed that *'members are not content with the proposed timetable for the introduction of the pupil profile.'*

The proposal was agreed by consensus

There was a discussion on a proposal on research on forms of academic selection and it was agreed that the DUP would bring a proposal to the next meeting for the consideration of the sub-group.

10. **Any Other Business**

Press Release

Members agreed a press release to be issued following the meeting.

11. **Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next meeting to discuss and agree the sub-group's report to the Committee on the Programme for Government will be held on Tuesday 16 January 2007 at 12.30 p.m. in Room 135, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.25 p.m.

Tuesday 16 January 2007 in Room 135, Parliament Buildings.

In the Chair: Willie Clarke

Present: Dominic Bradley
Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Barry McElduff
David McNarry
Catriona Ruane

In attendance: Debbie Pritchard (Principal Clerk)
Stella McArdle (Clerk)
Valerie Artt (Assistant Clerk)
Jim Nulty (Clerical Officer)
Eleanor Murphy (Research and Library Services)

Observing Brian Crowe (UUP Researcher)
Philip Weir (DUP Researcher)

The meeting commenced at 12.59 p.m. in closed session.

1. **Apologies**

An apology was received from Sammy Wilson

2. **Minutes of the Meetings held on 8 and 12 January 2007**

The minutes of the meetings on 8 and 12 January 2007 were agreed.

3. **Matters Arising**

Timetable for the Provision of Guidance to Schools on Admissions

Members noted the revised paper provided by the Department of Education.

Legal Position Regarding Possible Challenges to Information Contained in the pupil profile

Members noted the information provided by CCEA on possible legal challenges to the information contained in the proposed pupil profile.

Ms Ruane left the meeting at 1.05 p.m.

DUP Proposal on Academic Selection

Mr Donaldson proposed that *‘while recognising that some of the parties continue to oppose academic selection, the sub-group noted that very little research has been conducted into alternatives to the 11+ that would be available to an incoming Minister in the event of academic selection not being prohibited.’*

Ms Ruane rejoined the meeting at 1.11 p.m.

There was consensus and the proposal was agreed.

Proposal on the content of the pupil profile

Members noted the wording of the proposal on the content of the pupil profile, had been included in the report and would be considered at the appropriate place in the draft report.

Breach of Confidentiality

Mr McNarry referred to the debate on 16 January 2007 when a section of the minutes of a closed meeting of the sub-group, which had not been agreed were quoted by Mr McElduff. He stated that he wished to have it placed on the record that it was his view that discussions during a closed meeting should remain confidential until publication had been agreed.

4. **Consideration of the Draft Report**

Members considered the draft report.

Front Page agreed

Membership and Terms of Reference agreed

Introduction

Paragraphs 1 –11 agreed

It was agreed that a new sentence would be inserted into the Introduction stating that all recommendations of the sub-group had been agreed by consensus.

Consideration of Issues – Schools Admission Policy

Paragraphs 12 to 24 were agreed

Paragraph 25 was agreed as amended

Paragraphs 26 to 34 were agreed

It was agreed that a new paragraph containing the proposal on academic selection agreed earlier in the meeting should be inserted. It was also agreed that the following statement should be included.

‘Sinn Fein and SDLP stated that they were on the record that there was no need for research on academic selection at any age as there was no need for an alternative to the 11+.’

Paragraphs 35 to 44 were agreed
Paragraph 45 was agreed as amended
Paragraphs 46 to 65 were agreed
Paragraph 66 was agreed as amended
Paragraphs 67 to 77 were agreed as amended

Consideration of Issues – Pupil Profile

Paragraphs 78 to 91 were agreed
Paragraph 92 was agreed as amended
Paragraphs 93 to 105 were agreed
Paragraph 106 was agreed as amended
Paragraph 107 was agreed
The draft proposal in paragraph 108 was agreed by consensus.
Paragraph 109 was agreed as amended
Paragraphs 110 to 111 were agreed
Paragraph 112 was agreed as amended

Ms Ruane left the meeting at 1.55 p.m.

Paragraphs 113 to 128 were agreed

List of Witnesses	Agreed
List of Written Submissions	Agreed
Other papers considered by the sub-group	Agreed
Papers submitted by the parties of the sub-group	Agreed

Recommendations

Recommendations 1 to 21 were agreed

It was agreed that the sub headings from the report would be included in the list where appropriate. It was also agreed that recommendation 21 should be the first recommendation and the others would be renumbered.

Executive Summary

Paragraphs 1 to 15 were agreed

Report in its entirety

Members then agreed, as amended, the report from the sub-group on Schools Admission Policy to the Committee on the Programme for Government.

5. Minutes of the meeting on 16 January 2007

The sub-group agreed that it was content for the chairperson to approve the minutes of the meeting of 16 January 2007.

6. **Any Other Business**

Press Release

Members agreed a press release to be issued following the meeting.

The meeting ended at 2.15 p.m.

Appendix 2

Minutes of Evidence

Friday 8 December 2006

Members in attendance for all or part of proceedings:

The Chairman, Mr Jim Wells
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr Jeffrey Donaldson
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr David McNarry
Ms Caitriona Ruane

Witnesses:

Mr Leslie Ashe
Dr Robson Davison
Mr John Leonard
Mr David Woods

} Department of
Education

The subgroup met at 10.20 am.

1. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** Good morning and welcome to the first meeting of the Subgroup to Consider the Schools Admission Policy.

2. As is the normal practice, I will call out the name of each Member as they ask their first question, rather than waste time with introductions. I will begin by asking the representatives of the Department of Education to commence with opening remarks. Then I will allow Members to ask questions. School admissions policy is an issue on which everyone has strong views, and I am keen to hear as many views as possible.

3. **Dr Robson Davison (Department of Education):** The Department has put together some short papers covering topics such as previous developments, the current position, and the main elements involved in the admissions process. Do you want us to begin by summarising the papers, or would you rather we started straight into the discussion? Have Members received their copies of the papers?

4. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** Yes. Please begin.

5. **Dr Davison:** I will be brief. The papers explain how policy has developed, the present position and the main elements of the process in which we are engaged. We are here to clarify

anything that we can for Members in relation to the various processes. We are bound by the Secretary of State's letter to the Assembly setting out the parameters within which we can operate. We are here to explain things as best we can for Members, but we are unable to supply personal or speculative views.

6. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** Do any other members of the Department's deputation have anything to say at this stage? No?

7. Members, this is your opportunity to ask questions. You are all aware of the reference to this issue in the St Andrews Agreement. My understanding is that the form of selection represented by the 11-plus is over, although other forms of selection are not precluded.

8. **Dr Davison:** From the Department's perspective, the last transfer test will take place in 2008. However, the St Andrews Agreement refers the decision on selection by ability or otherwise to the Assembly. The Assembly's decision, endorsed by the Executive, would then become policy. Present policy may therefore change.

9. **Mr D Bradley:** The Independent Strategic Review of Education, carried out by Professor Sir George Bain, proposed an area-based approach to future school planning. Might that approach be streamlined to match enlarged catchment areas for schools, so that transport planning, building development and other services might be co-ordinated? There would be obvious advantages, including financial savings.

10. **Dr Davison:** You will appreciate that the Department has just received the Bain Report. We are still studying its implications — not only as regards the issues we are discussing today, but for the breadth of ground that the report covers. My only comment is that in our paper on admissions, catchment areas are one possibility that could be incorporated. Like

other elements of policy, catchment areas might be aligned to area-based infrastructure planning. That would be for a future Minister and a future Assembly to determine. Certainly, catchment areas are one option on the admissions side.

11. **Mr D Bradley:** Is that a possibility?

12. **Dr Davison:** Catchment is a current consideration, but it would be for the Assembly and a future Minister to determine what is built around it.

13. **Mr Leslie Ashe (Department of Education):** Catchment is just one of a number of elements in the admissions criteria — it is important to remember that.

14. **Mr D Bradley:** If there is an opportunity for alignment between what Bain is suggesting and future admissions criteria, that may prove to be useful.

15. **Dr Davison:** That is at one end of the spectrum. It has the benefits of a central planning view of the world. However, there are downsides as well.

16. **Mr D Bradley:** What are the disadvantages?

17. **Dr Davison:** Parental choice would be involved. The catchment areas drawn up might not match everyone's choice.

18. **Mr D Bradley:** People will not be pleased anyway.

19. **Dr Davison:** You cannot win in a lot of cases.

20. **Mr D Bradley:** I said that an enlarged catchment area might overcome some of the problems that people have referred to in the past as the postcode lottery.

21. **Mr David Woods (Department of Education):** That is one point, certainly. One of the papers that we have submitted touches on the Department's current thinking on how certain admissions criteria might be defined.

22. The Department assumed that it would leave the definition of a catchment area to the schools themselves — recognising the other side of the coin, that one size may not fit all. We are conscious that the catchment areas of schools differ quite markedly depending on

whether one is in an urban or rural area. We had been allowing flexibility around that. Other jurisdictions have defined catchment areas separately for their own reasons, and there are other ways of coming to a decision.

23. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** I wish to outline the way forward for the rest of the meeting. We have extra time, as the opening remarks were quite brief. I wish to invite Mr Jeffrey Donaldson to ask a series of questions, then Mr David McNarry, then Ms Caitríona Ruane and then Mr Barry McElduff. That saves introducing each individual later.

24. **Mr Donaldson:** I want to return to Mr Bradley's point about catchment. Research Services have provided us with a paper on the new admissions arrangements for post-primary education. It contains the following question:

“Will the geographical criteria not result in selection by post-code?”

25. The answer given is:

“One of the underlying principles of the new arrangements is that schools normally service their local community.”

26. Forgive me, Mr Chairman, for being parochial: I wish to use the city of Lisburn as an example. Within a two-mile radius of the urban core there are six post-primary schools. St Patrick's is a maintained school, and there are five state-controlled or independent grammar schools. Some of them — for example, the two grammar schools, Friends School and Wallace High School — sit almost side by side. How do those schools define the local community that they service? If someone lives in Moira, Hillsborough or Annahilt, which school's local community does that person fall into?

10.30 am

27. **Dr Davison:** You have illustrated one of the problems with catchment areas, which is the simple issue of definition. Lisburn is an example. However, one could name several places where there is the same problem: it might be extremely difficult to define a catchment area. However, that is not to say that it is

impossible. It would be a difficult call in a town that has five or six schools.

28. **Mr Woods:** Although we have not attempted to define what a catchment area is, it is on the list of admissions criteria that a school could decide to use. Some schools have a clearly defined catchment area, such as the local parish. However, to return to the wider issue, which is that schools normally serve their local community, there are costs involved in pupils travelling long distances to schools. There is some inconvenience to families as well as costs to the education budget. The aspiration is that a school that is well regarded in its community will serve its community without the need for pupils to travel in other directions. However, we have not sought to constrain or confine people in any way.

29. **Mr Donaldson:** Therefore, the idea of a catchment area or of serving a local community is, at the moment, a broad concept that has not been pinned down. With regard to a particular local community, what is going to happen to the Dickson plan in Craigavon under those proposals? As you know, transfer in Craigavon takes place at age 14 — albeit there is transfer at age 11, but selection takes place at age 14. Will the Dickson plan continue under the new system, and if it does, what does that say about the capacity to develop local arrangements in, for example, Lisburn, where there are several schools in close proximity to one another?

30. You mentioned that there is not a “one size fits all” approach. However, I must say that as a parent and a public representative, nothing that I have read from the Department has made clear how it is going to handle that in practice. It was made clear in the Burns Report, which went into some detail about local collegiates, and so forth. However, there has not been any clarity since. I am not sure whether there has been a move away from that. Where does the Dickson plan lie under those arrangements, and what is there to stop other areas adopting the Dickson plan under that system?

31. **Mr Woods:** To date, nothing in the Government’s thinking has had any impact on the structure of schools or on how schools are

organised in any locality. The key difference is in the Government’s current stance to introduce a non-selective system by which pupils in Craigavon, for example, could still go to junior high schools up to the age of 14 and transfer to other schools thereafter, but not on the basis of academic selection. Therefore, the structures would stay, but the basis of transfer beyond that would not include academic selection.

32. **Mr Donaldson:** Does that not render the whole point of the Dickson plan irrelevant? The idea was that there would be transfer at age 14 on the basis of a form of selection which would allow children to transfer according to their aptitude, vocational interests, and so on. What is the point in maintaining a system that transfers children at the age of 14, when it is not based on any academic criteria?

33. What would be the role of Lurgan College as against Killicomaine Junior High School, Clounagh Junior High School or Portadown College, for example? What will be their role in the future? They are clearly defined at present, but what will Portadown College become when this new system is in place? Will it become an all-ability comprehensive?

34. **Mr Ashe:** There is nothing to prevent those schools from retaining their existing status, position and role among the schools in the area. Like transfer now at the age of 14, a parent would have to examine a child’s attributes and consider what the school can offer before deciding whether Portadown College or some other school is appropriate for the child’s needs at that particular age. The system of transfer at the age of 14 would be identical to the system at the age of 11.

35. **Mr Donaldson:** If I were a parent living in Moira, and I had a choice between the schools in Lisburn and the schools in Lurgan, when would I take that decision? Would it be when my child is aged 11 or 14?

36. **Mr Ashe:** It could be at both ages.

37. **Mr Donaldson:** Is it possible to have two transfers?

38. **Mr Ashe:** At the moment, two transfers are possible under the Dickson plan.

39. **Mr Donaldson:** The Department's submission notes the complexity of the current admissions criteria; your approach in the new system is to simplify those criteria. However, I have read your detailed documentation and, as a parent, am left very confused about how this system will work. That is not a cheap point; it is a genuine concern as someone who deals with parents appealing decisions about what school their child will get into and so on — as I am sure all my colleagues do every summer. I know how confusing all that form-filling can be. I appreciate that the current system is far from simple, but I feel that issues have not been simplified for parents. There is so much uncertainty in much of what you have said this morning that I am still left very confused.

40. Nevertheless, I want to turn now to the issue of the pupil profile. The Department is at pains to make clear that the pupil profile is not a means of selection. The Department is clear in saying that the objective of the pupil profile is to inform parents. I accept that parents need information to make informed decisions about their child's education. The Department has made provision whereby, if it is the parents' wish, the school can see the pupil profile, but not for the purposes of selection. Why is the Department opposed to the pupil profile being used as a basis for selection?

41. **Mr Woods:** It is not so much that we are against it, but that the pupil profile is not designed for that purpose. It is an information document — a standardised annual report. All schools give annual reports to parents at the end of the school year.

42. **Mr McNarry:** Is that the pupil profiling that you are pushing, or is it profiling per se?

43. **Mr Woods:** It is the pupil profile that has been under development. We are talking about the position to date.

44. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** Ms Ruane, I think that you may be concerned about the way in which the subgroup is being conducted?

45. **Ms Ruane:** Yes, I think that we should stick to your earlier arrangement.

46. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** I am allowing Mr Donaldson to go down a line of questioning, but I will be equally generous with other members so that they can tease out their own issues.

47. **Mr Woods:** The current concept of the pupil profile is a standardised annual report that gives parents consistent information about how children are progressing at school. At the moment, if parents have children attending different schools, the format of their reports will differ from school to school. The pupil profile will be more consistent in order to benefit parents. A profile will indicate a child's progress in the core skills areas — communication, use of maths, information and communication technology — as well as in the other broad curriculum areas.

48. Its purpose is to provide information. As currently conceived, it does not place pupils in any sort of rank order. Therefore, in its present form, it could not be used for the purposes of selection.

49. **Mr Donaldson:** Implicit in your remarks is the suggestion that the pupil profile could be developed, by changing its layout and so forth. My children's reports clearly tell me where they came in the class in their examination results, the class average for the results and so on. If it is possible to include that kind of information in a pupil profile, is it not also possible, at least in theory, to develop pupil profiles so that they could be used in other ways? For example, in the event of oversubscription, a school could use pupil profiles as one of the criteria for selection.

50. **Mr Woods:** In theory, everything is possible. However, two issues must be borne in mind. First, we know from historical experience that primary schoolteachers will not be comfortable with the idea that what they write in a pupil's report will determine which school that pupil goes to at the age of 11, and their position must be considered.

51. Secondly, using the information contained in the profile in that high-stakes manner would raise the issue of ensuring consistency. For example, my child's profile could show that he is third in the class, but how would that profile

compare with that of another child who is fourth or fifth in a different class, based on a different class test? There are issues about ensuring consistency and validity in that sort of arrangement.

52. **Mr Donaldson:** I appreciate that. The consultation document stated that the pupil profile was to provide parents with information about the most appropriate school for their children. What does the word “appropriate” actually mean in that context? Does it indicate a tacit acceptance that certain schools are better for children with particular aptitudes? Does that not implicitly represent a form of selection, even if it is the parents who are making the decision?

53. **Mr Woods:** I am not sure about the particular reference that Mr Donaldson mentioned — it may be a bit of poor drafting on our part. The purpose of the profile is to allow parents to determine which is the most appropriate school for their child. The Department does not determine that — it does not have a definition of the most appropriate school.

54. It is clear that some form of differentiation— selection is perhaps the wrong word — is implicit. The Government have not said that they will abolish grammar schools, so there will be different types of schools with different educational characteristics and different styles of curriculum. Thus, under the current proposals, parents must choose which type of school is most suitable for their child.

55. **Mr Donaldson:** Finally, what work has the Department carried out on alternatives to the 11-plus examination since 2000? Has any work been carried out on a proposed acceptable alternative to the 11-plus? For example, has any work been carried out on whether future admissions criteria might involve some form of examination, either through continuous testing or through pupil profiling? Is any such work available from the Department?

56. **Mr Woods:** No.

57. **Mr Donaldson:** The Department has not carried out any work on replacing the 11-plus?

58. **Mr Woods:** Not with regard to selection by ability. The work that has been carried out has been based on the Minister’s view that there ought not to be selection based on ability.

10.45 am

59. **Mr McNarry:** Gentlemen, you are welcome. The message that I receive from parents and teachers in my constituency, and in every constituency that I have visited lately, is that education is overwhelmed by documentation but underwhelmed by satisfactory outcomes. The issue of academic selection has been held over for consideration by the Assembly, with which comes the murky world of deadlines and compelling handovers. Given that that is happening despite the possibility that a devolved Assembly may not be restored, it surely prompts some interesting thinking.

60. If there were to be no restoration — and I am sure that you are not betting against it — then, under continued direct rule, the passing of those deadlines vis-à-vis the future of the Assembly causes a state of confusion about the handover of deadlines relating to the 11-plus. I would welcome a statement from you outlining exactly how, in the absence of a restored Assembly, the Department would handle things under direct rule.

61. **Dr Davison:** You have entered political territory there, which the Department is not in a position to debate. The Department’s understanding of the legislation is that there is a deadline and that if it is not met, Ministers will proceed with the policy as enunciated before the legislation was passed. The Department cannot debate speculatively about what might happen if that deadline is not met: those are political issues.

62. **Mr McNarry:** Correct me if I am wrong but, in effect, the Department is preparing either for a deadline to be met or missed. If it is missed, the fate of academic selection will no longer be in the Assembly’s hands. The part of the legislation that leaves academic selection to be considered by the Assembly will be nullified, and the Department will kick into action with its proposals under new legislation.

63. **Dr Davison:** That is our understanding, but that is clearly a matter for Ministers.

64. **Mr McNarry:** It is a major concern for parents. I understand the restraints under which you are operating, and I am not trying to take you into political waters. However, some clarification would be helpful, because parents and teachers are trying to prepare for all eventualities. It is unfair to parents that the situation is so unclear — and I am sure that other Members have been hearing the same thing. They are asking what school uniform they should buy. Are you saying that you cannot offer the parents any help on that?

65. **Mr Woods:** Given that it is not a matter of opinion but of legislative fact, the Department can clearly state that if the Assembly is not restored by the date specified in the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, the automatic consequence will be that the element of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 banning academic selection comes into effect. There is no other intervening process.

66. **Mr McNarry:** You will understand that I cannot accept your choice of words — “the automatic consequence” — because that almost puts the blame on the Assembly.

67. **Mr Woods:** Sorry, I am not blaming anyone. It is what the law states.

68. **Mr McNarry:** The law does not refer to “consequences” and does not deal in consequences.

69. **Mr Woods:** The law simply states that if the Assembly is not restored by the specified date, academic selection will be banned.

70. **Mr Ashe:** It is also important to say that while academic selection will be banned at that point, the ban will not take effect until admissions in September 2010.

71. **Mr McNarry:** That is precisely the point, and I am glad that you have made it. That is a grey area for parents; they find —

72. **Mr Ashe:** The existing arrangements will continue until then.

73. **Mr McNarry:** I understand that, but the situation is not clear for parents. There is an

onus on the Department of Education to try, where possible, to clarify the situation for parents. Equally, there is an onus on politicians to seek the Department’s help in clarifying the situation for parents. That would be valuable.

74. One of the principles set out in the post-primary consultation document is that:

“the interests of the child”

75. should be

“at the centre of the decision-making process”.

76. However, none of the Department’s criteria mentions the real interest of the child. In your opinion, has that principle been achieved? Parental choice, which is given a great deal of credibility throughout the documents, is still an individual choice, yet there has been no recognition of the deserving case for a parent’s choice to be put into a parental voice, forum or organisation in order to give it some formal status. We have gone through all of this without having the benefit of a formal parental voice being heard on the admissions guidelines. I know that one of the Department’s tributaries is working on the new single education authority, and a parental voice may be considered there. Will the Department consider expediting that in light of the involvement of this subgroup and, in broader terms, the Assembly?

77. The new admissions criteria allow post-primary schools to use the category of “feeder” primary schools. What freedom or autonomy will post-primary schools have in determining which primary schools will, or could be, feeder schools? Many parents are anxious about that issue. It is important that parents know what degree of autonomy schools will have in determining which primary schools they use as feeder schools.

78. Parents will be selective about which primary school they send their children to. The restraints for bussing are not the same at that stage. Parents will say that they want their child to attend a certain school, because it is a recognised feeder school and their child will stand a better chance. That could lead to a form of discrimination. Parents cannot be faulted for

seeking what is best for their children, and the system allows that to be explored by parents.

79. **Dr Davison:** The question of the parental voice is for the Minister to determine. The parental voice has been expressed in various consultations over the past few years, but on the specifics of where we go at this point or subsequently, it will be for Ministers to determine the way in which they want to assess the parental voice. Whether that be a forum, an organisation, a consultation or whatever will be a call for Ministers.

80. **Mr McNarry:** Do you agree with the principle, referred to in the consultation document, that the interests of the child should be central? One would expect, perhaps, that a parent would be the best person to uphold the interests of a child.

81. **Mr Woods:** That is certainly recognised; it is the rationale behind parental preference and giving parents the information to exercise that preference in an informed way, accepting that they have the best interests of their child at heart. That is one aspect of admissions. As Dr Davison said, the wider issue of the parental voice will have to be considered by Ministers in the context of the new education structures.

82. **Mr McNarry:** Will you take it back to the Minister? She is not really listening.

83. **Mr Woods:** The proceedings of the subgroup will be reported, and I am sure that the Minister will be able to pick that up.

84. **Mr McNarry:** She did not listen to previous proceedings. She was very badly briefed at an earlier meeting.

85. **Mr John Leonard (Department of Education):** Post-primary schools will define their feeder primary schools. The basis of the proposals is to try to have as much flexibility as possible for schools.

86. **Mr D Bradley:** On what basis will feeder primary schools be defined?

87. **Mr Leonard:** They will be defined on the basis of the extent to which the children who already attend the post-primary school have come from them. That will be a matter for the

post-primary school. There are indications from the current system that —

88. **Mr D Bradley:** Therefore, a post-primary school cannot decide to add feeder primary schools to its list unless that primary school has contributed pupils over a number of years?

89. **Dr Davison:** The school will be free to choose on the basis of historical attendance. However, that freedom will be constrained. The Department of Education has the power to consider and approve where it thinks that there is doubt. What it would not want, for example, is for a primary school that has historically sent children to a post-primary school to be excluded on rather strange grounds. The Department will be in a position to monitor and challenge those sorts of decisions.

90. **Mr McNarry:** I accept what you say, Mr Leonard. However, given the school closures and amalgamations that we face today, what degree of flexibility is built into those criteria? What if an established school, with those kinds of links, hits the wall? How does the post-primary school make a decision when, for instance, it used to be school A, but now schools A and B have joined together? How does it address that situation? Is it still the school's decision?

91. **Dr Davison:** In that situation the new school would revisit —

92. **Mr McNarry:** Who would sanction that revisit?

93. **Dr Davison:** Given the Department's power to intervene, it would want to examine what emerged from that.

94. **Mr McNarry:** When a primary school has closed or been amalgamated, and is in the process of making representations to re-establish links with a post-primary school where there is now no history, must that be sanctioned by the Department of Education, and could there be disruption to that process?

11.00 am

95. **Dr Davison:** In the current system, when an amalgamation takes place, the same process applies. The difference will be the Department's

role in the process. I am not assuming that there will be any major dislocation of any process. The purpose is to leave as much in the hands of the school as possible, because it knows the local circumstances best.

96. **Mr Woods:** There will be no mystery about what are, or are not treated as feeder primary schools. The post-primary schools will have to list the feeder primary schools in their admissions booklet or prospectus, so parents will know what the position is. In circumstances where there is an amalgamation — which would not happen overnight — there would always be adequate notice. The list of feeder schools can be extended.

97. **Mr McNarry:** I understand that. I know that you have not had a chance to adopt the Bain Report, but there is a reference in it about the funding of preparatory schools. They are obvious feeder schools in a true sense. Is that likely to have any impact?

98. **Dr Davison:** It is too early to speculate on that.

99. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** The next question is from Ms Caitríona Ruane, to be followed by Mr Barry McElduff. They have been waiting for some time.

100. **Ms Ruane:** Fáilte romhaibh. You are very welcome. Thank you for the papers that you presented and for taking questions from us.

101. There is much angst about all the changes. Perhaps that is because — as you can hear from my accent — I did not grow up in the North of Ireland, although my children are in school here.

102. In my town, the changes happened very seamlessly and easily, and parental choice was fundamental to the process. Very few parents were unhappy about the changes and the schools that were chosen to transfer pupils from primary to secondary school. Different factors were taken into consideration, such as whether the pupils wanted to go to an Irish-medium secondary school, etc. I am not as worried about the situation as some other people. However, I understand the angst, because change is difficult.

103. The changes will benefit society in the longer term and create a more cohesive society. Initially, there will be much angst, but eventually, common sense will prevail. Parents with busy lives will get used to sending their children to the nearest school, because they do not want to spend half an hour travelling every morning. Change also brings dynamism and creativity. Once we get over the initial difficulties, that dynamism will kick in.

104. I come from a border area: I live in the South and my kids go to school in the North, so you can see where my question is coming from as regards catchment areas. Are you meeting with an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta (Department of Education and Science) in the South of Ireland? There would be no point in setting up a system in the North of Ireland when we will have North/South Ministerial Councils. The nearest post-primary school for my kids is in Newry rather than in Dundalk, as is my nearest primary school of choice for the Irish language. What thought has been given to North/South catchment areas? I am sure that the same applies for Inishowen and Castleblayney, and vice versa. That has other implications; one of the banes of my life is that there is no transport for my kids, which is a pain in the neck and does not make sense. What thought has been given to that issue, and what work are you doing in relation to that?

105. I love the idea of schools specialising in different subjects, such as music. How would that work in relation to catchment areas or criteria?

106. I must declare an interest as regards my next question. What would the development of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta — Irish-medium secondary, primary and pre-schools — náiscoileanna — mean for the development of new schools? At the moment, there is a gap in provision. My child had all her primary education in a bunscoil, and yet there is no meánscoil for her, and she is now in an English-speaking secondary school, which is heart-breaking for me. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta has plans for development in areas where there

is a gap in provision, such as Downpatrick, Newry and west Tyrone.

107. The same is true of the integrated sector, and there will be dynamism in the way in which schools will work together. I hope that we will start to see more natural integration of the current schooling system rather than a new integrated set-up, although that is an issue in which people are also interested. What is the Department doing about gaps in provision, and are there any barriers to groups such as Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and the integrated movement? It would be very worrying if there were any barriers.

108. The issue of special needs is very dear to my heart, as it is to other politicians around the table. Children who do not get the right intervention at the right stage is something that breaks my heart. There is some very good early intervention, but what are the plans for special needs? Mainstreaming is also an issue. We really must examine the provision for giving children the best start at post-primary level. Go raibh maith agat.

109. **Dr Davison:** Where do we start? Let us take catchment areas. The Department has been working on a set of proposals that emerged from a consideration of the existing system. The Department has not consulted on what the admissions criteria would be, so there is no agreement on them. Ministers intended to consult on the issue, but it has still to be considered. The North/South dimension means that there is clearly an issue about border areas. The Department of Education is in regular contact with colleagues in the Department of Education and Science. At this stage, full consideration has not been given about what is incorporated formally. Nonetheless, the Department is aware that it would be wise to talk to colleagues in the Department of Education and Science about catchment areas around the border. That is the best answer that I can give you on that issue.

110. Catchment areas have not yet been an issue with regard to specialist schools. The Department's approach to specialist schools is via school improvement. The school uses its specialism to improve on a more general basis

and to link into the new curriculum 14+, with its emphasis on a wider provision and a more collaborative approach to the curriculum, where the specialist school can be seen in a wider context. Specialist schools have not yet been read into catchment areas in a detailed way.

111. The Department has clearly established criteria for the establishment of new schools in the Irish-medium sector. Those proposals go through the same development proposal route as those for other schools. That is the policy at the moment. It is too early for us to say what we make of proposals in the Bain Report.

112. Ms Ruane quite rightly said that special needs is an area of real importance. We have brought in a schools inspector with expertise in that area to review special educational needs; that review is under way. We have brought together a panel of the main players in that area, and work has been ongoing for three or four months. We hope to have an outcome in the new year. The Department regards special educational needs as a really important issue.

113. **Ms Ruane:** Who is the inspector, and who is chairing that?

114. **Dr Davison:** The inspector is Marleen Collins.

115. **Mr Ashe:** Parents will have a choice of different types of schools. There will be those with an academic curricular emphasis and those with a vocational curricular emphasis, and there will be specialist schools. Therefore, specialist schools will be one of a range of schools from which parents can choose. At the moment, there is a small number of such schools, but that will increase.

116. **Mr McElduff:** From the information that you have provided, I understand that 100 schools have trialled the pupil profile, which has been evaluated independently. Two questions arise from that. First, what information about the profile would parents like? Secondly, what do teachers say about its manageability? Perhaps we should deal with those questions first, and I will ask my other two questions later.

117. **Mr Woods:** Parents and teachers in the schools that have undertaken the pilot generally

reacted positively to it. Parents have appreciated the format of the pupil profile and the information that it contains. They expressed views about ensuring that it was written in good, clear English rather than in teacher-speak, as it were. Therefore, we must ensure that the language in which it is expressed is meaningful and accessible to all parents.

118. Teachers were generally content with the pupil profile. At an early stage, they expressed fears about its being an additional burden. However, since it is meant to replace the annual reports that schools already provide, there should be no extra burden. We are making arrangements to provide computer software that will allow teachers to complete the pupil profiles using their laptops or other equipment. They can call down comment banks that would help them to populate the report. The aim is to make the pupil profile meaningful for parents but manageable for schools, and the pilot work to date confirms that that is the case.

119. People have issues with parts of the pupil profile, but the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has been adjusting the format of the profile to address those concerns.

120. **Mr McElduff:** Named parishes, named feeder schools and named catchment areas play a part in admissions. I am thinking of schools such as the Christian Brothers Grammar School in Omagh. Primary schools in Castlederg and Aghyaran are natural pathways to schools in Omagh, but people might consider that those areas are, technically, in the Strabane district. However, people who live in Castlederg or Aghyaran shop in Omagh, or perhaps in Ballybofey; in the main, however, people from those places go to school in Omagh.

121. Are natural, cultural and social pathways taken into account? For example, a big fear that I have heard expressed in that community is that its enriching contribution to Omagh CBS may not continue, even though people would like it to. Is a cut-off planned that would mean that people from that community would be discouraged from going to Omagh and encouraged to go elsewhere?

122. **Dr Davison:** In the first instance, it would be for the schools in Omagh to determine their feeder schools. When it comes to monitoring, I doubt whether we would intervene to stop that connection being as broad as the school felt that it should be. It would not be in our interest to break natural pathways.

123. Unfortunately, I am not as familiar with the Omagh area as Mr McElduff is, but we need to see how maintaining those connections would work in practice. The first call would be to ask what schools see as their feeder schools and how they see their natural pathways. I am sure that a historical picture would be built up over many years.

124. **Mr Woods:** A wider issue relates to rural schools and rural communities in general. If a school is oversubscribed after it has applied whatever other criteria it has decided to use, it may still retain some sort of a tie-breaker at the bottom end. If it were to use proximity to the school, the most rural would be most likely to be disadvantaged. We anticipate that our advice to schools in those areas would be that a randomised approach, rather than a distance-based approach, tie-breaker might be better. That approach would not disadvantage those at the greatest distance.

11.15 am

125. **Mr McElduff:** I have learnt about the development of learning partnerships in communities such as Limavady, which is very progressive in its approach. What value is there in establishing learning partnerships now to be ready for the future?

126. **Mr Woods:** Learning partnerships are coming about naturally from the bottom up as part of the work that schools have been doing in anticipation of the entitlement framework requirements, which seek to provide access to a wider range of subjects for pupils. It has always been recognised that schools cannot do that if they are working in isolation; they will need to collaborate with one another and with their local further education colleges.

127. Schools in several areas have been developing their thinking and holding

conversations among themselves about how they might make arrangements to provide that wider range of subjects. The Limavady partnership pre-dates anything that the Department was doing on the entitlement framework requirements, to be honest. Nevertheless, it is a good example of what can be done. We are aware of similar developments in other areas.

128. Earlier, Mr Donaldson mentioned the Burns collegiates. These did not receive much positive comment, as it was felt that they were over-engineered and were brigading schools into certain clusters without the schools having had a say in the matter. The present approach is to leave it to schools to make pragmatic decisions on collaborative arrangements. The idea of considering provision on an area basis, which I notice is a feature of the proposals in the Bain Report, has much to commend it, as the proposals should ensure that when individual components are taken together, they make for a broader range of provision for the young people of an area.

129. **Dr Davison:** Mr McElduff asked about the value of learning partnerships. We have always considered education to be of personal benefit: it is a good thing to be an educated person. We have always regarded schools as having social and cultural value. The revised curriculum, of which the entitlement framework is a key part, recognises the economic purpose of education in opening up the curriculum to include not just academic provision after the age of 14 but what the Department for Employment and Learning calls professional/technical provision for all pupils.

130. Therefore, the value of learning partnerships in either school to school, school to further education college or in a broad mixture of those settings is in trying to develop that aspect of schooling as well as the more traditional aspects. That ties in with the work that the Department for Employment and Learning has done in skills development. That is another dimension of learning partnerships.

131. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** Although we have had the main questioning, several members wish to ask a supplementary question.

Can we keep the questions to one or one and a half?

132. **Mr D Bradley:** Since I asked only one question in the first place — *[Laughter.]*

133. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** It is an important issue, and I have allowed members to tease out points with the representatives from the Department. Mr Donaldson, Mr Bradley and Mr McNarry will now put their questions, and then there will be an opportunity for other members to ask one final question.

134. **Mr Donaldson:** Your paper says that non-academic admissions criteria:

“would be required whether or not it is decided that academic selection should form part of future admissions policy: they would be used by non-grammar schools, and also by grammar schools where it is necessary to differentiate within a given ‘ability’ group.”

135. I am anxious to explore what you mean by “ability” in the context of non-academic admissions criteria.

136. **Mr Leonard:** At the moment, grammar schools that are oversubscribed within a grade — A or B1 or B2 — apply their non-academic criteria to decide which pupils to admit. That is the current pattern. Under an assumed non-academic scenario, all grammar schools would apply non-academic criteria all the time and would not have academic criteria. The purpose of the criteria is to give them a menu from which to draw.

137. **Mr Donaldson:** I appreciate that, Mr Leonard, but, with respect, that is not what I asked. I understand that what we are moving to at the moment is non-academic selection procedures. However, the Department talks about:

“where it is necessary to differentiate within a given ‘ability’ group.”

138. I am anxious to explore what you mean by “ability” and how you define that. What does that mean in the context of non-academic selection procedures?

139. **Mr Woods:** In the context from which you quoted, we are saying that if there were to be academic selection, those same criteria

would serve a certain purpose. That is perhaps what has caused the confusion. In that context, “ability” would be determined by whatsoever means a future Administration decided. That would be the issue. It is one of the questions that you must grapple with. If we are not going to have the existing transfer test but still want to have something that allows for academic selection, the question is quite what —

140. **Mr Donaldson:** I am sorry, Mr Chairman, for pursuing this, but I am not getting what I am looking for. I appreciate where the gentlemen are coming from, but that is not actually what the paper says. The paper states:

“These would be required whether or not it is decided that academic selection should form part of future admissions policy.”

141. So it is in either context.

142. **Mr Woods:** You are right. That is bad drafting, specifically on my part. I contributed that sentence; I should stop contributing sentences. We tried to deal with both sides. Of course, in a non-academic situation, all the criteria that schools apply would be non-academic. If — and it is still “if”, depending on what happens with devolution — there is going to an element of selection, we are simply saying that the work done on the non-academic criteria has not been nugatory. It will still be required, even in the event of academic selection. First, there will be a group of schools that will not use the academic criteria, and, secondly, the grammar schools will need it further down their list of criteria. I apologise for any confusion.

143. **Mr Donaldson:** My half-question is a very simple one. You talked about the different elements that a school might include in its admissions criteria. There is the “nearest school” or “nearest suitable school” aspect. My question concerns school transport. As you know, at the moment a child qualifies for school transport at post-primary level only if the distance between his or her home and the nearest suitable school is more than three miles.

144. Currently, “suitable” is defined in different ways. How will it be defined in the future? If the term “nearest suitable school” has

a much wider definition in the future and can include any post-primary school — or will it include any post-primary school? — then what do you mean by the word “suitable”?

145. **Dr Davison:** One issue that feeds into that is the Bain Report, and how Sir George Bain sees the world developing in the future. One of the issues will relate to that definition and the world that Bain portrays. We will then need to consider what is meant by the term “nearest suitable school”, because there is a picture that suits the current situation, but that may not suit the decisions that are taken in relation to the Bain Report.

146. We will have to consider the direction that the Bain Report takes us in as regards the overall planning of the schools estate, the nature of the schools estate and, importantly, the transport implications. One of the main school transport issues is the resource implication, the costs. We need to take that issue on board in relation to the debate on the Bain Report.

147. **Mr D Bradley:** I want to return to the issue of pupil profiling. I understand that the pupil profile will be a formative document, in so far as it will outline a pupil’s successes and achievements, as well as areas for future development that will be addressed by the school, the teacher and even the parents. It is on that basis that primary schoolteachers have agreed to co-operate in the production of pupil profiles, and I believe that they have the support of their unions in that.

148. I assume that, if pupil profiles become an instrument of academic selection, that goodwill will not be forthcoming, either from the teachers’ unions or, indeed, the teachers themselves. Does that mean that pupil profiles could not be used as an instrument of academic selection in the future, purely on the grounds of the probable withdrawal of support for pupil profiling from teachers and teachers’ unions?

149. **Mr Woods:** It would be inappropriate for me to comment on what the position of individual teachers’ unions might be. I mentioned that we would have to have regard to that issue in the context of whether pupil profiling will be

used as a basis for selection or whether it will form some part of the selection process.

150. Those with long enough memories will remember a process that was attempted for a few years in the late 1970s whereby the recommendation of the primary school determined whether a pupil moved to a grammar school or a non-grammar school. That process was fraught with difficulties and only survived for a couple of years. The evidence of history tells us that there are certain constraints on what can be done.

151. **Mr Ashe:** There is further historical evidence on the use of assessment outcomes for transfer purposes. That proposal was originally mooted when assessment was introduced but had to be shelved, simply because teachers were not prepared to take part in the training, and so forth, if the assessment outcomes were to be used for transfer purposes. That example contributes to the historical picture.

152. **Mr D Bradley:** Just to make up the balance from my only having asked one question at the beginning —

153. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** This is your half-question.

154. **Mr D Bradley:** If academic selection were introduced, how would it impact on the other provisions of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, given that that Order is largely predicated on the existence of a non-selective system during its period of operation?

155. **Mr Woods:** The other main provisions of the Order concern the curriculum and the entitlement framework. Those provisions can proceed, and are proceeding, on the basis that was originally planned. Those provisions are free-standing and can, therefore, proceed.

11.30 am

156. **Mr D Bradley:** You said that the new curriculum could be a driver for the economy. I understood by that that it would provide many skills that are currently lacking in the workplace. If academic selection were reintroduced, the present situation would continue. Those skills that we would expect to get in the workplace

through the operation of the new curriculum would not, in all probability, be forthcoming.

157. **Dr Davison:** Under the proposals, one third of the curriculum offered to all children — whether they are in academically selected schools or not — has to be what the Department for Employment and Learning calls “professional and technical”. The provision offered to children would have to include that dimension of learning. That would obtain whether selection continues or not. That is an important part of the plan.

158. **Mr McNarry:** How can you square the circle on curriculum content and vocational education for 14- to 19-year-olds on the back of this morning’s report when so many pupils fail to reach standards? Many are not achieving; their education stops, in effect, at the age of six. That is a point to which I hope to return.

159. Does the Department categorically rule out any elements of selection while direct rule continues?

160. **Dr Davison:** The Department cannot answer that; that question should be addressed to Ministers. Policy is determined by legislation. Ministers, whether devolved or direct-rule, will decide what happens. It is not for civil servants to determine.

161. If I may address your first question —

162. **Mr McNarry:** I wish that you had answered my second.

163. **Dr Davison:** I cannot. It is for Ministers to determine direction.

164. **Mr McNarry:** Surely the Department can determine the direction that a Minister might take.

165. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** Or advise Ministers.

166. **Mr McNarry:** Is that not why this Minister and her predecessors are in such a blooming mess?

167. **Mr Donaldson:** Resist the temptation.

168. **Dr Davison:** My job is to give advice to Ministers and to implement their policies.

169. **Mr McNarry:** And therefore you cannot possibly comment.

170. **Dr Davison:** I will answer your first question, which is important. The Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee have illustrated an important issue. It ties in with the importance of providing for special educational needs.

171. The Department rightly congratulates itself on the quality of outcomes in its system. Sometimes, however, that success masks underachievement, which was pointed out in a straightforward manner by the Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee. Underachievement presents the Department with a significant problem. One of the Department's responses is to strengthen greatly the emphasis in the revised curriculum on basic skills such as literacy, numeracy, and information and communications technology. It is conscious that underachievement is a significant issue.

172. **Mr McNarry:** This is my half-bit now —

173. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** Strictly speaking, this is not in the subgroup's terms of reference.

174. **Mr McNarry:** If you allow me to complete my question —

175. **Mr D Bradley:** If I leave the room at this stage, does he have to stop?

176. **Mr McNarry:** Do you accept that academic selection has had no bearing whatsoever on the figures in that report, and that it is not a barrier to pupils?

177. **Dr Davison:** That is a big question, to which I cannot give you a simple answer. It is a moot point as to whether the selection of pupils with the highest ability has a negative impact on those not selected.

178. **Mr McNarry:** We are talking about eight-year-olds.

179. **Dr Davison:** We are not just talking about eight-year-olds: underachievement is a significant problem at Key Stage 3 and at Key Stage 2.

180. **Mr D Bradley:** It continues into adulthood.

181. **Dr Davison:** Whether selection affects those not selected is a moot point.

182. You said that there are problems at primary-school level, which would come through; however, it is a moot point whether those problems are accentuated by what happens at the age of 11. That is a huge question, to which I cannot give a simple answer.

183. **Mr McNarry:** Could you give me an answer in writing? Could you give the subgroup an answer in writing?

184. **Mr Woods:** It comes back to the question of how relevant it is to the subgroup.

185. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** You were given a clear indication of the constraints under which we, as a Committee, were acting. I am happy that you have dealt with that subject to the satisfaction of most members.

186. We have time for a final supplementary question. It must be extremely short, because we must stop at 11.45 am.

187. **Ms Ruane:** I wish to make a point that I hope will be taken in the right — Nílím in ann.

188. **Mr D Bradley:** Spirit.

189. **Ms Ruane:** The right spirit. Go raibh maith agat.

190. **Mr McElduff:** I know what point you are about to make, Cairtriona. Go for it.

191. **Ms Ruane:** I am a big fan of gender equality.

192. **Mr McNarry:** Try to include the rest of us in this.

193. **Ms Ruane:** I will, David. I always include you.

194. **Mr McNarry:** You wanted to be called "Caterina", or whatever, earlier. Now we do not know what you are talking about.

195. **Ms Ruane:** Gender equality is important in society, and many of our teachers and educationalists are women. Any future delegations should include a senior woman from the Department of Education.

196. **Dr Davison:** I will certainly pass that request to Will Haire. After all, I have come from a Department where I was a token male.

197. **Mr Donaldson:** I want to return briefly to the guidance principles for admissions criteria. There is great public concern about postcode lotteries, particularly in areas in where there is likely to be oversubscription, such as my Lagan Valley constituency and, in particular, Lisburn. You talk about the need to ensure that:

“the combined effect of the criteria does not result in postcode selection or social exclusion, and that it does not disadvantage pupils living in particular areas e.g. rural areas or pupils attending feeder primary schools that are not given an appropriate degree of priority for admission.”

198. I am anxious to know how those living in rural communities such as Glenavy, Ballinderry, Moira, Hillsborough and Annahilt can avoid ending up with postcode selection. There is a massive population in the urban core where schools are located. How can the Department ensure that pupils who live in rural areas and attend rural primary schools are not disadvantaged?

199. **Mr Woods:** Part of the answer to that lies in the flexibility that the Department envisages in the admissions criteria, which will allow schools to define for themselves the range of feeder primary schools or other catchment arrangements. The new education authority, as and when it arrives, will be anxious to ensure in considering those issues that no small primary school in a rural setting has, inadvertently or otherwise, been omitted and the children not given an appropriate measure of priority. It is simply to ensure that whatever arrangements are put in place operate as fairly and comprehensively as possible across the board, so that there is inclusion for everyone.

200. **Dr Davison:** Also, sitting in Bangor and not knowing the specifics of every locality, the Department is open to taking representations if areas feel that in some way the arrangements that are being arrived at by schools are going to disadvantage them.

201. **Mr D Bradley:** Are you saying that it may be possible for grammar schools to retain their current catchment areas, which one could say are defined by their feeder primary schools?

202. **Dr Davison:** In the first instance, the grammar school, or any school, will nominate what it considers to be its feeder primary schools. As far as the Department is concerned, it will be a matter for the local body — either the board, if the boards still exist, or the education authority — to look carefully at what that says about the area from which the school is drawing its pupils to see whether there are any issues with that.

203. I believe that folk would raise those issues locally with the new education and skills authority, the boards or the Department if they felt that, in some way, they were being particularly disadvantaged. The system itself would have to be satisfied that they were not being disadvantaged.

204. **Mr D Bradley:** As Jeffrey said, if it were possible to ensure that rural children would not be disadvantaged under those circumstances, the fear that some people have of a postcode lottery would also be removed.

205. **Dr Davison:** The Department has stated that it does not want a postcode lottery. It will do its best to ensure that that does not apply.

206. **The Chairman (Mr Wells):** I must call it a day at that point, gentlemen. Thank you for coming. As you can see, we read your briefing notes carefully and ask some difficult questions. The subgroup reserves the right to give you feedback in written form or to ask further questions, because, as you know, the issue is controversial and difficult. It has attracted much interest. The subgroup appreciates your coming at short notice to give us that highly adequate briefing. Undoubtedly, we will see you again at some stage. Thank you.

207. **Dr Davison:** Thank you very much.

Adjourned at 11.40 am.

Friday 15 December 2006

Members in attendance for all or part of the proceedings:

The Chairperson, Ms Sue Ramsey
The Chairperson, Mr Willie Clarke
Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr Jeffrey Donaldson
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr David McNarry
Ms Caitriona Ruane
Mr Sammy Wilson

Witnesses:

Ms Avril Hall-Callaghan (Ulster Teachers' Union)
Mr Brendan Harron (Irish National Teachers' Organisation)
Mr Mark Langhammer (Association of Teachers and Lecturers)
Mr Seamus Searson (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers)
Sir Kenneth Bloomfield (Association for Quality Education)
Mr Finbarr McCallion (Governing Bodies Association)
Mr Marcas Patterson (Association for Quality Education)
Mr Billy Young (Association for Quality Education)
Mr George Buckley
Mr Jim Clarke (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools)
Mr Uel McCrea (Association of Head Teachers in Secondary Schools)
Mr Gavin Boyd (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment)
Mr Richard Hanna (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment)
Mr Robert Shilliday (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment)
Dr Charlie Sproule (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment)
Mr Michael Wardlow (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education)

Ms Dorothy Angus (Department of Education)
Mr John Leonard (Department of Education)
Ms Irene Murphy (Department of Education)
Rev Ian Ellis (Transferor Representatives' Council)
Rev Dr Lee Glenny (Transferor Representatives' Council)
Rev Robert Herron (Transferor Representatives' Council)

The subgroup met at 9.54 am.

(The Chairperson [Ms S Ramsey] in the Chair.)

208. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** You are welcome. Can you please introduce yourselves?

209. **Mr Brendan Harron (Irish National Teachers' Organisation):** I am Brendan Harron, a senior official with the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). I am standing in for Frank Bunting, our Northern secretary.

210. **Ms Avril Hall-Callaghan (Ulster Teachers' Union):** I am Avril Hall- Callaghan, general secretary of the Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU).

211. **Mr Mark Langhammer (Association of Teachers and Lecturers):** I am Mark Langhammer of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

212. **Mr Seamus Searson (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers):** I am Seamus Searson, the Northern Ireland organiser for the NASUWT.

213. **Mr Langhammer:** Thank you for the opportunity to address the subgroup. I have provided members with a pack in case they are short of weekend reading.

214. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers is a union of 160,000 members from across the UK. It is a relatively small union in Northern Ireland. Although it has members

from all sectors, the majority are concentrated in the grammar school sector; consequently, there has been a fairly robust debate on the issues.

215. I will make three points: the need for balanced intakes as the guiding principle for school admissions; how to reduce the high-stakes nature of transfer decisions that are taken at the age of 10 or 11, and to urge members to consider a delay; and to stress that what happens in school plays a relatively small part in explaining variations in education performance.

216. The ATL supports school intakes that are balanced in terms of social class and ability. There is reasonable academic consensus, and I have given members a considerable number of references in the file, showing that balanced intakes produce the best overall performance — not necessarily the best for those at the top or the bottom, but the best overall performance. Broadly speaking, the influence of one's peers and an atmosphere of aspiration help to achieve that, in addition to encouraging the retention of good teachers in schools. In Northern Ireland, however, a balanced intake is not easy. Crudely speaking, there must be either very large schools or some form of social engineering to achieve that.

217. Large schools tend to envelop well-off areas, disadvantaged areas and those in between, and because Northern Ireland is a rural country with a range of sectors, it has become Balkanised in its education system and tends to have relatively small schools. Notwithstanding the recommendations of the Bain Report, that is an obstacle.

218. In terms of social engineering, Ulster folk — Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter alike — tend to grate a little and do not sit easily with schemes of social engineering.

219. The ATL concurs with George Bain that the growth of integrated education at secondary level may bring about larger schools that, in turn, may help to achieve a balanced intake.

220. One small measure on admissions that the ATL asks members to consider is for a quota, or

target, or some means to incentivise schools to take children who receive free schools meals. I think we could thole that as a society.

221. With regard to deferred, or delayed, transfer, for some time the ATL has been averse to making any detailed admissions criteria at the age of 11 because it is convinced that that misses the point. The age of 10 or 11 is too young to make life-changing decisions. Parents face high-stake decisions for their 10- and 11-year-old children, and we support the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, which recommends that key education decisions be made at the ages of 14 and 16. If decisions on key pathways are to be made at the ages of 14 and 16, logically, those are the ages when transfers, or at least fluidity, between schools should occur.

222. We support and recommend the concept of middle schools, or junior schools, not because we are obsessed with institutions, but because we believe that they would be a useful institutional way of providing for a delay in transfer. We do not like to close down young people's options.

223. Delaying transfer, with or without junior high schools, is a popular option. The BBC 'Newline' poll this year, and successive Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey reports since 2003, have indicated that between 63% and 69% of parents support delaying those major education decisions. I do not want to bat your heads with statistics. However, the ATL believes that that figure includes people who are for and against transfer.

224. With regard to the effect of education, the ATL cautions against overestimating the degree to which schools can affect performance. There is significant academic consensus that up to 85% of the variation in pupils' performance is down to factors outside school, such as parental support, culture, income and social class. That is not to say that schools have no influence — they do. However, even the school improvement campaigns estimate that although effective schooling does have an impact, it does not have a huge effect on variations in performance.

225. I will not address the issue of pupil profiles; I will rely on my colleagues to do so, because we agree on the issue. I thank the subgroup for its time. I understand that some members will speak at an ATL seminar on 12 January 2007, at which we will explore the grounds on which consensus might be reached.

10.00 am

226. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I want to pick up on what Mr Langhammer said and elaborate on pupil profiles. I welcome the opportunity to address the subgroup. I want to emphasise the Ulster Teachers' Union's continued opposition to any form of academic selection. That has been the union's consistent policy for many years. We are delighted that the subgroup wants to examine what will happen after the termination of the existing transfer procedure.

227. The UTU views the pupil profile as an excellent tool, when it is used properly. However, if it is not used in the way that it was intended, it could become a dangerous weapon. Indeed, if the pupil profile were to be hijacked and turned into a selection instrument, all the good work that teachers have already done to develop it could be lost.

228. The pupil profile is simply an extension of the kind of ongoing assessment that teachers already make about pupils in every school. Its standardisation will benefit us all. It should give a broad and balanced picture of a young person's strengths and interests and of what he or she has achieved to date across a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities.

229. Teachers are concerned about the workload implications, and my colleague Brendan Harron will pick up on that. However, I am sure that those obstacles can be overcome through the appropriate negotiating machinery. Teachers, particularly those in the primary sector, welcome the prospect of a wider curriculum at the top end of the primary school. They will embrace the pupil profile as they have embraced many worthwhile initiatives over recent years because they consider it as a way to ensure that parents have the fullest possible information to advise them of the best pathway for their children.

230. I must emphasise that teachers will not allow themselves to be put in the situation where the professional advice that they give will be used in a selection situation. In fact, teachers have indicated to the UTU that if any pressure is put on them to do that, they will refuse to co-operate.

231. The UTU is convinced that even if the pupil profile were not finalised on time — and I understand that it has run into difficulties — it is still possible for teachers to supply sufficient information to advise parents of their children's strengths and weaknesses, because that, after all, is one of a teacher's professional competencies.

232. In addition, the UTU concurs with the ATL that there is an imperative: there is a radical change in the public's perception of transfer at the age of 11. It is a high-stakes decision at the age of 11 and it is too early for that decision to be taken. The concept of lifelong learning has impacted on traditional views on the time frame for education. With regard to career pathways and important choices for children, the time is right to shift emphasis from the age of 11 to the age of 14.

233. I hasten to add that even at the age of 14, it should be an elective rather than a selective system. That change of emphasis would reduce the impact of the pupil profile at the age of 11, if there are any concerns about the fact that there might only be a couple of years of profiling for the first intake going through. That would take a bit of pressure off the situation.

234. The public sector in Northern Ireland is facing an unprecedented period of change. Schools must, and will, change. Rationalisation is an inevitable fact, whether we like it or not, and the traditional institutions, particularly the grammar schools, must adapt to customer demand. When so many aspects of our lives are client driven, it is incredible that in this one very important area of life we still allow the institution, rather than the customer, to make the choice.

235. Before I turn to the admissions criteria, I would like to raise the important issue of funding. One challenge will be to ensure that collaboration between providers is not

hampered by a system whereby schools are competing for funds based on pupil numbers. That matter must be radically overhauled to suit the needs of our new system.

236. Many people see the choice of admissions criteria as critical to the success of future post-primary arrangements. The Ulster Teachers' Union agrees with the four broad categories outlined in the consultation document, and I have supplied the subgroup with the union's full response to that document.

237. Not all schools will wish to use all the approved criteria, and the Ulster Teachers' Union firmly believes that the tie-breaker is the only compulsory criterion that should be included.

238. Family-focused criteria are important and should feature as a high priority, and the geographical criteria support the idea of a school serving a local community. The Ulster Teachers' Union want to ensure that, where possible, young people are not denied access to their local school, if that is their preferred choice.

239. We are perfectly happy with either of the tie-breakers that are listed — the random and the geographical criteria. If we were forced to choose between the two, we would narrowly opt for the geographical criteria on the basis that that would serve the interests of local community schools.

240. The Ulster Teachers' Union is strongly opposed to the selection of pupils by means of interview or entrance test. Compulsory criteria should apply to all schools, and there should not be any optional interview or entrance test.

241. As I said earlier, pupils should be choosing schools, not vice versa.

242. Finally, I wish to make a heartfelt plea on behalf of teachers. Please act with urgency to submit a consultation document to the teachers' unions as soon as possible. Teachers will do all in their power to implement policy, but they need time to prepare for it. At present, teachers are in a state of limbo. They need direction, and they must be reassured that there is no going back to the 11-plus or anything like it, and they need to know what lies ahead.

243. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Thank you. We have another two presentations to hear, so I will hold questions until the end. I am conscious of the time and that members are keen to ask questions, so I ask witnesses to please keep their presentations as precise as possible. There will be a question-and-answer session after the presentations.

244. **Mr McNarry:** Members have been asked to declare their interests for the record. Do any of the panel have interests to declare? For example, do any of them work for somebody else or are they members of boards, and so on? It would be useful to have a little background. We know who the witnesses are officially representing, but they may be members of other groups or boards.

245. **Mr Langhammer:** I will declare my interests. I am a director of Monkstown Boxing Club, a life member of Crusaders Football Club and —

246. **Mr S Wilson:** I would be ashamed of that.

[Laughter.]

247. **Mr Langhammer:** I am proud of it this year, Sammy.

248. I am also a member of the Irish Labour Party, and I serve on its national executive.

249. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I am not a member of any political party, nor am I on the board of any school.

250. **Mr Searson:** I am the same.

251. **Mr Harron:** Likewise.

252. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** We will move to the next presentation.

253. **Mr Harron:** I represent the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, which has approximately 6,500 members in Northern Ireland. The INTO has been, remains, and always will be, opposed to academic selection, and we welcome its cessation after 2008.

254. The INTO supports the whole thrust of the reorganisation of post-primary education. We envisage the situation, post-2008 and on a rolling-out basis, in which the post-primary

school a child selects will be increasingly irrelevant. The context in which the INTO wishes to address the subgroup on the two questions is as follows: the new curriculum; and the implementation of the Entitled to Succeed policy, and the entitlement framework through which every 11-year-old child — regardless of the post-primary school they choose — will be offered a broad and similar education up to the age of 14, and that all children, at the age of 14, will be able to choose from a healthy balance of 24 vocational and academic subjects for GCSE, and 27 subjects for A level.

255. The INTO supports the concept of a pupil profile, and, as Ms Hall-Callaghan said, it is merely an extension of what presently exists. We have made several comments on pupil profiles in our briefing paper and in responses to consultations on the issue. The pupil profile must be manageable: it is not at present. In September, I read an independent evaluation of the pupil profile commissioned by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), which stated that it was not fit for purpose and not manageable by teachers.

256. The pupil profile must be manageable, and it must be fit for purpose. Those are the two conditions on which the INTO will give its full support to the profile. It takes a teacher one hour to complete a profile on one child; therefore, it takes 30 hours for a class of 30 pupils. That raises the issue of when teachers will get the time, or be released, to complete the profiles?

257. The INTO has made it clear that if pupil profiles are to be used as a selection tool, teachers will not complete them — they will not co-operate — and that has been accepted by the Department of Education and the CCEA. That must be made clear.

258. At present, the pupil profile is not designed to be used as a selection tool, and it could not be used as such because it is not completed in a secure situation. The INTO will withdraw its co-operation on pupil profiles if they are tinkered with to make them suitable for selection purposes.

259. In my briefing paper, I have also said that it takes too long to complete pupil profiles. The timing needs to be adjusted. The lack of computer facilities for the testing is a major-league problem. Primary schools do not have adequate hardware, and we are not content with the solution put to us by CCEA that we should do what is done in Scotland — that a busful of computers should be driven around primary schools, which people would board in order to do their tests. That is not the answer.

260. There should be simple, clear and centrally drawn-up admissions criteria for entry to post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. It does not matter which school a child chooses. There should be a centrally drawn-up list of feeder schools for all post-primary schools, and pupils should be accepted into those schools on the basis of how close they live to them. If there is a need for a tie-break situation between pupils, it should be based on random selection on a Northern Ireland-wide basis. Tie-breaks should be administered centrally to ensure that schools are not setting up their own methods of decision-making.

261. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Thank you. We move to Seamus Searson from the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers.

262. **Mr Searson:** The current events in Northern Ireland provide a real opportunity for change. We need to welcome that change and move forward. The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority in April 2008 will provide us with an opportunity to move the entire education system along and help every child reach his or her full potential. This is what the reorganisation of post-primary education is about.

263. I will not go into great detail. We agree with many of the points that my colleagues have raised. I will simply raise the issue and focus on the criteria. The reorganisation of post-primary education is neither a simple nor easy task. We must be aware of the downsides of any reorganisation, however. The paper that I circulated focuses on one or two of the problems that the criteria can throw up.

264. The NASUWT is the largest teachers' union in Northern Ireland, and our membership is drawn from across all the different education sectors. The paper was finalised after a lengthy discussion period about the process with our members.

10.15 am

265. As has been mentioned, there must be a code of practice for school admissions that covers all of Northern Ireland. The paper states that consistency and equity in the schools admissions process should be made clear. As I said, the Education and Skills Authority will have an important role in that regard and must ensure that the arrangements do not disadvantage, either directly or indirectly, particular social and minority ethnic groups, children with disabilities or children with special educational needs.

266. I wish to mention parental choice, a term that is often bandied about. The concept of parental choice does not fit in with what is needed for the future, which is an effective and co-operative relationship between parents and schools. The notion of parental choice is often misleading because people believe that they have a choice when, in reality, they do not. Often, it is the schools that make the choice rather than the parents. The present system creates competition, which, in turn, fosters tensions, and that works against greater co-operation.

267. I will quickly mention one or two aspects of family-focused criteria. If the system were to concentrate on family-focused criteria, where priorities are given to pupils whose siblings already attend particular schools, there is a possibility that children living close to those schools will be denied places. Although that is an important factor, it must not become the major determining factor. That is one of the issues that we are considering.

268. We are cautious about the use of geographical criteria, because the catchment area of a school may not reflect the local community. If tie-breakers are used, they need to be quite clear, open and transparent so that people can see what is happening. Furthermore,

the use of tie-breakers should be a fairly straightforward process.

269. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I thank you all for your presentations. I will now hand over to members, who will ask questions.

270. **Mr Donaldson:** My question is for Ms Hall-Callaghan. If I were a working-class Protestant child living in Benson Street in Lisburn, which is almost equidistant from Lisnagarvey High School, Laurel Hill Community College, Friends' School, Wallace High School and Forthill College, which school would be considered my local school? Which school would be the community school that would serve me in a selection tie-breaker?

271. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I do not know Lisburn well enough to comment on that. However, I presume that the people who live there would relate to a particular school and would know which school they wanted their children to attend.

272. **Mr Donaldson:** I am not talking about the school that a pupil would want to attend; I am talking about the tie-breaker situation. You have suggested that, in the event of a school being oversubscribed, a tie-breaker that is based on geographical location should be used.

273. I gave the example of a child who lives equidistant from the five secondary schools that I mentioned, two of which are grammar schools, three of which are secondary schools. What would happen in the event of a school being oversubscribed? Let us say that the child wants to attend Wallace High School, but it is oversubscribed. Which school will be considered that child's local community school for the purposes of the tie-breaker? My example could apply to Magherafelt, Londonderry or anywhere.

274. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** If a tie-breaker is used, the process of how various factors will be measured must be set out. Generally speaking, however, a child will not be exactly equidistant from two schools.

275. **Mr Donaldson:** Are you sure about that?

276. **Mr S Wilson:** It could come down to a distance of 5 feet.

277. **Mr Donaldson:** I could take you to a place in Lisburn that is almost exactly equidistant from five secondary schools. In that case, which would be my local school?

278. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** Almost equidistant?

279. **Mr S Wilson:** Are you suggesting that the school that a pupil will attend could depend on whether that pupil lives 5 feet away from one school or 5 feet away from another? Is that not a bit daft?

280. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** No, it is not. A decision must be made in some way. What I said was that I would be happy with a tie-breaker situation or with random selection. Schools should be equally good and, therefore, it should not matter which school a pupil attends.

281. **Mr Donaldson:** Lisburn, which is in my constituency, is a large urban area with five good schools, and I deal with the admissions appeals procedure every summer. I could name — but I will not — the schools that most parents in Lisburn would choose to send their children to. Three or four of those five schools are substantially oversubscribed.

282. Wallace High School and Friends' School are located in a middle-class area. Under your policy, more families would move into that area to be close to those two schools, which, I guarantee, would be oversubscribed every year. The result would be that working-class kids would lose out — and those kids want to go to those schools, believe me; I have sat with parents who have appealed against decisions. Both schools that I mentioned take in kids from working-class backgrounds. In my constituency, the working-class kids would lose out because their parents would not be able to afford to move close to the schools in order to benefit from your proposed tie-breaker.

283. Also, if I lived in a rural community such as Moira, Ballinderry, Aghalee, Annahilt or Hillsborough, how would I gain from that policy, when the decision comes down to a tie-breaker and the urban kids win every time?

284. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** We are coming at this from the wrong angle. Mr Langhammer and I emphasised that the choice at the age of 11 is not the important choice. We are also trying to promote the idea that all schools are good schools. Why would parents opt for Wallace High School or Friends' School, for example? All those schools in Lisburn should be attractive to parents.

285. **Mr S Wilson:** Do you ever read any inspectors' reports?

286. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** Yes, all the time.

287. **Mr S Wilson:** The inspectors' reports do not say that every school is a good school. It is totally naive to say that.

288. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** It is not naive to say that. It is what we are working towards. Teachers in Northern Ireland are excellent and very well qualified. We need to establish a system in which they can operate properly. The system is wrong at the moment.

289. **Mr Donaldson:** We agree with that, but we disagree on the method of achieving that objective. The system that you advocate would discriminate against far more children than the 11-plus does currently.

290. I have not had an answer to my reasonable question about how rural kids will be provided for in this geographical tie-breaker situation. Rural children will be discriminated against if the decision comes down to a tie-breaker. There are very few secondary schools in the middle of the countryside, so rural kids will lose out. I do not know what that will mean as regards equality and section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

291. Urban areas contain a multiplicity of schools. Perhaps in many towns there is only one school and the decision is simple, but in other towns there is more than one school. A postcode lottery will discriminate against many pupils and will not create a fair system. In fact, it will create a very unfair system.

292. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I live in the middle of nowhere, in the area that Mr Donaldson

mentioned, and I did not have any difficulty in getting my child into the school of her choice.

293. **Mr Donaldson:** That may happen at the moment, under the current system.

294. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** At the moment, yes.

295. **Mr Donaldson:** If the system were the postcode lottery that you advocate, would you still be of the same mind?

296. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I do not think that I would have any difficulty.

297. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I do not want to stifle debate, but we need to move on.

298. **Mr Donaldson:** This is an important point.

299. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I appreciate that, but a number of members want to ask questions. If we can get the first round of questions over, there will be time for more comments.

300. **Mr Donaldson:** I am finished with this issue.

301. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** If other members do not jump in and ask questions on the back of your time, there may be more time.

302. **Mr Donaldson:** Absolutely.

303. **Mr McNarry:** You should take him literally: he said that was finished.

304. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Mr Wilson's time is now cut because he made two comments during Mr Donaldson's time.

305. **Mr S Wilson:** They were short questions, and I did not get an answer to either of them.
[Laughter.]

306. **Mr Donaldson:** With respect, if geographical proximity were used as a tie-breaker, there is no way that Ms Hall-Callaghan's child, living in a rural community, would benefit from a system that dictates that the closer a child lives to a school, the better the chance of getting into that school in the event of that school being oversubscribed.

307. It defies logic and reason to suggest that if I live in a rural community — and I do — that my child will have an equal chance of getting

into a school that is oversubscribed when the tie-breaker is based on proximity to the school. If you can show me any area in Northern Ireland where such a tie-breaker benefits the rural child and not the urban child, I will look at it.

308. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I live close to the Dickson plan area, and there is never any difficulty in getting children into the junior high school in Lurgan.

309. **Mr S Wilson:** I have two questions. We can probably get a fairly quick answer to the first one. No one this morning has dealt with the reality of the situation, which is that after 26 March 2007, if the Assembly is up and running — and since members have been lobbied publicly and privately by all of your organisations to get the Assembly up and running, it seems that you are keen for that to happen — the Secretary of State has said that academic selection will still be here unless the Assembly decides otherwise. Given the cross-community nature of the Assembly, that situation is unlikely to change.

310. Given that we all want devolution, we will have to deal with the reality of academic selection being here. Can you give us some indication as to what form of academic selection you would like to see in those circumstances, or will the UTU simply opt out of the debate?

311. **Mr Harron:** My understanding is that the current situation will end in 2009, and the slate will be wiped clean. New arrangements from 2009 will have to be put in place by the Assembly or by the Minister. Therefore, we are not going to opt out of anything.

312. I have been teaching for 32 years in post-primary education. I believe that unless all the reforms have been put in place as regards the curriculum, the Entitled to Succeed policy and the entitlement framework have been a lie. Ms Hall-Callaghan is correct — from 2009 onwards it should not matter which school is being selected at age eleven, because children, regardless of whether they live in rural or urban areas, or east, west, north or south, are going to be guaranteed a menu of 24 subjects at GCSE and 27 subjects at A level.

313. **Mr S Wilson:** I do not know if you are trying to avoid the question or have not understood the question.

314. **Mr Langhammer:** I am happy to answer.

315. **Mr S Wilson:** I will always get an answer from you.

316. **Mr Langhammer:** It might be the wrong one.

317. **Mr S Wilson:** I wish to emphasise that academic selection will still be on the menu after 26 March 2007 — it will still be available. We have heard what you would like to see in an ideal world, but that is not likely to be the case unless there is no devolution. I assume you all want to see devolution as quickly as possible, because you have all lobbied us to that effect. Members would find it helpful if they knew what kind of academic selection the UTU could live with.

318. **Mr Harron:** None whatsoever. We have no time for academic selection.

319. **Mr S Wilson:** Why?

320. **Mr Donaldson:** Will you break the law?

321. **Mr Harron:** I do not see the connection between not wanting academic selection and breaking the law.

322. **Mr McNarry:** You said earlier that if pupil profiling became part of a selection method, your members would not work it.

323. **Mr Harron:** Yes.

324. **Mr McNarry:** In response to Mr Wilson's question about academic selection, you said, "None whatsoever." What instructions will you be giving your members that we can take back to the parents to tell them what they will be likely to face from your union members?

325. **Mr Harron:** Parents are not likely to be facing anything from our members. I said that the INTO's policy always has been, and always will be, to oppose any form of academic selection. However, that does not mean that we as professionals will not operate whatever system is in place. There is no question about that. We are professional teachers — regardless of what we have to deal with, we will deliver.

326. As regards the ideal world that Mr Wilson referred to, I emphasise that the Department of Education has been telling us for the past five or six years that the new curriculum, the new Entitled to Succeed policy and the new entitlement framework are coming in. I have believed the Department for 10 years that this would happen.

327. **Mr S Wilson:** Never believe officials from the Department of Education. We learned that a long time ago.

328. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Other members and witnesses wish to speak.

10.30 am

329. **Mr Langhammer:** My answer to the first question will be as brief as possible. I am not clear that the position is as you described. It is clear that that part of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 has fallen, with the result that academic selection has not been outlawed. I am also clear that the 11-plus will end in 2008. That does not mean that an alternative procedure is in place: it has not been made clear whether academic selection or another procedure must be used. Given that academic selection has not been banned and that the 11-plus will fall, I understand that we are facing a vacuum — we are not automatically considering different forms of academic selection.

330. **Mr S Wilson:** Schools will have the ability to make their own decisions.

331. **Mr Langhammer:** I agree with Mr Wilson's point about not believing Department of Education officials. With the aim of advising our members, I wrote to the Department to ask whether a school or a group of schools could implement their own tests in the absence of another procedure. The Department clearly stated that that would not happen. I do not know whether that is lawful, but that is the Department's view. However, I am happy to pass that letter to the subgroup.

332. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Perhaps the discussion can continue outside, but I wish to move on. Mr McNarry, you can speak next, but I ask you to be conscious that other members have not spoken yet.

333. **Mr McNarry:** OK, boss, I will see what I can do.

334. **Mr S Wilson:** Is that the Chairperson's official designation? *[Laughter.]*

335. **Mr McNarry:** She is bossing us about, so I decided to call her "boss".

336. If a vote were taken in the Assembly tomorrow, you would see here and on the opposite Benches a mirror image of how the parties would go through the lobbies. We will not be able to address the issue in a satisfactory manner as long as that situation pertains.

337. Your association is a big hitter; it commands a lot of media attention and produces lovely glossy brochures and propaganda. I wish to turn your attention to the recent findings of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee on literacy and numeracy. In everyone's estimation, that report was shocking and disturbing. As a group that broadly supports the 2006 Order, can you confidently say that it will preserve Northern Ireland's standards of academic achievement and address our record of educational underachievement?

338. Are you willing to say that what you support will improve the situation to such an extent that you will back the reforms totally? You are on record as saying as much.

339. **Mr Harron:** Yes.

340. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I like short answers.

341. **Mr Harron:** Those who support academic selection and the grammar schools seem to be in denial. I have been a grammar schoolteacher for the past 16 years. Forty per cent of pupils who leave school at age 16 do not have adequate literacy and numeracy skills. When will the penny drop with people that academic selection is one of the major causes of that? I also taught for 16 —

342. **Mr McNarry:** Where did you find that statistic? The report did not say that.

343. **Mr Harron:** The report said that —

344. **Mr McNarry:** That is a gross nonsense. Selection has nothing to do with that

misrepresentation. I am asking you whether the reforms that you support and for which you are lobbying will change the situation. Forgive me; I respect the organisations that you represent, but when I meet individual teachers, I do not hear from them the same things that come out of your offices.

345. **Mr Harron:** I taught for 16 years in a secondary school in an underprivileged area and another 16 years in a grammar school. Therefore, I have seen the system from both sides. The report said that 40% of pupils in Northern Ireland leave school at age 16 —

346. **Mr McNarry:** Of course it said that. However, it did not blame that on academic selection.

347. **Mr Harron:** You asked me for my view, and I am saying that one of the major causes of inadequate literacy and numeracy is that the vast majority of those pupils leave from our non-grammar schools.

348. **Mr McNarry:** Does that mean that the reforms are a panacea for curing all that?

349. **Mr Harron:** We in INTO wish that politicians would go the whole way and create a fully comprehensive system. However, by removing academic selection and making all schools equal, all pupils are treated the same. When there are no longer two tiers of education, the standards attained by all pupils will rise and the percentage of pupils who leave without proper numeracy and literacy skills will decrease.

350. **Mr McNarry:** Where are we on that issue? On one hand, members of the panel say that all schools are good, but the Bain Report states that they are not.

351. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I said that the UTU wants to move towards a situation in which all schools are viewed as good schools. There are many good schools and some that could be improved. We must work to change the public perception. There is much work to be done on education. The public perceives grammar schools to be the good schools, and that is not necessarily the case.

352. **Mr McNarry:** Let us not go into the question of grammar schools. I am asking you whether the reforms will improve the current situation, particularly in relation to under-achievement, and whether they will maintain the current levels of excellence that are attained.

353. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** We hope so. At the outset of any process, no one can predict where it will lead.

354. **Mr McNarry:** You are saying, though, that the system is broken and you want to fix it.

355. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** Yes; it is broken and we want to fix it.

356. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** If members would ask questions rather than making speeches, they might get more answers.

357. **Mr D Bradley:** I welcome the members of the panel and thank them for their contributions.

358. The INTO contribution included some reservations about the concept of the pupil profile. This afternoon, the subgroup will have a chance to address those problems with the CCEA — and we will endeavour to do so, because it is an important issue.

359. Mr Langhammer, you said that ATL's preference is for pupil transfer to take place at age 14 rather than age 11, and several other contributors concurred. On what basis would the transfer procedure operate at age 14?

360. **Mr Langhammer:** I must be honest: we have grave difficulties with some aspects of the 2006 Order. On balance, we support it, but I am not pretending that the union's debate about it has been anything other than robust. Ultimately, we felt that anything other than widespread consensus was not good for Northern Ireland's education system. However, in a fairly intense debate, there is not that level of consensus. ATL's view is that children develop at different ages and that those aged 10 or 11 are too young to take definitive decisions about career paths or particular types of school.

361. We are not hung up on the idea of junior high schools, because some schools could develop junior schools within them. However,

we are clear that if there is to be a move towards a more skills-based curriculum in which children take key education decisions at the age of 14 and 16, it is important that they not be locked out of schools. For instance, if my youngster goes to a particular school at the age of 11 and realises by the age of 14 that he or she wants to go in a particular direction that is best supported by a different school up the road, there should not be a situation whereby that school is simply full.

362. If the key decisions are to be taken at age 14 and 16, as stated in the 2006 Order, we must provide for transfer or fluidity between schools. Crudely, people have said that the system is like the Dickson plan, and perhaps it is slightly similar. The failure of the Dickson plan is that it is not uniformly applied and people can get round it. However, ATL clearly supports the Department on the part of the 2006 Order that states that it is better for pupils to take key decisions at the age of 14, rather than when they are 10 or 11.

363. **Mr D Bradley:** Ms Hall-Callaghan said that if the pupil profile were not completely developed, teachers from the UTU would be prepared to give advice to parents on which post-primary school would be best suited to their children. Would INTO members be prepared to do that also?

364. **Mr Harron:** No. We do not believe that it is the job of primary school teachers to advise on which post-primary school pupils should go to — and I think Ms Hall-Callaghan said the same.

365. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I did.

366. **Mr Harron:** As primary schoolteachers, we would advise parents on the strengths and weaknesses of their children but we would let the parents make the decision on which post-primary school their children should attend.

367. We have not yet mentioned the specialist schools pilot programme. The first tranche of 12 schools started the programme last year, and the selection process for the next tranche is under way, although I do not know how many schools will be involved. As I said before, on paper it

should not really matter which school a pupil chooses, because in five, six or 10 years' time, as the programme is rolled out, all schools will have specialisms of some sort — including the five schools in Lisburn to which Mr Donaldson referred. Thus, if a pupil profile says that the child has a particular bent towards the arts, sciences, or vocational studies, the pupil can choose a school with an appropriate specialism. We must look to the future on this issue. We would not advise teachers to give pupils advice on which school to attend.

368. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I would like to confirm an earlier point, Mr Bradley. I did not say that teachers would advise pupils on which school to choose. I said that they would advise on the strengths and abilities of the children.

369. **Mr McNarry:** How do you dodge a question from a parent —

370. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** David —

371. **Mr McNarry:** If a parent is told how strong a child is, can he or she go to Regent House?

372. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** David, with respect, I am chairing the meeting. I will let Barry ask a question now.

373. **Mr McNarry:** Sorry, I was just getting carried away.

374. **Mr McElduff:** I welcome the specific and targeted way in which each of the contributors addressed the terms of reference.

375. It has been said that the pupil profile is an excellent tool, if used properly. How can it be used properly? What type of information do parents tend to want to hear?

376. **Mr McNarry:** Can my child go to a grammar school — that is what they want to hear today, Barry.

377. **Mr McElduff:** Are teachers concerned that pupil profiling might add to their already bureaucratic burden? Is that a real concern? How might the profile be used properly?

378. **Mr Harron:** INTO's policy is that children's test results should not be included in

pupil profiles. Despite teachers' expertise in telling parents how their children are doing, parents tend to focus purely on test scores and do not look at what is written about their children. In the models and prototypes that are being experimented with in the pilots, a good deal of information is written about pupils under a whole raft of educational strengths and weaknesses —but parents simply focus on the scores. For example, the profile may say that a pupil's age is nine, but his reading age is 10 or six or whatever. We are concerned about how that information is shared with parents.

379. Workload is very important. I talked to a school principal in Mr McElduff's area who is involved in the pilot, and she told me that she has a class of 30 pupils and only two computers in the classroom. The profile takes an hour to complete, and if two pupils are working on the interactive tests, the rest of the pupils must be cleared out of the room.

380. There are logistical problems, as adequate computer hardware is needed to allow pupils to do the interactive tests. Primary-school teachers normally take about 30 minutes to write a report on a pupil. The pupil profiles that are now being experimented with take twice as long. I hope that the CCEA will tell the subgroup this afternoon that it plans to make the process more manageable by slimming it down, which will free up teachers' time. I also hope that it tells the subgroup that it will provide the hardware resources needed to enable the pupils to carry out the computer interactive tests.

381. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** Mr McElduff asked what form the profile will take. There is much more to a child than academic ability, and the profile must reflect all a child's competences. Although some children are wonderful at drama, arts, music and other such subjects, the current profoundly academic structures can make them feel as though they are failures, when, in fact, they are brilliant in those subjects in which they excel. The purpose of the profile should be to reflect the full breadth of each child's ability.

382. **Mr S Wilson:** May I ask the witness about that last point?

383. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Quickly, please.

384. **Mr S Wilson:** You said that although the pupil profile would not be used as a selective tool, it would be the basis on which parents chose the pathway for their children. Consider the example of a child who is either wonderful at art or brilliant at football. That is so subjective. What use is that to anyone?

385. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** It is not subjective. At football matches it is obvious which children can play well and which cannot.

386. **Mr S Wilson:** Therefore, you do not believe that the words “brilliant” or “good” are subjective terms. You might think something is brilliant, whereas I might think that it is rubbish. Those terms are subjective.

387. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I think that you are splitting hairs.

388. **Mr S Wilson:** I am not splitting hairs at all.

10.45 am

389. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** If there are no more questions, we will move on. I want to let Barry finish.

390. **Mr McNarry:** Are you allowing him another question?

391. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** No. Witnesses are waiting and the subgroup is in danger of exceeding its time limit. When we make the switchover, members can talk briefly to witnesses.

392. **Mr McNarry:** With all respect, Chair, this is a subgroup of the Committee on the Programme for Government. The whole thing has been set up for the benefit of the public. Will witnesses follow me outside so that I can hold a conversation with them? That is just not practical.

393. **Mr McElduff:** The question that I wanted to ask was about the additional transfer arrangements that would apply to children who have a statement of special educational needs.

394. **Mr Harron:** There is a section in the consultation paper on compelling individual

circumstances. INTO supports the retention of those considerations. Those children should be supernumerary to the school’s quota of pupils. Compelling individual circumstances should be used only rarely. Children with statements of special educational needs should be given special priority and INTO believes that they should be supernumerary to the school’s quota.

395. **Ms Hall-Callaghan:** I refer Mr McElduff to our document, which has a full section on that.

396. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** With respect, David, members agreed this agenda at the last meeting. Witnesses were agreed. There is a time limit. I suggest that if members have further questions, they should forward them to the Committee Clerks, who will contact the organisations to request written answers.

397. **Mr McNarry:** Mr Searson has not contributed, and I have one small question for him. Surely, if we are all here —

398. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** If you work with me, I will work with you.

399. **Mr McNarry:** If you will work with me, may I put the question?

400. **Mr McElduff:** The proposal is that the question be now put.

401. **Mr McNarry:** Mr Searson, can you give your views on the importance of setting and streaming in post-primary education?

402. **Mr Searson:** Teachers work hard to improve the ability of all children. That has a bearing on my earlier point about the 2006 Order. Present practice does not work for all the children of Northern Ireland, and the 2006 Order is a means to improve practice. Particular points arise with regard to setting and streaming, and teachers will need to work with particular children. That might start at 11 years of age, 13 or 14. It will vary from child to child and from school to school. Schools will need to determine what is in the best interests of each child and how that is operated.

403. **Mr McNarry:** Are you working in that direction at the moment?

404. **Mr Searson:** Yes.

405. **Mr McNarry:** Thank you.

406. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Thank you for coming. I should say that members might have further questions for you. I trust that your doors will always be open.

The subgroup was suspended at 10.50 am.

On resuming —

10.54 am

407. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I ask members to take their seats. The witnesses should introduce themselves, after which they will have a total of 10 minutes to make their presentation. I will then open the floor to members' questions.

408. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield (Association for Quality Education):** I shall begin by introducing myself. In common with a lot of the witnesses who appear before you, I wear many hats. However, we are all involved in one way or another with the Association for Quality Education (AQE), which is a coalition of interests that are concerned with the future of our education system.

409. I shall begin by making a few points of principle. First, I am not sure that the selection issue, important though it is, is really at the centre of our education problems. I acknowledge that although there are many education problems in Northern Ireland, we have records of substantial achievement, including good performance at A level and GCSE, a high representation of underprivileged communities in the universities, and so on. On the other hand, we have heard a lot about areas of obvious underperformance: clearly, something must be done about that. AQE does not think that such underperformance is attributable wholly to the method of selection.

410. Calling ourselves the Association of Quality Education does not mean that we think that grammar schools represent the only excellent part of the education system; that would be an extremely arrogant point of view. We must remember that we would not have the record of performance of entry into higher

education without the excellent performance of many of the non-grammar schools.

411. AQE endorses views that, as we understand it, the population at large has expressed repeatedly. In a democracy, those views should not be ignored. A very consistent result has emerged from at least six separate Government-conducted polls, saying that on the one hand people do not like, do not trust or do not accept the 11-plus as a method of selection, but that, nevertheless, they want to retain some method of academic selection. It is important to listen to the voice of the people.

412. Secondly, we are conscious of the assurances that a number of the Ministers who have held the education portfolio in recent years have given about these matters. People have been assured that the proposed changes to selection methods do not mean that grammar schools will disappear, and that they do not mean that comprehensive education will be introduced in Northern Ireland. However, we confess to a degree of scepticism about that.

413. For our part, we accept that we should go along with the fact that the Northern Ireland population has said that the 11-plus system of selection should go. However, it would be possible to replace it with a more reliable system that would be acceptable across the education sector. We should be looking for widespread acceptability in the same way that we are looking for wider consensus. Clearly, we are looking for as much consensus as possible throughout the education system. We do not want to impose unreasonable burdens on the head teachers of primary schools, for instance; we must be sensitive to their views.

414. I wanted to make those points at the start of our presentation. First, we should listen clearly to what people have said about this matter, and, secondly, we should take at face value the assurances that successive Ministers have given us, while exploring how those can be made a reality.

415. **Mr Marcus Patterson (Association for Quality Education):** I am a parent with two young children, one in primary 4 and one in primary 3, who will be directly affected by the

changes. I have a couple of comments about the strengths of the current system. Our system produces examination results that are much better than those in Great Britain, and it produces better outcomes with regard to social inclusion than the education systems do in other parts of these islands. We attribute that success to the diversity in Northern Ireland.

416. Statistics show that social deprivation tends to be linked to poor examination results. We have more social deprivation here, and yet our examination results are better than those in Great Britain. For example, the 2004 figures show that 60% of pupils in Northern Ireland got five GCSE passes ranging from A* to C — the figure for England is 54%, and in Wales it is 51%. Northern Ireland has more pupils getting A grades, including in subjects such as English and maths.

417. We hear a lot about the myth of the long tail of underachievement in regard to social inclusion. That long tail of underachievement does not exist in the sense that every education system has a tail of underachievement. Northern Ireland's situation is no worse than that in other parts of these islands. It is better, certainly, in some senses than in England. For example, if we consider the figures for free school meals, 33% of students who receive free school meals in Northern Ireland get five GCSE passes ranging from grades A to C, while the figure for England is 26.1%, which is very much lower. The people at the bottom end of the social scale are actually doing much better in our system.

418. There has been a lot of concern about people on the Shankill Road, and there have been a lot of crocodile tears on the issue. It is a very important issue, but the facts have often been distorted. The Public Accounts Committee pointed out that the 11-plus is not a problem there. The statistics for 2001 show that 5% of the students got five GCSE passes at grades A to C — that applied to three people. The figures went up by 300% the following year when 12 young people got five GCSE passes with A to C grades. If we are going to blame the 11-plus for the results in the Shankill area, we will have to

credit it for the superb results in the New Lodge area, where social deprivation is very similar.

419. We think that those successes come from teaching pupils in schools with other pupils of similar abilities. The diversity of the schools system allows us to have, on average, smaller schools. It is great to have secondary, grammar, faith, interdenominational, comprehensive and Irish-medium schools. Tá spéis agam féin i scoileanna lánGhaeilge. Eighty-eight per cent of parents secure a place for their child in their first choice of school.

420. We do not have a private sector, unlike other parts of these islands. Basically, most children get the type of education that parents choose for them. We have a successful system, social inclusion and diversity.

421. **Mr Billy Young (Association for Quality Education):** I am the head teacher of Belfast Royal Academy. I have cut some of what I wanted to say, as I am aware of the time.

422. First, what we want from a new system — and have wanted for five years — is money directed to the source and not wasted: £1.5 million has been wasted on consultations and reports.

423. Secondly, we want an honest acceptance of our strengths and successes, an honest attempt to tackle the weaknesses, imaginative tackling of underachievement, real support for primary schools in disadvantaged areas, a system that hits all the criteria mentioned in our paper, a system of transfer that will satisfy 88% of the people — as the current system does — and something that matches the will of the public as expressed in the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey.

424. Four useful tie-breaker issues were mentioned in the survey, including community-based criteria and geography. However, if they were included as main criteria, it would result in local comprehensives. People have to be honest and say that that is what would happen. We will also see, as has happened, that parents would move their children to successful schools. The family-focused issue would be useful as a tie-breaker, but if it were applied to a school — as I

would apply it — it might affect one third of children applying to the school. What happens to the other two thirds that would be affected by community-based criteria? Again, the answer is local comprehensives.

11.00 am

425. Random selection is, again, a useful tie-breaker, but if it were applied as a whole, people would not apply to those schools more than a certain distance from their homes.

426. The profile cannot be used for selection. The system that the Governing Bodies Association would like to elaborate on and improve is computer-adaptive tests (CATs), which would address the criteria that we have listed in our paper. It would minimise coaching and much more. Therefore, we have proposals for a new system that would be much better than the present one.

427. **Mr Finbarr McCallion (Governing Bodies Association):** I am the secretary of the Governing Bodies Association. The association represents and works with 73 grammar schools in Northern Ireland, of which 53 are voluntary grammar schools.

428. I thank you for the opportunity to come here. One is never supposed to begin with an apology, yet I think that we owe the subgroup an apology. Although we have spent about 10 years trying to reach a solution, we do not yet have one. We are coming to ask the subgroup to create one, as Members of the Assembly are more likely to be in the business of finding solutions to difficult problems. We hope that, with the experience that members have had, they may be able to help us to find a solution to this problem.

429. To date, we have been involved in two side-by-side arguments. One is about comprehensive education. When comprehensive education was introduced in England, Scotland and Wales, every political party supported it. Its introduction presented great problems, but it was established. Members might be surprised to know that every political party supported comprehensive education. During her time as Minister of Education, Margaret Thatcher

converted more grammar schools to comprehensive schools than any other Minister of Education, including the sainted Mr Crossman.

430. Afterwards, the Conservative Party changed its mind. Look at what David Cameron is doing today. He leads a party that wants grammar school education. He admits that there is no political consensus, and, therefore, he has warned his party not to reach too far. He has advised the party to deal with what it can deal with in order to sort out the problem as best it can. No doubt, he wants grammar schools by stealth.

431. We believe that the new system in Northern Ireland should offer people a choice and a chance to change. Some grammar schools might be willing to operate on a more comprehensive basis; certainly, there are secondary schools that want to become comprehensive schools. Why is it that only four secondary schools in Northern Ireland are allowed to select pupils? What is so special about Lagan College, Slemish College, Holy Cross College in Strabane and St Patrick's Co-educational Comprehensive College in Maghera? Why should every secondary school and every grammar school not be allowed that choice? Why do we not allow the parents to make the decisions?

432. There are good grammar schools in Northern Ireland. There are good comprehensive schools and there are good secondary schools. How do we know that? We know because the parents want that system to remain. I trust parents. They need help and guidance, but I trust them. Surely Northern Ireland can get to a situation where, with children of nine years of age, one can have a decent idea of where they will be when they are 13 years of age. That is what must be done to advance towards a solution.

433. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Thank you for your presentation and for keeping within the time limit. In the first instance, I will allocate each member five minutes in which to ask questions. Depending on the length of your answers, they may be able to ask further questions at the end. In the spirit of fairness, I

will start from this side of the table because we started at the other side earlier.

434. **Mr McElduff:** I welcome the delegation. I am concerned by Mr Patterson's reference to the myth that is the long tail of underachievement. I seek general comments from the panel on that. The House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts' report, 'Improving Literacy and Numeracy in Schools (Northern Ireland): Second Report of Session 2006–07' (November 2006) seems to bear out that there is a long tail of underachievement, in that 40% of 16-year-olds leave school with inadequate numeracy and literacy skills. Is that the case or not?

435. Secondly, how would grammar schools deliver the new varied and vocational life-skills curriculum?

436. **Mr Patterson:** May I clarify the long tail of underachievement? It has been suggested that, in the past, Northern Ireland results — at the bottom end — were much worse than those of other parts of these islands, where GCSE and A-level examinations were taken.

437. The point that I strove to make — perhaps I was not clear enough — was that, at the bottom end, Northern Ireland results are very similar to those of other parts of the United Kingdom. For example, in England, the number of pupils who leave school without any GCSEs is 5%; here it is 4%. The suggestion that grammar schools create a long tail of underachievement, while alternative systems do not, is incorrect.

438. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Mr McElduff's point about the curriculum is important. It would be an absurdity to suppose that we would ever have one set of schools that are purely academic and another set that are purely vocational. In future, every individual will need to have a mix of those skills, but that mix will vary according to particular aptitudes.

439. People often talk of children's sense of failure when they do not get the 11-plus and do not go to grammar school. Part of that stems from the fact that, in many ways, the non-grammar schools compete in the same races as the grammar schools in skills to which they are not necessarily very well adapted.

440. I see the possibility of parallel systems in which the emphasis in grammar schools will continue to be on academic subjects — for example, the hard sciences, which will be very important for our economic future — but, of course, there will have to be a vocational element as well. Similarly, other schools will place an emphasis on vocational subjects, but their students will also need language skills, and so on. I do not therefore see a terribly stark divide. However, at the moment the difficulty is that post-primary education submits virtually all children to the same hurdles, irrespective of their aptitudes. That does not serve them terribly well.

441. **Mr McCallion:** Sir Kenneth makes a good point. It is foolish to pretend that there are not children for whom our system does not work well, but that is true of every single education system in western Europe. Even those systems that have twice the amount of money invested in them as ours still have problems — those systems do not work for many of the children who go through them.

442. Our curriculum is very grammar-school driven. Huge numbers of comprehensive schools in England offer a diploma in business administration, but virtually no secondary school in Northern Ireland does because CCEA does not offer it.

443. We must think ahead. The great problem — and I will admit this; I have been a protagonist in this matter for the past 10 years — is that we have argued about grammar, secondary and comprehensive schools, but we have not argued for a curriculum that matches children to their futures and gives them opportunities. I want schools to be free. Schools are driven by their governors, parents and teachers, and they will do what is best for their children. However, it would be madness to return to the situation of the 1950s when secondary schools were forbidden to do the old Senior Certificate. We will not go down that road; we want to do the reverse and offer opportunities.

444. **Mr Young:** Given the time of year, it might be appropriate to quote from Isaiah,

chapter 11, verse 6, leading up to the prophecy about the birth of Christ:

“and a little child shall lead them.”

445. Over the past five years, we have been saying that the focus should have been on the little child in disadvantaged areas — on the Shankill Road or anywhere else. We have heard promises that money will be invested. Poor literacy and numeracy skills have been mentioned, and certain people have said that grammar schools are responsible for that. However, primary schoolteachers — who are doing a superb job — have for years been crying out for real support at primary-school level. As the subgroup will know, it is possible to identify reading difficulties in primary 1 and primary 2. However, time and time again, things just rattle on in primary schools, and the matter is not handled until much later.

446. I take the comment about literacy and numeracy, but the key to solving this problem is to start where it really matters. The Reading Recovery programme has achieved wonderful things, but it can continue to do that only if the personnel are there to deliver it.

447. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Thank you. There will be time later for follow-up questions.

448. **Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. Tá céad míle fáilte romhaibh go léir.

449. You are very welcome, and thank you for your input.

450. I have great respect for the work of grammar schools. I attended a grammar school for two years and studied for my A levels there. I certainly appreciated the tuition and the high level of academic standards at that school, just as I appreciated the high level of academic standards at the secondary school that I previously attended.

451. Sir Kenneth began by mentioning that although the majority of the people who responded to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey were against the 11-plus, they were in favour of academic selection. That

is a contradiction. In Northern Ireland, although approximately 12 methods of academic selection have been tried, none has been found to have been satisfactory. I wonder whether it is time that we learned a lesson from that. I noticed also that the survey showed that the majority of the parents questioned expressed the view that they should be allowed to choose which post-primary school their children would attend. Perhaps we should give more weight to those statistics.

452. I am very much in favour of grammar schools continuing to deliver their current academic curriculum. I am not so sure about academic selection. For example, it is often claimed that academic selection benefits working-class communities by providing them with social mobility. However, some of the figures suggest that academic selection is unfair and discriminates against working-class communities.

453. In 2000, the study published by Peter Daly and Ian Shuttleworth of Queen’s University showed that 84% of children from professional families and 79% of the children of clerical workers attended grammar schools. In contrast to that, only 23·5% of factory workers’ children, and a mere 13·2% of children whose fathers were unemployed went to grammar schools. Those figures suggest that academic selection does not provide social mobility and is not good for working-class and disadvantaged communities. They suggest that the opposite is the case.

454. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I remind members that they are restricted to five minutes each.

455. **Mr S Wilson:** Sir Kenneth has 30 seconds in which to answer.

456. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** He has about two minutes.

457. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I will leave Mr Patterson to address the statistical point.

458. There is no greater misnomer than the phrase “parental choice”. There will not be parental choice, merely parental preference. In many cases, proximity will apply, and parents

will not be able to get their child into the school of their choice. Undoubtedly, that will be the case.

459. Mr Bradley makes a fair point about the need for an alternative to the 11-plus. We would be in an absurd situation, having —

460. **Mr D Bradley:** Excuse me, I did not say anything about an alternative to the 11-plus. I said that I am unconvinced that selection is good for working-class children.

461. **Mr McCallion:** May I deal with this issue?

462. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Please deal with it briefly because there are other members waiting to speak.

463. **Mr McCallion:** Where did our middle class come from? On the whole, the people who make up the middle class in Northern Ireland are former grammar-school children.

464. **Mr D Bradley:** I agree with you. Back in 1948, and for perhaps 20 to 25 years after 1948, the 11-plus provided social mobility for many working-class people. My former party leader is on record as having said that he benefited from sitting the 11-plus. However, things have moved on, and what was intended to encourage social mobility in 1948 now militates against it.

465. **Mr McCallion:** I was the principal of Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, and when it opened, the vast majority of its children came from lower-middle-class or working-class backgrounds. The difficulty is that there are significant numbers of parents who have gained from the grammar school system, and they want their children to gain from it too.

466. I want a system that will allow all children to gain. There are secondary schools that are doing fabulous jobs. When I was the principal of St Colm's High School in Twinbrook — Twinbrook is not an area that is famous for being rich — I helped, with the assistance of John Allen and Imelda Jordan, to improve that school to a point where many of its children could move on to a grammar school. That is something of which I am proud. In fact, when I attended a recent function at Rathmore Grammar School, a young girl was presented to me to shake my hand. She asked whether I

remembered her: I did not. She informed me that when she was a third-year pupil at St Colm's, I became the school principal. She told me that I had given her a chance. Her words made me so proud that I have no hesitation in telling the members of the subgroup that my head was as big as this room.

11.15 am

467. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** To maintain a sense of fairness, we must move on. There should be time at the end of the session for further discussion. I ask members to respect the five-minute time limit. They may have a chance to ask further questions later.

468. **Mr McNarry:** Our new task is to identify whether selection is necessary. Part of our remit is to compile a report bringing forward alternatives to selection, and we would appreciate your help on that. The debate is deadlocked; it is stifled, and we must move on from that. As I said earlier, if the Assembly were to vote tomorrow — and it would not be by choice — one side would go into one lobby, the other side would go into the other lobby, and we would come out as deadlocked as we are now. Therefore, any help on alternative processes would be much appreciated in the short time that we have now, and beyond.

469. In an earlier evidence session this morning, a senior union official said that academic selection had contributed to underperformance, as identified by the shocking numeracy and literacy figures in the Committee of Public Accounts' report. I would welcome your comments on that matter.

470. At an evidence session last week, officials from the Department of Education said that there was a significant role for historical feeder primary schools in a schools admission policy under the proposed new arrangements. What experience have you or your colleagues had of the patterns emerging from feeder schools? Are the admissions criteria for historical feeder primary schools easy to identify?

471. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I am chairman of the board of governors at the Royal Belfast Academical Institution (RBAI) in the centre of

Belfast. Historically, we have drawn our pupils from a wide area. At present, there are somewhere in the region of 135 feeder schools represented there. In many cases, some of those schools have sent only one or two pupils, and four or five schools provide a large part of the intake.

472. The last thing that we want to do in Northern Ireland is to create a series of educational ghettos. It is a bad idea to fixate on a neighbourhood and an immediate community that does not present the opportunity for people from different places to mix. That is why I am so antipathetic to making proximity the prime criterion for school admission. Such a criterion would be educationally and socially wrong.

473. **Mr McCallion:** Through our involvement with the grammar school sector, we will do all that we can to help. We understand the difficulty of the task that members have been set; it is awful. If it were easy, we would have done it long ago, but we are stuck.

474. Apparently, we have a numeracy and literacy policy. Why, therefore, do the Government hand out money to five education and library boards that merrily go off and do whatever they choose? The North Eastern Education and Library Board, the South Eastern Education and Library Board, the Western Education and Library Board and the Belfast Education and Library Board are all different. If there is a problem, and it has been identified, is it not acceptable to assume that there should be a solution? We know that the solution is to tackle numeracy and literacy sensibly. It is wise to establish the present situation and decide what has to be done, constantly monitoring the results.

475. Why has there not been an inspector's report on the £40 million spent on the numeracy and literacy strategy? Did the inspectorate never write a report? I doubt that that is the case; rather, I think that it was never published. Marion Matchett is a competent chief inspector and a robust, tough individual. I do not believe that she and her officials sat there and did nothing. If you throw £40 million at something without making effective and efficient plans for what it will be spent on, there will be problems.

476. It looked like a good idea at the time, and I do not want to criticise the individuals who were responsible. I know that certain schools made fantastically good use of that money. However, I would not want to suggest that it only happened because of the 11-plus or that it does not apply in England or Scotland.

477. The Republic of Ireland has a quasi-comprehensive system. I use that word very advisedly. Twenty per cent of the young people in the Republic of Ireland do not sit the Leaving Certificate examinations. They leave school before they do the Leaving Certificate. In Northern Ireland, 5% leave with no qualifications. Is that a system that we want to go towards? Listen to the Ministers in the South and read the Skills Research Initiative (SRI) report; they know what the problem is. The whole of western Europe has this problem. We need to raise the matter of the people at the bottom, and we need to focus on that. When we talk about the 11-plus, we are not focusing on those children. Let us get this argument out of the way. We are asking members to help us to solve it.

478. **Mr Young:** May I make two brief points? To blame grammar schools or academic selection for the problems with literacy and numeracy is nonsense. Primary 1 and primary 2 teachers can identify problems at that stage. As Sir Kenneth and Finbarr McCallion have said, there is much more that can be done at that level. It is totally wrong to lay it at the academic door.

479. It is, of course, possible to identify feeder schools. We have on average some 50 feeder schools from a very wide catchment area.

480. **Mr McNarry:** In which area is that?

481. **Mr Young:** Belfast Royal Academy has about 50 feeder schools from a wide catchment area. It is possible to identify them, but in addition to that one has to identify the children with, perhaps, the intellectual gifts to benefit from the academic curriculum that we are offering. Feeder schools alone would not be sufficient to provide that.

482. **Mr S Wilson:** I have just three questions. You may not be able to answer them all today, but perhaps you would write to us. Some of the

questioners this morning and the trades union representatives who were here have already posed the argument that we want to retain the academic ethos in the grammar schools. Can you explain how that could be done without academic selection? If academic selection, as we understand it at present, is to be done away with, what do you need from any report available to parents or teachers that would ensure that youngsters who want to go to a grammar school and want to benefit from the academic ethos — which everybody says they want to preserve — make best use of the opportunity?

483. Secondly, we are not looking at this in a vacuum. There will still be the possibility of academic selection after 26 March 2007. Can you outline what you mean by computer-adaptive testing? I know that we could get a paper on that.

484. Thirdly, if the political parties cannot agree on a form of reporting or selection that can be applied universally to schools, what would the view of the grammar schools be towards the possibility of testing or assessing youngsters and having their own arrangements for making those decisions? Academic selection would remain, but only for those schools that wanted to use it.

485. **Mr Young:** A variety of things could happen. The first that was suggested, of course, was the pupil profile, but if a profile is used for selection, it will end up being bland. It will put primary schoolteachers on the spot. The system that we are currently investigating, and will probably hang our hat on, is computer-adaptive testing. If we adopt any other system of testing, should it be Key Stage 2, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) tests or standardised tests, it will result in the same sort of pressures that the 11-plus imposed. Computer-adaptive testing is done on a computer. It can be done in primary 5, primary 6 or primary 7, and done as often as the young people like. It meets many of the criteria that we mentioned. In other words, it is not a sudden-death thing. It can be used by primary schools to determine what level a young person is at. It

would give a score from -3 to 0 right up to $+3$ — so it gives different levels. It can be done at different stages and as often as young people like, and there is no time limit. Therefore, pupils can, in a sense, be relaxed about it.

486. Mr Wilson said that that there is a problem about reaching agreement. Although we need to investigate the computer-adaptive system further before hanging our hats on it, if we assume that schools go down that road, the system could be used in a variety of ways. For example, if a school wished to take a strict approach, it could choose children who achieve a score of 2 or 3. For those who wish to use the system more loosely — that could be done. Finally, schools that do not want academic selection could use the system to determine the individual needs of young people.

487. It will be very difficult to reach a compromise that is agreeable to everyone, but something similar to the computer-adaptive system — a system that does not put pressure on primary schools — could identify the gifts and strengths of young people and could be used by different schools in different ways.

488. We still require a presentation on that, although that will happen soon, but after that, we will probably choose that system. It does not put the pressure on primary schools, as the current tests do, but if there is to be selection, there must be some form of testing. The issue is about how it can be done without creating the current pressures.

489. **Mr S Wilson:** Some witnesses have suggested that it is possible to maintain the academic ethos of a grammar school without testing.

490. **Mr Young:** That would be impossible. The ethos may be retained for a while, but within seven years all grammar schools would become comprehensive schools, and, depending on criteria, they may become local comprehensive schools.

491. People continually say that we must look to the future and not to the past — they have not looked to England, where comprehensive schools have been a disaster. It would be very

difficult to identify a young person's potential for grammar school from a profile.

492. **Mr McElduff:** Is it fair to say that the tests are unproven?

493. **Mr Young:** I wish to make one point. The computer-adaptive system has been proven in the United States. For young people, there is a competitive element. If they are successful at one level, they move on to a slightly harder one, and so on. The level they reach becomes a useful tool that is used by teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in the student.

494. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** We are not thinking only of the schools; we are trying to think of the children. There is nothing more miserable than the condition of a child who gains admission to a school where he or she is unable to cope. If there are too many of those children —

495. **Mr D Bradley:** That happens now.

496. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Either they are not able to cope, or the school has to reorganise its teaching resources. That affects the capacity to continue offering subjects such as the hard sciences, which underpin the Northern Ireland economy.

497. One reason for abolishing the 11-plus is that schools are obliged to be more prescriptive than they would otherwise choose to be. Every year, schools like ours have to turn away children that they would ordinarily be happy to accept, and who would be perfectly capable of coping with what those schools can offer.

498. **Mr Donaldson:** You said that certain selection criteria might be used as tie-breakers. I am concerned about the possible development of a postcode lottery if geographical location is used as a tie-breaker, especially where a number of schools are in close proximity. Belfast Royal Academy and the Royal Belfast Academical Institute would fall into that category. If academic selection were not available as a transfer criterion, and there were schools that were oversubscribed, how would that be dealt with?

499. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** If academic selection were abolished, the Department of

Education would produce an acceptable menu of entry criteria. Individual schools would then select approved criteria from that menu.

Important questions would then arise about the order in which those criteria were addressed.

For schools such as ours, the last thing we would want is to be confined to a tightly circumscribed geographical area. Ultimately, if hardy came to hardy, we would prefer random selection to proximity to the school.

11.30 am

500. **Mr Donaldson:** If academic selection were retained but there was no political agreement about the method, how would grammar schools feel about introducing their own selection procedures?

501. **Mr Young:** If academic selection were retained and nothing else was agreed, grammar schools would happily use their own procedures.

502. Focusing on what Mr Bradley said earlier, however, I emphasise that I have a very working-class background. If there is a problem with coaching now, there is no doubt in my mind that if schools introduced their own tests, that problem would increase, possibly tenfold. It is important to identify the young people who can cope with the grammar curriculum. Of course, we would provide our own tests. However, we have to emphasise that if we did that, young people from poorer areas would probably be disadvantaged.

503. **Mr McCallion:** I want to add an important point. We have discussed bright and academically successful children. Let us consider for a moment those children who are not academically successful in primary school. At present, if they were placed in grammar schools, the necessary teachers would not be available to manage them. New teachers would be needed. How would that be managed?

504. First, teachers would have to be taken away from minority subjects. Physics, chemistry and biology would probably survive, although interest in subjects such as German and other modern languages would decrease — those are the low-uptake subjects. We would

have to go to secondary schools and poach their good remedial teachers. Let me be clear about remedial teachers: as the principal of a secondary school, I can tell you that they are among the most talented teachers. I consider myself to be a reasonably confident teacher. However, for me, the idea of going into a class of 10 or 15 children who have the attention span of a click of your fingers is impossible. I team-taught with people in those schools. There are a limited number of those very talented teachers, who are, at the moment, concentrated where they are needed. Another group of teachers is concentrated on teaching the difficult sciences, high-level English, maths, and so on.

505. If you want an example of a really good teacher, one is sitting here — Sammy Wilson. Education in Northern Ireland has lost Mr Wilson as a teacher. He was a leader. He will laugh, because I am going to embarrass him. He was a talented teacher; people recognised that about him. However, if I had been his principal, I would not have let him near the first-formers. He would have been a star with the fifth years and the lower and upper sixth; they would have thought that he was wonderful. He would have worked them to death. However, if he were put among the first years, it would not have been so good. That is a fact: teachers are just not meant to teach every year group.

506. If you were to put me in a primary 1 class, I could not cope. The seats are too small, the kids are too tiny, and their heads are buzzing. I am too old — I was too old when I was 21 years of age. You must choose horses for courses.

507. **Mr McElduff:** I notice that Sammy has been silenced. *[Laughter.]*

508. **Mr McCallion:** Is that a record?

509. **Mr McNarry:** Roy Beggs Jnr in East Antrim is going to talk to him. *[Laughter.]*

510. **Mr Young:** Differentiation is the key. Any teacher will tell you that in order to pitch lessons appropriately and stimulate pupils in the same classroom, it is not easy to separate the bright ones from those who struggle. One of the strengths of the current system is that top-class

grammar schools and top-class secondary schools cater for two different groups. Secondary schools deal with the children who Mr McCallion talked about — those young people who struggle and who need extra help.

511. Secondary schools also identify the late developers. That is extremely important, particularly for males, who can develop as late as 14, 15, or even 17 years of age, some even after they have left school. Secondary schools have the academic stream that allows those children to make progress. That is one of the system's strengths.

512. I want to return to several issues that Mr Bradley raised about the 11-plus. Perhaps there will be a chance to do so later.

513. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** There will not be a chance later. Five minutes are left before the meeting is suspended. I want to do a quick round up with members, so — I had a good education — that is one minute each. *[Laughter.]*

514. **Mr McNarry:** Can you imagine her being a teacher?

515. **Mr D Bradley:** I do not accept, nor am I convinced by, your argument that grammar schoolteachers cannot teach children of varying abilities. After all, all teachers in Northern Ireland receive similar basic training. If you do a degree and then do a postgraduate certificate in education, you are just as qualified to teach in a secondary school as in a grammar school. In addition, I am not convinced by the argument that grammar schools contain homogenous groups of pupils. They do not; that is far from being the case.

516. We could say that at one time the grammar school sector took about a quarter of the supposedly top pupils. However, last year 13 grammar schools drew less than half of their intake from this group. For example, at Campbell College only 37.4% of new pupils had grade A. At St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore, the percentage was 38.4%; at Cambridge House it was 25.7%; and at Hunterhouse it was a mere 10%. What is happening, possibly through a process of

demographic change, is that grammar schools are gradually becoming all-ability schools, and the teachers in those grammar schools are coping very well with that expanding range of ability. If they can do it now, surely they can do it in the future.

517. **Mr Young:** Chairperson, I thought we were here to give some answers, not to listen to lectures.

518. **Mr D Bradley:** Chairperson, that was a question. The witnesses have put certain points to us.

519. **Mr McCallion:** Can I run the question the other way round?

520. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** May I remind you that I am the principal of this school? Mr Bradley is entitled to add a comment.

521. **Mr McNarry:** It is either 100 lines or a whacking, Dominic?

522. **Mr Patterson:** For a number of years, over 90% of children accepted into grammar schools have had an A or B in the transfer procedure. The suggestion that grammar schools are becoming comprehensive schools is complete nonsense. There are a couple of schools in which the intake has gone down to pupils with a C, but we are talking about a small number of schools. Over 90% of pupils taken into grammar schools have an A or a B in their transfer test — that does not denote a comprehensive intake.

523. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** May I just remind you that this is being recorded in evidence, and if you want to make a written submission to any of the comments that the members have made, feel free to do so.

524. **Mr McNarry:** I see now why Dominic did not want the Catholic head teachers to be attending these sessions — they might have given him a bit of a shock.

525. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** It is 45 seconds now.

526. **Mr D Bradley:** I take it that they are represented here by Mr McCallion, if I am not mistaken.

527. **Mr McNarry:** Can the witnesses quickly address the impact of falling rolls and school closures on the reforms, bearing in mind that the reforms may eventually dispose of selection of any kind? What is the match-up in terms of the children, who Sir Kenneth rightly identified as the most important aspect of this?

528. **Mr McCallion:** One of the problems is that we have done nothing for 10 years. We have argued, and we have not thought of the issues. Our population is now back to where it was in 1985. We should have done something. In 1985, voluntary grammar schools came together and agreed to take cuts in their numbers. That is where the quotas came from. What has happened since? Nothing, except that we have opened integrated schools which have taken children out of the system. If we are going to have a selective system, we are going to have to come to an agreement about selection and about intakes. That is life. It is hard. It is going to be very difficult, but it is life — no free lunches.

529. **Mr McElduff:** To be directly specific to the terms of reference, I am anticipating that academic selection will have gone in the future. Has the grammar school sector given any thought to aptitude testing at the key stages of children's education to enable them to be placed on the basis of subject choice?

11.45 am

530. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** Setting is carried out in many English comprehensive schools. Interestingly, at one of our meetings, the principal of a grammar school said that people talk all the time about the sense of failure that children feel when they do not pass the 11-plus. She wanted to assure us that a pupil in a comprehensive school who is in the bottom set for all subjects has no less a sense of failure than a pupil who has failed the 11-plus. Whether we like it or not, some pupils will do better than others.

531. I am conscious that, yet again, selection is dominating the education debate. However, the real problem lies elsewhere: at primary level. It lies not in poor teaching but in the conditions in which our children are taught in primary schools. If, by 11 years of age, a child has no

motivation or interest in learning, it is possibly too late to do anything about it.

532. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** If anybody wishes to comment on that, they should feel free to do so in writing.

533. **Mr Young:** I want to ask what Mr McElduff meant by his question; I would like to answer it properly. Was he referring to aptitude tests that pupils take before they start secondary school or tests that they take when they are there?

534. **Mr McElduff:** I was referring to tests that they take when they are there.

535. **Mr S Wilson:** All this morning's evidence suggests that those who support the move away from academic selection towards pupil profiles do so on the basis that profiles will give the ultimate parental choice. Parents will be able to choose a school based on a report that will enable them to make the best choices for their youngsters. Against the picture of falling school rolls, will the inevitable outcome of pupil profiles mean gains in pupil numbers for the schools that are correctly or incorrectly perceived to be the most successful — your schools — while the secondary sector loses out? If people have freedom of choice, they will choose grammar schools.

536. **Mr McCallion:** Some parents will do that. The situation in Great Britain must be considered. Who would want to be principal of a school that is six times oversubscribed? Hundreds of children are being turned away from such schools. That will happen here: people will begin with the school that they perceive to be number one and ricochet their way down a list until they finally find a slot. What method is that for placing a child in a school?

537. **Mr McNarry:** Are you referring to good schools and bad schools?

538. **Mr McCallion:** Yes, schools that are perceived as good schools or bad schools, handy schools, schools that are far away, schools that offer T-shirts if you go to open days — it will not matter.

539. **Mr Donaldson:** Thank you for your submissions. My question relates to

comprehensive education. I went to Killeel High School, which is a comprehensive school. Given the locality, comprehensive education was the only available option. Should there be a one-size-fits-all solution? In places in which there is oversubscription, should we consider area-based solutions that could include academic selection?

540. **Mr Young:** One strength of the current system is the variety of schools that are available. I am not against comprehensive schools as such; various types of school here are doing really well. Mr Donaldson hit the nail on the head when he asked whether we want a one-size-fits-all solution or separate solutions for separate situations. Study after study in the Republic of Ireland has found that parental choice is a myth: it leads to confusion and to the oversubscription that Mr Donaldson and Mr McCallion mentioned.

541. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** I wish to return briefly to the point that I made at the beginning of the session. The Department of Education has repeatedly assured us that there is no threat to grammar schools, that there is no intention to introduce comprehensive education to Northern Ireland and that there is no search for a one-size-fits-all solution. We want substance to be added to those assurances to make them credible, because we do not think that they are credible.

542. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I thank the witnesses for their presentations.

543. **Mr D Bradley:** I have a point of information. Mr McNarry said that I objected to the Catholic grammar school heads —

544. **Mr McNarry:** Quote me correctly; I did not say that. I said that I could now understand why you did not want them. That is different.

545. **Mr D Bradley:** Can I correct that? I knew that this group of witnesses, and Mr McCallion in particular, would be more than able to represent the views of all grammar schools.

546. **Mr Young:** I would like to say one thing to everyone: no successful business would put pressure on so many variables at the same time. The 11-plus, the Bain Report, the review of the curriculum, the review of public administration,

and the review of procurement have all contributed to the uncertainty of the last five years in the education sector. The Bain Report should have happened first, followed by the curriculum review. We must think of teachers and pupils in the primary schools, where there is a very serious vacuum. Something must be done.

547. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Thank you for giving up your time this morning, and thank you for your presentation. We have a lot of people to see this afternoon, and that is why I am pressing the pace. If you feel that you need to respond further to any of our comments or questions, feel free to do so in writing to the Clerks.

548. **Sir Kenneth Bloomfield:** We thank you for the opportunity to come and talk to you; we appreciate it.

The subgroup was suspended at 11.46 am.

On resuming —

11.48 am

549. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I welcome the new witnesses to the Subgroup to Consider the Schools Admission Policy. In a moment I will allow time for introductions and presentations. Members will then be free to ask questions.

550. We have been struggling with time all morning, because there have been more questions and comments than expected. If I push you, it is for that reason and because a number of evidence sessions are scheduled for this afternoon.

551. **Mr Jim Clarke (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):** I was nearly going to say good afternoon, but it is definitely still morning.

552. My name is Jim Clarke, and I am the deputy chief executive of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). I was also a member of the Costello Group. I understand that Stephen Costello was invited today but was unable to attend; I will make a comment or two on his behalf.

553. It does not make sense to consider pupil transfer in isolation from everything else that is happening in education. CCMS does not

consider education to be an end in itself. However, it is important that there be coherence and connectivity in education policies throughout the education system. Perhaps equally, if not more, important is the link between the education system, society and the economy. I commented on that point, particularly with respect to the economy, in my paper to the subgroup

554. The Costello Group faced the same issues, and I suppose some people were surprised that we actually came up with a solution. We did it by establishing principles and drawing practical outworkings from those principles. We tested everything that was proposed against those principles.

555. I would like to remind the subgroup of those principles. There should be equality — each young person should be valued. All education should be high in quality. The curriculum should be relevant, in order to motivate learning. There should be effective access to education, with appropriate support to allow everyone to fulfil his or her potential for lifelong learning. There should be the flexibility to provide a range of choices, with information and advice available to guide those choices — whether it is for parents in the early years of their children's education or students in later years.

556. The education service should promote tolerance and reconciliation through understanding and respect for diversity, not only from a religious or political perspective, but in relation to the social differentiation in our society. It should be based on the principles of partnership, and the education service should foster effective partnerships. That makes sense in the context of the education of children, not the preservation of schools per se.

557. Schools exist to meet the needs of pupils. We must examine that point carefully in the context of a range of issues, not least the fact that a recent report on literacy and numeracy highlighted those who are disadvantaged in education and the link to those who are disadvantaged in society as a whole. The question is how we ameliorate that situation in the context of social justice.

558. As regards the demographic downturn, there are 2,000 fewer pupils in schools this year than at the same time last year, which follows a trend that started in 2002.

559. The Government have accepted the broad principles contained in the Bain Report, which proposes area planning, something that we should consider in relation to resolving some of the pupil transfer issues.

560. I mentioned the need for coherence and connectivity of policy. We cannot look at demographics, the Bain Report and area planning without looking at transfer, admissions and transport policy, because another strand of the Bain Report was that we need to get better value out of the education service by not spending money on things that do not affect the child in the classroom.

561. Before we start talking about transfer procedures, there is a question that must be asked. Sir George Bain has said that Northern Ireland has more schools than it needs, and perhaps schools in places without children. The question is: what kind of post-primary arrangements will there be? Until that question is answered, the issue about the kind of procedures that should be in place for the transfer of pupils at age 11, 14 or any other age cannot possibly be addressed.

562. In particular, with reference to rural areas, should we always be looking at the structures we know? Can we not consider ages four to 14 or ages seven to 14 in certain areas, because the curriculum model we now have, via the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, is creating core skills, which are really in the middle part of the education cycle between the ages of seven and 14. This is about a skills curriculum, and about coherence within that skills curriculum. We need to ask what kinds of post-primary arrangements should be put in place to facilitate that.

563. Finally, we also need to look at things such as the pupil profile and remember what the intention was. The pupil profile is a document that guides pupils, parents and teachers in identifying and meeting children's learning needs over a period of time. It was never

designed to be a tool to aid selection. It was designed to reinforce assessment for learning and build on good practice in the classroom.

564. So, those are some of the issues. I have no doubt that there are other issues about admissions arrangements that you will come to in the course of your questioning.

12.00 noon

565. **Mr Uel McCrea (Association of Head Teachers in Secondary Schools):** I am Uel McCrea, Headmaster of Ballyclare Secondary School, a non-selective school with just over 1,000 students. I am also Chairman of the Association of Head Teachers in Secondary Schools, which is an association of principals from controlled and maintained schools throughout the five education and library board areas in the Province. I have provided the subgroup with a paper that attempts to set out our position on the inclusion of academic selection as part of admissions criteria.

566. Our association, although it represents non-selective schools throughout the Province, is not primarily concerned about the preservation of our schools or our type of school. Our main concern, and I know this is shared by many, is that we really wish to have the child at the centre of our focus. The reason for our very existence, as Jim Clarke said, is that schools are there to provide the educational opportunities that will meet the diverse needs of children, with their wide variety of talents and abilities, at each stage of their development.

567. We want to see young people from Northern Ireland better qualified, more confident and more competent in their skills than ever before. I quote Jeremiah 29:11, where God says to his people:

“For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”.

568. That is what we want for all our children — a hope and a future. We believe that if that is what we are interested in then we are not living in the 1950s, we are moving into the twenty-first century.

569. There is no reason for academic selection at the age of 11 — children simply do not need it. It is a device to facilitate a ranking order so that a particular type of school can select its intake. That is all it is. Why do we want to separate children artificially at the age of 11? What benefits are in it for them?

570. I can see why the grammar schools wish to have a pecking order, but what is the cost to the children — the children we serve? What are the negative effects on the primary school curriculum? George Buckley is with me today. He is the parent of a child at my school, but he is also headmaster of a primary school in Magherafelt, and I will let him speak on that point.

571. My paper clearly states our view that academic selection completely distorts the curriculum. It focuses our minds on things that do not primarily address children's needs. There are now new proposals for computer-adaptive tests (CATs) — we have not learned the lesson that CATs will do exactly the same thing. For 40-odd years we have tried different methods of separating children artificially at the age of 11. They have all been doomed to failure. Now we are told that there is another system comprising 27 tests for children in primaries 5, 6, and 7. The simple question I ask is — why? Why do we do that? Why do the children need to do that? It is simply because certain types of institutions want to have a pecking order.

572. Education is not about pecking orders: it is about giving everybody hope and a future. Personally, and as an association, we believe firmly in all-ability schools — the Scottish or the Finnish models — but we accept that it seems as though we will not achieve that. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 gives us the opportunity to formulate an education system that meets the needs of all children and young people and creates a solid foundation for a learning society. When academic selection at the age of 11 is abolished, we can improve choice and flexibility for all pupils.

573. We believe in the formation of partnerships. We will build on the strengths of existing schools, including grammar schools,

which are not threatened by the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. Those partnerships will enhance educational opportunities and, if they are strategically placed, as the recommendations in the Bain Report suggest, we could form local networks of institutions and learning communities and offer a comprehensive range of courses and provision. All children would have a minimum entitlement regardless of where they live or their social-class backgrounds. We should not shut off possibilities for young people, rather we should ensure that they continue to learn and develop and gradually take decisions — along with their parents — on the sort of education and training that they would like and to which they are best suited.

574. The pupil profile, to which Mr Clarke referred, is designed to help parents and children to choose the most appropriate pathway. It is not meant to be a means whereby a particular school can choose its intake or deal with oversubscription. Mission criteria that best suit local networks of schools, including grammar schools and colleges, can be chosen from the broad categories outlined in the consultation document. Those local partnerships can be given the responsibility to develop appropriate criteria that best suit their community and students.

575. We cannot retain the present system. It is a socially stratified schools system suited to the 1950s. I do understand, however, why it was created in the 1950s. We need a system that promotes the skills of all our citizens, puts Northern Ireland at the top of the schools' league, encourages entrepreneurship and ends false distinctions between academic and vocational study.

576. **Mr George Buckley:** Good afternoon. Mr McCrea asked me to come along to give a parent's perspective. I am a product of the secondary school system. I am a past pupil of Ballyclare Secondary School, and I went through the selection procedure. I have two daughters; one proceeded through the grammar school system, and the other is in the secondary school system.

577. From a parent's perspective, selection is fine if the child achieves the grade to which he or she aspires, which applies to around 25% of children. However, the impact of a grade that does not allow the child to go to the school of his or her choice can be devastating. Parents see at first hand that their child's self-esteem is damaged when he or she is separated from friends of six or seven years of age. Regardless of having been told that a B, C or D grade is not a failure, society, children and parents regard those grades as failures, and the damage caused can be long term.

578. As a parent, I question why our children are put through that trauma. My two girls, because of the superb teaching that they have received, will probably end up receiving third-level education in the same place, and I am not quite sure why the selection system needed to separate them at 11 years of age.

579. Wearing my other hat, I operate within the school system as a primary school principal. Politicians have commented that there is a little distortion in year 7. That is not correct. There is a distortion in the primary curriculum for years 5, 6 and 7, and it is devastating. Our teaching is geared towards the selection test. We do not teach a differentiated curriculum to those children who select the test, and I tell parents that. Parents are under tremendous social pressure, because it is social engineering.

580. We do not differentiate. Children are taught at level 5, often above their individual ability level. They suffer as a result, and they are frustrated. That teaching method is contrary to the educational principles that have been set out for primary schools, yet schools have to teach in that way because the examination is competitive. Children go through that procedure in years 5, 6 and 7.

581. The revised curriculum, which has just been launched and which contains a foundation stage, is an enriched curriculum that will operate from year 1 up to year 7. That new curriculum will not dovetail into a system of selection. Neither the in-service training nor the structures that are being put in place for the pupil profile lend themselves to such a system

at the age of 11. Therefore there is a huge anomaly.

582. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Members may now question the witnesses. However, I would appreciate it if they adhered to their five-minute time limit. For fairness, I will start with the DUP this time.

583. **Mr Donaldson:** Gentlemen, you touched on the implications that the Bain Report will have for the reconfiguration of the education system. Given Northern Ireland's changing demographics, I accept that that change will occur. In light of that review and its consequences on the reconfiguration of post-primary education — never mind primary education — is now the right time to change the transfer procedure? Should that change now be put on hold and a temporary arrangement put in place until we see the outcome of the Bain Report and how the system will be reconfigured? Is now the right time to make those decisions about which the subgroup has to make recommendations?

584. **Mr U McCrea:** Perhaps Mr Clarke would like to comment on the strategic view; I have no comment to make.

585. **Mr J Clarke:** This is absolutely the right time. Earlier this week, Maria Eagle indicated that the Department of Education would take immediate action on the Bain Report proposals rather than wait until the Education and Skills Authority is established. The subgroup should bear in mind the comments that have been made about the curriculum. A new curriculum will be rolled out from next September, and, as I said earlier, we must ensure that we have coherence and connectivity in education policy.

586. Area planning recognises an area as a cogent unit. It involves ascertaining pupil numbers in an area, and it considers the kind of educational structures that are needed there. That may mean acknowledging that in some areas there are not enough schools and that in others that there are too many. Therefore relocation of schools may have to be considered.

587. However, area planning must be addressed within the right context. We need to

know the kind of post-primary education into which we are transferring children. Until we know that, some of the other issues that we have discussed are irrelevant. We need to know what we are moving towards, and, as Uel McCrea said, parents want to make genuine choices.

588. As a community, we need to make real choices. As I have said, we must stop looking at education as the preserve of some and not the preserve of others or as an end in itself. We have to create a much closer link between our education system and our economy. If we want to buy people into the idea of a prosperous Northern Ireland, we must have an economy that underpins that concept. At present, there is considerable debate about the attitude of the Protestant community to education, and the results in the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts' report question that.

589. Our educational success is another factor. Some 50% of our people go to university, but our economy can employ only 20% to 23% of graduates. Where do the rest go? We are exporting them. However, we may also be creating an even more insidious problem: people with degrees are working at sub-degree level, doing jobs that they could have obtained with GCSEs. That is not the best way to buy a community into the value of education. Our education system must therefore play into our economy.

590. The Bain Report has several strands. Besides addressing area planning, it considers school funding. Much of what we do, particularly transporting kids from one area to another, takes money out of the classroom. Therefore to answer your question, we must consider the big picture. Bearing in mind the work that has been done in the Catholic sector, with the agreement of education and library boards and other school providers, we could move quickly to area planning.

12.15 pm

591. **Mr U McCrea:** We are probably 50 years too late. However, that is a personal view. As a school principal for 20-odd years, I have seen youngsters coming in every year, and I know the damage that selection has done to them. My

heart bleeds for them, and I say that this is wrong. I do not believe that an academically capable 11-year-old will lose anything by not having academic selection as one of the criteria for admission. I honestly believe that with all my heart. In the best interests of children — and long term, in the best interest of our Province — we should remove selection.

592. **Mr Donaldson:** Supposing that an academically gifted child ends up in an underachieving school on which inspection reports indicate that there is a problem. How does that benefit that child?

593. **Mr U McCrea:** There are examples of very good practice. I could take you to Birmingham, for example, where a group of educationalists came together and simply said that they did not want any sub-standard schools in their area. They share expertise to ensure that every child in the area gets an education of a very high standard. There is no doubt about the quality of teachers in Northern Ireland. We already know that they are better qualified and, I would say, have a greater commitment. We simply cannot allow the scenario that Mr Donaldson described to happen. Therefore, in partnership with others, we must ensure that that academically gifted child gets a first-rate education and that nothing blocks his or her way. Moving towards this system will not hinder a child like that.

594. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I wish to remind witnesses that they should feel free to forward any other information that could be relevant to the subgroup. If we have time at the end, members will ask questions.

595. **Mr S Wilson:** I have a question for each of the panel. First, Mr Buckley talked about separating children at the age of 11. It is inevitable: we had a submission this morning from one of the teachers' unions, which claimed that if we go for area-based schools, we could have youngsters separated on the basis that one house was in one place and another was 5 yards away. Separation at the age of 11 is going to happen where there is a choice of schools and oversubscribed schools.

596. You also mentioned the distorting effect of testing on the curriculum. Is it not your job as a principal to manage that? If you believe that the curriculum is being distorted, it is up to you to ensure that that does not happen.

597. I do not like talking about people's personal choices, but you said that you chose a grammar school for your daughter. Were you not making a choice about the differences in schools when you made that decision?

598. My question for Jim Clarke is on the matter of choice. Mr Clarke was a member of the Costello Report team, and the main thrust of Costello at the time was that parental choice would be central when determining which schools youngsters went to. How can parental choice be exercised without producing the result that Mr McCrea described in which there is an artificial pecking order? People have perceptions about "good schools" and "bad schools", which will not disadvantage some secondary schools. The alleged emphasis on parental choice could result in some good secondary schools going to the wall while some bad grammar schools might be preserved — the exact complaint that Mr McCrea made in his submission.

599. **Mr Buckley:** I acknowledge that. We have experience from both perspectives at first hand. We had a child who was a so-called success in the transfer selection procedure. She got an A grade in the competitive examination, so we directed her down the route that the system indicated.

600. It must be remembered that academic selection was imposed externally. Primary schools have been forced into competition: our children are competing against other primary schools to get into the top 25% of primary-school pupils who are accepted into grammar schools. Our parental body is under pressure as a result and requires that we ensure that pupils are as ready as possible to compete in that examination.

601. There is no intrinsic educational advantage in sitting a selection test, because the same material is covered over and over again, with the result that children eventually stop learning and become exam-wise. The distortion

of the curriculum comes from the system, not what happens in the school.

602. **Mr S Wilson:** If that were true, one would expect there to be a far higher rate of failure among pupils who have got into the school of their choice after having gone through that process, and there is no evidence of that.

603. **Mr U McCrea:** That is another myth. In the 1950s, the intake of grammar schools was about 20% of pupils; in the North Eastern Education and Library Board the intake is now 45%. The tail of the issue needs to be considered. For instance, the last statistic that I read was that 95% of grammar-school pupils were getting five or more GCSEs. If we assume that 45% of the total academic range of pupils is accepted into a grammar school, 5% of those pupils are getting fewer than five GCSEs. Forty-five per cent of the ability range goes to the so-called academic schools. However, of the next 20%, for which schools such as mine cater, 100% get five or more grades A* to C.

604. It is a myth that academic selection is a wonderful system. I have yet to meet a foreign gentleman or lady who has viewed our system and thought that it was so fantastic that they wanted to replicate it in their part of the world.

605. We must be realistic and wake up to the figures. The Department can produce figures that, with respect to Mr Wilson, question that assumption.

606. **Mr S Wilson:** You mentioned five passes at GCSE. I must say that one in 20 hardly represents the distortion that Mr Buckley mentioned.

607. **Mr U McCrea:** No, no, no. With respect, Mr Wilson, you have misinterpreted what I said. I was talking about the 20% of pupils who fall into the next ability range; I was not talking about our own standards — where 50% of youngsters get five or more GCSE passes — but the ability range. I am talking about the assertion that if we did not have our own selection system, somehow standards would fall. Teachers in both types of school are doing a fairly good job. Quite honestly, however, it is a false notion that separation is necessary in

order to maintain standards. That argument does not hold water.

608. **Mr J Clarke:** To reinforce that, it should be remembered that there is a common curriculum, which will continue; there is no division in our curriculum. It is nonsense to separate; it is also nonsense to subvert the primary-school curriculum to carry out what is essentially an administrative exercise in transferring children.

609. Sammy Wilson asked about parental choice. The Costello Report talked about parental choice in the broadest sense: allowing all children — including the most academically able — to have the choice of a curriculum that they value.

610. The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) commissioned NFER to conduct a cohort study into attitudes to the curriculum. The first thing that the study found was that there are about 11 different curricula. The study also found that children, particularly those in grammar schools, were demotivated by the curriculum and that many aspects of the curricula that reflected their learning styles were diminished because they were not regarded as academically elite subjects.

611. Our community, our society and our economy do not require people with academically elite subjects; they require a broad range of skills, some of which will be determined to be academic, others as applied. We need to enable everyone to follow whichever pathway suits their needs. Parental choice is about a type of school in Northern Ireland, not a particular school; by “type”, I mean a Catholic school, an integrated school, a state school and so on. In the context of area planning, all those needs should be met.

612. The aspirations of schools to deliver particular kinds of curricula should be agreed in the same way as the Birmingham model, which Mr McCrea described. That may mean that some grammar schools continue to offer courses that are primarily academic or vocational. However, it should be remembered that the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 makes

it clear that there should be access to 24 subjects at Key Stage 4, and 27 subjects at post-16, or a broad selection at least, to every pupil. That policy is underpinned by the notion that opportunities should be created — not closed.

613. **Mr S Wilson:** You have redefined parental choice. Your interpretation is different from that in the Costello Report, and that is interesting.

614. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I must interrupt. We are working to a time limit and, as I said earlier, if witnesses wish to provide any additional information, they should feel free to do so.

615. **Mr McNarry:** The debate is passionate, and I welcome your deep interest. During previous evidence, a witness said that he had been working on this matter for 10 years and had not yet succeeded. I am a newcomer to the debate, and I think that if someone has worked at this matter for 10 years and has not succeeded, he needs his ass kicked. The problem is that we have not really been trying to find a solution. Everyone has been setting up his own little empire. That worries me, because we have now boxed ourselves in. We have backed ourselves into a stalemate. The Assembly is not going to be able to address the problems that people think it can solve, and it is mischievous of the Government to put the Assembly into that position.

616. Having said that, I think that members should not give up. The subgroup has a particular remit, and a key role to explore the possibility of consensus on a schools admissions policy. You are the third group of witnesses that the subgroup has heard, and on the basis of that, we have not a hope in hell of succeeding. With all due respect, all members have heard is your side, their side, and somebody else’s side, and this, that and the other.

617. We know that the pro- and anti-selection debate is divisive, and remains so. I would therefore be grateful if you could not simply adopt those standpoints, but give the subgroup some idea of where you think you could be flexible, where you think that there might be compromise in your ideals or where we could

help to build a post-debate consensus. The debate is over, and it has been interesting to listen to, but I have heard most of it before. We want to try to move on from that.

618. Finally, I would like to hear your opinion on whether 14 is a more significant age in a young person's education than the age of 11. That has come across from what has been said. Does that have implications for how the transfer procedure should be approached, or for school admissions philosophy?

619. **Mr J Clarke:** I am sorry that what you have heard from us sounds as though we are defending a position. Essentially, this is a political issue, and I have been asking why matters have not moved on. The issue would have been resolved by now had it not been for political intervention. Let us be clear about that.

620. **Mr McNarry:** Political intervention from where?

621. **Mr J Clarke:** From the St Andrews Agreement. The date in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 was clear. That date has now been moved forward again. Educationalists have reached solutions on selection, and had taken the view that, over a 10-year period, the Costello recommendations were the way forward.

622. **Mr McNarry:** With all due respect, educationalists are like lawyers and consultants. We hear from one group, then another, and, as I say, you all have your little empires. We must move on from that, because you have not succeeded. My priority is children's welfare. The report that you referred to investigated underachievement. Grammar schools seem reasonably sound, according to that. Below grammar schools, however, we find good and bad schools.

623. **Mr J Clarke:** No, we do not. We find schools that do a good job with the pupils that they admit, and the circumstances in which those pupils come to those schools. I have sent a paper to all the education spokespersons on how additional money might be spent. One of the matters that I have stressed in that paper is that we must focus on year 0 to year 7 in order to prevent failure in the education system.

624. That is a fact. Mr Buckley has provided a very clear picture of what primary 5, primary 6 and primary 7 are like. We create failure and we force children through arbitrary thresholds when they reach a certain age. There is sufficient evidence to show the differential between a child born in June and a child born in July, and who happen to be in two different year groups. We need to face the realities.

625. I have tried to steer this debate away from the narrow view of transfer and selection. In essence, I agree with you — those arguments are gone.

12.30 pm

626. **Mr McNarry:** The subgroup's remit is to look at the admissions policy, and also to look for options and alternatives.

627. **Mr J Clarke:** As a potential Government, you also have a remit to look at the purpose of the education system.

628. **Mr McNarry:** We do not have that remit.

629. **Mr J Clarke:** We cannot ignore the realities of how the education system fits in relation to our social and economic development. Members should find out what needs to be done to secure the best possible education system. The notion of selection and transfer is irrelevant, in the first instance. We must first build the system that we want, and then find out what mechanisms are needed to make that system work.

630. **Mr McNarry:** Are you saying that the reforms that you support will maintain the excellence that we have on one level and will also improve the poor results? Do you really believe that?

631. **Mr J Clarke:** Absolutely. Paper 13 of the Department of Education's review of public administration (RPA) proposals looks at school improvement, and it places a duty on every school to engage in a continuous process of improvement. One of the reasons for that is a recognition that many of our schools — secondary and grammar — are coasting along and are not adding value. We could do so much more.

632. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I asked everyone to keep to a five-minute time limit, and so far everyone has used seven minutes. If anyone has anything else to add, they should hand their comments to the Committee Clerks.

633. **Mr D Bradley:** I have a question for Jim Clarke, and if either of the other two gentlemen wish to comment, they are more than welcome. Mr Clarke, you mentioned area-based planning. Can that be reconciled with catchment areas, and would such an arrangement assuage the anxieties that people have about postcode lotteries and rural disadvantage?

634. **Mr J Clarke:** First, the catchment area should be the area plan. It does not make sense to have an area plan if it is not regarded as the means by which the education of children will be managed in that area. Secondly, if those areas are large enough, and they should be large enough — in our sector, and looking at post-primary education, we have about 20 to 24 areas across Northern Ireland — they could be easily mapped into other sectoral areas as well, and that should provide a catchment area. Everyone in that catchment area should have the same general right to a level of education. While Mr Wilson may feel that my definition of parental choice departs from the Costello Report, we must look at parental choice within the context of the Bain Report. Catchment areas and the area plan are integrally linked.

635. The Department is charged with two tasks: first, cutting the amount of money spent on school transport in the current spending round and, secondly, coming up with a new policy. The policy should be area based, and that would result in economic savings.

636. **Mr D Bradley:** Since you are standing in for Steve Costello, tell us whether the Costello Report was a good compromise among competing educational interests.

637. **Mr J Clarke:** We did not set out to compromise. We set out to look at a future educational structure for Northern Ireland. We took all the interests and balanced them by testing them against principles and coming up with proposals. However, that did not mean that

we were not changing the system; we were changing it for everyone, and we were mindful of the changes that were taking place at the time on the development of the new Northern Ireland curriculum, which was skills based. We were also cognisant of the development of the pupil profile; we were trying to get connectivity into our educational system.

638. **Mr McElduff:** How do you define an area? Mr Donaldson was very specific about situations pertaining to Lisburn. I am looking at it from an Omagh or west Tyrone perspective. For example, Castlederg is a natural social or cultural pathway to Omagh, and yet could be allocated elsewhere. How would you deal with such anomalies? Castlederg is technically in the Strabane district, but is a natural social and cultural pathway to Omagh.

639. My second question is about pupil profiling. What sort of information do you think parents want or need to inform them about their child's ability? What type of information do they tend to seek?

640. **Mr J Clarke:** I will take the first question. As I said, definition of areas will require careful consideration. Within the Catholic sector, CCMS has used the diocese as the base; however, it recognises pupil movement across diocesan boundaries, and structures have been set up to examine that. We believe that those could easily be mapped onto what George Bain has talked about with regard to district council areas. I am not sure whether he was referring to 26 or seven councils, but I assume that it was 26. We could organise that, but we would have to address the questions that you have posed before the areas could be defined.

641. It must be recognised also that there may be overlaps. Habits of pupil movement build up, sometimes as a result of the road network in particular areas. At a specific level, CCMS considers Holy Cross College in Strabane to be a school for the future. At the moment it is a bilateral school, but it is an all-ability school. It is area-based; however, we recognise that children from Castlederg, which is in that district, are more naturally inclined to travel towards Omagh. We have taken that factor into

account in looking at the long-term enrolment of that area. That is area-based planning.

642. It is significant that the Western Education and Library Board is now engaged in a similar process in relation to the controlled grammar school in Strabane. That is area planning in operation.

643. **Mr U McCrea:** Although there has not yet been broad agreement on admissions criteria, learning communities are already becoming established, within which different sectors are co-operating. I know, as a member of the North Eastern Education and Library Board, that that is happening throughout the board area. There is a classic example of cross-sector co-operation in Ballycastle. In Coleraine and Ballymoney there is also a coming together of schools in different sectors. In my own area, Ballyclare, the two schools are co-operating on a common agenda to enhance 16+ courses. Next year, God willing, one of our courses will be health and social care at advanced vocational level. That course will be on offer for the first time.

644. Those are natural progressions for educationalists, and they give the lie to the notion that we are building our separate empires. My school has been oversubscribed for the past five or six years. What interest would I have in —

645. **Mr McNarry:** Do you rank the pupils in your school?

646. **Mr U McCrea:** There is nothing in this for me personally. It is about educational opportunities, and I believe that educationalists can work together in the best interests of children, even though they may approach the issue from different angles. We believe in non-selective, all-ability schools, but we are not getting that. Our position is already compromised. We believe that the Scottish system works best; however, we accept that we are not going to get that, so we have to work together for the benefit of children.

647. **Ms Ruane:** Go raibh maith agat. You are very welcome. I thank you for your passion. I love to see that — it is great. Your passionate

interest and your sense of equality are qualities that are needed in the education system.

648. I speak both as a parent and as a politician. I grew up with the system that operates in the South of Ireland. Transfer was not an issue; it just happened. No one talked about it. Parents made choices with their children. By and large, the right choices were made, although they were based on many different factors. I am not as worried as others seem to be about change, because change is creative if it is managed well. We can co-operate to manage change well, and we will do so.

649. There is a border, and my question is about catchment areas for those living in border areas. How will that be dealt with? I have a personal as well as a political interest in this. My children go to the nearest school, which is in Newry, although we are resident in Louth. What changes can be made to admissions criteria to help those in that situation?

650. You mentioned distortion of the curriculum. The first time my child said to me, “I hate school” was when the school started planning for the 11-plus, and it broke my heart. The key years are nought to seven and then seven to 11 years of age. How do you see the new system stopping that distortion in the primary schools?

651. **Mr Buckley:** The idea is that the new curriculum will be skills-based. Assessment is nothing to fear; assessment for selection is where the difficulties arise. Primary schools are all about summary and formative assessment of the children from year one right through to year seven. We do not have a difficulty with developing the children within a skills-based curriculum, developing them as individuals, focusing on their strengths and assessing them.

652. A comment was made earlier about ranking. We know exactly where our children are in relation to each other; that is not the difficulty. The difficulty is when it becomes competitive to suit the needs of a grammar school and when the children are selected on that basis. The focus of this curriculum is not on the needs of an individual area or sector, it is on the needs of the children. Assessment, and

knowing exactly where our children are at the age of 11, will not be a problem.

653. **Ms Ruane:** Do you have a problem with Key Stages 1 and 2?

654. **Mr Buckley:** No.

655. **Mr J Clarke:** Your question on admissions is an interesting one. It is certainly one way of reversing the demographic downturn. The answer to your specific question about Louth, however, is a matter for European countries and how they deal with the issue of crossing borders.

656. CCMS sees admissions criteria as an artificially constructed problem. If we engage in area planning and produce schools to meet the needs of the area, many of the difficulties that we have experienced will be diminished. I accept that that is not going to happen overnight, but we can make significant progress.

657. The Department of Education has stopped all building proposals until they are reassessed. They are going to be reassessed within the context of an area plan. When we have that plan, we will know where things are headed and we can quickly move children into an arrangement that points ahead to the new structures. The sum of £3.3 billion has been notionally allocated by the Strategic Investment Board for rebuilding the schools estate over the next number of years. We have to ensure that that money is well spent to create schools for the future, not schools for the past.

658. The other aspect of your question about the curriculum is that it enables children to develop at their own pace. It is important to recognise that. I know that proposals exist for an alternative to the transfer test, such as CATs. As I understand it, CATs comprises 27 tests of 35 minutes each, taken over three years. Fifteen of them are taken in year seven and the rest divided between year five and year six.

659. I ask you as politicians: is that electorally logical? Could you sell that to parents? Could you say to them: “We are going to put your kids under pressure for no reason other than to help them move from one building to another.”? As Mr McCrea said, our focus is not on buildings; it is on children, and the focus on choice is on

the subjects that meet their needs. We should not be forcing kids beyond their learning capacity until they are ready. In the paper that I sent to the party education spokespersons, I said that we should start challenging the cultures that exist in our society.

660. The pupil profile will help teachers to know when a child is ready to learn certain things. The evidence from the enriched curriculum, as it is emerging, is showing the underlying creativity of children in their capacity to learn — not when people think they ought to learn, but when they are ready. If that means that a child has to repeat a year — fine. If yet another year has to be repeated, it should automatically begin a resourced, bespoke special needs programme for those children.

661. The big question is: why are 25% of our children transferring with literacy and numeracy deficits? It is because we create failure. Let us stop creating failure.

662. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I am going to allow members to have a brief round-up. I remind members that they agreed this agenda. All I am doing is trying to ensure that we stick to time.

663. **Mr Donaldson:** Mr McCrea, you mentioned the benefits of a comprehensive, all-ability system. I went to a comprehensive school — Kilkeel High School — and the comprehensive model was introduced there due to the isolation of the area; it was the best option for the area. I am, therefore, not against the provision of a comprehensive model when it is chosen as an area-based solution, but there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Are you saying that comprehensive, all-ability education is the one-size-fits-all solution for Northern Ireland, or are you prepared to make provision for locally based solutions, which might include some form of academic selection, in cases where schools are oversubscribed? Is there any way that such provisions could be accommodated in the future system?

12.45 pm

664. **Mr U McCrea:** The comprehensive model was ideally suited for Kilkeel, but it is

also suitable for Ballyclare, because the children in Ballyclare go to all-ability schools until they are 11. What mysteriously happens to children when they are 11? They can be educated together until they are 11 because the parents or grandparents — along with the children — decide between Fairview Primary School and Ballyclare Primary School. Each of the schools may offer a different ethos or style, and no one questions the choice of school that is made for a child up until the age of 11.

However, when the child is 11, something mysterious happens and the children from Fairview Primary School and Ballyclare Primary School are told that they have to go in one of at least two different ways. Why should that be the case?

665. **Mr Donaldson:** That might also happen in the system that you are advocating, because if a school is oversubscribed it may not be able to take all of the children who want to go there. Mr Buckley's daughters may still have to go to different schools, because of oversubscription. Is it not correct that comprehensive schools stream children as well? Therefore, there is a form of selection for 11-year-olds in comprehensive schools.

666. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I will not allow another debate to start. If members or witnesses have questions or comments, please forward them to the Clerks. Sammy, please be brief, or you will get 100 lines.

667. **Mr S Wilson:** For understandable reasons, Mr McCrea and Mr Clarke have tried to downplay the role of the 11-plus — as it is now — but it was not for purely administrative reasons. Mr Buckley admitted that he has seen a difference between two schools. He had the choice to send his daughters to Ballyclare Secondary School or to a grammar school, and he did not send both of them to Ballyclare Secondary School. He obviously recognises that there is a difference between the schools, and that is why he decided that one daughter would go to one school, and that the other daughter would go to the other.

668. Costello recognised that there were differences among schools, and his report

mentions different pathways for different children through different schools. Mr McCrea also recognises that there is a difference

669. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Sammy, please be brief.

670. **Mr S Wilson:** Yes. Mr McCrea recognises that things happen in his school that do not happen in Ballyclare High School, and vice versa. Therefore, the 11-plus is not merely an administrative arrangement; it is a process that decides what school a child may choose. Is that not the case?

671. **Mr U McCrea:** I would love it if you would work in our school for a while.

672. **Mr McNarry:** He has been offered a job in another school.

673. **Mr Donaldson:** Only in the second form. *[Laughter.]*

674. **Mr U McCrea:** I wish that you would talk to parents such as Mr Buckley, whose second daughter is a lovely girl and who is doing well with us.

675. **Mr S Wilson:** Perhaps Mr Buckley can tell us about that.

676. **Mr U McCrea:** There are instances when children are artificially separated on the basis of some sort of pecking order. There is no need for that. All children will be entitled to the same curriculum, and they will be doing the same examination at GCSE. They will be competing for the same jobs, but no one will publicly declare that they achieved a particular grade at age 11 just so that it could be used by certain schools as a means of dealing with oversubscription. We can deal with oversubscription, but we do not have to resort to making a statement about the child.

677. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** We are not starting another debate.

678. **Mr S Wilson:** In that —

679. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Sammy, I remind you again that I am the principal.

680. **Mr McNarry:** The subgroup will be considering computer-adaptive tests. What is your opinion on those?

681. **Mr J Clarke:** As I have already said, they are unproven, they will place even more pressure on children, and they might — as is the case with the current transfer test — distort the curriculum.

682. **Mr McNarry:** Are computer-adaptive tests not just as unproven as what the Government are forcing on us? Does the same argument not apply to other types of pupil profiles?

683. **Mr J Clarke:** Those are not predictive tests; they are mainly diagnostic tests. Diagnostic tests are there to find out the learning strengths and deficits of a child, and we absolutely support them.

684. The research into pupil profiles has recognised that many teachers are using standardised tests, but do not know what those tests are telling them. That is the focus of the training programme, alongside the roll-out of the new curriculum and assessment regime.

685. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** I will take three questions together, and the witnesses can answer them as best they can.

686. **Mr D Bradley:** Do you agree that the all-ability model, far from being the one-size-fits-all solution that some people claim is, in fact, the opposite? That model has the flexibility to deal with pupils of varying abilities, talents, interests and capabilities, from supported learning right through to A level. Is it not the case that selective education creates a narrower model that has far less flexibility?

687. **Mr McElduff:** Can I seek clarification that computer adaptive testing would amount to 27 tests of 35 minutes each over primaries 5, 6 and 7?

688. **Ms Ruane:** North/South co-operation is part of the Good Friday Agreement. We have the North/South Ministerial Council, which includes the Minister for Education and Science in the Twenty-six Counties and the Minister of Education in the Six Counties. Education is a specially designated issue and should concern arrangements between the two member states. Both Departments, North and South, should work together when examining catchment areas. Otherwise, we are wasting resources, and that is

short-sighted. I agree with what was said about CATs. That is unbelievable — if you were a parent, you would have to go on strike.

689. **Mr J Clarke:** None of us are saying that we are for a mixed-ability learning environment. We are interested in differentiation in terms of choice, learning styles, and pace for children of all abilities. Schools organise themselves in different ways. Some schools, mainly grammar schools, use mixed-ability organisations. Many utilise bands and sets, which means that a pupil could be in a top group for one subject and a lesser group for another.

690. **Mr D Bradley:** By all-ability, I meant a non-selective model.

691. **Mr J Clarke:** Yes; it is non-selective, but we should be focusing on the notion that children make choices that meet their particular needs. I made the point about coherence and connectivity. Everyone can be under the one roof, but can follow different strands. I am not committed to labels such as “comprehensive”, “all-ability” or “one-size-fits-all”. I am committed to looking at needs. When we had the notion of specialist schools, we were talking about meeting the needs of areas, which will differ, perhaps due to their economic profile. That is another form of differentiation that we need to build into the curriculum. We are trying to bring children through an education system so that they fit into society and the economy in later life.

692. **Mr U McCrea:** I am a firm believer in all-ability education in the primary sector and in the post-primary sector. I believe that one can differentiate within the system according to children’s needs. Schools must change as the needs of the children change. We must adapt and change. We cannot be fixed and expect children to fit our model; we must adjust our teaching approach to the needs of the children.

693. **The Chairperson (Ms S Ramsey):** Thank you for your presentation. If you have any other comments to add, you can forward them to the subgroup. If members wish to ask further questions, the Clerks are willing to forward them.

The subgroup was suspended at 12.55 pm.

On resuming —

1.32 pm

(The Chairperson [Mr W Clarke] in the Chair.)

694. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** My name is Willie Clarke, and I am an MLA for South Down. Welcome to Stormont. I want to do a bit of housekeeping first. Will all members and witnesses please turn off their mobile telephones?

695. I want to make it clear that I have no professional interest in the education sector. The first group to give evidence is from the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). Perhaps you would introduce yourselves.

696. **Mr Gavin Boyd (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment):** I am Gavin Boyd, chief executive of the CCEA. On my right is Richard Hanna, my senior manager in charge of the pupil profile project. On my immediate left is Dr Charlie Sproule, the senior manager in charge of curriculum and assessment policy and on my extreme left is Robert Shilliday, my communications manager.

697. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Perhaps you will give a short presentation, after which I am sure that members will ask questions.

698. **Mr Boyd:** CCEA has provided the subgroup with a short paper. However, it may be useful if I spend a couple of minutes talking about the pupil profile and explain what it is, and what it is not.

699. The pupil profile is a standardised annual report supported by informed teacher judgement. It builds on the best practice that already exists in classrooms. It supports the current statutory requirement on schools to provide parents with an annual report. The standardised format seeks to ensure that an annual report is provided in the same format across all primary schools, which is not currently the case.

700. In future, the difference will be that schools will be required to have a meeting with parents early in the school year to discuss each child's specific attributes and learning

programme for the year ahead. That meeting will be informed by the previous performance of the child in the school, by the teacher's observations of the child early in the new term and also by two new diagnostic assessments in literacy and numeracy.

701. I will explain what is meant by diagnostic assessment. We are well used to assessments or end-of-term/end-of-year tests, which are designed to tell us how a child has performed. Diagnostic assessment is designed to tell us how a child has performed in a particular assessment and why. There are several component elements in literacy that contribute to a child's performance in reading. By analysing the child's performance in each of those components, we can identify if there are any particular issues for that child and use appropriate strategies to improve that child's performance.

702. One of the essential themes of that approach is to ensure that we improve outcomes for children and that we seek not just to identify where children are in terms of their performance, but also seek to improve their outcomes by supporting them where we have identified particular needs.

703. I could talk for the rest of the time on pupil profile, but it would be better if I handed over to you and your colleagues.

704. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Thank you, I appreciate that. Members will want to spend some time on this. I remind members that any questions should relate to the pupil profile. I will start with members to my left. Caitríona Ruane apologised that she had to leave for a short time, so Barry McElduff will start.

705. **Mr McElduff:** Does the council have a view on CATs? The South of Ireland uses a report-card-template system. Has any scrutiny been done on the effectiveness of that system?

706. **Mr Boyd:** We do not have a single view on CATs. The diagnostic tests, which I mentioned in my opening remarks, are computer-adaptive tests. Computer-adaptive tests is where the system, or the computer, looks at the answers that candidates give, sees how they are

responding to particular questions and decides on the next question or the next series of questions. The diagnostic assessment that we plan to use for literacy and numeracy are computer-adaptive tests.

707. There are other circumstances in which we use computer-adaptive tests — for example, in testing skills. We could talk to you in some detail about that. We have also looked, in considerable detail, at the use of computer-adaptive tests in other jurisdictions.

708. **Mr McElduff:** Is there any specific thinking on the effectiveness, or otherwise, of the report-card-template system in the South, which helps parents make informed choices about their children's future?

709. **Mr Boyd:** No, we have not done any specific work on that, but we would be happy to have a look at it.

710. **Mr D Bradley:** The subgroup met with representatives of the teachers' unions this morning. Some of them expressed serious reservations about the development of the pupil profile. For example, they claimed that the profiles, as they are at the moment, are not manageable. The profiles take 60 minutes for each pupil — work that could previously have been done in 30 minutes. They also said that there are presentational problems with boxes and graphs; the timing of the tests is not appropriate; there is not sufficient hardware in the schools to carry out the computer tests; and the testing is too disruptive for the class and it takes too long to carry out. The tests themselves demonstrate improved accuracy, but the concept of awarding scores flies in the face of the thrust of the revised curriculum. They based some of those claims on a report that you commissioned, which was published in September.

711. **Mr Boyd:** I will make some initial comments, which Mr Hanna will follow up. First, in line with all our advice to the Government and with all the policies that we seek to develop, we conduct trials widely. We are keen to ensure that the advice that we give to the Government has demonstrably worked in schools in Northern Ireland.

712. Secondly, I want to split the pupil profile itself, which is the standardised annual report, and the methods that we use to produce the profile. Currently, schools are required by law to provide parents with an annual report in respect of their children. The pupil profile is another form of annual report; of itself, it is no more onerous than previous reports and can be completed manually. In other words, if teachers choose to write reports by hand, they can do so.

713. The specific comments about the manageability of the reports — for example, that they take an hour to complete — relates to the use of a computerised report writer. Some teachers do not feel comfortable using computers to write reports, and there are other issues about hardware and manageability.

714. Before I hand over to Mr Hanna to comment on the use of a report writer, I want to point out that, in order to ensure the quality of the information and advice that we give to the Government, we engaged BDO Stoy Hayward to carry out an independent evaluation. We will receive the second part of that evaluation next week, and all the information will be placed on the CCEA website in due course.

715. **Mr Richard Hanna (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment):** Mr Boyd made a distinction about the physical completion of reports and administering the diagnostic tests. We have used two report writers. One was included in the evaluations and trials of pupil profiling in order to inform our own judgements and opinions about the functionality of the report writer.

716. A second report writer is used through the service provided to schools by Classroom 2000 (C2k). That report writer has been very successful with regard to functionality, but we recognise that teachers have concerns about it, because it has been the first time that they have used this type of technology to prepare reports. Traditionally, those teachers would have handwritten reports.

717. We have now conducted two trials for administering diagnostic assessments through the interactive computerised assessment (InCAS) system. The purpose of the trials was

to identify teachers' concerns, manageability issues, and so on. Through those trials, concerns were expressed about the length of time that the tests take to administer and the access to hardware in schools, which we accept.

718. We have evidence from schools that do not have many computers in classrooms that have managed to administer the tests very successfully, albeit that that has been challenging in respect of classroom management, and so on. We are aware of the issues in relation to the use of report writers and are working with our colleagues in Classroom 2000 in an attempt to alleviate any, or all, of the manageability pressures.

719. **Mr McNarry:** May I welcome the witnesses to the subgroup.

720. The subgroup heard three presentations this morning, two of which rejected CATs and another that supported such tests. In the context of the overall education debate, is it likely that there will be an argument over the type of CATs that will be used in schools? Will the purchase of the hardware required be put to tender, or will a strict recommendation be made that a particular type of hardware must be used?

721. We know that the Order does not provide for profiles to have a role in the transfer procedure. Is there a role that profiles could play after transfer decisions have been taken? Can you elaborate on that and on how you view any assistance that would be given to a post-primary school in the delivery of educational provision?

1.45 pm

722. **Mr Boyd:** Mr Chairman, in relation to the CATs and the particular assessments that are to be used in schools, we are very keen that the same assessment tool is used in all schools. The reason for that is that we want to ensure that there is complete comparability of information across the system.

723. **Mr McNarry:** Does that mean that you will be recommending a tool?

724. **Mr Boyd:** We have recommended a tool. We have been working very closely with

Durham University, which is acknowledged as one of the world leaders in the area of literacy. The interactive computerised assessment system (InCAS) tool that Mr Hanna referred to earlier is Durham University's computer-adaptive literacy test, which has been built out of years and years of experience of the standard reading test that it ran before.

725. **Mr McNarry:** Is that it? Under European law, there have to be open tenders, and it seems to me that this would be quite a lucrative contract for someone. Who are the handling agents for the Durham tool that you mentioned? To be blunt about it, to avoid suspicion, will your organisation derive any monetary gain from the purchase of this?

726. **Mr Boyd:** No. Nor will we be involved in the purchasing process. Our role is to develop advice for, and to give advice to, the Department. The procurement agent in these circumstances would be Classroom 2000, which is the service provider for IT in schools.

727. **Mr McNarry:** I asked about that because I do not think that the Department has been great at managing its money. I will say that; you do not need to comment.

728. **Mr Boyd:** I am trying to look blank, Mr Chairman.

729. **Mr McNarry:** I would be sensitive to the aspects of procurement. There are rules that we have to go through in the Assembly, particularly when approving systems that include hardware and tools. I want to be clear that, while you may make a recommendation, the Department is under no duress to accept it if some other methods are suggested for consideration. Is that a correct assessment?

730. **Mr Boyd:** Factually, the situation is that Ministers and the Department make all the decisions; we provide advice. A range of other parties can provide advice or may be asked to provide advice. However, all decision-making resides ultimately with Ministers.

731. **Mr McNarry:** Have you any comments on the role that profiles could play after transfer decisions?

732. **Mr Boyd:** If I could put this in the wider context, the profile has been developed to travel with a child throughout his education. It is not designed specifically in relation to transfer; it is meant to provide good-quality information to inform decisions all the way through a young person's education. There will be, therefore, a profile in Key Stage 3 and a profile in Key Stage 4. They will differ, but the principle will be the same. It is there to inform decision-making.

733. **Mr McNarry:** There is no way that you would envisage profiles being used for selection purposes?

734. **Mr Boyd:** The profile is not designed to put children in rank order, whereas the current transfer test does precisely that. Our intention is that the profile will have good-quality information, but it is not designed as a selective tool.

735. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** I will allow other members to speak, and, if we have some time left, I will allow further questions.

736. **Mr McNarry:** This is a new Chairman we have, and boy it is great. *[Laughter.]*

737. **Mr S Wilson:** Mr Boyd, you have used the word "standardised" on three occasions so far. Do you mean "standardised" as defined in the format that you have included at the back of your paper?

738. **Mr Boyd:** Yes; however, "standard" is probably a better word than "standardised".

739. **Mr S Wilson:** I ask that question because there is no way that the reports, in their present format, could be regarded as standardised across comments or across schools. This morning, we heard a witness from a teachers' union say that, for example, she might state that someone was brilliant at drama. It was felt that that was an objective assessment, but do you accept that, in their present form, there is no way you could use the reports to compare teachers' comments within a school, let alone between schools?

740. **Mr Boyd:** I am not quite sure that I understand the context of the question. The purpose of the profile is to provide a full picture of each child.

741. **Mr S Wilson:** For example, suppose I have two youngsters at two different schools, and the reports are meant to guide me. One report states that my youngster is very good at maths, brilliant at English, and excellent at drama, but the other, from a different teacher, in a different school, says that my youngster there is not bad at maths, all right at drama, or whatever. How can I use those reports as a guide in deciding which school my youngsters should go to, given that there is absolutely no guarantee that the comments are relative or mean the same thing when they come from different teachers?

742. **Dr Charlie Sproule (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment):** Some comments that teachers will use will be drawn from comment banks. They relate to levels of progression, so teachers will be able to refer to levels of progression that relate directly to the curriculum content for mathematics, communication or information and communication technology (ICT), when making their comments.

743. **Mr S Wilson:** The ability to draw comments from a comment bank does not mean anything. You and I could draw comments from the same comment bank about Jeffrey Donaldson, and you could —

744. **Mr Donaldson:** He knows me too well. *[Laughter.]*

745. **Mr S Wilson:** Well, perhaps I know him better, so the comments could be radically different.

746. **Mr McNarry:** He would probably prefer Dr Sproule's assessment.

747. **Mr S Wilson:** Levels of progression — the very term that you have used — tend to be vague. I am simply saying that the purpose of the reports, even if it is not to guide schools, is to guide parents, and it is a very vague instrument, is it not?

748. **Dr Sproule:** You may be overlooking the quality-assurance element involved in teachers' judgements. It is not simply down to individual teachers making judgements. Those judgements are supported by external moderation

arrangements, and so forth, and are supported by statements on levels of progression. Therefore, judgements are not made on the whim of an individual teacher.

749. **Mr S Wilson:** The fact that you mentioned levels of progression indicates that it is not specific and that it is open to interpretation.

750. I wish to address another point, which Dominic Bradley made earlier. You have been working at this matter since 2003. You received a report from BDO Stoy Hayward and, after three years of development, we are still hearing the type of comments that have been made today: “not fit for purpose”; “not manageable”; “insufficient hardware”, and so forth. You have heard all of that from Mr Bradley, so I am not going to repeat it. If, in three years, you have only reached the stage where you are getting what I would describe as fairly fundamental criticisms, how on earth do you ever expect the reports to be effective from 2007?

751. **Mr Boyd:** First, it is a necessary but perhaps slightly painful part of any evaluation process that one learns hard lessons, so I do not mind getting pretty hard feedback.

752. Secondly, I will return to what I said at the beginning. I shall split this up into easy pieces. Many of the comments that were made on manageability do not relate to the report itself but to the processes that we use to produce the report.

753. We have identified that hardware availability is an issue in some schools. So, despite the money we have spent on integrating IT into the education system, some schools are finding it very difficult to put young people through their assessments using the existing hardware.

754. There are two responses to that. First, we will put the point to the Department, and it will take the additional hardware provision very seriously. That is the first response, and it is an investment decision.

755. **Mr S Wilson:** We are talking about September next year.

756. **Mr Boyd:** There will be a significant roll-out of the Lot 6 refresh programme in C2k, which will start at the beginning of the new year and be completed by next September. That is a huge additional investment that will be going into our schools between now and then.

757. **Mr S Wilson:** I want to take up that point. Given that you have already told the unions about that roll-out, will you accept that you are not too confident about the roll-out because you are talking about buses with computers going around schools?

758. **Mr Boyd:** I will put that one in context presently. Mr Hanna referred to the fact that approximately 100 primary schools — almost 10% — and over 5,000 children were involved in the latest evaluation.

759. We identified a number of schools with manageability issues and another group, with precisely the same resources, in which there was no manageability problem. Therefore it is a question of us disseminating good practice — how some were able to manage while others were not.

760. We discovered that despite significant investment in IT, some teachers are not comfortable using it, and that was why it was taking some of them more than 60 minutes to produce reports. However, according to the evaluation, even those teachers admit that once the system is up and running and they become used to it, the process should be considerably quicker in future.

761. **Mr S Wilson:** You are telling me that we will have a pupil profile, which will still contain subjective comments from teachers, regardless of the assurances that have been given. You are also saying that many schools do not have the hardware, and that even if they did, teachers are not comfortable using it and will therefore need to be trained.

762. Furthermore, we have not even talked about how we can ensure that parents, whom we expect to be able to interpret this material, will know how to interpret it. You propose that everything will be done by September 2007 — is that realistic?

763. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):**

Please answer that question and then we will move on to Mr Donaldson.

764. **Mr Boyd:** I take issue with every element of Mr Wilson's statement, and it would take me quite some considerable time to go through it.

765. **Mr S Wilson:** I am only quoting your own words to you.

766. **Mr Boyd:** You may be quoting my words, but not in their original order, which makes all the difference.

767. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** I think that I heard some Ulster Scots in there as well.

768. **Mr Boyd:** I apologise, Chairman. If I had the time, I would give you a very detailed rebuttal to just about every element of Mr Wilson's statement.

769. **Mr Donaldson:** Thank you gentlemen, you are very welcome.

770. You indicated that computer-adaptive testing is not an appropriate means for academic selection or for testing pupils so that schools and parents can make decisions. However, under the legislation that was passed after the St Andrews Agreement, academic selection will be retained in Northern Ireland if there is devolution by 26 March 2007.

771. Last week, the Department of Education told the subgroup that it has not conducted any research into alternatives to the 11-plus should academic selection be retained. Has CCEA conducted any research into alternative forms of testing for academic selection purposes, and has it informed parents or schools of its intentions?

772. **Mr Boyd:** First, we have not commented about appropriate ways to make academic selection. That is not our business; it takes us into political territory.

773. My comment about computer-adaptive tests was that we are using them to support teacher judgement and reporting in the pupil profile. The straightforward answer to the second part of your question is, no.

774. **Mr Donaldson:** Therefore, there is no research available from the Department or CCEA on alternatives to the 11-plus? Have you been asked by the Department to conduct such research?

775. **Mr Boyd:** No.

776. **Mr Donaldson:** Are you content to leave it to the politicians to make that decision, or would CCEA be prepared to look at alternative forms of testing in the event of academic selection being retained?

777. **Mr Boyd:** CCEA operates under political direction, so if Ministers ask us to carry out such work, we would do it to the best of our ability.

778. **Mr Donaldson:** Are you aware of any models in European countries or elsewhere where there is a form of academic selection and an alternative to either the computer-adaptive test or the 11-plus?

2.00 pm

779. **Mr Boyd:** We have not carried out any research looking at alternatives to the current transfer procedure.

780. **Mr Donaldson:** Are you, or any of your colleagues, aware of any models that we might look at from your professional work?

781. **Mr Boyd:** I cannot think of any system in the world where children are tested at the age of 11 in order to transfer them from primary school to post-primary school.

782. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** We have some time left; I will give each member a couple of minutes again.

783. **Mr D Bradley:** I would like some clarification on CATs. You said that the CATs that you use is a diagnostic instrument. Is that right?

784. **Mr Boyd:** What I said was that the CATs test that we are using is a diagnostic instrument. That is not to say that all CATs are diagnostic.

785. **Mr D Bradley:** That is the distinction that I want to make. We had the Association for Quality Education here this morning, and its members were advocating using CATs as a

means of academic selection. Is that a totally different computer program from the CATs that you are using for the pupil profile?

786. **Mr Boyd:** We have not seen a lot of detailed information, but as I understand it that is a pure test of knowledge.

787. **Mr D Bradley:** I just wanted to make sure that there is no confusion between what you describe as a CAT and what someone else describes as a CAT.

788. **Mr Boyd:** We are simply describing a process in which a computer uses a bank of knowledge to identify the next appropriate question to ask a candidate — if the candidate is doing well, the computer asks a harder question; if the candidate is not doing well, the computer asks a less hard question — until the system can identify the level at which that candidate is operating.

789. **Mr D Bradley:** I am just trying to make a clear distinction between two different forms of CAT.

790. With reference to what Mr Wilson said earlier regarding the comparability of comments on pupil profiles, if teachers are using comment banks — pre-written statements which can be drawn upon by teachers to describe a level of attainment that a pupil has reached — then surely they are comparable right across schools in the North of Ireland?

791. **Mr Boyd:** I have two comments to make on that. First, comment banks are provided to ease the burden on teachers when they are filling in reports using a computerised system. In fact, if you look at traditional non-computerised teacher reports, you will see that most teachers actually draw on their own comment banks; in 30 reports that a teacher has written on one class you will see similar comments appearing in groups of reports.

792. Secondly, it is very important to note that all teachers' comments included in a pupil profile will be informed professional judgements. They will be informed by reference to levels of progression, which are quite detailed statements of attainment, specific skills, attributes and achievements. Dr Sproule has teams of people

working hard on that at the minute. Teachers make reference to those levels of progression when they are filling in reports.

793. We will have in place, as we already have with Key Stage testing, a system of moderation that ensures that there is a level of comparability across the system.

794. **Mr McElduff:** Perhaps I misunderstood, but the impression I got from the teachers' unions was that more general statements would not be recorded in the pupil profile scores for literacy or numeracy; rather, there would be a more holistic development of the child. Yet I see that there is a fair bit of scoring recorded in the pupil profile. Do scores not act as a tool for a form of selection?

795. **Mr Boyd:** Scores in themselves cannot act as selection tools; the issue is what people choose to do with those scores. The papers that we have submitted to the subgroup show how children's reading and mathematics outcomes would be recorded over time. To use fairly common terminology, we have set those outcomes in the context of reading and maths age. We are used to primary schoolchildren being assessed and being told that they have a reading age of seven and a half or seven and three quarters. That objective information is derived from the diagnostic assessments that are included in the reports and that are meant to be discussed with parents annually.

796. **Mr McElduff:** I am seeking a restatement of the purpose of the pupil profile, which is to inform parents.

797. **Mr Boyd:** That is exactly right.

798. **Mr McNarry:** David Woods, a senior official in the Department of Education, said at last week's evidence session that:

“Parents and teachers in the schools that have undertaken the pilot generally reacted positively to it ...

Teachers were generally content with the pupil profile. At an early stage, they expressed fears about its being an additional burden. However, since it is meant to replace the annual

reports that schools already provide, there should be no extra burden ...

People have issues with parts of the pupil profile, but the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has been adjusting the format of the profile to address those concerns.”

799. What adjustments are ongoing? Have teachers and parents found that the profiles add quantitatively to children’s educational experiences?

800. **Mr Boyd:** The simple answer is yes. The BDO Stoy Hayward evaluation of the pilot reported very high levels of parental acceptance, particularly in relation to meaningfulness. For example, 84% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the pupil profile provided them with a clear description of their child’s progress throughout the school year. Some 96% strongly agreed or agreed that the information that the diagnostic assessments provided was useful.

801. Whenever we design reports that are meant to be of use to parents, it is very important that they tell us that they understand them and that they find them useful. That means that we can continue to work on the presentation of that information.

802. **Mr McNarry:** Did you begin with CATs, or have they just been introduced? Are you getting parental responses to those?

803. **Mr Boyd:** We have been working on that for some time. Mr Wilson has reminded us that we have been working at those for two and a half years; indeed, they have always been part of the process.

804. **Mr McNarry:** It has taken longer than inventing the wheel. [*Laughter.*]

805. **Mr Boyd:** There is a serious point, however. Presentation of information is very important, and we continue to work on that. One of the lessons that we learnt from the most recent evaluation was that teachers were concerned about the amount of time and effort that it took to fill in the reports. As a result, we reduced the scope of the reports. The work is ongoing.

806. **Mr R Hanna:** The iteration of the pupil profile report that is in the subgroup’s paper has been refined over time as a direct result of the evaluations that we —

807. **Mr McNarry:** I was asking whether work on the report is ongoing. Are you still adjusting it?

808. **Mr Boyd:** We will continue to work on its presentational aspects until it goes live. In fact, I make no apology for continuing to work on those aspects as far into the future as we can see. If parents say to us that they do not understand certain aspects of it, we will work on changing those.

809. **Mr S Wilson:** I want to come back to standardisation, because I am getting more confused.

810. According to Mr Boyd, standardisation will be introduced, because there will be a bank of comments that could be open to interpretation by different people. However, Dr Sproule says that those comments will not be open to interpretation and that there will be different levels of progression. Given that this report has 17 different sections and that some of those have five subsections, how many levels of progression will there be for each of those sections?

811. If, for example, there are five different levels of progression, against which one of the comment banks will be used, how confusing will that be for teachers? Will there be levels of progression for each of the 25 sections, and how many levels of progression will there be? Can you explain how teachers will be able to ensure that their comments are standardised? For example, will the system be able to ensure that David McNarry assesses a youngster in exactly the same way as I would? Will it be able to ensure that children are not treated differently because some teachers take either a harder or easier approach than others?

812. **Mr Boyd:** Dr Sproule will deal with the detail of your question. However, I want to come back to the point about comment banks, because I am not sure that I have made myself clear. The comment banks will be a series of

computerised records on which teachers may draw to make the writing of their reports easier. Teachers can choose not draw on the comments; they can choose not to use the computerised records. The computerised comment banks are not part of the standardisation process: they are there to make life easier for teachers.

813. **Mr S Wilson:** That approach will make standardisation even less likely, because teachers will be able to make different comments. In fact, words mean different things to different people. We had an example this morning where one of the representatives of the teachers' unions talked about using the word "brilliant" on the report. "Brilliant" could mean something totally different to me than it does to you. That is my point exactly: how can these reports be used to make an assessment when they are open to so much subjectivity?

814. **Mr Boyd:** Dr Sproule will deal with the detail of that issue. However, please bear in mind that pupil profiles are simply building on the best practice that exists in our schools. I am sure that Mr Wilson does not mean to, but it almost sounds as though he is asking whether any of the information contained in school reports over the past 20, 30, 40 or 50 years could have been trusted. I know that that is not what he means to say, but we are seeking to demonstrate that we have built a higher level of utility to support the system. The report system will be supported by levels of progression, by assessment units and by all the other tools that teachers can and do use in their daily practice.

815. **Dr Sproule:** The levels of progression are not a new measure. They exist and are used by primary and post-primary teachers to inform their judgements. The levels of progression that we are revising will apply to reporting performance in the three cross-curricular skills of understanding maths, communication and using ICT.

816. **Mr S Wilson:** Therefore, those levels of progression will not apply to 14 sections, meaning that teachers will not receive guidance for nearly 60% of this report. That means that each of those sections will be wide open to

subjectivity. Therefore, even with the levels of progressions, an element of subjectivity remains.

817. All I am trying to get at is that if these levels of progression are to be used as guidance for parents, they will be virtually useless. Is that not the case?

818. **Dr Sproule:** The levels of progression relate to the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. The report reflects the fact that some of the other aspects on which parents would wish teachers to report, such as personal development, do not lend themselves to such strict measurement. The report refers to whole pupil development along with more specific development in certain skills.

819. **Mr S Wilson:** I would like a yes or no answer to this question. Given your comments about the lack of hardware and teacher training, the fact that no explanation has been given as to how parents will be prepared for this system, and the work that Mr Boyd has said remains to be done, will a fit-for-purpose pupil profile be ready by September of next year?

820. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Yes or no, Mr Boyd?

821. **Mr Boyd:** Yes.

822. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Sammy, are you happy enough with that?

823. **Mr S Wilson:** Yes.

824. **Mr Donaldson:** Sammy mentioned parental preparation, which is crucial because the whole purpose of the pupil profile is to inform parents. These documents are much more complex than I envisaged and, following today's exchange about subjectivity, the levels of progression do not appear to be very clear-cut. What are you going to do to inform parents about, and educate them on the role of, pupil profiles?

2.15 pm

825. **Mr Boyd:** First, I refer back to the most recent evaluation, which involved 5,000 children and their parents. We picked up on what parents do and do not like, and on what they know and what they need to know. Secondly, a huge programme of assessment

conferences for teachers will take place in January. Although I do not know how many teachers will be involved, I can tell members that there will be 47 conferences.

826. **Mr R Hanna:** The conferences will involve well over 1,000 teachers.

827. **Mr Boyd:** We intend to build on the relationship between parents and teachers. Think back to the process that I described at the beginning. The idea is that a teacher would meet with parents early on in the year to discuss, for example, Jane. The teacher would outline what the school knows about Jane, her strengths, the areas in which she might need help, and how the school proposes to provide that help. The suggested approach might involve Jane's parents sitting down each night to read with her. That system would work effectively if Jane's parents were to take that information on board, along with the other interaction that they have with her teachers. We all rely on guidance from primary schoolteachers to make the right decisions for our children.

828. **Mr Donaldson:** We do, and I accept that. However, the advent of the pupil profile changes the nature of that guidance, making it much more crucial than it is today. This may be an unfair question to ask CCEA, but I will ask it anyway: does that not leave teachers more vulnerable to pressure from parents who have a preconceived outcome for their children? Let us face it, parents will, in many cases, have selected the ideal school that they want their child to attend well before they enter the pupil-profile process. Is there not a danger that parents will put pressure on teachers as to how the profile is prepared? In the end, the parents take the final decision, but, nevertheless, they do have the right to give the pupil profile to a school. I am concerned that this could result in pressure being put on teachers.

829. **Mr Boyd:** This is getting into territory that is a little bit away from our home base. Our objective is to ensure that the best quality information is available in the profile. The situation at the minute — given that pupil profiles were not designed to be a selective tool — is fundamentally different from the situation

that pertained in 1978, 1979 and 1980, when children transferred on the basis of primary school decisions or, in the couple of years when there was no transfer test, information from teachers. That led to the situation that Mr Donaldson identified. Indeed, there were one or two incidents where teachers had to move home. This situation is different because pupil profiles are not designed to be a selective tool.

830. **Mr Donaldson:** I have one final question. How do you feel pupil profiles will help parents and children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds?

831. That process tends to be of more benefit to parents from an affluent background than to parents from a disadvantaged one, who might not have had the best educational experience themselves.

832. **Mr Boyd:** That is an important question. There is no way that we could answer it in a couple of minutes, but I would be happy to come back to the subgroup on the matter. That issue takes us a little bit beyond our territory. However, when advising Ministers on other issues, we have pointed out that there are circumstances in which young people need multiple interventions, particularly those from disadvantaged areas or from socially difficult backgrounds.

833. **The Chairperson (Mr Clarke):** Each member may ask a question, after which the witnesses can sum up their answers.

834. **Mr McNarry:** I was struck by a thought when listening to Jeffrey's line of questioning. Surely there is bound to be a risk of a parent mounting a legal challenge against a pupil profile if, having disclosed their child's profile to a head teacher, their child then receives a rejection letter from the school? What indemnity is there in such an event? How can the matter be foolproofed? That is a serious issue, as rejection could shape the child's future. What happens if the parent does not accept the pupil profile?

835. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Mr Boyd, can you please take note of that question?

836. **Mr Boyd:** Yes.

837. **Mr McNarry:** Can he not answer it?
838. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** He will answer it at the end.
839. **Mr D Bradley:** Does the pupil profile have sensitivity to children with special needs?
840. **Mr Boyd:** Yes, and we have carried out additional work on that.
841. **Mr D Bradley:** Can you elaborate?
842. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** That question can be answered in the summary.
843. **Mr S Wilson:** I want to follow on from Jeffrey's point. It is not enough for Mr Boyd to say that Jeffrey's question is very important but that he does not have time to answer it now. I do not accept that this issue is not CCEA's responsibility. Mr Boyd, you must have some idea about this if CCEA is to achieve the Government's objective. If CCEA is placing in the public domain a report that is meant to be for the guidance of parents, it must have some idea of how to make it accessible to them. As Jeffrey pointed out, it will be more accessible to some parents than others, depending on their educational experience, their knowledge of how the schools system works and their interest in their youngsters' education.
844. That will add to the timetable, so we should at least be told how CCEA believes that it can be achieved. What plan will CCEA put in place to ensure that the report is accessible and that it is not full of gobbledegook that a teacher is left to explain at a parent-teacher meeting? I know from experience that the parents of the youngsters whom teachers most want to reach often do not attend such meetings.
845. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** I thank members for their questions. I now ask the witnesses to sum up.
846. **Mr Boyd:** I will deal first with the question on special needs. Some additional work has been carried out with special needs teachers to adapt the profile to make it relevant to young people with special needs without reinforcing feelings of underachievement. We will happily provide additional information.
847. Mr McNarry's question about pupils being rejected because of their pupil profile goes beyond our competence, but I do not know how such a circumstance could arise if the profile is not to be used as a selective tool.
848. **Mr McNarry:** I asked about the potential for legal challenges.
849. **Mr Boyd:** I am trying to envisage how circumstances involving a pupil profile would be different from circumstances involving a third-form report or the primary 6 report that children receive. These reports will show teachers' professional, informed judgement, backed up by objective information. The grounds for challenging a profile are no different from the grounds for challenging the reports that schools issue now.
850. That is my first reaction to the question, but I would be happy to get back to Mr McNarry on that.
851. **Mr McNarry:** If you would.
852. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Mr Boyd, could you furnish the subgroup with any additional information by the middle of next week?
853. We now move on to Sammy's question.
854. **Mr Boyd:** I was not trying to dismiss Mr Donaldson's question in any way, shape or form. I was trying to react to your direction, Chairperson, because I sensed that time was moving on. Parental involvement is hugely important to the entire community, and CCEA has put in place tools that will allow it to improve the educational outcomes for all young people.
855. However, putting those tools in place will not work without the strategies to support them. There will be an extremely detailed programme of support, including the sort of parental support to which Mr Donaldson referred. There are already one or two schools in Northern Ireland in which that happens. The need for that support is recognised.
856. **Mr Donaldson:** You will be giving the subgroup a paper on that, Mr Boyd?
857. **Mr Boyd:** That sounds like a request.

858. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Thank you very much for your contribution, Mr Boyd, and congratulations on your appointment as chief executive of the new Education and Skills Authority.

859. **Mr McNarry:** Crawler.

860. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** I also thank members for their patience. Mr Boyd, is it possible to furnish members with copies of the pupil profile evaluation report?

861. **Mr Boyd:** Yes; as soon as we receive it, we will happily do so.

862. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Thank you very much to all your team.

The subgroup was suspended at 2.26 pm.

On resuming —

2.35 pm

863. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** The subgroup will hear three presentations; therefore, each session will take 20 minutes, including questions. It would be good to have an hour, but, unfortunately, our time is restricted. Each party will ask one question. Representatives of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta are unable to attend, but they will give the subgroup a detailed submission.

864. The delegation is most welcome. If Mr Wardlow would give a brief two- or three-minute presentation, we may have time for questions.

865. **Mr McNarry:** Is this not the fifth session? Should we not be hearing from the Transferor Representatives' Council? Has that been changed?

866. **The Committee Clerk:** Yesterday the agenda was reshuffled, and a new version was issued this morning. Please take a copy.

867. **Mr McNarry:** When will we hear from the Transferor Representatives' Council?

868. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** We will hear from that group at 3.10 pm.

869. **Mr S Wilson:** Could we not be integrated with someone else? I want to be separate.
[Laughter.]

870. **Mr Michael Wardlow (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education):** Equal and separate.

871. I am so small that, had you told me that the seats were so low, I would have brought a cushion. You could have raised me up in hire purchase.

872. It is good to have the opportunity to speak to members. I have given the subgroup a paper that contains brief overviews of the two main subject areas. However, I have only three or four minutes to highlight some aspects of those.

873. My first point is with respect to the general overview. One cannot discuss the pupil profile and admissions criteria without considering the planned changes to education. I do not mean the implications of the review of public administration alone; I am referring to 'A Shared Future' and the Bain Report, which was published last week, and the statement that Maria Eagle, the Minister with responsibility for education, issued in response to that. In that statement, she announced that 95 projects will be frozen. At the moment, everyone is trying to find out what is happening. Ultimately, however, education will change profoundly: we all know that.

874. In considering pupil profiles and the admissions criteria, admission will be to a different type of school than that which we have been used to. However those matters are agreed, they will probably be part of a much better, and wider, collaborative arrangement. Therefore, admissions and pupil profiles should not be thought of as a high-stake changing of schools at the age of 10 or 11.

875. My second point is that integrated schools, about which I am speaking in particular, are distinct from others simply because there are relatively few of them. Their catchment areas, therefore, tend to be much wider. For example, Integrated College Dungannon has a catchment area of a 30-mile radius. When I discuss that later, members should be aware that integrated schools do not have local catchment areas.

876. I turn now to the two main issues: pupil profile and admissions criteria. The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) broadly welcomes the pupil profile. We have been following its development and evaluation by the Department of Education and the Strategic Advisory Group. Although this is not the appropriate time for philosophical argument, I need to make it clear that most integrated schools are all-ability schools. The exceptions to that are two schools that have chosen to select a cohort of pupils. The fact that, in some integrated schools, 70% or more of pupils consistently achieve A to C grades confirms, to our satisfaction, that all-ability education can be delivered.

877. The council has stated in its paper its reasons for not wanting the pupil profile to be used for any form of selection. It was never designed for that: selection means ranking a child at a particular age, on a particular test, to go to a particular type of school. Schools, on the other hand, are more concerned with knowledge, experience and attitude. Given that the pupil profile reflects those concerns, it could not be used for a one-off ranking process.

878. For the same reason, the council is not in favour of computer-adaptive testing; it is also a selective process. I can discuss that later, if members wish. The council would like the subgroup to refocus slightly and ask why pupils should consider any high-stake changes of any sort at the age of 11. The council would like the subgroup to focus on the age of 14 and to consider how selection might proceed at that age. That might involve academic selection, but it could also involve election, because children are more mature when they are 14 years of age.

879. Teachers have some concerns about the pupil profile. They fear, for example, that parents might want to influence teachers unduly so that they put particular subjects on a pupil's record. The council has also spoken to a number of parents who feel that the profile needs to be readily accessible and easily read because sometimes teacher-speak does not always translate easily for parents. Time and resources

must be applied to that. The council's evaluation highlighted those points.

880. The second aspect was admissions criteria. Our response has been that far too many admissions criteria are used as selection tools. We are in favour of a drop-down menu that contains compulsory groups. For example, our overview paper mentions elements such as geographical location, feeder primary schools and family connections. We argue that those criteria should be compulsory but that there should be an option to choose from within them. In fact, it should be the same for every school. We want to do away with interviews and other forms of specialist admissions criteria.

881. The overview paper highlights some methods that schools currently use to select pupils. The methods used by grammar, integrated and secondary non-integrated schools are very different. We argue that a drop-down menu would streamline the process. Schools should be able to select from a common criteria menu. Our argument is that compelling individual needs should be very much reduced.

882. When the survey was carried out two years ago, post-primary integrated schools had 50% more statemented pupils than the other sectors. Our schools would not want to close the doors on, or have a quota for, special-needs children. We accept that schools should not be required to have more than 2% to 3% of their total intake made up of special-needs children. The quota should not be supernumerary. However, schools can accept more special-needs pupils, and they should be resourced accordingly, if that is the case.

883. The final page of the overview paper details the four different areas of criteria. We consider aspects such as family criteria and, for the integrated sector in particular, it is important to have family connections at the top of the list of criteria. All our schools use family connections; most use the criterion of the eldest child in a family already attending the school, followed by another sibling. Second families, adoptive families and step-families must also be considered in that regard.

884. We argue that a child who has attended the school, but who has since left, should also be counted as a family member. That is not only to consider second families, but to allow for the fact that, on some occasions, there was no integrated school available for an older child to attend.

885. Community-based and local criteria have been problematical for us, simply because we are not sure what that means for an integrated school that has a catchment of 60 feeder primary schools, for example. That is one area that needs to be debated. We are concerned about nominated feeder primary schools and parish schools because they run contrary to the Shared Future agenda.

886. Furthermore, if a state or Catholic-maintained school, for example, wants to move towards becoming integrated, but is situated in a single-identity community, which 94% of public housing areas are, how on earth would community balance be achieved? For NICIE, community balance is a key factor. Using local criteria as part of the overall admissions criteria needs to be put in the context of community balance. In fact, we still need to select children on the basis of community balance.

887. If a tie-breaker is required to be used as a selection tool, NICIE uses a randomised alphabet through computer sorting. The feedback survey that was carried out in 2005 found that the majority of views supported that process, with one or two exceptions. We advocate the use of randomised selection on pre-published surnames, which would change every year. When the way in which tie-breakers work is considered, it does not actually cover many schools at present.

888. The big problem is that significant numbers of schools are oversubscribed. In the academic year 2004–05, almost 100 schools were oversubscribed. Almost all grant-maintained integrated schools are oversubscribed, so admissions criteria are something that must be viewed in the new context of collaborative arrangements. That will mean that children will not have to take a high-stakes test that brands them as certain types of learners from the age of 11.

889. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** I ask members to ask succinct questions. There will be three minutes allowed for each question and answer, but that should include two minutes for the answer. As we want to hear complete responses, members should not make long speeches when asking their questions. We will begin with the DUP.

890. **Mr S Wilson:** My question is to seek clarification. Mr Wardlow said that he does not want specialist criteria. He also mentioned academic selection. Does attending an integrated primary school not count as specialist criteria?

891. **Mr Wardlow:** To be frank, our problem is that we are stuck in a situation where there are around 20 integrated post-primary schools, yet there are 40 integrated primary schools. There are not enough integrated post-primary schools. One issue is to ensure that parents who have chosen integrated education for their children from the age of four can rely on systemic integrity throughout. If a child does not sit a transfer test and writes off the opportunity to go to a grammar school, we want to be able to offer that child the potential to finish his or her education in an integrated school.

892. Integrated primary schools do not count as feeder schools in the sense that they are not locally based, but we want schools to be open to the possibility of accepting children from other schools. Around 50% of kids come from integrated primary schools, so I do not want them to be closed.

893. Mr Wilson said that he felt that attending an integrated primary school counted as specialist criteria, and I understand that view. We are trying to highlight the fact that 800 pupils were turned away from integrated secondary schools last year, and we want to try to do something about that.

894. **Mr S Wilson:** It is not that I consider attending an integrated primary school to be a specialist criterion, but it cannot be denied that that is a specialist criterion in so far as it can apply only to pupils who have attended integrated primary schools. How do you justify using that criterion when you want to deny grammar schools the right to use specialist criteria?

895. **Mr Wardlow:** Let me answer very quickly; perhaps it is my use of the language. The specialist criteria to which I referred include interviews and extra-curricular activities, which are used by 50 or 60 schools. Selection is not a specialist criterion; it is a fundamental criterion that transcends specialism. However, if you are saying that it is the same as attendance at an integrated primary, we would have to differ philosophically on that.

2.45 pm

896. **Mr S Wilson:** That is not just my interpretation; anybody would accept selection as specialist. There is one point that you have not addressed. Given the political arrangements, we are still likely to have academic selection after 26 March 2007 as the basis of at least some transfer from one school to another. What means might be put in place to facilitate that?

897. **Mr Wardlow:** There are two issues — how to address the admissions criteria and how to set the test. I am fundamentally against selection of any sort. The potential to select still exists, but the admissions arrangements do not, so we have to create those arrangements and the test. The parties agree that selection should continue; however, NICIE recommends that if selection must continue, it should happen when pupils are 14 years of age. We should consider how to assess the capability of a child of the age of 14, not in a high-stakes test but in some way that we have to work through. I do not have a simple answer. It should not be a two-Friday test; at the age of 14, it is more serious than that.

898. **Mr McNarry:** I mean no disrespect, but I have been here since 9.30 am and have heard nothing new; the debate is going nowhere. People are adopting rigid attitudes, and I suspect that you will not change yours. I want to ask two questions. Do you rank pupils in your schools and how do you rank them? Secondly, to be more positive, how can we build a post-debate consensus on admissions criteria? Where will we take matters? We need to hear something new — you are meant to be innovative and all things to all men in education.

899. **Mr Wardlow:** I am not sure what is fact and what is opinion, but I shall assume that most of what you say is opinion rather than fact.

900. **Mr McNarry:** That is your opinion; I am only giving it back to you.

901. **Mr Wardlow:** Since I am not sure what you mean when you ask how we rank — whether you mean by set or by streaming — I will explain both very simply, because it answers your two questions. The boards of governors of Lagan College and Slemish College have decided to select a certain number of pupils. I am against it, and NICIE opposes academic ability as a form of selection.

902. **Mr McNarry:** Do you punish them in any way?

903. **Mr Wardlow:** I suspect that there has been a misunderstanding. We are a charity: we have absolutely no control over any school. We exist to give parents access to integrated schools. There is a debate in the sector among the schools about selection. Personally, I do not accept academic selection even in part.

904. Some of our schools, such as Shimna Integrated College, do not even put pupils into sets in stronger or weaker subjects until the third year. Other schools will set, which means that if a pupil is strong in English, he or she will be put into a stronger English class. However, to the best of my knowledge, none of our 20 post-primary schools uses streaming, in which pupils are placed in a stream based on some sort of academic ability and remain in that stream for every subject.

905. We have come up with new ideas on the post-admissions criteria. Our paper stated our fundamental opposition to selection at the age of 11, and I suggest that the debate should refocus on the age of 14. That is new, and consensus is possible. First, we could look at some form of empowerment for pupils at the age of 14 in a new collaborative arrangement under the Costello and Bain Reports to consider how we get that choice at the age of 14. Selection is one of those issues. With respect, Mr McNarry, that is new.

906. **Mr McNarry:** I am glad of the newness, although choice at the age of 14 is hardly new. The NICIE paper states that the organisation favours pupil profiles; however, if a school does not set or stream, what are the profiles for?

907. **Mr Wardlow:** I am sorry; I have answered you incorrectly. The schools do set, but they do not stream. For example, if your child comes in —

908. **Mr McNarry:** However, you are not in favour of either.

909. **Mr Wardlow:** No. That is where there is misunderstanding. I do not accept the high-stakes test at 11 years of age — selection through academic ability. It is fundamentally important that children reach their potential, but I do not accept that that should be done by selection at 11 years of age.

910. With regard to children who have different abilities in a school, I accept that there is absolutely nothing wrong or contradictory in allowing a child whose English is stronger than his or her French, for example, to be put in a more able English class. That child may not be as strong in three or four other subjects. However, the whole idea of trying to set children is to allow the less able to progress upwards. There is currently a debate on that issue in all the education sectors. I am fundamentally opposed to sending children to a particular type of school and deciding whether they are academic or more suited to a vocation at 11 years of age.

911. **Mr D Bradley:** Mr Wardlow, you mentioned earlier that you had been tracking the progress of the pupil profile. Are you satisfied with the progress that has been made to date?

912. **Mr Wardlow:** Part of what I receive comes from the Strategic Advisory Group, of which I am a member. As a parent, I am not satisfied that the pupil profile is at the stage that it ought to be. Several pilots have been carried out, and the results will roll over to the next evaluation. I would prefer to be further down the line with profiling. However, progress has been made on the new, more straightforward form. The original form was much more complex. The expectation on teachers to

complete the profiles in 35 to 40 minutes is unreasonable. Teachers must be trained in how to complete profiles.

913. Teachers still believe that they will have to make decisions for parents about which schools their children should go to. That is not a teacher's role. The relationship between the parent and the school — particularly the primary school — must be specified. Furthermore, young people say that they want to see post-primary schools earlier. They have said in the responses that they want to find out what the post-primary schools look like. However, they are not allowed to do so until the year before they are due to leave primary school.

914. The pupil profile is only one issue. My fear is that it will become yet another issue like class averages. I do not believe that class averages should come into the matter. That is the carrot-and-stick approach.

915. **Mr D Bradley:** You said that you were strongly opposed to the high-stakes decision at the age of 11 and that 14 is a more strategic age for making choices, choosing pathways, and so on; and that selection may be in the mix.

916. **Mr Wardlow:** Purely pragmatically, I agree that we must be mature, have a debate and not allow fundamentalism to get in the way. I am, therefore, happy to debate the matter.

917. **Mr D Bradley:** By the age of 14, a child could be studying 12, 13 or 14 subjects. What type of test do you envisage for 14-year-olds?

918. **Mr Wardlow:** I am not sure. We must consider how the stage between the age of 11 and the age of 14 will look. The Craigavon model has been mentioned. However, that model leaks because young people can get out and go to grammar schools. There is, therefore, no hermetically sealed homogeneous unit that can be examined.

919. There is enough creativity in Northern Ireland to prevent us from always having to borrow the educational philosophies of others. There are plenty of us, and we are mature enough. I welcome being able to talk to the subgroup again because I have missed that. It sets the standard that the subgroup can have

such debates where I must put my philosophy to one side for the greater good of young people.

920. **Mr McElduff:** My question is about the admissions criteria and the tie-breaker that will come into play. Will proximity to the school be introduced earlier than the tie-breaker with regard to integrated schools?

921. **Mr Wardlow:** Our integrated schools do not have proximity criteria. Part of the problem with that is exactly what I referred to earlier. Many integrated schools have a catchment area of perhaps a 15-, 20- or 30-mile radius. Proximity has never been an issue. Our integrated schools are, in fact, fundamentally opposed to proximity criteria in any shape or form.

922. **Mr McNarry:** Is it true that you are going to buy a bus company?

923. **Mr Wardlow:** I may have to buy two in order to have a community balance.

924. The council believes that random selection that is based on pre-published surnames, with “Mac” surnames included as well, is a better way. The survey seems to agree with that.

925. **Mr McElduff:** It is interesting that the Ulster Teachers’ Union, I believe, preferred the geographical criteria to the randomised criteria. Your view is that criteria should be randomised without any reference to proximity.

926. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Caitriona arrived late at the meeting, and I had said that each party would have one question. However, Caitriona can have the rest of the time that is available, if Barry agrees. There is one minute left

927. **Mr McElduff:** I will give way.

928. **Ms Ruane:** Thanks, Barry.

929. One of the issues that you mentioned was special needs. What are the percentages?

930. **Mr Wardlow:** A survey of integrated post-primary schools that was carried out in either 2003–04 or 2004–05 — I cannot remember which year — found that on average 50% more children are on statements in

integrated post-primary schools than in other comparable schools.

931. **Ms Ruane:** That interests me. How do those children get on as they get older?

932. **Mr Wardlow:** I could give you individual examples of young people who have come to school with low self-esteem — most of whom are included in the mainstream. At Integrated College Dungannon, where there are 30 of those young people, or Shimna Integrated College, where there are 35, my experience is that the majority of those young people are well rounded, get extremely good results and outperform what they are predicted to achieve. However, there are exceptions to that.

933. **Ms Ruane:** The work that you are doing is very interesting.

934. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Michael, thank you for your contribution.

The subgroup was suspended at 2.56 pm.

On resuming —

2.59 pm

935. **The Chairperson:** (Mr W Clarke): You are welcome to the Subgroup on the Schools Admission Policy. You may introduce yourselves and follow with a short presentation of around three or four minutes.

936. **Ms Dorothy Angus (Department of Education):** I am from the equality, inclusion and pupil support division of the Department of Education, and my colleagues are Irene Murphy, who is head of the special education branch, and John Leonard, who is from the open enrolment transfer procedure branch.

937. I will begin with a summary of the paper that we have provided. My colleagues attended the subgroup meeting last Friday, and some members expressed interest in special educational needs (SEN). The short paper that we have provided sets out the current arrangements for the provision for children with SEN. Approximately 3% of the school population has a statement of SEN, and about 16% have some learning disability.

938. We have set out the interface between SEN and the current admissions arrangements in particular, bearing in mind the subgroup's terms of reference.

939. Children with statements are considered for post-primary placement outside the usual arrangements to ensure that they are placed in the school best suited to their needs. Other children with SEN follow the usual procedures but with an opportunity for their special circumstances to be considered.

940. The paper also refers to the ongoing review of special educational needs and inclusion. I can outline the process of that review, but, as indicated in the paper, the outcomes have not yet reached the stage that would allow them to be explored with members.

941. Will I continue?

942. **The Chairman (Mr W Clarke):** Does everyone have a copy of the paper? We will take questions from the floor.

943. **Mr McNarry:** The subgroup was specific in its acknowledgement that it could have been better informed on special needs. It is something that, sadly, is neglected in the plethora of papers that come at us.

944. The session has been interesting up to now, and I am sure that you will continue to make it so. Pupil profiles have been highlighted in many instances. How can children who have SEN adapt or respond to the equipment that pupil profiles will demand of them? Or should there be different tools from the pupil profiles for children who have special needs, and, if so, would there be a parental reaction to that?

3.00 pm

945. **Ms Angus:** The pupil profile is a standardised form of annual report, and the intention is that it will apply to the majority of pupils. However, CCEA is developing an alternative format for reporting to the parents of pupils who have multiple learning difficulties. To achieve that, it is consulting principals, teachers and parents on the most suitable format. The SEN dimension will, therefore, be considered.

946. The statement reflects the child's ability and needs. The pupil profile will build upon and complement that. Computer-based tests form part of the pupil profile, and there will be provision to modify or disapply those for pupils for whom they are not appropriate. That is my understanding, having spoken to colleagues who work in that area.

947. **Mr McNarry:** Will the Department of Education work with parents on those modifications? I am particularly interested in the equipment involved.

948. **Ms Angus:** I am sorry that I cannot give you a detailed answer, because CCEA is developing the pupil profile. However, my understanding is that CCEA will consult principals, parents and teachers to adapt the profile so that it is suitable for children with special educational needs.

949. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Are you happy with that, David?

950. **Mr McNarry:** I am not sure that CCEA is qualified to modify specialised equipment. The pupil profile is a different matter; I am talking about the tools and equipment that are used. If a standard piece of equipment needs to be modified, the pupils who use it and their parents should be consulted. Can you assure me that CCEA is doing that?

951. **Ms Angus:** I am not sure what you mean by tools and equipment.

952. **Mr McNarry:** The computers.

953. **Ms Angus:** Are you referring to the computer-based tests?

954. **Mr McNarry:** I mean the use of the equipment or machinery for assessment purposes. Mr Boyd talked about diagnostic tests in which pupils hit buttons to answer questions. If they get a question wrong, the computer moves them on to the next question, which is not as difficult. If they answer a question correctly, however, they move up to a more difficult question, etc. Does that clarify what I mean?

955. **Ms Angus:** My understanding is that CCEA will modify or disapply the use of those tests, but I expect CCEA to work with experts

in the Department, principals and teachers. I believe that an individual from the teaching profession has been seconded to CCEA to work on the pupil profile, but I cannot be absolutely sure about that, Mr McNarry. I hope that that is helpful.

956. **Mr McNarry:** It is.

957. **Mr Donaldson:** The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 and the new arrangements to encourage and facilitate children with special needs who want to attend mainstream education mean that any changes in the wider remit of education and, in particular, the transfer procedure, have some impact.

958. Are you saying that, in relation to the transfer of children with special needs from primary to secondary education, statementing will still have primacy over the pupil profile when informing parents, schools, and education and library boards (ELBs) which school is most appropriate for a child's needs?

959. **Ms Angus:** The statement of special needs is the more detailed of the two documents that will be available to parents, children, schools, ELBs and everyone involved in deciding how children transfer to their new schools. Therefore, under the current arrangements, the statement has primacy.

960. **Mr Donaldson:** I must declare an interest. I am a governor of a special school in Lisburn.

961. The statement would have primacy, but is there an academic content in the statementing process?

962. **Ms Irene Murphy (Department of Education):** I will outline the statutory assessment process. The education and library boards, as currently formed, have a statutory duty to assess children, who may then be statemented. That statutory assessment must formally take advice from parents, schools, the child, health professionals and other education professionals. That is then considered in the round. The assessments that the boards' educational psychologists undertake have an academic element that covers English and

mathematics and considers the results of psychometric testing.

963. **Mr D Bradley:** There is a special category in the proposed admissions criteria called "compelling personal circumstances". Is that directed towards children with special needs?

964. **Mr John Leonard (Department of Education):** No, it is a provision in the legislation that will enable pupils with compelling individual circumstances, such as looked-after children and children with severe medical conditions, to be placed in suitable local schools.

965. **Mr McElduff:** Some people argue for academic selection at the age of 14 rather than 11. If that were to come about, how would the education interests of children with special educational needs be protected?

966. **Ms Angus:** Those are hypothetical circumstances that have not been considered, but, at the moment, there is a process in place for children with special educational needs to transfer at age 11. A process would be put in place to look after children with special educational needs if the transfer process was changed to age 14. I do not foresee any major difficulties, but that matter has not been considered in detail.

967. **Mr Donaldson:** I wish to return to the use of psychometric testing as part of the statementing process. I appreciate that the purpose of that is different from a transfer test that grades a child. Nevertheless, when a child reaches the age of 11, or whatever the age is under the new arrangements, what is the process? If a child has been statemented in primary school and is at the point of transfer to secondary education, presumably you undertake a reassessment and decisions are then taken about the school to which the child will transfer. Will you describe that process at age 11, and explain the factors that determine which school the child transfers to?

968. **Ms I Murphy:** When a child is in primary 6, his parents will be considering the options for post-primary education. The parents liaise with the school, and the school liaises

with the education and library board. Detailed psychometric tests may not need to be applied, but there will certainly be a review of the child's work in class, in conjunction with the class teacher and the parents, and consideration is given to the child's and parents' aspirations. If it is felt that the parents and the child want a grammar school education, as it is now, the education psychologist will be asked to review the documentation and make a decision on whether further testing is required.

969. The result of that testing, along with all the other work that the child has done over the past number of years, will be taken into consideration by the psychologist. That is the advantage of the system for children who have statements: rather than a one or two-day test, the child's all-round achievements are considered.

970. **Mr Donaldson:** It is a combination of continuous assessment and testing?

971. **Ms I Murphy:** Yes.

972. **Mr Donaldson:** Thank you. That was very interesting.

973. **Ms Ruane:** We always hear about how children with special needs "hold back" those children who have "different or higher abilities". As experts in this field, what are your opinions on the benefits of children from all ranges of ability studying together? In particular, what are the benefits for those children who are not viewed as having special needs?

974. **Ms Angus:** I do not believe that it is within our remit to express any personal views or to comment on policy. We can give members guidance on how many children are in mainstream schools, if that would be helpful. Did the question refer to children who are educated in mainstream schools as opposed to special schools?

975. **Ms Ruane:** My point goes slightly further than that. In certain countries, the school of thought is that educating children of all abilities together benefits and enriches all those children. In the North, however, the education system is divided, and some sectors believe that children with special needs hold back the other children.

I understand that you cannot give personal opinions, but studies show that children who do not have special needs benefit from being educated alongside those children who do.

976. **Ms Angus:** Ms Ruane has referred to the policy of inclusion. The Government's policy is to include all children in mainstream schools. However, parental choice is important, and a growing number of parents are choosing to send their children to mainstream schools. Of those children with special educational needs, 65% attend either mainstream schools or special units attached to mainstream schools. Therefore, the policy is to educate children with special educational needs with other children. The availability of parental choice means that some parents still choose to send their children, depending on their needs, to special schools.

977. **Ms I Murphy:** The policy provides for measures to meet the continuum of need and to fit with the current legislative requirements. It is a mixture of considering the needs of the child, the wishes of his or her parents and the education of other children. In comparing two children with similar needs, one could be more comfortable at a special school, while the other would be better placed in a mainstream school. That is why current policy allows for a continuum of provision coupled with parental choice.

978. **Mr D Bradley:** At what stage is the review, and when will it be completed?

979. **Ms Angus:** The review of special educational needs is at its development stage. As the review will cover a wide-ranging and complex area, one of its initial characteristics has been a lot of pre-consultation work to determine people's opinions of what issues should be included. We have started to develop a model, but proposals are not yet far enough developed to have received ministerial clearance. A fair wind permitting, we hope to have the new policy in place by the late summer. Of course, special educational needs are governed by legislation and, if legislative changes are required, the implementation of the new policy will depend on the legislative timetable and developments in the Assembly. That is the timescale to which we are working.

980. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** On behalf of the Committee, I thank Ms Murphy, Ms Angus and Mr Leonard for their contributions.

The subgroup was suspended at 3.14 pm.

On resuming —

3.30 pm

981. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** You are all very welcome. We will have a brief presentation and then take one question from each of the parties, followed by a supplementary question. The session should last approximately 20 minutes.

982. **Rev Dr Lee Glenny (Transferor Representatives' Council):** It will be helpful for you to know who we are and whom we represent. We are here as part of the executive of the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC), which seeks to serve on behalf of the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, which in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s largely handed their schools over to the state, so that they became Church-related schools instead. Under that name, we were involved in the governance of schools with members on each board of governors and on the education and library boards.

983. I am the Methodist secretary for the board of education, and my colleagues are the Rev Ian Ellis, the Church of Ireland secretary of the board of education and the Rev Robert Herron, the Presbyterian secretary of the board of education.

984. **Rev Ian Ellis (Transferor Representatives' Council):** Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you and to share and touch on some of the general issues around the post-primary arrangements that have been proposed. We are acutely aware that since we submitted all our responses to the draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 last year, the process has moved on in some ways yet seems to be standing still in others.

985. The matters of pupil profiles and admissions criteria were consulted on, based on the assumption that academic selection would be excluded as a criterion, but now, since the

passing of the 2006 Order and the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, it is no longer clear that that will be the case. Perhaps we can get some clarity on that soon.

986. It is our understanding that an incoming Minister of Education would have to establish very quickly the context for admissions arrangements, whether it be a selective system or not, and to come forward with some kind of regulations about those admissions criteria.

987. I want to say something briefly about where our Churches stand on the issue of academic selection to try to help you see our stance. We considered the decision to abolish academic selection very carefully indeed. We believed, as many do, that it has been a blunt instrument to determine a child's abilities, aptitudes, career destinations, and so on.

988. We balanced that criticism with an acknowledgement of the very high achievements in schools in Northern Ireland, but we also had to take seriously the other criticisms of the selective system's negative effects and, most notably, the disadvantaging effects that it has had on children from deprived and disadvantaged backgrounds — in particular, it seems, children from working-class Protestant backgrounds. Among other reports, this week's report from the Committee of Public Accounts shows a clear differentiation in outcomes for children from those backgrounds.

989. We are also acutely aware that academic selection is an issue on which people are divided. I know that the parties are divided on this issue, and there is a division of opinion within our Churches, too. As members of the education boards and the TRC, we have tried to take a balanced view. We decided that, on balance, transfer by informed parental election was a better way forward. We have listened to the views of many who support academic selection and fear a lowering of standards. Many people are unconvinced that the proposed system will work, and we have, on many occasions, pointed out to the Department that it has failed to demonstrate with enough conviction that the system will work in future.

990. Our paper outlines some of our opinions on pupil profiles, admissions criteria and other general issues. We do not know how much detail the subgroup wants to go into on each of those areas.

991. We feel that a pupil profile would be a helpful tool. The Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey has shown that most parents feel that it would help them to choose the best pathway for their child. Although the pupil profile has been well tested and piloted, no real information about the outcome of those tests has been placed in the public domain. Such information has been promised, but we have not heard much about it. Disclosure of that information would help to boost public confidence.

992. As the Department has not yet issued the promised regulations, it is difficult to see how the admissions criteria will work. If distance is used as a criterion, that will affect rural areas as review of public administration policy papers suggest that transport costs will be charged in future. There are likely to be many disputes about exact calculations of distances and who is eligible and who is not.

993. Our paper includes comments on the education system that we feel is needed. It must be adaptable and flexible, and it must allow for people's development later in life. Pupils who find that their education path does not work out as planned should be able to have their needs met in an adaptable system.

994. Oversubscription is also an issue. We have no research estimates about the likely future levels of oversubscription and which areas are expected to be oversubscribed. It seems that it will be a problem in areas such as Belfast and greater Belfast, but less of a problem elsewhere in the Province.

995. I am simply touching on issues; I am not sure which topics the subgroup would like to expand on.

996. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** No doubt members will draw out the issues in their questions. We will start with Mr McNarry this time.

997. **Mr McNarry:** You are very welcome. It is good to see you. I noted the Rev Dr Lee Glenny's point about how the Churches disposed of their schools long ago. Perhaps in his report, Sir George Bain will recommend that the Churches be given the ability to re-purchase some of those schools and put them back into community use. It would be great to see the Churches consider playing such a role in the future of education.

998. The TRC paper is very interesting, and it raises issues that have crossed all our minds. It comments that the council would like "honest and accurate feedback" on pupil profiling to be placed in the public domain — I am sure that that is not suggesting that what we might get is dishonest or inaccurate feedback, but I will leave that for the council to answer. How can such feedback be placed in the public domain? As politicians, we have information on these results, but is the problem that the council and the wider public does not have it?

999. **Rev Ian Ellis:** I was hinting at wider public confidence that the pupil profile will do what it says on the tin.

1000. **Rev Dr Lee Glenny:** To follow on from that, Angela Smith made a statement in December 2005 in which she said:

"Our key aim is to ensure that pupils, parents and teachers have confidence in the Pupil Profile."

1001. There are vague details about pupil profiles in the public domain and they have not been brought forward as they should have been.

1002. **Mr McNarry:** I concur; the issue is about information and communication. How can that be addressed? If the wider public were in receipt of information on the pupil profiles, how could their confidence be gained, bearing in mind what you know about pupil profiling and how it will be developed?

1003. **Rev Robert Herron (Transferor Representatives' Council):** It would have been interesting to see how parents would have used pupil profiles if they had had them before academic selection vanished. We are in a difficult situation because we have no idea

about the choices parents will make. As the Rev Ian Ellis said, we can see major problems with possible over-subscription to schools in the greater Belfast area, whereas, in the west — where I come from — the difficulty for some schools is in surviving.

1004. **Mr McNarry:** Paragraph 3.2 of your paper is interesting. It states:

“the present selective system has diminished the esteem of non-grammar schools... Even if a non-selective system is agreed, a prolonged investment of resources would be required.”

1005. What do you mean by “prolonged investment of resources”?

1006. **Rev Ian Ellis:** My view is not one that is shared by all. I believe that the selective system has counted against secondary schools in particular; they have lost the oxygen required to survive. A secondary school pupil in the 1960s and 1970s would have been in a mixed environment with many pupils with a wide range of abilities. Many children did well through the system. Even though they may have failed the 11-plus, they got good qualifications and achieved reasonable levels of attainment.

1007. The selective system has sucked many able pupils into grammar schools, which means, ultimately, that the range of abilities of those children attending the secondary schools is narrower. That is what I mean when I say the schools are being starved of oxygen — the oxygen of wider-ability pupils.

1008. Secondary school head teachers say that the loss of more able pupils has had many effects. It has removed role models, pupils whom other children might look up to, and those with leadership qualities who might inspire others. The wider mix of pupils has been diminished through parental choice and the transfer system.

1009. **Mr McNarry:** Is parental choice not a key point in this case? Parents voted with their children’s feet.

1010. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Could we have a yes or no answer?

1011. **Rev Ian Ellis:** The other thing is the reduction in the numbers.

1012. **Rev Robert Herron:** Pupil downturn is a major issue, and if I am allowed the time, I will give you an example, because it will be useful for everyone to hear. For the past year, I have attended meetings with the governors of a high school and grammar school in Strabane. The situation there is that two thirds of the pupils in the controlled sector are going to the grammar school and one third — about 200 pupils — is going elsewhere. Therefore, the high school does not have enough resources or pupils to offer the broad curriculum required. In such cases, not only are teachers being made redundant every year due to the downturn in pupil numbers, the grammar school is continuing to fill its complement. Pupil downturn has a negative impact on schools, and it affects the morale of the teachers and pupils.

1013. **Mr S Wilson:** I am confused. You began by saying that election was better than selection and that — further to that — the pupil profile would be helpful in that regard. However, you are now saying that in the west, where there are plenty of places, parents can elect whatever school they want for their children. You have, therefore, got exactly what you said in paragraph 3.2 that you did not want — the diminished esteem of non-grammar schools and their decline.

1014. The policy that you advocate seems to be in line with current Government policy. If that policy were to be adopted, is there not a danger that the situation in Strabane that you described will become even more commonplace? That is that parents will elect schools that are deemed as, or perceived to be, good schools. Is there not a further danger that some good secondary schools could be diminished as a result?

3.45 pm

1015. **Rev Robert Herron:** Where there is a limited number of pupils, it is a question of balancing parental choice against keeping a viable school. What are schools to do when their numbers are continually falling? That is the experience right across the west of the Province.

1016. **Mr S Wilson:** Would a better option be simply to continue with selection but to make it clear that, if a selection system will operate with one route for academic education and another for vocational or general education, the number of places in academic schools will be limited to protect the other schools, as you suggested? Is that not a better way of managing the situation than simply allowing parents to select the school that they want?

1017. **Rev Ian Ellis:** I agree with part of what you say, Mr Wilson. Somewhere along the line, grammar schools have lost their *raison d'être*. As I understand it, grammar schools were established to encourage academic rigour and to develop analytical thinking and the skills that are needed for professional jobs. As the years have gone by, however, their role has expanded, and grammar schools have become popular, good schools that provide a good education. Perhaps the solution would be to restrict grammar schools to what their primary purpose ought to be.

1018. **Mr S Wilson:** Would that not be a step back towards selection rather than election?

1019. **Rev Ian Ellis:** The difficulty with having a test as a selection tool is that it favours advantaged pupils, that is, those whose parents can afford to pay for their children to have extra tuition to prepare for a test and those parents who aspire to send their children in that direction.

1020. **Mr S Wilson:** You said that schools take youngsters down a particular educational route. In the absence of educational assessment, how on earth would youngsters be selected? You now seem to be arguing for the retention of grammar schools, albeit with limited numbers.

1021. **Rev Ian Ellis:** Our argument is that selection should not happen at the age of 11, as it is perhaps not the best age to make such an assessment. The new proposals, and the thinking of many people, seem to favour the age of 14 as a key pathway decision time. At that age, pupils can bring something to the decision-making process themselves. I do not know whether we all have 14-year-olds in our families, but they can easily say what they want

to do. It is important to hear that voice when making a decision on whether a pupil will study French verbs or something more vocational.

1022. **Mr D Bradley:** I note your concern about the admissions criteria and the effect that they may have on children from a rural background. You are anxious that a situation may arise in which such children would be discriminated against. Is a possible solution to draw catchment areas as widely as possible and use random selection as a tie-breaker?

1023. **Rev Ian Ellis:** I have a feeling that we could end up using tie-breakers very quickly. The different proposals contain a variety of criteria. Some focus on effectively drawing a circle around a child and finding the nearest appropriate school; other proposals draw the circle around schools or suggest that schools identify the predominant feeder schools.

1024. That could disadvantage children who have to travel a very long distance to school. Do we really want our children to have to travel for more than one hour to get to school? We need much more thinking and research into how the regulations and criteria could disadvantage children who have a long way to travel.

1025. **Mr McElduff:** Dominic Bradley asked a good question, which concerned the understanding of rural communities. I had in mind a similar question about whether academic selection is randomised or geographical. However, I shall ask another. Does the Transferor Representatives' Council draw a direct connection between the system of academic selection and underachievement on the part of many pupils?

1026. **Rev Ian Ellis:** We have to conclude that there is a systemic problem with academic selection, which enables those who are capable and well resourced to do extremely well and achieve some of the highest results in the UK. By "well resourced", I do not mean money; I mean pupils whose parents will encourage them and take them forward. However, as we mentioned earlier, we have also received notice that many children are underachieving. It seems to be a systemic effect that when large groups of children who have been failed by the system are

brought together, there is nothing to motivate them to achieve higher standards.

1027. I was interested to read that many members, in their political comments on the report, said that there is a poverty of aspiration. How can we improve that? As I suggested at the beginning, part of the solution concerns the mix of pupils in our schools. Beyond that, we must also tell children — in our case, Protestant working-class children — that education is a route forward. It seems that many Protestant families in impoverished areas see education as a turmoil and a travail; whereas many Catholic families seem to see it as a transport and a route to a better life.

1028. I believe that much work needs to be done to change that poverty of aspiration. Resourcing is also part of the solution: we need long-term investment.

1029. **Ms Ruane:** There is a real issue with the Protestant working-class community, and that is something that we, collectively, have to look at. However, although some sections of the Catholic community see education as a way forward, huge sections of it are being left behind. We should not be under any illusion: the Catholic working-class community is not benefiting from academic selection. We must work on that matter collectively. However, traditionally in Ireland, even in the most rural and disadvantaged areas, education was seen as a pathway, although not everyone had that pathway.

1030. **Rev Robert Herron:** That is difficult to measure. There is plenty of evidence to demonstrate a clear correlation between social need and academic achievement. However, sometimes this matter comes down to a personal family situation. I have three children, two of whom were selected and one of whom was not. Perhaps members have been in a similar situation. I drop my three children off to school each morning, and one of them wears a uniform that represents the words: “I didn’t make it.” Not only do we say to children that they failed the 11-plus, but we then put a uniform on them for the next six years just to remind them.

1031. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** I will allow two more questions of one minute each.

1032. **Mr McNarry:** It is very difficult in a session such as this not to make throwaway remarks, but we must not simply dismiss underachievement in Protestant areas by saying that academic selection has had a great bearing on it.

1033. The three of us on this side of the table work very closely with the Protestant working class, as I am sure you do. In identifying the deprived areas, we must ask ourselves why they are deprived, how they became deprived and what the areas are like. They are known as the interfaces in Belfast. The grandparents of today’s children were not attending school, so there are two generations whose parents and grandparents have not contributed in the home to benefiting their children in the way one would expect to be normal two miles away on the Malone Road. I do not dismiss the idea of aspirations, as that is a positive aim, but we cannot write off underachievement as the cause of a test that children do not aspire to pass.

1034. **Rev Ian Ellis:** Of course it is much more complex than that. The conflict has a lot to do with it, as does the social and geographical setting. We think that the problem with the system feeds into those factors and exacerbates and ingrains the differences that already exist.

1035. **Mr Donaldson:** Gentlemen, you are very welcome. Robert, I will pick up on the last point that you made, as it was a very powerful one about your three children. I know that that is replicated in many families and homes across Northern Ireland. My difficulty, however, is that in some areas, schools will still be oversubscribed. In the area I represent, Lisburn, I can see immediately that at least three of the schools will be even more oversubscribed than they are today. There will still be good schools and better schools — I do not like to call any school a bad school — in the public consciousness for years to come. Purely because of demographics and year of birth, and so forth, those situations will continue to arise; the problem you are talking about will not fully be overcome by the new arrangements.

1036. Is there not the possibility of another unfairness arising, in that a pupil may find that they did not get into a school simply because of where they lived rather than because of their educational or academic ability? Dad is a farmer, they live in the countryside, the proximity rule is applied as a tie-breaker, and they lose out. Are you not in danger of replacing one unfairness with another? Is there not some other approach to this that strikes a better balance?

1037. **Rev Robert Herron:** This is balancing one unfairness against another. I sit on the board of governors of a grammar school, and we are already applying the criteria about family and geographical focus and being community-based — after academic selection. There is unfairness now.

1038. **Rev Dr Lee Glenny:** Thank you for that. We would like to emphasise the importance of the end of Key Stage 3 and the question of the esteem of secondary schools. If that esteem is raised and there is a common curriculum at Key Stage 3 with flexibility and adaptability so that at the end of Key Stage 3, a child will have greater maturity and a greater opportunity to be aware of his gifts and talents, and a change of school can be appropriate. If those elements are built into the system, some of the inequalities of the first three years can be negated.

1039. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Thank you very much for your contribution. On behalf of the subgroup, I would like to wish you all a very enjoyable Christmas and a peaceful new year.

1040. **Rev Dr Lee Glenny:** We appreciate the opportunity to be here and to share ideas. We realise that you have big responsibilities in front of you and we too wish you every blessing as you seek to find an equitable and helpful way forward for the children of this and future generations.

1041. **Mr Donaldson:** If you find a Solomon out there, please send him in.

[Laughter.]

1042. **The Chairperson (Mr W Clarke):** Thank you.

Adjourned at 3.59 pm.

Appendix 3

Written Submissions

Association for Quality Education

AQE Submission to Sub-Group considering Schools' Admission Policy

Introduction

We welcome a situation in which, following the St Andrews' Agreement, the future of our education system is likely to become a matter for locally elected politicians rather than being subject to policies imposed by Westminster politicians who have no association with, or long term interest in, Northern Ireland. This situation presents both opportunities and challenges. We are ready to play our part in developing a system that will allow for academic selection without the disadvantages relating to the 11 plus.

We acknowledge many of the technical weaknesses with the current 11+, identified by Gardner and Cowan, and accept that a transfer test with these psychometric shortcomings has the potential to misclassify when matching pupils to schools. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that our system, based on academic selection, has produced the best outcomes for children from all social backgrounds. (The facts which demonstrate this case are available in: "The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006: An Analysis of the Government's Proposals for Post-Primary Education, which can be downloaded from www.comcernedparentsforeducation.org).

The Democratic Will

Our organisation, and its constituent groups, accepts the will of the people as set out in their response to the Household Survey, initiated by Mr Martin McGuinness in 2002 and confirmed by other independent surveys of public opinion. When just over half of the responses had been returned to the Department Mr McGuinness declared, "I have 100,000 responses sitting in my Department and those are the people that count." The Direct Rule administration has sought to ignore the public will on this issue.

The responses from 200,551 households, including 162,000 parents and 21,000 teachers, showed that while 57% of households, 58% of parents, and 64% of teachers, were in favour of abolishing the 11+, 64% of households, 63% of parents, and 62% of teachers favoured the retention of academic selection.

It has been suggested that the Household Survey did not provide an accurate account of public opinion because of the campaigning work of grammar schools. This is analogous to suggesting that a political party should not take office if it got to power through a well-run election campaign. Even if we set this argument to one side, however, it is clear that the

Household Survey was an accurate reflection of public opinion since it was confirmed by the results of an independent “Omnibus Survey” carried out contemporaneously with the Household Survey with a random sample of the population. Moreover, the BBC Newline Survey of January 2004 and Belfast Telegraph Survey of September 2005, both with a random sample, all indicate remarkably consistent support for academic selection.

The Pupil Profile

Those in CCEA who have responsibility for development of the pupil profile, and officials from the Department of Education, have stressed that the profile is not intended as a tool for selection purposes and could not be used as such. We accept the profile, in line with responses to the Household Survey, as long as it is not overly burdensome to primary teachers, but believe that any information being provided to parents should meet international standards of reliability and validity. In other words any information being provided to parents should provide a reliable indication of their child’s ability and it should provide a valid assessment of what it claims to assess. Despite the fact that the pupil profile should have been in place in primary schools from this school year, we have yet to see a final version. Preliminary indications suggest, however, that the proposed profile would not provide reliable or valid information to parents.

Family-Focused, Community-Based and Geographical Criteria for Over-Subscribed Schools.

The consultation on new admissions arrangements, from which the Government excluded academic criteria, was rejected by the overwhelming majority of respondents. We oppose the imposition of non-academic criteria as it would alter the fundamental ethos of grammar schools and would turn them, over time, into neighbourhood comprehensive schools. Research from the south of Ireland and from Great Britain shows that the absence of academic criteria intensifies social apartheid, creating a situation in which parents with the resources to do so move to the catchment areas of the most popular schools, or buy a private education for their children, leaving the children of working class or disadvantaged parents corralled in the least popular schools.

The Requirements of a New System

Proposals on academic selection should be seen in the context of an overall package which would:

- allow schools, if they so wished, to retain or to develop specialist academic or vocational pathways, freed from the current constraints of an overly prescriptive common curriculum;
- support learning at primary level to enhance the potential of all children, and particularly those from working class or disadvantaged backgrounds, to secure places in schools best suited to their needs and abilities.

Any replacement for the 11+ should:

- meet international standards of reliability and validity;
- offer equal accessibility to all children, irrespective of their social/ethnic background;
- reduce the pressure and anxiety to the pupils by removing the ‘sudden death’ nature of the 11+ test and the ‘brown envelope Saturday’ nature of receiving the results;
- allow parents to monitor effectively their child’s progress over the last few years of primary school;
- provide an effective mechanism for matching the pupil to the school best able to cater for their interests, talents and abilities;
- support teaching and learning at primary level rather than distorting the curriculum;
- minimise the impact of coaching.

Having reviewed the alternatives we believe that Computer Adaptive Testing in the final years of primary school would provide helpful information to teachers and parents to inform teaching and learning and could also be used for the purposes of selection, while meeting the criteria listed above.

Interpretation of Test Results by Schools

We oppose a prescriptive approach to the use of testing by grammar schools. Our preferred option of CAT during the final primary school years could be used in a number of ways by post-primary schools. We advocate that schools be given a choice over whether to implement academic criteria and, if they choose to do so, how those criteria should be implemented. The approach of each school should, however, be set out in a transparent way, which could be easily understood by parents.

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006

An Analysis of the Government's Proposals for Post-Primary Education

May 2006

FOREWORD

In spite of valid criticism made during the earlier process of consultation, the threat to our well-trying education system represented by the draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 continues to hang over us. Since the draft Order itself fails to take any meaningful account of the support for academic selection expressed so strongly in earlier consultation exercises, further comment may seem a waste of time. But we will be prejudicing the future of our children if we do not take the opportunity to protest against the imposition of misguided policies.

These policies are, we believe, detrimental to our education system accompanied by meaningless and valueless assurances, and contemptuous of public and political opinion in Northern Ireland.

What is at risk is the ability to sustain a mixed economy of state, voluntary, religious and integrated schools. The Order threatens to undermine the responsibilities of Governors, and to bring the entire system under a more centralised political and bureaucratic control. It represents a threat to Northern Ireland's exceptional record in preparing its sons and daughters for entry into third-level education. It seeks to impose a universal mixed-ability system upon a community able to foster both academic and vocational excellence. It threatens to confine children to specific neighbourhoods rather than allowing them the opportunity to mix with peers from different neighbourhoods and backgrounds.

Critics of these proposals have been fobbed off with assurances that they represent no threat to grammar schools, no imposition of comprehensive education in a 'one size fits all' solution. These assurances are manifestly valueless.

Since 1920 education has been a 'transferred' or devolved matter. Now, in the temporary absence of a devolved Assembly and Executive; the British Government seeks to impose upon us radical changes which would never suit the consensual requirements of the Belfast Agreement. Once enacted, we could find ourselves powerless to restore a system which enjoys the confidence of a majority of our people and their elected representatives.

Our cause rests not upon educational arguments alone, but upon our democratic rights.

Kenneth Bloomfield KCB

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield is a former head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and Chairman of the Association for Quality Education.

INTRODUCTION

Unless the Government changes its position, within a few months, it will have sealed the fate of Northern Ireland's education system by enacting legislation to introduce wide-ranging changes to admissions procedures to post-primary schools, to the curriculum, and to the way in which schools are run.

In every test of public opinion in Northern Ireland, the Government's proposals have been rejected, most recently in the consultation on admission arrangements for post-primary schools in 2005, when over 90% of respondents opposed the Government's proposals to outlaw academic selection. Moreover, they have been rejected by a clear majority of parents, teachers and locally elected representatives.

In any other part of these islands government would accept the democratically expressed wishes of the people. In a manner reminiscent of a bygone era, however, the Secretary of State, Mr Peter Hain, and the Minister with responsibility for Education, Ms Maria Eagle, intend to use the Labour majority in the House of Commons to trample upon the rights of the people of Northern Ireland by forcing through an Order in Council to give effect to their plans.

This document has been produced by the Association for Quality Education. It sets out the democratic, educational and financial rationale for our opposition to the Government's proposals. We call on all who are interested in democracy and in the education of our children to support our campaign by every legal means.

Information on how to participate in our campaign can be found at the end of this document.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our objections to the policy based on implementation of the recommendations in the Costello Report through the proposed Education Order are:

a) **The proposals lack democratic approval**

The will of the people of Northern Ireland, of parents, teachers and locally elected representatives, has been ignored by the government, an approach that would be considered unacceptable anywhere else in these islands.

b) **The proposals would result in the imposition of a one-size-fits-all comprehensive system**

All schools would be required to accommodate pupils of all abilities and interests and inevitably would be forced to become the type of one-size-fits-all comprehensive that has failed several generations of young people in Great Britain.

c) **Examination results would deteriorate**

Pupils in Northern Ireland have outperformed their peers in Great Britain at GCSE (formerly Ordinary Level) and Advanced Level since the mid 1970s, following the introduction of comprehensive education in Great Britain, despite much higher levels of poverty in Northern Ireland and the legacy of conflict. Given the widely acknowledged flaws of the comprehensive system, the imposition of non-selective education in Northern Ireland would lead, inevitably, to a deterioration in our performance.

d) **The proposed pupil profile is flawed**

It is intended that the proposed pupil profile be used to guide parents in selecting an appropriate school for their children. The scramble for places in the most prestigious schools suggests that parents would be highly unlikely to be able to exercise choice. Even if choice were possible the proposed profile fails to meet widely accepted international standards of reliability and validity and is therefore more likely to mislead, rather than guide, parents.

e) **The proposed curriculum is unworkable**

The proposed curriculum in most cases can only be provided by collaboration between schools on a scale wasteful of resources, teaching and financial, and would be prejudicial to discipline, pastoral care and identity with a particular school.

f) **Social integration, social mobility, and participation in higher education would be adversely affected**

Our grammar schools are much more socially inclusive than the top comprehensive schools in England; our education system produces better results for pupils from disadvantaged

backgrounds than the comprehensive system in Great Britain and sends a greater proportion of young people from working class backgrounds to higher education than any other system in these islands.

g) **The strengths of our current system would be lost**

The success of our current system depends on: teaching pupils with others of similar abilities, the expertise contained within our secondary and grammar schools and the beneficial effects of smaller average school size, particularly in the secondary sector. This would all be lost if schools were compelled to accept pupils of all abilities.

h) **The proposals lack any estimate of cost**

The proposed Education Order would involve massive changes to admissions procedures, the curriculum, and the way in which schools are run, but nowhere does it offer any estimate of cost.

A POSITIVE ALTERNATIVE

There is a workable alternative which addresses these objections. We believe that, rather than rush ahead with the introduction of legislation to implement proposals which are not fit for purpose, the alternative should now be fully evaluated.

1. THE PROPOSALS LACK DEMOCRATIC APPROVAL

- 1.1 Following publication of the Burns Report in October 2001, the then Minister for Education in the devolved administration at Stormont, Mr Martin McGuinness, set in train a consultation process (cost £419,000) on its recommendations¹. When just over half of the responses had been returned to the Department he declared, “I have 100,000 responses sitting in my Department and those are the people that count².” The results were published in October 2002.
- 1.2 The responses from 200,551 households, including 162,000 parents and 21,000 teachers, showed that while 57% of households, 58% of parents, and 64% of teachers, were in favour of abolishing the 11+, 64% of households, 63% of parents, and 62% of teachers favoured the retention of academic selection³. Opinion on these issues was seen to cross both class and sectarian divides.
- 1.3 It has been suggested that the Household Survey did not provide an accurate account of public opinion because of the campaigning work of grammar schools. This is analogous to suggesting that a political party should not take office if it got to power through a well-run election campaign. Even if we set this argument to one side, however, it is clear that the Household Survey was an accurate reflection of public opinion since it was confirmed by the results of an independent “Omnibus Survey” carried out contemporaneously with the Household Survey with a random sample of the population. Moreover, the BBC Newslite

Survey of January 2004⁴ and Belfast Telegraph Survey of September 2005⁵, both with a random sample, all indicate remarkably consistent support for academic selection.

1.4 The Costello Committee, established following the publication of the responses to the Burns Report, was not representative of opinion in Northern Ireland. Our groups made this point clear to the then Minister, Ms Kennedy, and predicted the inevitable outcome, but our objections were ignored. The Committee was used as a mechanism to subvert the will of the people. Out of 11 members only one representative was drawn from an organisation favouring academic selection, while a majority was drawn from organizations on record as opposed to academic selection and it soon transpired that the remainder held a similar view.

1.5 It is sometimes argued that some educational interests support the Costello proposals. Included in these educational interests are the teacher unions. A more powerful argument, however, is that the number of teachers responding to the Household Survey roughly equates to the number of teachers in Northern Ireland's schools and their opposition to the abolition of academic selection reflects the view of the general population and of parents.

1.7 On 6 December 2005 Ms Angela Smith, then Minister with responsibility for Education, published the Draft Order which, if passed, would implement the Costello proposals and simultaneously released the results of a consultation on admissions arrangements which was completed 6 months ago. While the figures do not appear in the document, the Minister admitted that at least 90% of the responses to the consultation supported academic selection⁶. **The Minister, therefore, deliberately chose to ignore the outcome of every public consultation and test of opinion on the issue over a period of more than three years and instead impose a policy against the will of the people.**

1.8 At no time have the people of Northern Ireland had an opportunity to influence the pattern of education reform through their elected representatives. A majority of locally elected politicians opposes the Costello proposals which would not pass if our local assembly were functioning. However, once imposed by an Order in Council at Westminster, the nature of the Assembly's voting would make reversal of the legislation impossible.

1.9 It would be inconceivable for a government, having promised the people their say, to impose such huge changes in any part of Great Britain against both the will of the people and a majority of elected representatives in that area. Indeed, in England the issue is handled with great sensitivity as highlighted by a statement by the Department for Education and Skills: "Where selection exists, the government believes in local decision-making as to whether it should continue and has put in place mechanisms to allow this to happen⁷." The government has yet to explain why it has accorded this right to people in England while denying it to the people of Northern Ireland.

2. **THE PROPOSALS WOULD RESULT IN THE IMPOSITION OF A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM**

2.1 The effect of the implementation of the Costello Proposals, and the proposals in the Review of Public Administration, would be to re-model schools as community comprehensives, under centralised control, with all schools being required to deliver a prescribed curriculum mix of vocational and academic subjects. This is contrary to the current direction of policy

in England, where it is proposed that schools be given more freedom to manage their own affairs and buses be used to counter the situation in which the creation of community comprehensives has led to social segregation, with the children of working class or disadvantaged parents being condemned to the poorest performing schools.

- 2.2 Former Minister, Ms Smith, accepted that “grammar schools are currently seen as the preferred choice of many⁸.” She failed to explain, however, how, given their popularity and the lack of any barrier to application based on the suitability of a child to an academic education, grammar schools could avoid being transformed into one-size-fits-all comprehensives if the Costello proposals are implemented. While at present 88% of parents secure a place in their first choice of school⁹ this figure would fall since schools which are highly regarded would be vastly oversubscribed and selection on merit would be replaced by selection by postcode or lottery.
- 2.3 Successive ministers and Department of Education officials have persisted in the claim that different types of school, including grammar schools, would remain if the government’s proposals were implemented and that to suggest otherwise is to misrepresent the government’s intentions. A casual glance at the letters pages of the Belfast Telegraph illustrates that, although there are very few proponents of their proposals (as set out in the Costello Report and, more recently, in the Proposal for a Draft Education Order) in comparison to opponents, all but the Minister and departmental officials accept that implementation of the Costello proposals would result in the creation of all-ability, or one-size-fits-all, comprehensive schools. It cannot be otherwise if every school must offer a mix of vocational and academic subjects and accept pupils irrespective of ability.
- 2.4 Ms Smith asserted that under current arrangements, falling pupil numbers is having the effect of widening the ability profile of grammar schools and that this would continue in the future¹⁰. We reject this suggestion since over 90% of grammar school entrants have an A or B grade in the 11 plus examination and less than 10% have grades C and D, many of whom are special cases. 55% of pupils receive a grade D in the 11 plus examination and 10% receive a grade C, giving a total for these grades of 65%¹¹.
- 2.5 In association with the claim that the grammar school intake has widened significantly Ms Smith asserted that this has required grammar schools to adjust their teaching and learning to make appropriate provision for pupils admitted¹². While Ms Smith’s claim regarding the grammar school intake is contrary to the evidence, we agree with her contention that widening the ability range would require a very different teaching and learning style. Clearly the move to a system in which all schools must accommodate children of all abilities would require radical change. This view, however, contradicts earlier statements by officials in the Department of Education. In the first few months of 2005 Department officials responded to queries from the public with a standard letter that stated “Grammar schools can maintain their academic ethos through the curriculum they offer, the style of teaching and the pace and depth of learning¹³”. Ms Smith conceded that this would not be the case.

3. EXAMINATION RESULTS WOULD DETERIORATE

- 3.1 It is generally accepted that there is a link between social deprivation and examination results. One would expect, therefore, that results from Northern Ireland, which suffers higher levels

of social deprivation than England and Wales, and is emerging from serious internal conflict, should have lower examination results. The reality is, however, contrary to this expectation. The average GCSE (formerly Ordinary Level) performance of pupils in Northern Ireland moved ahead of their peers in England in the 1970s and has remained ahead ever since¹⁴. In 2004 60% of pupils in Northern Ireland obtained 5 GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C while the figure for England was 54% and for Wales was 51%¹⁵. If we consider the figure for 5 GCSEs grades A*-C, including English and Mathematics, a similar difference exists (49% NI¹⁶, 42.6% England¹⁷). A greater proportion of our young people obtain 2 Advanced level passes at A-E grade or equivalent than their peers in England (38% NI¹⁸: 34.4% England¹⁹). Furthermore, a larger proportion of Northern Ireland's pupils obtain A grades at both GCSE (7.1% in NI as opposed to 5.6% for the UK) and Advanced Level (30% in NI as opposed to 22.4% for England and Wales)²⁰.

- 3.2 It is often asserted by opponents of Northern Ireland's education system that its excellent performance at the top end is at the cost of a poor performance at the bottom end and among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The "long tail of underachievement" is a myth since GCSE statistics show virtually identical results with England in terms of the proportion achieving 5+ A*-G grades (88% NI: 89% England) and the proportion leaving school with no GCSEs (4% NI: 5% England) of any grade²¹. Since receipt of Free School Meals is regarded as a proxy for social disadvantage it is significant that 33%²² of children in receipt of Free School Meals in Northern Ireland in 2004 obtained 5 GCSEs A*-C, and while the English figure was only 26.1%²³.
- 3.3 Opponents of our current education system have also attempted to portray the international comparisons contained in the PISA Report carried out by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) as reflecting negatively on our achievements when this is not the case. We have a number of reservations about the PISA research. Its critics included Professor Sig Prais of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research who at the time the results of the 2000 survey were released had been leading the Institute's team which has been carrying out a detailed investigation of international comparisons of standards in mathematics for almost a decade²⁴.
- 3.4 One concern noted by Prof. Pais about the English figures for 2000 was that more able pupils in better performing schools were much more likely to be included than pupils from schools with a poor performance. In contrast, a representative sample was used in 2000 and 2003 to produce Northern Ireland's figures. We do not accept, therefore, the suggestion that the performance of English pupils was on a par with their peers in Northern Ireland in 2000. In respect of the PISA 2003 results the English sample was again unrepresentative, but showed a very substantial decline from 2000. On this occasion it was decided to disregard the English figures.
- 3.5 Even if we set aside our concerns about the survey, it cannot be argued that it portrays Northern Ireland's education system in a negative light. A summary of the PISA report published by the Office for National Statistics stated that, "the proficiency in mathematical, reading and scientific literacy of 15 year olds in Northern Ireland compares well with that of young people of the same age in other countries." Only two countries in the world performed significantly better in either reading or scientific literacy, while only six, in the list of 41 countries, performed significantly better in mathematical literacy²⁵.

3.6 With respect to Ms Smith's comments about the wide variation of scores in Northern Ireland it is apposite to consider the comments on mathematical literacy in the Office for National Statistics Summary Report: "A small proportion of 15 year olds was not able to demonstrate the lowest level of proficiency: in Northern Ireland, 5% of students were in this category, below the proportion in the OECD as a whole (8%) and the same as the proportion in the Republic of Ireland²⁶."

3.7 Commenting on the "good news story" of Northern Ireland's PISA 2003 results, Alan Lennon, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Evaluation and Assessment stated:

"What this means for educational policy makers in NI is that great care must be taken in considering and implementing changes to the current curriculum and examinations systems and the supporting school infrastructure. In the many changes currently under consideration, it is of vital importance to remember that the Province is starting from a position of relative strength, as confirmed by the PISA study."

He concluded by stating:

"However, if NI society, as a whole, is not sufficiently well informed to appreciate the context in which change is taking place, society may be effectively handing over important decision making to a relatively small cadre of experts in CCEA [his own organisation] and beyond. That would not be good either for education or democracy²⁷."

If after more than 30 years of "non-selective" education in Great Britain performance remains below the level achieved by Northern Ireland's selective system, despite higher levels of poverty and the legacy of conflict, all the evidence suggests that removing academic selection will result in a falling performance, especially for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

4. **SOCIAL INTEGRATION, SOCIAL MOBILITY, AND PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION WOULD BE ADVERSELY AFFECTED**

4.1 Since 1947 children in Northern Ireland, irrespective of their socio-economic category or residential location, have been able to avail themselves of an opportunity to maximise their achievements according to their abilities. Tens of thousands from socially deprived backgrounds have been the first in their family to benefit from a university education, having gained the entry requirements in grammar schools, secondary schools and further education colleges. At present 41.3% of students accepted into higher education in Northern Ireland are drawn from the four lowest socio-economic groups, compared to only 28.4% for the United Kingdom as a whole²⁸.

4.2 The success of the system is also reflected in the fact that a higher percentage of young people in Northern Ireland enter higher education than in Great Britain and there is also a significant differential in the percentage of 16 and 17 year olds in education in Northern Ireland (78%) compared to England (66.6%)²⁹.

4.3 If the Government's current proposals were implemented, selection by ability would be replaced by selection on the basis of class and economic power. This is already well known to the Government. As current Under Secretary of State for Schools, Lord Adonis, wrote in

relation to England, while serving as one of Mr Blair's advisors, "Middle-class children now go to middle-class schools, whose catchment areas comprise middle-class neighbourhoods, while working-class children are mostly left to fester in inner city comprehensives their parents cannot afford to move away from³⁰."

- 4.4 Obviously this would not enhance social equity, but in educational terms would increase the gap between those who have and those who have not. The effect would be worse in Northern Ireland than in Great Britain as there is a significantly higher proportion of pupils from working-class and disadvantaged backgrounds here than elsewhere in the United Kingdom.
- 4.5 If the government's proposals are implemented, schools which are highly regarded would be markedly over-subscribed, and the result would be selection by postcode. The choice of school would be determined by where parents can afford to live rather than by their child's ability. Already there are instances of parents, anticipating implementation of the proposals, moving house to gain advantage of proximity to "a good school." Thus, for a majority, rather than further the stated objective of affording parents greater choice, in practice their right to choose the most appropriate and suitable school for their child would be taken away. Children would have to attend the nearest school, regardless of its suitability.
- 4.6 Advocates of so-called non-selective education fail to mention that we do not have the type of "selection by bank balance" that occurs in Great Britain and in the south of Ireland, with parents with the resources to do so, buying a place for their children in a private school, or moving to the catchment areas of the most prestigious comprehensive schools. While private education flourishes in Great Britain and the south of Ireland, particularly in urban areas (e.g. Edinburgh where 25% of pupils are privately educated³¹) it is almost non-existent in Northern Ireland, where there is only one small private school.
- 4.7 As one might expect research suggests that a system such as is now being proposed for Northern Ireland would not remove the link between education and class but would strengthen it³². Bright children from poor families would suffer disproportionately. A recent report comparing social mobility in the United Kingdom and a range of other developed countries, supported by the Sutton Trust, and published in April 2005, confirms that social mobility has declined since the introduction of a comprehensive system in Great Britain, which has now one of the worst records in the developed world³³. Commenting on the report one of Mr Blair's advisors on education, Sir Peter Lampl, said, "The comprehensive system was brought in to try to improve social equality, the opposite has happened. We are supposed to have parental choice but it does not work for those at the lower end of the economic spectrum who do not have the income to move near the best schools or even pay the fares for their children to get there.³⁴" Moreover, Prof Stephen Mackin, one of the report's authors, stated with respect to grammar schools: "They were perceived as elitist and not good for social mobility but, actually, it has turned out that some kids from lower income families were helped. We probably had more people through from the bottom end to the top than we do have at the moment³⁵."
- 4.8 Highly regarded research by Richard Breen of the University of Oxford (see, for example, his chapter in the recently published *Understanding Social Change*) demonstrates conclusively that comprehensive education has been powerless to enhance social mobility³⁶. When the progressivist nature of the new curricular arrangements is added to a Comprehensive model

of schooling, the clear message of the international literature is that social disadvantage will worsen under the Costello proposals.

- 4.9 A Study of transfer in the Republic of Ireland by Maeve O'Brien, published in 2004, produced similar conclusions. She argued that the concept of equal choice was a myth since, "middle class parents possess a greater economic and cultural capital which affords them and their children a greater range of choice than those in more disadvantaged circumstances³⁷."
- 4.10 The problem of selection by postcode in comprehensive systems is explicitly admitted in the Burns Report which predates the Costello Report: "For example, when geography is used as the final criterion for admission purposes, comprehensive school systems can display a relatively high level of social differentiation, particularly in cities. In practice this can mean that socially advantaged parents are likely to live in areas served by the highest status schools and are better placed to take advantage of any flexibility in their admissions arrangements. Alongside this there is then the prospect that cities are likely to contain sufficient demand for private schools in circumstances where parents are dissatisfied with the admissions arrangements or other aspects of local schools³⁸." Ministers may claim that they are not imposing a comprehensive system but there is no mechanism in the Costello proposals to prevent the social differentiation described in the Burns Report.
- 4.11 Successive education ministers have articulated a particular concern for the children of the Shankill ward although this has not, as yet, translated itself into significant additional resources for the area. Despite the obvious fact that educational underachievement is often well established by the age of 11, academic selection has been cited as being responsible for the poor academic performance of young people in the Shankill ward. Moreover, the level of underachievement has been exaggerated due to selective use of figures for particular years since the numbers of young people in each year group (around 50) is small e.g in 2001 only 5%, or 3 young people, obtained 5 GCSEs grades A*-C, while in the following year the figure was 26%, or 12 young people³⁹. Neighbouring areas with identical or higher Free School Meals statistics have much larger percentages of young people gaining 5 GCSEs grades A*-C e.g. New Lodge: 49% in 2001 and 40% in 2001⁴⁰. This suggests that there are a range of factors at work. Not only does the Shankill ward top the Northern Ireland list in terms of social deprivation⁴¹, but the legacy of the conflict and continued paramilitary activity, present particular difficulties for the education of young people in the area.
- 4.12 It is important to note that pockets of under-achievement are found in all countries. A report published in 2005 by The UK Higher Education Funding Council found that: "Many cities and towns are educationally divided, containing neighbourhoods where almost no one goes to university and neighbourhoods where two out of three or more will enter higher education." The Council report noted that young people living in the parliamentary constituency of Kensington and Chelsea were ten times more likely to go to university than those living in Sheffield, Brightside, who were eight times less likely to go than those living in Sheffield, Hallam. Those living in Bristol West were five times more likely to go to university than those living in Bristol South⁴².
- 4.13 Any lingering notions that a non-selective educational system would promote social inclusion are extinguished when we consider the level of social apartheid in English schools revealed by the Free School Meals statistics. In the top 200 state schools in England only 3% of pupils

are in receipt of Free School Meals, a percentage which is less than half the figure of Northern Ireland's grammar schools⁴³.

5. THE PROPOSED PUPIL PROFILE IS FLAWED

- 5.1 While we do not seek to defend the current 11 plus examination, we dispute the simplistic suggestion of opponents of the current system that the 11 plus divides people into successes and failures. It may be the case that some pupils who do not receive the grade required to obtain a place in a grammar school experience feelings of failure, but this is not universal. It should be remembered also that a significant proportion of children does not take the transfer test and therefore does not experience these emotions. Our alternative would be a reliable and valid pupil profile, built up over a period of years for all pupils, which would be diagnostic and support learning. It would remove much of the anxiety and opportunities for coaching associated with the two-test 11plus model.
- 5.2 To suggest that pupils who do not achieve the 11 plus grade required for a place in a grammar school and who, therefore, are educated in a secondary school, have in some way “failed”, is to belittle the work of our secondary schools.
- 5.3 If feelings of failure associated with the 11 plus were strong we would expect that those respondents to the Household Survey who had pupils at secondary schools would have been opposed to academic selection: in fact a majority support its retention. Likewise the Omnibus Survey of a random sample of the population showed a majority of respondents who had attended secondary schools also support its retention⁴⁴.
- 5.4 The Costello Report states that, “the fundamental principle...should be informed choice by parents and pupils” and that this should be based on a “pupil profile” drawn up by the primary school⁴⁵. If we accept this vision, the pupil profile becomes a critical document in helping parents decide between different types of school.
- 5.5 One of the factors creating pressure to end the 11 plus was a paper by Prof Gardner and Dr Cowan that argued that the tests failed to meet international standards of reliability and validity that are commonly accepted throughout the developed world⁴⁶. A recent paper by Dr Morrison, of Queen's University Belfast School of Education, has shown that the profile being proposed is conceptually flawed, does not meet international standards and is incapable of being amended to make it an acceptable instrument⁴⁷. Even if parents have the right to disregard the profile, as the Government proposes, is it not a reasonable request that they should have access to information that meets international standards of validity and reliability?
- 5.6 It is possible to use the experience of the states of Vermont and Kentucky with mathematics “portfolio” assessment to anticipate some of the implications of pupil profiles. The USA's RAND Corporation, lauded for the quality of its research, found that portfolio grades and comments couldn't be standardised within and between schools. Further research identified portfolio assessment as very expensive (both financially and in terms of teacher workload) and inefficient, open to corruption, and damaging to the child's development of basic skills. The research concludes that portfolios should not be used to make serious decisions about pupils⁴⁸.

5.7 CCEA has published on its website a trial, involving just 10 teachers, of part of the pupil profile. Given the response to Gardner and Cowan's work it is disappointing that the trial includes no reliability or validity data. Section 7 of the evaluation questionnaire deals with the pupil profile. The following quote (p.36) gives a flavour of the views of the teachers: "Doesn't help parents to know how their child is working ... Teachers likely to see through the vagueness of some of the comments ... I think parents want concrete statistics about their children ... Most parents like to see grades and marks. To aid pupils' learning, comments on the profile must be very specific ... I felt parents want more clear information on progress with grades, levels etc., not a lot of flowery rhetoric⁴⁹." While they have not used the words, teachers are in effect, articulating the need for reliable and valid information.

6. THE PROPOSED CURRICULUM IS UNWORKABLE

6.1 Dr Morrison has demonstrated that there is a complete equivalence between the curriculum proposed by CCEA (The Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum and Assessment) and educational "progressivism" which American schools rejected in the 1960s⁵⁰. The principal reason for the demise of progressivism was its negative impact on disadvantaged children in general, and the children of the working class black community in particular. There is therefore a total contradiction between a stated concern of the Costello Report to ameliorate social disadvantage in education and a proposed curricular model rejected four decades ago because of its negative effects on the poor.

6.2 The proposed Entitlement Framework requires pupils to have access to 24 subjects at GCSE and 27 subjects post GCSE, but only a handful of Northern Ireland's schools are sufficiently large to offer this level of choice. The proposed solution is to require schools to co-ordinate provision and to share resources, with new bureaucratic structures created to co-ordinate the process at a number of levels⁵¹. In effect, pupils and teachers would need to be shuttled between schools and it has even been suggested that classes could be delivered via video link. While voluntary co-operation is desirable, where practical, the type of compulsory co-operation which would be required presents a huge variety of problems concerning issues such as co-ordination of timetables, transport and safety, time wasted in travel, pastoral care and discipline. Many of these problems have already been experienced in England, where secondary and grammar schools were amalgamated in the late 1960s and early 1970s to provide the school sizes required by comprehensive education. Problems encountered by the split-site model have led to its abandonment in many cases, with the rationalisation of schools on a single site.

6.3 It has been argued that there has been a decline in the school population of Northern Ireland, that there will be a major decline in the future and that, if nothing is done, this process would result in a process of creeping comprehensivisation over time as grammar schools accepted greater numbers of less academically able pupils to fill their quotas. It has been shown above that any widening of the grammar intake has been extremely modest and the suggestion that grammar schools are becoming, or would become, all-ability comprehensive schools is incorrect. The extent of demographic change is also open to question. Responding, on behalf of the Government, to a question by Lord Maginnis, Lord Rooker indicated that the population estimate for 2005 printed in the Costello Report was incorrect. If the revised current estimate is correct, and we feel that it may still underestimate the reality, the actual figure for the

decline of the 11-18 year old population would be 2% and not 6% as printed in the Costello Report⁵². If we add to this the fact that the birth rate in Northern Ireland has been rising since 2000, and it is estimated that around 40,000 young Eastern European and Portuguese workers have migrated to Northern Ireland in the two years since the enlargement of the European Union⁵³, the long run population estimates appear increasingly suspect, yet it appears that they continue to be used, unamended, by the Department of Education.

6.4 We do accept that there has been a decline in pupil numbers and that grammar schools should shoulder their share of the burden that this imposes on schools. It is important to remember, however, that while the school population has declined, new integrated schools have been opened and this has jeopardized the future of a number of otherwise viable schools.

7. THE STRENGTHS OF OUR CURRENT SYSTEM WOULD BE LOST

7.1 The Costello Committee's minutes record an admission that in all-ability schools "more able pupils may not be stretched fully" and that such a system "may impact on the achievements of high ability pupils⁵⁴." A similar impact would also be felt by weaker pupils. We attribute the success of our current system to the teaching of pupils with others of similar abilities and to the diversity of provision within our system. In particular we stress the expertise contained within our secondary and grammar schools and the beneficial effects of smaller average school size, particularly in the secondary sector. We also acknowledge the success of the relatively modest number of integrated schools, Irish medium schools and comprehensive schools and support their existence where they enjoy local support and are appropriate to local circumstances. Forcing all schools to accommodate the full ability range, in what would be, in effect, a split-site comprehensive system, would mean the loss of many of these strengths.

7.2 Large schools would be necessary to accommodate the entire ability range and this presents many difficulties. Recent research from the US National Centre for Education Statistics concluded, "As school enrolment increased, so did the likelihood of schools reporting each (categorized) discipline problem ... 26% of principals at schools with 1,000 or more students reported student verbal abuse of teachers, compared to 14% of schools with 500-999 students, 10% of schools with 300-499 students, and 7% of schools with less than 300 students⁵⁵." Further evidence is found in Malcolm Gladwell's book, "The Tipping Point." He discusses how, "The figure of 150 seems to represent the maximum number of individuals with whom we can have a genuinely social relationship⁵⁶." He points out that this number, or one close to it, crops up as the size of tribes in different parts of the world, Hutterite communities, successful businesses and military units. He then goes on to suggest that, "If we want to develop schools in disadvantaged communities that can successfully counteract the poisonous atmosphere of their surrounding neighbourhoods, this tells us that we're better off building lots of little schools than one or two big ones⁵⁷."

7.3 We believe there is a role for a variety of school sizes to serve the differing needs of the population. Just as practical difficulties with the move to comprehensive education on split site campuses in England in the 1970s led to rationalisation on a single campus, the imposition of an all-ability intake and the Entitlement Framework would lead to the closure or amalgamation of small to medium sized schools here. The negative impact of such changes

would be most keenly felt by children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and those who live in rural areas.

- 7.4 We support the right of parents to send their children to integrated schools, where practical, while rejecting simplistic notions that integrated education is the panacea to resolve Northern Ireland's divisions. We also support the right of parents to choose schools that reflect a particular religious ethos. The creation of a system in which only large schools are likely to survive, and in which teachers are employed by a central authority, would pose a huge threat to the continuation of faith schools, particularly outside large population centres.

8. **THE PROPOSALS LACK ANY ESTIMATES OF COST**

- 8.1 The HM Treasury Green Book advocates, as a matter of best practice, the introduction of an economic appraisal framework at an early stage of consideration of a new policy proposal⁵⁸.

- 8.2 We have already indicated our concerns about the advisability of introducing comprehensive education, a new progressive curriculum that reflects practice abandoned as unsuccessful in the USA 50 years ago, and changes to the administrative structure of the education system, some of which, by centralizing control, move in the opposite direction to policy in England. Even if we lay aside our concerns about the nature of these proposals and about their simultaneous implementation, there is growing alarm at the fact that there are no estimates of the financial implications associated with any of these changes. We believe that best practice requires that change be made on the basis of an in-depth analysis of the costs involved and, where possible, piloting of that change. To proceed otherwise is to ask the people of Northern Ireland, or indeed the British tax payer, to sign a blank cheque.

9. **A POSITIVE VISION**

We are not opposed to change. We wish to retain all that is best in our current system of secondary and grammar schools, while allowing them to develop to better meet the needs, abilities and aspirations of all our young people.

9.1 Our Proposals

- a) Recognise that underachievement and inequality do not begin at age 11.
- b) Preserve opportunities for academically gifted pupils to develop their talents to the full.
- c) Allow schools to develop or retain specialisms which could offer pupils genuine alternatives in terms of academic and vocational pathways.
- d) Develop, in specialist schools of perceived status, technical and vocational qualifications that carry real weight and would have increased economic relevance for both pupils and prospective employers.
- e) End the 11plus as soon as new admissions procedures have been developed and piloted.

- f) Develop a Pupil Profile that would contain information on pupil attainment that would meet international standards of reliability and validity.
 - g) Allow parents to make an informed choice, taking into account the advice of both primary and post-primary schools, who would have an absolute right to see the profile in advance of any decision regarding admission. In the event of oversubscription, schools should be permitted to offer places to those pupils most likely to benefit from their provision, based on the information contained in the profile.
 - h) Develop a coherent strategy to address the specific problems arising from a revised assessment of the scale of demographic change.
- 9.2 A more detailed description of our alternative vision for the future can be viewed or downloaded from www.concernedparentsforeducation.org.
- 9.3 Finally, it would be our wish that the introduction of legislation intended to implement proposals, which are demonstrably not fit for purpose, should be deferred so that a more holistic appraisal can be undertaken of Northern Ireland's real educational needs.

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PLEASE SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS BY:

1. Sending a financial contribution to help fund our campaign (which may include a legal challenge) to:

Association for Quality Education
C/O McKinley & Co Chartered
Accountants
15e Molesworth Street
Cookstown
BT80 8NX

Association for Quality Education
C/O John McKee & Son
Solicitors
55 Royal Avenue
Belfast
BT1 1FD

Contributions should be in the form of a cheque, postal order or banker's draft, and should be made payable to the "Association for Quality Education."

2. Helping to organise opposition in your area by contacting us via the Concerned Parents for Education (CPE) address or through that organisation's website (See back cover). We need volunteers who can canvass friends, relatives and acquaintances with our information and requests for financial assistance.

Please Note

Financial contributions are to be made payable to the Association for Quality Education (AQE). The AQE is an alliance of groups opposed to the government's plans to impose comprehensive education on the people of Northern Ireland. It is supported by:

- Concerned Parents for Education
- Confederation of Grammar Schools' Former Pupils' Associations
- Grammar Principals' Group
- Down Parents' Group
- Governors and staff of a number of grammar schools

AQE – Short Explanation of Computer Adaptive Testing

AQE is currently producing a paper considering a range of options that would allow the matching of pupils to schools beyond 2008. One of the options being considered by an AQE working party with membership drawn from our constituent organisations, is Computer Adaptive Testing. While we have not finalised our proposals we are happy to provide a brief outline of CAT to comply with Mr Wilson's request.

How Might this System Work?

Pupils completing the tests would initially be presented with questions with moderate or low difficulty values. If pupils were to get a series of correct answers, they would be presented with progressively more difficult questions until their position in the distribution of pupils was determined with high reliability. Pupils who found the initial questions difficult would be presented with progressively easier questions until their position in the distribution was determined with high reliability. The pupil's ability is computed with a psychometric precision the transfer test could never hope to emulate because each child takes a unique test matched to his/her ability. Time is not wasted presenting pupils with questions which they find trivial or with questions they find impossible. CAT allows the test to adapt to the child so that while no two children take the same test, their scores can all be reported on a common scale. In this respect CAT has no peer.

Pupils with a computer at home would not have an advantage as tests would not be time-limited nor could pupils access tests from home.

Much of the stress associated with the current 'high stakes' tests would be removed. Unlike "pencil and paper tests", there need be no "test day" or "results day". Pupils need not take CAT on the same day; they can receive instant feedback on their performance and can undertake the test again if they have had a "bad day".

In the adaptive method, the teacher does not know the test items in advance and cannot teach to the test because each child in a group of 30 takes an entirely different test. Two children sitting alongside are free to look at each other's screen since they are taking different tests. Suppose a mathematics test covered items in arithmetic algebra and geometry, the test would ensure one third of the items each child was exposed to was algebra items, one third was arithmetic, and one third was geometry but the selection of items within these domains would adapt to the child. The teacher cannot teach to the test because there is not a test to teach to; there are 30 different tests in the room. The elegance of Item Response Theory is that even though each child took an entirely different test, their scores can all be reported on a common scale e.g. from -3 to +3. Similarly, no past papers exist for coaching purposes. The notion of a past paper is meaningless.

CAT could be used with pupils with learning difficulties. A pupil unable to read a test item, for example, could have it read to him or her via headphones.

The AQE working party arranged for the European Director of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and one of that organisation's technical experts to give a presentation on CAT to our group on 19 December.

The ETS representatives confirmed that they are the biggest testing organisation in the world and that the company employs the most PhD qualified people in the world. They placed great emphasis on the reliability and validity of their testing. This was the issue raised by Garner and Cowan regarding the 11 plus and is also likely to be a problem with the InCas system currently being developed for use alongside the pupil profile.

They have stated that they would be willing to take on the work of producing a CAT for Northern Ireland, which would take approximately two years to develop.

CAT could be used for accurate measurement of pupil performance over the final years of a pupil's primary school education with the results informing teaching and learning as well as indicating the ability of the child to benefit from a grammar school education. Alternatively it could be used as a grammar school entrance test. If either method were employed, a single test score need not be used to decide entry to a grammar school. Pupils could be facilitated to make several attempts to compensate for the problem of the "off day".

Conclusion

In conclusion we would stress that an AQE paper outlining and assessing the various options will be available in mid January 2007.

Kenneth Bloomfield KCB

Chairman

Follow-Up to Evidence given to Sub-Group considering Schools' Admission Policy, Stormont 15 December 2006

We appreciated the opportunity to put our views to a group of MLAs on the education issue. In view of time restrictions we wish to take up the offer made by the chairperson, Ms Ramsey, to clarify and expand on certain points made during our questioning.

Support for Academic Selection

There is no ambiguity about public opinion with respect to academic selection. The Household Survey was one of a number of surveys that have shown remarkable consistency in public support for academic selection. This evidence is set out in our earlier submission to the committee and it is noteworthy that the submission by CCMS (a body opposed to academic selection) to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in November 2005 included reference to a number of other studies showing similar levels of public support for academic selection.

Social Inclusion

Advocates of comprehensive education, or any form of non-academically-selective education, tend to compare our current system with an idealised vision of the future rather than with the sad reality of experience in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain.

In our submissions, both written and oral, we spoke not only of the success of grammar schools, but also of the success of our diversity of provision. It is true to suggest that fewer children from working class or disadvantaged backgrounds obtain places in grammar schools than their counterparts from middle class backgrounds. What is not sometimes appreciated is that, in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, middle-class parents use their economic wealth to secure a place for their children in the most prestigious schools, leaving the least popular schools to children from working class or disadvantaged backgrounds. Consequently, research from England by the Sutton Trust showed that the percentage of children in receipt of Free School Meals in the top 200 comprehensive schools was 3%, less than half the figure for Northern Ireland's grammar schools. This does not take into account inequality caused by private education, with approximately 8% of pupils educated in private schools in Great Britain, a figure that exceeds 25% in some urban areas. Private education also has a high profile in the Republic of Ireland, where in Dublin 18 out of the top 20 schools with the greatest percentage of pupils securing third level places were in the private sector.

The introduction of comprehensive education in England was followed by rationalisation to produce larger schools, after experiments with split-site campuses proved a failure in most cases. With a variety of our existing variety of school types catering for pupils with different interests, needs and abilities, small schools are more likely to be viable. Recent research

from the US National Centre for Education Statistics concluded, “As school enrolment increased, so did the likelihood of schools reporting each (categorized) discipline problem ... 26% of principals at schools with 1,000 or more students reported student verbal abuse of teachers, compared to 14% of schools with 500-999 students, 10% of schools with 300-499 students, and 7% of schools with less than 300 students.” Further evidence is found in Malcolm Gladwell’s book, “The Tipping Point.” He discusses how, “The figure of 150 seems to represent the maximum number of individuals with whom we can have a genuinely social relationship.” He points out that this number, or one close to it, crops up as the size of tribes in different parts of the world, Hutterite communities, successful businesses and military units. He then goes on to suggest that, “If we want to develop schools in disadvantaged communities that can successfully counteract the poisonous atmosphere of their surrounding neighbourhoods, this tells us that we’re better off building lots of little schools than one or two big ones.”

The Shankill Experience

Successive education ministers have articulated a particular concern for the children of the Shankill ward, although this has not, as yet, translated itself into significant additional resources for the area.

Commenting on underachievement of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds a recent report from the Public Accounts Committee cautioned against “a simplistic view that structural change is the answer to this problem.” This is borne out by the evidence which shows that the problem is well established long before age 11.

We advocate the formulation of properly researched and funded strategies to raise pupil achievement in areas of social disadvantage. Nevertheless, it is instructive to note that small numbers distort the statistics for the Shankill ward e.g. in 2001 only 5%, or 3 young people, obtained 5 GCSEs grades A*-C, while in the following year the figure was 26%, or 12 young people. Neighbouring areas with identical or higher Free School Meals statistics have much larger percentages of young people gaining 5 GCSEs grades A*-C e.g. New Lodge: 49% in 2001 and 40% in 2002.

The Myth of Parental Choice in the Costello Proposals

In Great Britain studies by A Gerwitz et al. (1994), Reay and Ball (1998) and the Sutton Trust (2005) demonstrated that parental choice was manipulated by middle class parents in the interests of their children. In the Republic of Ireland, a study by Maeve O’Brien, published in 2004, produced similar conclusions. She argued that the concept of equal choice was a myth since, “middle class parents possess a greater economic and cultural capital which affords them and their children a greater range of choice than those in more disadvantaged circumstances.”

Ability of Teachers

It is true that, having completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, an individual possesses the requisite qualification to allow him/her to teach from Primary 1 level up to Advanced level and the entire range of ability levels. In our view it is unlikely that many teachers would be equally comfortable with, and competent at teaching the whole range of

ages and abilities. An individual with gifts in teaching Further Mathematics, for example, may struggle in teaching remedial mathematics to younger pupils.

Population Changes

Great emphasis has been placed on declining rolls and this, coupled with the impact of opening new integrated schools, has caused some schools to close and others to shrink in size. While this decline has not halted at the secondary level, the government has been forced to admit that the population statistics published in the Costello Report are incorrect. Moreover, census figures for the last few years show a rising birth rate and this, coupled with significant immigration, is likely to increase the need for school places in the future.

The Grammar School Intake

It is often asserted that there has been a considerable widening of the grammar schools intake. This is factually inaccurate. Over 90% of grammar school entrants has an A or B grade in the 11 plus examination and less than 10% has grades C and D, many of whom are special cases, whose mark is upgraded by the grammar school on the basis of evidence by the primary school, or who are admitted on appeal. 55% of pupils receive a grade D in the 11 plus examination and 10% receive a grade C, giving a total for these grades of 65%.

In future we believe that schools which do not wish to implement academic selection should be free to move to an all-ability intake.

The Folly of Simultaneous Multiple Policy Changes

Regardless of one's policy-perspective we question the wisdom of a simultaneous attempt to change the administrative structure of the education, to introduce de facto comprehensive education and to change the curriculum.

A Concluding Comment

The removal of academic selection and the inevitable move to one-size-fits-all comprehensives would necessitate an increase in average school size and would destroy the diversity of our system that produces better GCSE and A level results than Great Britain, offers 88% of parents their first choice of school and provides better outcomes than anywhere else in these islands for children from working class and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The way forward is not to imitate the failed British comprehensive system but to build on our success to accommodate better the needs and abilities of all our young people.

Kenneth Bloomfield KCB Confederation of Grammar Schools' Former Pupils' Associations.

William Young Grammar Principals' Group

Finbarr McCallion Hon Sec Governing Bodies' Association

Marcas Patterson Concerned Parents for Education

Association of Headteachers of Secondary Schools

Paper from Chairman of Association of Headteachers of Secondary Schools Mr S McCrea

For N Ireland Assembly Sub Group on the Schools Admission Policy

The association is made up of principals of both ‘controlled’ and ‘maintained’ secondary schools from all five education and library board areas in N Ireland.

We would view the retention of ‘academic selection’ at age 11 as a means of dealing with over-subscription as

- a distraction from the true purposes of education.
- a device which suits the needs of a particular type of institution rather than the needs of children, ie it has been used to create annually an artificial pecking order from which grammar schools can fill up their intake. No other purpose is served by the 11+ selection process.
- a major source of distortion to the curriculum offered and delivered at Key Stage 2 in the primary school.
- a defunct mechanism in other countries which have long since rejected such a process.
- an unfair process which discriminates against working class children.
- a damaging experience for a significant number of children. Each school year we see children whose self-esteem, self worth and confidence have been adversely affected by the experience of academic selection at age 11.
- a major contributory factor to the serious performance gap in N Ireland. between children of similar age in a number of subject areas.

It is our belief that, with the Education Reform Order (2006), we have an opportunity to create an education system that will meet the needs of all children and young people which will create a solid foundation for a learning society. With this ending of academic selection at the age of 11, we can improve choice and flexibility for all pupils.

The formation of partnerships will build on the strengths of existing schools (including grammar and secondary) and will enhance educational opportunities. These strategically located local networks of institutions could form ‘learning communities’ offering a comprehensive range

of courses and provision. All children would have on offer a minimum entitlement ensuring a high quality provision regardless of where they live or what their social class background.

We should not shut off possibilities for young people; rather we should ensure that they continue to learn and develop and gradually take decisions, along with their parents, on the sort of education and training they would like and to which they are best suited.

The pupil profile is designed to be an aid to parents and children in this process of choosing the most appropriate pathway. It is not meant to be a means for a particular school to choose its intake or to deal with oversubscription. Admission criteria which best suits the local networks of schools (including grammar) and colleges can be chosen from the broad categories outlined in the consultation document. These local partnerships can be given the responsibility to develop appropriate criteria that best suit their community and students.

We cannot retain an ossified, socially stratified school system suited for the 1950's. We need one that will promote the skills of all citizens and will put N Ireland on the top of the league in skills, one that will encourage entrepreneurship and end false distinctions between academic and vocational study.

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

ATL, to the Northern Ireland Assembly Sub Group on School Admissions

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) has broadly agreed with the main architecture of the 2006 Order, namely:

- the end of the 11+, and selection at 11
- the pupil entitlement and movement towards a skills curriculum
- the delay (to 14 and 16) of critical educational pathways

However, ATL has been sharply critical of the “laissez faire” approach of Government to implementing change. The failure to spell out potential transfer arrangements at 14 and 16, future school funding arrangements, and good practice models for inter-school partnership risks leaving parents with the same “**high stakes**” decisions at 11 – with or without selection.

Amongst the points ATL has made in respect of Post Primary policy are:

Entitlement Framework: ATL supports the entitlement framework, and supports the improved currency and cultural value of “applied” education. ATL supports moves to break the link between “vocational” education and “low achiever”.

Pupil Profiles: ATL supports the concept of pupil profiles as providing parents and schools with a useful and “*fear free*” standardised report on the progress of their child. ATL does not support the profile as a selection tool, and considers that this would put an intolerable burden on teachers. ATL awaits ongoing CCEA research on the matter with an open mind and will lobby for adequate training for teachers, and for appropriate evaluation and moderation methods.

Admissions: ATL considers that putting Admissions in place in advance of the “collaboration agenda” risks “*putting the cart before the horse*”. In advance of collaborative arrangements being clearly put in place, what will pupils be admitted to? With LMS and open enrolment remaining in place, funding mechanisms will continue to stimulate inter school, “*dog eat dog*” rivalry rather than collaboration.

“Middle Schools”, Admissions and transfer at 14 or 16: ATL also considers that “Pathways at 14” will, inevitably, increase transfer at 14, and 16. ATL supports “middle schools” as a useful medium term ambition and is concerned that little thought has been given to transfer arrangements at 14 and/or 16. **Too much remains at stake at 11.** More fluidity and movement

between schools at 14 and 16 will ease the “crunch” nature of decisions at 11. “Middle” or “Junior High” schools can act as an institution means of delaying critical decisions.

Other issues impacting on Admissions: Other issues which need to be tackled simultaneous to Admissions include:

- Planning to facilitate the likelihood of transfer at 14 or 16;
- Inflexibility of PFI / PPP / Strategic Investment Board led estate planning – locking schools into long term private procurement and facilities contracts at a time of maximum uncertainty makes no logical sense. PFI style contracts also reduce and impact upon professional control of space;
- Mainstreaming funding to drive collaboration, between schools and with Further Education Colleges. Whilst the Vocational Enhancement Programme is interesting and welcome, it remains a programme with a short term “project funded” approach pertaining;
- Requirement for Planning, for “sticks and carrots” – and for “capacity” (including partnership or “collegiate” management posts) to facilitate partnerships;
- Need for clear viability criteria (now recommended under the Bain Review), so that less viable secondary schools can opt to become neighbourhood “middle schools”, opt to merge, or opt to close quickly to avoid blighting children’s education, and avoid demotivating teaching staff;
- ATL has concerns over “post code” criteria, unless catchment areas are sufficiently large to facilitate balanced intakes.

Balanced Intakes: ATL’s broad policy on admissions is that balanced intakes have been proven as the best means of providing for better overall performance. It has long been generally accepted academically, if not acted upon by policymakers, that overall school performance improves with socially balanced intakes. The following is a good summary, although the references are only a small selection of what is available.

Sullivan and Whitty (2005) comment as follows: in ‘Life Chances and Educational Achievement in the UK: A Research and Policy Overview’ in *Maintaining Momentum: promoting social mobility and life chances from early years to adulthood*’ Eds Delorenzi, Reed and Robinson London: Institute for Public Policy Research

‘There is consensus that school composition effects are important and that schools with a high proportion of students of low social status or low prior academic ability are at a disadvantage (Coleman 1966, Henderson et al 1978, Mortimore et al 1988, Rutter et al 1979, Smith and Tomlinson 1989, Summers and Wolfe 1977, Thrupp 1995, Willms 1986)... Levacic and Woods (2002) find the concentration of social disadvantage in a school relative to other local schools has a strong impact on GCSE improvement over time. These school composition effects may be due to the influence of peer groups on aspirations and behaviour, or they may be due to other processes, such as schools with low proportions of ‘able’ students finding it hard to attract good teachers.’

External/internal influences on pupil performance: Another point on which academics are largely united (and which, again, does not feed into policy formation) is the proposition

that most (ie up to 85%) variation in educational performance can be traced to factors **outside** of school and educational provision. Indeed, the logic is that public spending on education would be better directed at other social policy areas.

Martin Johnson, ATL's Director of Education Policy, in a chapter in the International handbook of Urban Education (forthcoming) comments:

*“School improvement was as much a grass roots movement as a Government policy, but it provided support for two policy themes. First, it supported the contention implied in the earlier reform that autonomous schools could produce better pupil performance. Second, it underpinned the rejection of an apparent determinism which explained pupil failure in terms of social factors, as summed up by the Labour Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett – ‘poverty no excuse’. Whilst fatalism and low expectations were, and possibly remain, a feature of some schools, it seemed by the mid-nineties that the pendulum of rhetoric had swung excessively, leading to the title *Schools making a difference: let’s be realistic* (Thrupp, 1999), and ‘... improvement methods would make a difference. A little difference.’ (Johnson, 1999, p.166) Limitations on the utility of the school improvement model became clear (Mortimore, 1998, MacGilchrist this vol.).*

One was the reliance on high quality leadership and management, when there was continuing concern about that quality which led to the establishment of a National College for School Leadership. The second was the recognition that school improvement placed heavy demands on a workforce already feeling overstretched. Thirdly, improvement research corroborated earlier findings (Coleman et al 1966, Hanushek 1992) and showed that 85% of the variation in pupil performance is due to factors external to the school (Teddlie and Reynolds 2000).

Of the remaining 15%, the classroom effect was shown to be the most substantial. This finding coincided with the determination of the Labour Government elected in 1997 to move to the third phase of reform, a programme to develop the teaching force and the quality of pedagogy.”

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Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Selection at 10 - Starting from the wrong place

Since governmental involvement in Education in Ireland started with Chief Secretary Stanley's letter to the Duke of Leinster in 1831, there has rarely been a controversy that has caught public attention more than the current dispute over the 11+, the end of selection and "Costello".

In all the furore, I am reminded of the Kerryman who, when asked for directions by a tourist, replied that *"If I was going to there, now, I wouldn't start from here at all"* And so it is with the current debate.

Since Jim Callaghan's landmark Ruskin address of 1976, there has been philosophical debate about the purpose of education. Should education produce the good, inquiring minds that make responsible citizens in a democratic world, or should it churn out the skills required by a changing "knowledge" economy. The current government veers towards the latter, but consider this.

In Northern Ireland, over 50% of our young people go to University. Yet our main skills needs are at *technician and associate professional* level – or, in educational jargon, at "Level 3". Recent research has shown that only 13% of our graduates need or use their degree skills to get or retain their jobs. Massive over production of graduates has no proven benefit to economic competitiveness! Such diverse interests as the CBI, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the trade unions have all raised such concerns.

Why do we persist in obsessively over-producing graduates? As parents, or consumers, the answer is simple. Graduates earn more! Graduates have more chance of getting any given job than non graduates, whether their degree is relevant or not. Equally, general educational qualifications at GCSE (Level 2) or "A" level (Level 3) will tend to earn people significantly more in the labour market than equivalent vocational qualifications at Level 2 or 3.

So the bias towards general, or "academic" education is about more than just grammar schools, selection, or social segregation. It's about the sort of labour market we have, and how it is run.

The Northern Ireland, and UK, economy is not characterised by production and manufacturing. It is largely service based, driven by credit fuelled consumer spending, a housing speculation "bubble", higher public expenditure and a balance of payments deficit. This deficit is made up by the "invisibles" of financial services and supported by adventurism and diplomacy across the globe. It is not productive in the Nordic or West European manner, requiring technical skills. In short, we "live off the world" and have poor local labour market demand for high level skills.

The recent Sector Skills Development Agency "Working Futures" report considers that, over the next 10 years, Northern Ireland will lose full time, productive, manufacturing jobs, and gain part time, flexible, usually low paid, service and care orientated jobs.

Far from “*moving up the value chain*” as predicted by the Government Economic Vision earlier this year, there is strong evidence to suggest that Northern Ireland is de-skilling. Far from moving towards a “knowledge based” economy of self confident, discerning, motivated staff working in largely autonomous skilled teams, the 2nd Skills Survey indicates that “task discretion” had declined, and most sharply amongst professionals.

The point is that if we are seeking an education system which is “fit for purpose” – what is the purpose? Does a selective, academically driven, system meet the requirements?

The current Government proposals are unquestionably poorly planned in terms of institutional post primary modelling, but the deferment of major decisions on learning pathways – at 14 instead of 11 – is surely welcome. It recognizes that young people learn at different paces, in different ways. Some mature more quickly than others. There is surely acceptance that “age 10” is too young to divide into proverbial “sheep” and “goats”, regardless of how inconvenient that is for current institutions. “Pathways at 14” will, in the long run, mean that different institutions evolve. Transfer at 14 will become more common. In many areas, the case for “middle schools” will grow, whatever the inflexible strictures of school estate contractual arrangements through PFI, PPP or the Strategic Investment Board may say. And such moves may be less threatening politically, and to the interests of current secondary and grammar schools – all of whom need to be positive agents for change.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers supports “pathways at fourteen”, and sees movement towards the “middle school” arrangement as a useful ambition, with differentiation thereafter. It is a common arrangement in Europe. In Italy the *Scuola Media* – a comprehensive lower secondary school – provides three years general education before pupils enter either *Liceo Classico* (preparing pupils for higher education) or technical or vocational schools. In Austria, a lower secondary school, the *Hauptschuler*, provides a similar, though streamed, function for some 70% of children. In France, pupils attend a lower secondary College from 11-15 before differentiating to either a General and Technological Lycee or a Vocational Lycee at 15. In Germany, there is differentiation at lower secondary level, but with a wider variety of arrangements dependant on Land including *Gymnasium* (generally academic, preparing pupils for higher education), *Realschule* (strong on science, maths and languages), the *Hauptschule* (geared towards entering structured apprenticeships) and the less popular *Gesamtschule*.

In all cases, “vocational” routes are, culturally, more highly valued and better rewarded within more regulated and planned productive labour markets.

Within the relatively unregulated, or “flexible” British labour market, the work based apprenticeship route has, to all intents and purposes, disappeared. Without clear vocational routes of real currency, we should caution against early differentiation at age 10 or 11, and meantime allow the government’s review of apprenticeships to establish more robust and valued work based learning routes.

Mark Langhammer is Director of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and is a member of the Policy Forum of the Oxford based vocational education research group SKOPE. Research references from mlanghammer@n-ireland.atl.org.uk

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Press Release

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7 March 2006

EMBARGOED TO 00.01 HOURS ON MARCH 7



High Stakes decisions at 11 still in place – with or without selection.

Absence of Planning “negligent”

In its response to the Draft Education Order, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers has been sharply critical of the “laissez faire” approach of Government to implementing change. Whilst broadly supportive of the main architecture of the Order, ATL considers that the failure to spell out potential transfer arrangements at 14 and 16, future school funding arrangements, and good practice models for inter-school partnership risks leaving parents with the same “high stakes” decisions at 11 – with or without selection.

Director of ATL, Mark Langhammer commented:

“Determining “critical pathways at 14” will, inevitably, increase transfer at 14, and 16. ATL supports “middle schools” as a useful medium term ambition but are concerned that little thought has been given to transfer arrangements at 14 and at 16. Too much remains at stake at 11.”

“Middle schools are common in modern European education. In Italy the Scuola Media – a comprehensive lower secondary school – provides three years general education before

pupils enter either Liceo Classico (preparing pupils for higher education) or technical or vocational schools. In Austria, a lower secondary school, the Hauptschuler, provides a similar, though streamed, function for some 70% of children. In France, pupils attend a lower secondary College from 11-15 before differentiating to either a General and Technological Lycee or a Vocational Lycee at 15.”

“The failure of the Order to make provision for transfer at 14 or 16 means parents consider the decision at 11 to be all important – a decision which is too definitive, too early. With or without selection, parents are still locked into high stakes choices at 11”

Note to editors

1. THE Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
2. ATL exists to protect and improve the status of teachers, lecturers and other professionals involved in delivering education to further their legitimate professional interests.
3. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). It is unaffiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.
4. Further information and all press releases are available on ATL’s website: www.atl.org.uk

ATL response to the Draft Education (NI) Order 2006

Summary of Main points:

- **Curriculum (General):** ATL supports a pupil centred curriculum, and a partnership approach between parents, teachers, schools and governors.
- **Special Cases:** Teachers require training in both teaching and assessing skills for disaffected pupils. There should be appropriate staff / pupil ratios.
- **Entitlement Framework:** ATL supports the entitlement framework, and supports the improved currency and cultural value of “applied” education. ATL supports moves to break the link between “vocational” education and “low achiever”. ATL is concerned, however, that the collaboration agenda (between schools and with Further Education Colleges) may dilute the professionalism of teaching. In particular the GTC should look at the equivalence of the PGCE (FE or HE) qualification and the PGCE, as well as considering those who have no pedagogic or teaching qualification (such as instructors who have entered FE from the Government Training Centres). Undermining teaching jobs in the 14-19 stages through use of less costly (often casual) Further Education staff is a concern.

- **Curriculum Advice:** Curriculum advice, support and training is essential in moving from a content/subject based curriculum to a skills based curriculum
- **Information/Protection of Privacy:** Any increased data collection, monitoring and reporting requirement will cause additional workload strains.
- **Admissions:** ATL supports the Admissions criteria in principle, but considers that putting Admissions in place in advance of the “collaboration agenda” risks “putting the cart before the horse”. In advance of collaborative arrangements being clearly put in place, what will pupils be admitted to? With LMS and open enrolment remaining in place, funding mechanisms will continue to stimulate inter school, “dog eat dog” rivalry. The ideological dogma of “contestability” in the public sector is in danger of getting in the way of purposeful collaboration.
- **Admissions and transfer at 14 or 16:** ATL also considers that “Pathways at 14” will, inevitably, increase transfer at 14, and 16. ATL supports “middle schools” as a useful medium term ambition and is concerned that little thought has been given to transfer arrangements at 14 and/or 16. Too much remains at stake at 11. More fluidity and movement between schools at 14 and 16 will ease the “crunch” nature of decisions at 11.
- **Other issues impacting on Admissions:** Other issues which need to be tackled simultaneous to Admissions include:
 - Planning to facilitate the likelihood of transfer at 14 or 16
 - Inflexibility of PFI / PPP / Strategic Investment Board led estate planning – locking schools into long term private procurement and facilities contracts at a time of maximum uncertainty makes no logical sense PFI style contracts also reduce and impact upon professional control of space.
 - Mainstreaming funding to drive collaboration, between schools and with Further Education Colleges. Whilst the Vocational Enhancement Programme is interesting and welcome, it remains a programme with a short term “project funded” approach pertaining.
 - Requirement for Planning, for “sticks and carrots” – and for “capacity” (including partnership or “collegiate” management posts) to facilitate partnerships.
 - Need for clear viability criteria, so that less viable secondary schools can opt to become neighbourhood “middle schools”, opt to merge, or opt to close quickly to avoid blighting children’s education, and avoid de-motivating teaching staff.
 - ATL has concerns over “post code” criteria, unless catchment areas are sufficiently large to facilitate balanced intakes.
- **Expulsions / Suspension:** ATL is wholly against the proposals in the Draft Order – proposals which – where schools are unable to act – will inevitably lead to increases in school based industrial actions.
- **Further Education Governors:** ATL opposes payment for Further Education governors. Although understanding the “direction of travel” of the Further Education sector within “FE Means Business” strategy, the risks of moving away from voluntary governors will promote the profit motive and remove Colleges from it’s area based mission.

ATL Response to the Draft Education (NI) Order 2006

Including summary of main points

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- **Curriculum (General):** ATL supports a pupil centred curriculum, and a partnership approach between parents, teachers, schools and governors.
- **Special Cases:** Teachers require training in both teaching and assessing skills for disaffected pupils. There should be appropriate staff / pupil ratios.
- **Entitlement Framework:** ATL supports the entitlement framework, and supports the improved currency and cultural value of “applied” education. ATL supports moves to break the link between “vocational” education and “low achiever”. ATL is concerned, however, that the collaboration agenda (between schools and with Further Education Colleges) may dilute the professionalism of teaching. In particular the GTC should look at the equivalence of the PGCE (FE or HE) qualification and the PGCE, as well as considering those who have no pedagogic or teaching qualification (such as instructors who have entered FE from the Government Training Centres). Undermining teaching jobs in the 14-19 stages through use of less costly (often casual) Further Education staff is a concern.
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Consultation Responses from ATL Question by Question.

Part II Curriculum

General Duty relating to curriculum, Articles 3-13 p7

A Support? Why?

ATL supports the partnership idea between teachers, parents, school and governors and that a pupil centred curriculum is being put in place.

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

ATL is concerned that there will be insufficient funding available to bring these major changes forward. Teachers need training in both the teaching of specific skills and, more importantly, in ‘assessing’ of these skills

C Changes to be made?

ATL is concerned that a ‘skills vs. content’ balance be achieved to provide a platform at the later stages of school.

Children need to be extended to the highest levels in all skill areas at each Key Stage Content needs to be given a higher profile, be assessed and as a foundation for future learning and key understanding.

Special Cases, Articles 14-17, p

A Support? Why?

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

C Changes to be made?

ATL has concerns regarding the time required to ensure curriculum “need not apply” consultations and the monitoring of and about pupil progress.

ATL has concern about what disaffected pupils will study?

Teachers need training in teaching and assessing skills for disaffected pupils.

Reassurance is required on the Staff/Pupil ratios appropriate to deliver the whole curriculum
Re: disaffected pupils.

Access to Courses for Older Pupils (The Entitlement Framework), Articles 18 — 22, p 1

A Support? Why?

ATL generally supports movement towards a wider subject choice, an “entitlement” for all pupils and supports the improved currency and cultural value of “applied” education. ATL supports moves to break the link between “vocational” education and “low achiever”. ATL prefers the terminology of “General” and Applied” to the terms “Academic” and “Vocational”.

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

ATL is concerned that the collaboration agenda (inter school and schools with Further Education Colleges) may dilute the professionalism of teaching. In particular the GTC should look at the equivalence as between the PGCE (FE or HE) qualification and the PGCE, as well as the issues surrounding those who have no pedagogic or teaching qualification (such as instructors who have entered FE from the Government Training Centres). Undermining teaching jobs in the 14-19 stages through use of less costly (often casual) Further Education staff is a concern.

It is vital that the General Teaching Council gives a clear view of these matters.

Equivalence of FE Lecturer pay with Teacher Pay

There is also a need to ensure that “Applied” courses and exams have a transparent equivalence of “currency” with “General” subjects.

C Changes to be made?

Students should be encouraged to have a broad and balanced education.

Certain schools may not have the resources to deliver applied, general and language courses – how will collaboration models be devised and will they be achievable, e.g. remote rural schools.

How will transport costs between centres be supported?

Curriculum advice & support for all grant aided schools, Article 23, p13

A Do you support? Why?

ATL would emphasise that curriculum advice, support and training is essential and necessary in moving from a content/subject based curriculum to a skills based curriculum.

Miscellaneous and supplementary undermine the vision of the complete process.

B Do not support? Objections?

C Changes to be made?

Information / Protection of Privacy, Article 24, p

A Support? Why?

ATL has concerns over the collection, monitoring and reporting of data on pupil achievement and the degree to which this could create a significant administrative burden on school administration staff

Information must be meaningful to parents – and parents must be involved in the process of change. Guidance and training should be provided in understanding what is happening. In assessing and monitoring skills, class sizes must be reduced.

B Do not support? Reasons?

C Changes to be Made?

Appeal Tribunals to consider complaints against Boards of Governors, Article 25, p

A Support? Why? No ATL comments

B Do not support? Reasons?

C Changes to be Made?

Provisions NOT applying to nursery schools, nursery classes in primary schools or hospital schools, Article 26, p

A Support? Why? No ATL comments

B Do not support? Reasons

C Changes to be made

Admissions, Articles 27-29, p

A Support? Why?

ATL in its previous submission broadly supports the measures taken, however ATL does have some fundamental reservations about the manner in which the Government, through DENI, appears to be implementing change (See below)

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

ATL considers that putting Admissions in place in advance of the “collaboration agenda” risks “putting the cart before the horse”. In advance of collaborative arrangements being clearly put in place, what will pupils be admitted to? With LMS and open enrolment remaining in place, funding mechanisms will continue to stimulate inter school rivalry. ATL also considers that “Pathways at 14” will, inevitably, increase transfer at 14, and 16. ATL supports “middle schools” as a useful medium term ambition and is concerned that little thought has been given to transfer arrangements at 14 and/or 16. Too much remains at stake at 11. Other issues which need to be tackled simultaneous to Admissions include:

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- Need for clear viability criteria, so that less viable secondary schools can opt to become neighbourhood “middle schools”, opt to merge, or opt to close quickly to avoid blighting children’s education, and avoid de-motivating teaching staff.

C Changes to be made?

The points raised by ATL above are of a fundamental nature and may not be able to be accommodated by tinkering.

ATL has concerns over “post code” criteria, unless catchment areas are sufficiently large to facilitate balanced intakes.

Suspensions and expulsion of pupils Articles 30-33, p 23

A Support? Why? ATL does not support this provision.

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

ATL supports the view that suspension and expulsion of pupils should rest with Principal and Governing Body of schools, - not the Education and Library Board or new Super Body.

Principal and Board of Governors should be ‘legally’ advised in all cases

C Changes to be made?

ATL supports the view that an expelled student has the ‘right’ to appeal – we stress that while the ‘appeals’ process is taking place the student should not be admitted to school

There should be no ‘appeal’ for a student who is suspended

General Teaching Council Articles 34-36, p

A Support? Why?

All teachers should be fully qualified to degree standard and PGCE as defined by GTC (NI) and be registered with GTC(NI). This should include any Further Education staff teaching school pupils in or out of school.

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

C Changes to be made?

Further Education Institutions (Payment for Governors) Articles 37-38,

A Support? Why?

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

ATL objects to this provision.

ATL have concerns about that remuneration for members of Boards of Governors would dilute the voluntary, and “not for profit” basis of Further Education. ATL understands the direction of travel set out in the Further Education Means Business Strategy, but considers that the area based mission of the Colleges will be compromised by remuneration for Governors – particularly when no similar remuneration is available to school governors. ATL is also concerned that the Department for Employment and Learning does not have a good record in controlling potential excesses. The recent example of Andrew Smith, a member of the former Training & Employment Agency Board between 1990 and 2000 travelled regularly from his home in France for Agency business. The travel and subsistence costs for Mr Smith (who also held a consultancy role with the Social Security Agency) were, by any reasonable standards, unacceptable.

C Changes to be made?

Baseline Assessment of pupils Article 39, p

A Support? Why? No ATL comments

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

C Changes to be made?

Annual Parents Meeting — Removal of existing requirement on Boards of Governors, Article 40, p

A Support? Why? No ATL comments

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

C Changes to be made?

DARD - specification of charges for courses, p33

A Support? Why? No ATL comments

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

C Changes to be made? ATL has no objections to this provision, so long as it is in cooperation with other Higher and Further Education institutions and that there is an equivalence in tariffs. There may be a need to seek 'clarification' in terms of who is responsible for paying fees.

Supplementary Provisions Articles 42,43 (includes registration, role of BoG's & information about FE Colleges: In respect of pupils attending another school/college for part of their education, p35

A Support? Why? No ATL comments

B Do not support? Objections and Reasons?

C Changes to be made?

Belfast Education and Library Board

HR/PM

13 December 2006

Ms Stella McArdle
Clerk 245
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Dear Ms McArdle

Schools' Admission Policy

The board agreed a response to the Department of Education's "New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools – Consultation Document" at its education committee on the 9 June 2005. It would have been my preference to enclose the full submission of 15 pages made at the time, however, I note you request that reports should be limited to 6 A4 pages.

I have therefore enclosed the areas of the response which appear to address the terms of reference that the sub-group on the schools' admission policy has been asked to address.

Should the sub-group have any further queries or require the board's complete submission to the Department of Education's consultation document please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

David Cargo

Chief Executive

Enc

Belfast Education and Library Board

New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools

Consultation Document – BELB Officer Partial Response

1 **The Department is seeking your views on whether the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements.**

- The officer group welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on new admissions arrangements.
- The officers welcome the proposed principles and endorse the key principle of placing the interests of the child at the centre of the decision making process. This should imply that there is no bias or indirect discrimination against any group/individuals.
- The transfer arrangements should be based on informed choice but it is not a given right that ‘informed parental choice’ will alone determine a pupil’s post-primary provision. Parents may be disappointed to learn that the expression of their choice will not always result in the securing of a preferred place. To this extent the document contributes to the creation of an unrealistic expectation that parental choice will ultimately prevail.
- The objectives outlined in section 2.3 of the document require further analysis and consideration. The Department needs to indicate how the provision of a range of schools will assist ‘educational choice’. The mapping of the landscape indicates that schools will be more collaborative but it is unclear how the information can be used by parents to actually make ‘choices’.
- We do note that parental choice based on informed choice as set out in the pupil profile can be at variance with the choice based on actual or perceived parental perspectives on schools.
- It is our view that the objectives require fuller explanation and review. Preference may be curtailed by school provision in the local area particularly in rural areas.
- There is the danger in the proposals of a new principle that if you exercise “choice” you have to exercise “provision”.
- The officers would encourage further development by the Department of Education in order to provide greater detail on transparency and consistency. For example consistency may need to be qualified; eg from area to area, school to school?
- The exercise of choice should be deferred to 14 when it is educationally more appropriate.

2 **The Department is seeking your views on:**

(a) **whether the pupil profile should be used in the way described in the consultation document; and**

(b) **whether there are alternative or additional ways in which the pupil profile should be used to help parents decide on future post-primary provision for their child.**

- (a)
- It is our view that there should be substantive changes to the recommendations on the pupil profile.
 - We would outline difficulties in defining ‘aptitudes to learning’. Every child has an aptitude for learning, so how can we define a hierarchy which would be educationally stable.
 - The recommendations proposed will put a significant burden on principals and teachers. There would be a genuine concern that educational objectivity could be tempered by fear of litigation and challenging parental opinion.
 - We do note that if the pupil profile is to be used as an objective assessment of a child’s achievements then there may be a challenge to the ‘subjective’ opinions aspect of the document.
 - We also note the significant professional development issues raised in the document. There is an indication that all teachers would need to have training in standardised testing/profiling/use of a range of external tests. This staff development issue should be resourced through the CASS services who have significant experience in working with schools on the effective use of data.
 - The officer group suggest that the department provide a ‘model profile’ in advance, which could be used to illustrate ‘educational pathways’ to parents. Potential education and career pathways could be ‘matched’ to pupil profiles thus providing parents with a range of examples of possible ways forward.
 - We agree that parents should receive information on and have opportunities to visit post-primary schools.
 - Previous experience has illustrated that where the pupil profile is used as part of the transfer process it will be a potential source of challenge, particularly when the views of parent and teacher conflicts. The Department of Education had trialled aspects of this process before and ‘parental choice’ and ‘advice and information, from the primary school did not bring about the expected fair and equitable decisions anticipated due to a range of factors.
 - We recommend that the development of a pupil profile should be set within a process which develops capacity for the right of choice to be made. If the profile is the only document then the process could be manipulated.
- (b)
- The analysis and consultation would have been significantly enhanced by the consultation exercise had it contained examples of profiles.

- · The pupil profile would be enhanced by the inclusion of the opinion of the pupil. If the whole process is predicted on the ‘centrality of the child’ then the ‘voice’ of the child should be expressed in the profile.
- · The place of ‘formative assessment’ as the ‘glue’ of the revised curriculum and assessment proposals will necessitate the pupil engaging in setting and achieving personal learning targets. The summation of this process should be catered for in the profile and the profile should not be a process “done” to pupils. The profile should encompass and provide for the opinion and learning of the child.
- · We do note and caution that when the pupil profile encompasses not just objective matters but subjective matters, then there is significant room for third parties to disagree with the manner in which the judgement is exercised and decisions reached.

12 **The Department is seeking your views on the family focused criteria listed and their inclusion within a menu.**

- The officers recognise the dichotomy faced when the Department of Education espouses to all schools a set of principles which enshrines the centrality of the parent/child in the decision making process about educational pathways and then needs to outline an entry/gate-keeping process to the potential schools of choice.
- We agree that any admissions framework should ensure a greater degree of consistency, fairness and transparency.
- The officers acknowledge the need to establish a criteria which focuses on the ‘family education’. We note that this area requires further clarification. The ‘family criteria’ could have implications for ‘single sex schools’. The criteria ‘siblings currently at the school’ only works for the first generation of families. The criteria for ‘only child’ is based on other criteria in 5.9.
- The changing social nature of what constitutes a family means the definition of eldest child is proving increasingly difficult to define as illustrated in recent high court cases. If ‘eldest child’ is to remain as a criteria careful definition would be required, for example, we would wish to ensure that a child is not disadvantaged because an older sibling has a statement. We also note that family connections to the school for example, mother/uncle are not considered yet they have been previously the basis of decision making just as important as parishes 5.9.

13 **The Department is seeking your views on the community-based criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and how they should be defined?**

- The officers would recommend that the Department of Education provides further clarity and guidance in this area. The Department would have to ensure that the use of this criterion is robust enough to withstand equality legislation. The difficulty in this area is that unless you include feeder primary schools under a geographical (locality) criteria then this criteria could be used to perpetuate exclusivity.
- We recognise that within Belfast schools an individual school can attract pupils from as many as 30 plus feeder primary schools. The notion of “educational community”

requires further careful scrutiny. The development of new housing areas, the migration of population from the city of Belfast, the accessibility issue concerning transportation and the parental work journey are all complex factors in defining “the educational community”. If the issue is “choice” then defining feeder primary school lists under community based criteria will radically alter parents’ perception of “choice”.

- The officer group recognises the importance of the ‘parish’ dimension yet the arguments concerning any restriction to parish criteria are largely the same as those applied to restricting the feeder primary school issue. The national school system may have been parish yet it was confined to elementary schooling. Secondary/grammar education had more order based schools and was not confined to a ‘parish’ description.
- This criterion may be acceptable as all religious and (non religious) communities can subscribe to ‘parish’ boundaries and there are no significant gaps or anomalies e.g. one child having a choice based upon residence in 3 different ‘religious’ parishes.
- We recommend that the Department unifies guidance in these areas before defining criteria. The term ‘community’ school has been loosely interpreted in the past. It is our recommendation that we need to rigorously challenge the ‘community’ school label as currently defined in education provision and have a clarity of definition and role for such schools.

14 **The Department is seeking your view on:**

- (a) the geographical criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and the most appropriate means of operating them; and**
- (b) what percentage limit, if any, should be set for places allocated by geographical criteria.**

The officers agree with the proposal that the school is an essential element of local community development. We acknowledge the social, educational and employment benefits that local schools provide in local ‘communities’.

The notion of a ‘child centred catchment’ would better reflect the key principle outlined in 2.2 that “the interests of the child is central”. We fully recognise that if a child wishes to attend a local school then this should be supported and would be particularly desirable in remote and/or rural localities.

The issue of school centred catchments brings with it the issue of postcode omissions and the danger of overlaps.

The officers have concerns that the use of geographical criteria as outlined in section 5:10 may not comply with article 29 (1) of the U.N Convention of the Rights of the Child which states: ‘parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind’. The officers note that percentage limits are difficult to apply and are likely to result in an increase in appeals due to the non-transparent nature of the process.

- 15 **The Department is seeking your views on:**
- (a) **the tiebreakers, random selection, and proximity from home to school, as a means of admitting pupils down to the last available place;**
 - (b) **the most appropriate method of operating random selection and/or measuring proximity; and**
 - (c) **whether schools should be free to use different methods of operating random selection or proximity.**
- (a) The officers note that if any system is required it should be consistent across all schools. If there has to be a verifiable random system used, then a computer based random lottery selection process could be used.
 - (b) The Department of Education should set the method of random selection and its terms of operation. In order to ensure accuracy since distance from school can be contentious the ordinance survey service could be used to measure distance impartially. This process could however be expensive.
 - (c) The final chosen method should operate for all schools and the method of operation should be clearly published and circulated to all parents/pupils well in advance of the applications stage.
- 16 **The Department is seeking your views on other criteria that you believe should be included in the menu, bearing in mind the principles and objectives outlined in Chapter 2.**
- It is the officer's view that key criteria outlined in the basic principles at 2.2 take precedent and priority and should minimise the need for any other criteria or processes.
 - We do however consider that a "specialist interest criterion" may be considered if schools move to "specialist status". Children with sporting, musical and artistic talents need to be acknowledged and provided for in the education system. The Department may well wish to consider the issue of defining clear criteria for children living outside Northern Ireland and children living within Northern Ireland whose parents are not EU nationals.

Belfast Education and Library Board

CIRCULATED

ITEM 7

BELFAST EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

EDUCATION COMMITTEE (SCHOOLS)

THURSDAY 9 JUNE 2005

New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools Consultation Document – Officer Response

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The officers of the curriculum advice and support service welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on new admissions arrangements for post primary schools. The officers fully agreed that any new arrangements should work for the benefit of all children and should be as simple as possible for parents to use.
- 1.2 The transition of a child from one phase of their education is a time of educational importance and should enhance and consolidate the child's educational pathway. It is the view of the officers that any new arrangements should cater for the holistic development of the child and that all talents should be developed and nurtured.
- 1.3 We do note that in planning for a new educational landscape the development of educational pathways from 0-6, 7-13 and then 14-19 was not transformed into the educational framework. It is our view that the realignment of the school estate into the educational pathways would have the potential to break the current cycle of competition and autonomy.

Principles and Objectives

1 **The Department is seeking your views on whether the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements.**

- The officer group welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on new admissions arrangements.
- The officers welcome the proposed principles and endorse the key principle of placing the interests of the child at the centre of the decision making process. This should imply that there is no bias or indirect discrimination against any group/individuals.
- The transfer arrangements should be based on informed choice but it is not a given right that ‘informed parental choice’ will alone determine a pupil’s post-primary provision. Parents may be disappointed to learn that the expression of their choice will not always result in the securing of a preferred place. To this extent the document contributes to the creation of an unrealistic expectation that parental choice will ultimately prevail.
- The objectives outlined in section 2.3 of the document require further analysis and consideration. The department needs to indicate how the provision of a range of schools will assist ‘educational choice’. The mapping of the landscape indicates that schools will be more collaborative but it is unclear how the information can be used by parents to actually make ‘choices’.
- We do note that parental choice based on informed choice as set out in the pupil profile can be at variance with the choice based on actual or perceived parental perspectives on schools.
- It is our view that the objectives require fuller explanation and review. Preference may be curtailed by school provision in the local area particularly in rural areas.
- There is the danger in the proposals of a new principle that if you exercise “choice” you have to exercise “provision”.
- The officers would encourage further development by the Department of Education in order to provide greater detail on transparency and consistency. For example consistency may need to be qualified; eg from area to area, school to school?
- The exercise of choice should be deferred to 14 when it is educationally more appropriate.

2 **The Department is seeking your views on:**

(a) **whether the pupil profile should be used in the way described in the consultation document; and**

(b) **whether there are alternative or additional ways in which the pupil profile should be used to help parents decide on future post-primary provision for their child.**

- (a)
- It is our view that there should be substantive changes to the recommendations on the pupil profile.
 - We would outline difficulties in defining ‘aptitudes to learning’. Every child has an aptitude for learning, so how can we define a hierarchy which would be educationally stable.
 - The recommendations proposed will put a significant burden on principals and teachers. There would be a genuine concern that educational objectivity could be tempered by fear of litigation and challenging parental opinion.
 - We do note that if the pupil profile is to be used as an objective assessment of a child’s achievements then there may be a challenge to the ‘subjective’ opinions aspect of the document.
 - We also note the significant professional development issues raised in the document. There is an indication that all teachers would need to have training in standardised testing/profiling/use of a range of external tests. This staff development issue should be resourced through the CASS services who have significant experience in working with schools on the effective use of data.
 - The officer group suggest that the department provide a ‘model profile’ in advance, which could be used to illustrate ‘educational pathways’ to parents. Potential education and career pathways could be ‘matched’ to pupil profiles thus providing parents with a range of examples of possible ways forward.
 - We agree that parents should receive information on and have opportunities to visit post-primary schools.
 - Previous experience has illustrated that where the pupil profile is used as part of the transfer process it will be a potential source of challenge, particularly when the views of parent and teacher conflicts. The Department of Education had trialled aspects of this process before and ‘parental choice’ and ‘advice and information, from the primary school did not bring about the expected fair and equitable decisions anticipated due to a range of factors.
 - We recommend that the development of a pupil profile should be set within a process which develops capacity for the right of choice to be made. If the profile is the only document then the process could be manipulated.
- (b)
- The analysis and consultation would have been significantly enhanced by the consultation exercise had it contained examples of profiles.

- The pupil profile would be enhanced by the inclusion of the opinion of the pupil. If the whole process is predicted on the ‘centrality of the child’ then the ‘voice’ of the child should be expressed in the profile.
- The place of ‘formative assessment’ as the ‘glue’ of the revised curriculum and assessment proposals will necessitate the pupil engaging in setting and achieving personal learning targets. The summation of this process should be catered for in the profile and the profile should not be a process “done” to pupils. The profile should encompass and provide for the opinion and learning of the child.
- We do note and caution that when the pupil profile encompasses not just objective matters but subjective matters, then there is significant room for third parties to disagree with the manner in which the judgement is exercised and decisions reached.

3 **The Department is seeking your views on the information / advice which should be available from the primary school to help parents make informed decisions.**

- It is essential in the interests of informed choice that the primary school provides the fullest range of information on each pupil in order to assist the parental decision making process.
- It would be of assistance if a standardised enhanced format is used across all schools.
- The officer group would however indicate that the perspective of many primary teachers may be too confined to primary education and some teachers may not have a sufficient knowledge of the post-primary sector. There is a clear need to have supplementary information available from other sources.
- It would be possible to provide P6/P7 teachers with awareness raising training on the range of post-primary opportunities available to their pupils.
- We are also aware that the proposals will require additional time and resources to allow teachers and principals to complete the necessary administration procedures.
- The officer group would agree that primary principals should continue to offer general advice and guidance to parents and pupils on ‘choice’.

4 **The Department is seeking your views on:**

- (a) **the range of information outlined in the Consultation Document to help parents make informed decisions;**
 - (b) **the role of the post-primary school in advising parents; and**
 - (c) **whether any other information / support should be provided to parents to assist the decision-making process.**
- (a) ■ We recognise that the range of information on schools has evolved over time and we would welcome a greater emphasis on clear information on the ‘school ethos’. This aspect of the proposals requires further additional review.

- The officers support the use of open days and other opportunities for transferring pupils such as shadowing year 8 pupils.
- (b) ■ The post primary school role in ‘providing advice’ could be a contentious issue and lead to possible litigation. The process can be inconsistent unless we receive significant guidelines on the extent and range of information expected beyond the current headings outlined in these proposals.
 - The officer group recommend that greater clarity is provided on the access of all parties to the pupil profile.
 - We do again emphasise that the proposals will place a considerable additional pressure on arranging interviews, with teacher substitution and resources being required to accommodate the additional workload.
- (c) ■ A prospectus should include details of ‘pathways’ available to pupils via academic or vocational routes. The prospectus should also be available via web based information. We do note that not all parents have the opportunity to avail of on-line/web information.

5 The Department of Education is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from the DE/education and library boards to help parents choose the most suitable post-primary schools.

- The officers agree that procedural guidance is important and the current provision of information for parents should be reviewed. We live in a data-rich society and an enhanced data system should be made available to parents.
- The education and library board staff are well positioned to provide objective guidance and information to all parents in order to assist “informed parental choice”. The transfer officers are responsible for admission procedures to primary and pre-school and any subsequent appeal procedures. The Department of Education will have to take account of the diverse procedures operating at the moment.
- The use of a “helpline” for parents and the further development of web-based information will require appropriate additional staffing and resources.
- The officers recommend that the current transfer booklet should be reviewed in light of the strengthened prospectuses and the further development of web-based information. All school-based information should be sourced under standardised guidelines from the Department of Education with the education and library boards providing an overview of the process. The education and library boards would still require admission criteria but the possibility of these being published only electronically should be reviewed. Relevant legislation in this area will require amendment.
- The use of the individual school link officer to inform the system about those schools who are providing particular educational “pathways” through the area of specialised school provision, or where a school makes provision through the inclusion agenda for specific aspects of learning difficulties will be an important element in the information debate. We recommend that the department makes “case study” models available to parents utilising how they can draw down information from all the recommended sources.

6 The department is seeking your views on what information/ advice should be available to assist with choices of educational pathway during post-primary education.

- The officers agree that the fullest range of information and advice should be used as a continuous dialogue between the parent, pupil and school concerning the individual child's learning pathway. More important than the advice however is the actual provision of opportunity to change a child's 'pathway' whether through changing the school or provision across a number of schools. In order to achieve this 'flexibility' schools will have to alter the current 'fixed' and set system of transfer.
- Priority can be given to accommodating a pupils' preference while allowing the pupil to remain on the original school register.
- The officers recognise that to facilitate this process the Department needs to establish complementary educational school networks which facilitates a pupil's entitlement to courses/accreditation provided by a group of schools.
- This concept of 'educational passport' will necessitate additional financial commitment from the Department of Education for all schools.
- The officers agree that education and library board personnel could maintain a register of course provision and could facilitate pupils/schools in devising pathways which incorporate contributions from more than one establishment.
- The officers also wish to indicate that they have a high degree of confidence in the professionalism of teachers to further develop their knowledge and skills in advising pupils/parents on educational pathways. We would also indicate that this area will require further training and professional development opportunities.
- The provision of a more structured and intensive engagement between schools, parents, pupils, education and library boards will require additional time and resources. The Department needs to take account of the additional consultative pressures these new proposals will place on teachers and schools.
- We support in principle the need to improve the availability and expertise of career departments and career officers currently working in schools.
- The officers do note the wording of the final sentence in 3:17 which would imply a guarantee of acceptance at the chosen school irrespective of numbers etc.

7 The Department is seeking your views on the broad timetable for the new admissions process.

- The officers note that the suggested timetable seems appropriate from the logistical viewpoint. We recognise that this will be a significant step change from the current timetable. We do acknowledge that the outcome of the timetable is to enable the ultimate 'parental' choice to be as late as possible but within the boundaries of realistic implementation.
- We acknowledge that the timetable set up is to cater for informed choice.

- The officers would recommend that the department provides guidance to schools on a range of induction/familiarisation processes which could inform parental/pupil choice. Such guidance could reference examples of good practice such as;
- visits from post-primary teachers and year 8 pupils to the primary schools;
- co-operative planning of work between year 7/year 8 teachers which would coordinate teacher understanding of learning outcomes, teacher expectations and common pedagogy;
- buddying of year 7 – year 8 pupils.
- The officers agree that all admission timetables must be clearly established and integrated to ensure delivery. It is also essential that resources are made available and appropriate structures are put in place to permit delivery of services.
- We agree that the department should recommend the June date as the deadline for appeals. This would facilitate attendance by both the school and parents and limit the uncertainty for parents.

8 The Department is seeking your views on the types of cases which should be considered as compelling individual circumstances (see paragraphs 4.3 – 4.5)

- The officers agree that the provision for those children with compelling individual circumstances must be entirely consistent with the fundamental principle of ‘informed parental and pupil choice’. It therefore seems unnecessary to produce a definitive list of ‘types’ of cases.
- Since “compelling” individual circumstances will be dealt with via the pupil profile which will extend over the duration of the child’s educational career, is there a necessity to have the intervention of other statutory agencies? Paragraph 4.5 outlines the issue well in that the total education support system for such children will be aware of the child’s compelling circumstances.

9 The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils admitted under compelling individual circumstances should be super-numerary to schools admissions and enrolment numbers (see paragraph 4.6)

- The officer group agree that where compelling individual circumstances arise the pupils should be treated as super- numerate. We would contend that no individual child should be disadvantaged by another child’s compelling individual circumstances. We also recognise that the Department of Education needs to take account of the impact this has on class sizes, particularly practical classes where there is a maximum of 20 pupils, and the possible impact of super-numerary issues on neighbouring schools.
- We recognise that this area is problematic and we note that the procedure and timing of consideration of these cases has not been addressed in the timetable.

10 The Department of Education is seeking your views on whether individual Boards of Governors or a central panel should consider cases of compelling individual

circumstances of a central panel. Your views are sought on its size and composition (see paragraph 4.7)

- The officer group would recommend that a central panel should consider cases of compelling individual circumstances. The use of a central panel could eliminate any potential for lack of impartiality and inconsistency.
- The key issue here we feel is the ‘education’ of the child. The educationalist view should be the most important aspect of the decision making with medical, social/legal expertise contributing to the best ‘educational’ decision for the child.
- The officers are conscious that a high degree of expertise is required across a number of disciplines where cases of compelling individual circumstances are being reviewed.
- The membership should consist of representation from the education, legal, medical/social areas with administrative support from the education and library board.
- The officers recommend that the Department of Education considers the creation of a regional pool of panel members which would service all boards with administration provided by the individual board in question.
- We would further recommend that all panel members would undergo common quality assured professional training. We recognise that the panel should take account of the opinion of the individual school principal / Board of Governors in question.

11 The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils with statements of special educational needs should be continued to be admitted as super-numerary.

- The officers would indicate that the role of the education and library board is to recommend a required type of provision rather than a specific school. According to the SENDO legislation all schools are expected to strive towards meeting the requirements of children with special educational needs.
- The officer group would recommend that such pupils remain super-numerary but the approach outlined in 4.10 has merit.
- The officers also wish to bring to the Department’s attention, that the admission and inclusion of pupils with statements of special educational needs should not diminish the allocation of resources available to other pupils.
- We recognise that the statementing process has the potential to be regarded as an alternative means of securing a desired placement.

12 The Department is seeking your views on the family focused criteria listed and their inclusion within a menu.

- The officers recognise the dichotomy faced when the Department of Education espouses to all schools a set of principles which enshrines the centrality of the parent/child in the decision making process about educational pathways and then needs to outline an entry/gate-keeping process to the potential schools of choice.
- We agree that any admissions framework should ensure a greater degree of consistency, fairness and transparency.

- The officers acknowledge the need to establish a criteria which focuses on the ‘family education’. We note that this area requires further clarification. The ‘family criteria’ could have implications for ‘single sex schools’. The criteria ‘siblings currently at the school’ only works for the first generation of families. The criteria for ‘only child’ is based on other criteria in 5.9.
- The changing social nature of what constitutes a family means the definition of eldest child is proving increasingly difficult to define as illustrated in recent high court cases. If ‘eldest child’ is to remain as a criteria careful definition would be required, for example, we would wish to ensure that a child is not disadvantaged because an older sibling has a statement. We also note that family connections to the school for example, mother/uncle are not considered yet they have been previously the basis of decision making just as important as parishes 5.9.

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- The officers would recommend that the Department of Education provides further clarity and guidance in this area. The Department would have to ensure that the use of this criterion is robust enough to withstand equality legislation. The difficulty in this area is that unless you include feeder primary schools under a geographical (locality) criteria then this criteria could be used to perpetuate exclusivity.
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The issue of school centred catchments brings with it the issue of postcode omissions and the danger of overlaps.

The officers have concerns that the use of geographical criteria as outlined in section 5:10 may not comply with article 29

(1) of the U.N Convention of the Rights of the Child which states: ‘parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind’.

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- (c) The final chosen method should operate for all schools and the method of operation should be clearly published and circulated to all parents/pupils well in advance of the applications stage.

16 The Department is seeking your views on other criteria that you believe should be included in the menu, bearing in mind the principles and objectives outlined in Chapter 2.

- It is the officer's view that key criteria outlined in the basic principles at 2.2 take precedent and priority and should minimise the need for any other criteria or processes.
- We do however consider that a "specialist interest criterion" may be considered if schools move to "specialist status". Children with sporting, musical and artistic talents need to be acknowledged and provided for in the education system.
- The Department may well wish to consider the issue of defining clear criteria for children living outside Northern Ireland and children living within Northern Ireland whose parents are not EU nationals.

17 The Department is seeking your views on the possible options for the menu.

- The officers recognise that there is a need to balance present or new criteria against the changing Northern Ireland educational landscape.
- There is some merit in developing a range around:
 - family focused criteria
 - the child centred catchment area
 - the 'parish' dimension
 - random selection.

18 The Department is seeking your views on whether the process for appealing the decisions of Boards of Governors not to admit a child to the school should be altered in any way.

- The officers note that if the recommendations outlined are implemented the central panel's consideration of compelling individual circumstances will impact on the present appeal process. There is a need for greater clarity on the compelling individual circumstances.
- The recommendation that appeals should be heard during May and June is a positive one although it could place additional pressures on principals at an already busy time in the academic year.

Other issues

Are there any other issues you would like to comment on in relation to new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools?

The officers recognise that there needs to be changes in the current system of transfer of children. We recognise that provision should increasingly reflect the pupil's personal choice of learning, pathway and his/her needs, aptitudes, interests, and aspiration.

We endorse previous recommendations made to the Department in our response to the post-primary review body when we indicated that a change management process is required to gradually reduce the focus on transition at 11 and refocus on 13-14 when young learners will be completing their key stage three education phase and looking forward towards more relevant learning pathways.

There are a significant number of complex, inter-related developments arriving on the educational scene. The introduction of a statutory revised curriculum and assessment in 2006, the decline in pupil numbers, the inclusion agenda, the definition of a revised pupil profile by 2009, and the introduction of the entitlement framework are only some of the major areas of change.

It is obvious that it will be difficult to ensure confidence in the capacity of the education system to cope with such a significant transition.

The officers are actively aware that it is not a given right that "informed parental choice" will determine a pupil's post-primary provision. Parents may be disappointed to learn that the expression of their choice will not always result in the securing of the preferred place. We caution that the proposals could contribute to the creation of an unrealistic expectation that parental choice will prevail.

The officer group also wish to see a greater degree of consideration given to the increase in the ethnic minority population and the place of their choices in the education system.

In conclusion the officers recognise that it is not possible to manage a rapid revolution to the current structures. We noted in a previous report to the Department that "while there is widespread acceptance of the need for change the current diversity of provision, as well as the deep seated economic, social, political, and sectarian differences within elements of our community, make it difficult to provide a uniform system which can command universal support whilst retaining the confidence of the Northern Ireland society, its parents, and educators".

It remains the position that in common with other European countries the physical transfer of pupils from primary to post-primary education will take place at 11. This transition is still one of the most single sensitive issues around. Education will still need to continue to adapt to serve the needs of pupils, parents, society and the economy.

The officers would wish to make further responses to the board as future proposals in this area arise.

SMcE/ST

Catholic Head Teachers Association

Thoughts on a Scaffolding to Support Informed Parental Preference

Father Eamon Martin, St Columb's College, Derry

A Scaffolding to Support Informed Parental Preference

It is necessary to find a scaffolding or structure which will enable informed parental preference to become the dominant force in shaping our education system for the future. **Without any incentive to follow the information and professional advice provided, the popularity of certain schools is likely to override the desire to match children with an environment that will best meet their needs and aspirations.** The envisaged 'tapestry of provision' to provide for the full range of needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations of young people will simply not emerge. Local collaboration will remain sporadic and little progress will be made in the development of a wider range of routes and choices with a critical mass of various provision types with the help of Further Education, training providers, local employers and school-school collaboration.

The following example of a possible scaffolding arrangement is therefore proposed:

1. Pupil Profile

An effective and workable pupil profile is needed as soon as possible. Since this will be the primary instrument in achieving a system of informed parental preference, it will need to be an open document and to contain clear, standardised and objective information about the pupil. **Professionals and parents will need to co-operate in an atmosphere of trust and concern for the child so that the pupil profile can be a key document in informing pupil and parental choice about individual pathways which best reflect pupils' needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations.**

2. Consultation with primary and post-primary schools

Teachers' and principals' professional judgement should play a strong part in a system of informed parental preference. This input needs to be supported and respected. **All parents should therefore attend consultation interviews with their primary school and to receive information from the post primary schools which they are considering.** Information from the post primary schools should not only be of a general nature (e.g. open nights and prospectuses), but should also include specific advice pertaining to the individual child and

based upon the pupil profile. **It is imperative, therefore, that post-primary principals should have access to, and should comment clearly on, the profiles of all pupils who are considering a place in their schools.** This should be done before parents state their final informed preference. (Parents may also wish to attend a consultation interview with the post primary schools which they are considering for their child. This could help them to be more fully informed about whether the particular post-primary school feels able to meet their child's educational needs and aspirations within its curriculum provision).

3. **Firm statements from primary and post-primary schools to guide parental preference**

Having considered the pupil profile, as an integral part of the informed preference process, parents should expect to receive, from the primary and from all the post-primary schools which they are considering, firm statements pertaining to their child's suitability for a particular school/educational pathway. One of the following three statements should be given:

- There is a **strong match** between the needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations expressed in your child's pupil profile and curriculum provision of Post-Primary School A.
- There is **some match** between the needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations expressed in your child's pupil profile and curriculum provision of Post-Primary School A.
- We have **concerns** that Post-Primary School A shall be unable to meet the full needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations expressed in your child's pupil profile within its curriculum provision.

4. **Informed Preference Transfer Form**

An Informed Preference Transfer Form should be used to record all stages of the informed preference process (see exemplar). This form should remain with the pupil profile throughout the transfer process. The form will include the firm statements (above) provided to parents from primary and post-primary schools which shall be formally recorded by the school principals concerned.

Having received firm statements from the primary and post-primary school principals, parents should record on the informed preference transfer form their school preferences. **Parental preference should be strongly influenced by the firm statements of professional advice provided by the primary and post primary schools.**

(Before signing the final choice list, pupils and parents may wish to receive further professional advice from their primary school principal about appropriate pathways – this advice should take account of the combined firm statements provided by the primary and post-primary schools re the appropriateness of the learning pathways being considered).

5. **Transfer Office**

Completed Informed Preference Transfer Forms should be sent with the pupil profile via the primary school principal to the transfer office. **The transfer office will then oversee the**

admissions process. Transfer forms should be sent by the transfer office to the first choice school. The process should then continue as in the current system.

6. **Sorting of forms before applying admissions criteria.**

In order for parents to feel confident that they can secure a place for their child in a school which in the opinion of the professionals is suited to the child's educational needs, interests and aspirations, **applications should be sorted by the receiving school on the basis of the firm statements provided to parents on the informed preference form** (cf. the process described in 5.5 of 'sorting' applications for integrated schools in order to ensure their particular school ethos.)

Parents who have received 'strong match' statements from both the primary and a post-primary school need to have a high degree of confidence that their informed preference for that school will be respected and given priority. Parents who have received 'concerns' statements from the primary and a post-primary school should realise that their child's needs are unlikely to be met in that school. School admissions criteria should therefore be applied to each group separately and in the order below, places being filled initially from 1-3 in order. Places are therefore filled in the order below until there are no remaining places.

1. **Two x 'strong match'**
2. **One strong match, one some match**
3. **Two x 'some match'**

Where oversubscription occurs within 1-3 above, admissions criteria should be applied to applicants at each stage.

7. **Addressing concerns**

If there are places remaining after 1-3 have been applied, schools may be able to accept a number of pupils in 4, 5, 6 as follows if resources are available to address the concerns and if an individual educational programme can be mapped out for the child subject to review at the end of year 8.

4. **One strong match, one concern**
5. **One some match, one concern**
6. **Two 'concerns'**

Parents will realise that in order to be confident of securing a place in a suitable school, they should take seriously the advice given by professionals to inform their choice and list their preferences from schools which will be initially able to consider them under 1, 2, or 3.

Parents will be confident that where concerns have been noted, these have been identified early and that measures have been suggested to help tackle these concerns.

8. **Local planning and co-operation**

This proposed scaffolding arrangement will respect and encourage informed preference. It will drive movement towards the provision of a range of choices, in that schools will be encouraged to fill gaps in provision that are emerging each year. It will place the child at the centre of all discussions and encourage partnerships between primary and post-primary schools, and among various educational bodies to widen availability of pathways and tackle identified concerns. **Definite practical support and resources should therefore be provided to local groupings of schools who are actively engaged in discussions and planning for the provision of a variety of educational routes and pathways in their area. As confidence develops within a particular local area that a working system of informed parental preference towards a variety of respected educational pathways is in place, there will be less need for the scaffolding arrangement to support the system.**

INFORMED PREFERENCE TRANSFER FORM

**FOR SCHOOL USE ONLY
(to be completed by Primary School)**

Section A

Pupil's Surname _____ Boy Girl Ed & Lib Bd _____
 (Tick appropriate box)
 Forenames _____ Pupil's Date of birth _____ Primary School _____
 (please list all forenames) Pupil's Ref. No _____
 Names of Parent(s) or Guardian(s) _____
 _____ Daytime Tel No. _____
 Postal Address _____
 _____ Postcode _____
 Special Educational Needs Assessment in Progress Yes/No
 (Delete as appropriate)

Section B (List at least 3 different schools)

FIRM STATEMENTS TO INFORM PARENTAL PREFERENCE

	<i>(to be completed and signed by Parent or Guardian)</i>	<i>(to be completed and signed by the Primary School)</i>	<i>(to be completed and signed by the Post-Primary School)</i>
	PARENT CONSIDERING <i>Strong match/some match/concerns</i>	PRIMARY SCHOOL ADVICE <i>Strong match/some match/concerns</i>	POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL ADVICE <i>Strong match/some match/concerns</i>
SCHOOL	Signature Date	Signature Date	Signature Date
SCHOOL	Signature Date	Signature Date	Signature Date
SCHOOL	Signature Date	Signature Date	Signature Date
SCHOOL	Signature Date	Signature Date	Signature Date
SCHOOL	Signature Date	Signature Date	Signature Date

INFORMED PREFERENCE TRANSFER FORM contd.

Section C

PARENTAL PREFERENCE

FIRST CHOICE	
SECOND CHOICE	
THIRD CHOICE	
FOURTH CHOICE	
FIFTH CHOICE	

Section D

PARENTS' REMARKS/REASONS FOR EACH PREFERENCE especially factors relating to schools' Admissions Criteria (e.g. is the child the eldest child or the eldest boy/girl in the family or an only child – please specify below). Continue on a separate sheet if necessary:

Section E (to be completed by Parent/Primary School Principal)

COMPELLING INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR STATEMENTS

Principal's comments, if any _____

Section F

Signature of Primary school Principal _____ *Date* _____

I have read this form and discussed it with the Principal. I hereby certify that the address which I have given is the pupil's normal place of residence.

*Signature of * Parent/Guardian* _____ *Date* _____

(* "parent" - is the person who has legal custody of the child) Please indicate number of pages attached: _____

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta

Sub-group to Consider the Schools Admission Policy

a. **The Pupil Profile**

The lay out of the annual Pupil Profile must give recognition to and include the particular characteristics of immersion education. Amongst those are translanguaging, bilingualism, and literacy and numeracy skills in both English and Irish.

The awarding of levels of achievement is problematic for the IM sector. Currently, there is no method available to assess Irish-language literacy in the north or in the south. In addition, assessment of other core subjects through the medium of Irish is problematic and needs careful consideration to ensure that linguistic factors do not impede the assessment of skill areas such as numeracy and science.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is also concerned about the extra pressures the arrangements regarding the compilation of profiles may place on primary schools.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta does not believe that the post-primary school should be allowed request the Profile in order to choose students.

b. **The Admissions criteria* for over-subscribed schools including any specific number or combination of criteria to be included and whether the criteria should be applied in a specific sequence**

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is of the opinion that the welfare of the child rather than the welfare, ethos or tradition of a particular educational institution, should be the over-riding influence in deciding Admissions Criteria for all schools including over-subscribed schools.

Family-Focused Criteria;

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is of the opinion that this criterion should be permitted.

Community-Based Criteria;

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is of the opinion that this criterion should be permitted.

The definition of community should be flexible enough to include the Irish-speaking community in a particular area, which may not be coterminous with the English-speaking community. This is particularly relevant where IM post-primary provision is provided

through a unit in an English-medium school. In such instances, the English-medium community that the school may serve may be local or parish-based. Because of the small number of schools offering IM post-primary provision, where DE has invested in IM post-primary, it is of paramount importance that this investment is used to its maximum potential and that it caters for children in IM primary provision over a wide area. In most cases this area will be much wider than the area to be served by the English-medium provision.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is concerned that criteria based on parish boundaries, for example, will discriminate against children in IM primary schools where the nearest IM post-primary provision is in a unit in an EM school. In this case, children attending an IM primary school outside the parish would not be included in the criteria.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is concerned that criteria associated with lists of contributory primary schools could potentially discriminate against Irish medium schools and other schools on the periphery. Primary schools that are located far from any post-primary school may not be included as a feeder primary for any post-primary school. It would be important that each primary school is included as a feeder primary school in the admissions criteria of at least one post-primary school were this criterion to be permitted.

It is important that a child attending Irish medium primary provision be facilitated to transfer to the nearest post primary school with suitable Irish-language provision in instances where IM post-primary provision does not exist within a reasonable distance. (this would include the ability of a school to offer some limited provision through the medium of Irish, conversation classes or accelerated access to GCSE and A level provision).

Geographical Criteria;

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is strongly of the opinion that no child should be forced to travel a significant distance to avail of post-primary provision. Therefore, preference should be given to children for whom a particular post-primary school is the nearest suitable post-primary school.

Measures should be taken to avoid a situation arising where children for whom a particular school is the nearest school, are required to travel a significant distance past that school to avail of post-primary provision in a different school, because available places in their nearest school have been allocated to children who also have close alternative provision.

Tiebreakers

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta believes that the fairest tiebreaker is

“the child for whom the particular school is the nearest suitable school”

Signed

Seán Ó Coinn

Príomhfheidhmeannach

Council of Catholic Maintained Schools

CCMS Proposals on Transfer Arrangements

Introduction

The means by which children transfer from primary to post-primary school has masked a range of philosophical as well as practical difficulties and has now, regrettably and without clear reason, become a political issue. Before commenting on the means of transfer it is important to reflect on where this issue fits into a modern education system and specifically into the changing environment of the Northern Ireland system with a revised curriculum and an entitlement framework. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools does not regard education as an end in itself but as a formal means of preparing all young people to contribute to and benefit from society and the education economy. It is not solely a utilitarian pursuit as spiritual and moral teaching underpin an understanding of the individual's contribution to the common good. It is therefore useful to consider some basic 'principles' around which the education system should be organised for the 21st century. These include

- The child is at the centre of the education process and each should be equally valued
- All schools should provide a quality education through a process of continuous improvement
- Social justice and economic realities require that disadvantage is ameliorated and that prevention of failure through investment in early years is preferable to limited and expensive cure in later years
- There should be coherence and connectivity in education and economic policies as part of a Strategic Economic Plan for Northern Ireland
- There should be coherence and consistency in education policies including Collaboration, Area Planning, Post-Primary Structures, Funding, Transport and Admissions Arrangements
- Recognition of the skills needed for the modern world and a curriculum that provides choice and relevance to provide these - not a preparation for an age that has passed
- Understanding that disposition to different learning styles and contexts is not confined to a narrow definition of 'ability'.
- Partnership at every level should be exploited to increase effective access and support for learning including objective careers advice
- Respect for all learning as well as for broader aspects of a shared future

Transfer Arrangements

There is no logical case for ‘selection’ into perceived higher and lower status schools in the modern world. The P.A.C. Report is reflective of a selective system in which the gap between high and low achievement in Northern Ireland is one of the widest in O.E.C.D countries. There is a case, however, for differentiation in the organisation of learning and at 14+ course choice. Many successful education systems defer any formal assessment to differentiate until 16+ Demographic trends require a consolidation of resources through collaboration, within the reasonable expectations of parental choice; not arbitrary divisions, particularly in the context of ‘Open Enrolment’. Schools should serve pupils and communities - not the opposite.

The Bain Report makes clear that there will need to be a significant re-organisation of Post-Primary Education. This was understood by the ‘Costello’ group, when it proposed the notion of ‘informed parental choice’. Implicit in this is that any differentials between schools, either at 11 (but remember that Key Stage Three is a common curriculum) or more likely at 14 will be based on agreements between schools on what they can offer. The key becomes access to the preferred courses rather than a particular school building. Bain makes the case for ‘area planning’ while respecting the sectoral ethos. The logic of this is that schools should be planned (reorganised, replaced or closed) to meet a future need. Such planning leads logically to the Area being the ‘catchment’ referred to in the Admissions criteria. This requires all the relevant providers to ‘agree’ a system of schools organised to meet the particular needs of that area. Every child in that area should have a ‘right’ to admission to any school in that area. This would dispel any concern about ‘post coding’ and that of rural discrimination and ensure a broader, but not necessarily equal, social mix.

Admissions Criteria

To make new arrangements work and to help pupils and parents understand this there needs to be a re-organisation of post primary education to give real meaning to ‘choice’. This is most likely to emerge at 14+. Each area should provide an education which meets that area’s agreed needs, including any ‘Specialists Schools’ or courses with a specific economic focus. In such a scenario there could be a range of delivery structures including, for example, 11-19 multi-lateral schools, single and multiple site management units or even 4-14 or 7-14 schools reflecting the core skill developments of the new Northern Ireland Curriculum.

In this situation the principal admissions criteria should be living in the (large) catchment area and siblings. Sub criteria including other geographical, parish, community or feeder primary schools criteria could be used to manage any over subscription. The Council does not see any logic in ‘eldest’ child as these would be included with the catchment which should conform to the Bain proposal on maximum travel distance, possibly graduated for age.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Pupil Profile

What is the Pupil Profile and what information will it contain?

The Pupil Profile replaces the annual report to parents and will provide a standardised format instead of the variety of formats currently used by schools. In line with current practice, schools will be required to provide the report towards the end of the academic year. The Pupil Profile is not designed or intended to be used as a tool for selection.

The provision of relevant information for parents and pupils and manageability for teachers are two key priorities in developing the Pupil Profile at all Key Stages. A consistent format should make it easier for teachers to complete the report and for parents to access the information in it. The Pupil Profile will contain information about a child's achievements in the cross-curricular skills of communication, using mathematics and using ICT, as well as in the main areas of learning, and about the focus for their development.

Teachers will be able to complete the Pupil Profile electronically using report writing software available in all schools. Banks of comments will be provided which can be used and if necessary modified by teachers.

During the Autumn term teachers will use a computer based diagnostic assessment tool in literacy and in numeracy for pupils in Years 4-7. This information will be used by teachers to inform and review their teaching. The outcomes of these diagnostic assessments will be reported to parents in writing at a meeting with the teacher early in the school year. The information provided will be in the form of a reading age score and a mathematical age score set alongside the pupil's chronological age. The teacher will also set out at that meeting the general plans for learning in the year and any specific learning needs of the individual child.

CCEA is working with schools to investigate whether computer based diagnostic assessment should continue into Key Stage 3 and will provide advice to the Department of Education in due course.

What is the intended use of the Pupil Profile at transfer stage?

Over time, the outcomes of diagnostic assessments build a picture of each child's progress in reading and mathematics. A summary of this information will be provided to parents in the Autumn term of Year 7, and will form part of the information on which parents will base decisions on which post-primary schools to apply to for their children.

The information contained in the Pupil Profile is not designed to place children in rank order. Parents may choose to discuss their child's abilities, interests and achievements with post-primary schools before deciding whether to apply to them. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 provides that parents can request that the Pupil Profile is made available to prospective post-primary schools.

What progress has been made in trialling the Pupil Profile?

CCEA has been developing, testing and refining the Pupil Profile since 2003, including trialling it in a number of schools. During May and June of this year almost 100 primary schools were involved in trialling the Pupil Profile. Participants in the trial included approximately 200 teachers and around 5,000 pupils and their parents.

An independent evaluation of the pilot has been carried out by BDO Stoy Hayward. The outcomes of the evaluation have informed proposals about the content of the Pupil Profile in terms of manageability for teachers and the information parents wanted to see.

The Implementation of Pupil Profile

It is expected that the Pupil Profile will be phased in as follows:

Academic Year	Pupil Profile in for Year Groups
2007/08	Yrs 1 and 5
2008/09	Yrs 2, 6, 8, 9
2009/10	Yrs 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12

This means that those pupils transferring in 2010/11 will have three years' information contained in their Pupil Profiles.

(SCHOOL NAME)
Annual Pupil Profile
(DATE)

Name:
Teacher:
Attendance:

Class:
Punctuality:

Communication (taking account of <i>Language and Literacy</i>)	
Using Mathematics (taking account of <i>Mathematics</i> <i>and Numeracy</i>)	
Using ICT	
Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing Information• Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making• Being Creative• Working with Others• Self Management	
Focus for Development	

The Arts	
Personal Development and Mutual Understanding	
Physical Education	
The World Around Us	

Religious Education (optional)	
---	--

Interests and Strengths	
--------------------------------	--

Optional Content	
-------------------------	--

Teacher :	Date:
Principal:	Date:

(SCHOOL NAME)
Summative Pupil Profile
(DATE)

Name:
Teacher:

Communication	
Using Mathematics	
Using ICT	
Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing Information• Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making• Being Creative• Working with Others• Self Management	
Interests and Strengths	

Teacher :	Date:
Principal:	Date:

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

EXEMPLAR

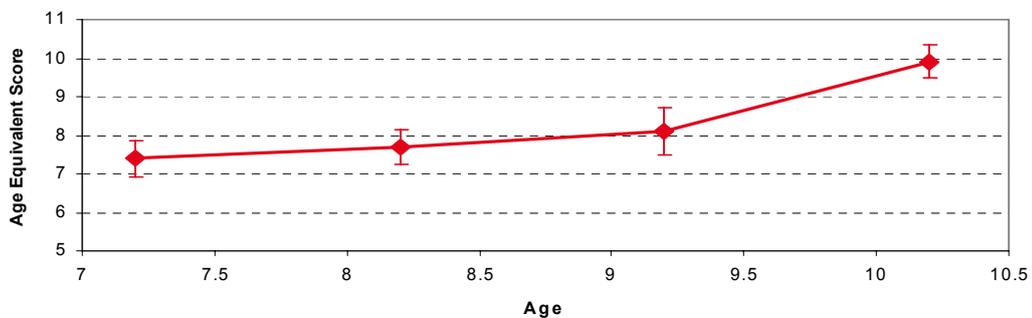
Summative Pupil Profile Summary of Diagnostic Assessment Outcomes

Name: Joshua Elliott
Class: P7

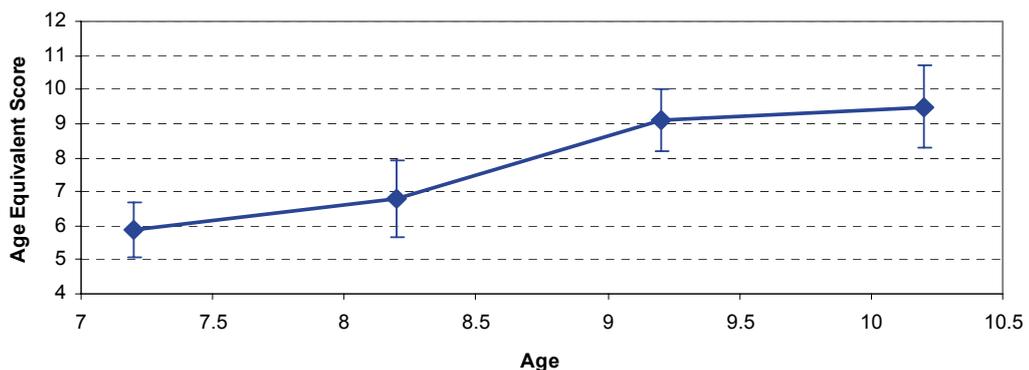
Teacher: Mrs Wright
Date: November 2009

The scores below are the outcomes of assessments carried out at the beginning of each school year from Year 4 to Year 7. The scores are a measure of Joshua's performance at these particular points in time.

Reading



Mathematics



Primary Pupil Profile additional information December 2006

This paper provides additional information to that provided by CCEA to the Assembly Sub-group on Schools Admission Policy on 15 December 2006. The information relates to two key areas;

1. Accessibility of the Pupil Profile to Parents
2. Provision for pupils with Special Needs

1. Accessibility of Pupil Profile to Parents

Pupil Profile trial (2005-2006)

Parental Feedback

An independent evaluation of the Pupil Profile trial has been commissioned by BDO Stoy Hayward. The final report has not yet been published but interim findings relating to parents' views of the Pupil Profile are presented for information. An important part of the trial was to determine how meaningful the report was to parents. The trial took place between March and June 2006 and involved 178 teachers P3-P7. 446 pupils received reports. Details of consultation with parents prior to the 2006 trial are provided in Appendix 1 of this paper.

Questionnaires were distributed to the parents of all pupils who took part in the trial and three parent focus groups were conducted. 244 responses were received.

Key findings

- 84% (n¹ = 236) of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the report provided them with a clear description of their child's progress throughout the school year;
- 85% (n = 232) of parents agreed or strongly agreed that when built up over a number of years, and discussed with teachers, the Pupil Profile would be helpful when making decisions on post-primary education;
- qualitative evidence from the parents' focus groups, suggests that a number of areas of the report need to be further developed to make it clearer and to help make decisions relating to post-primary selection;
- 74% (n = 234) of parents felt that the Pupil Profile gave them a clear indication of their child's future learning needs;
- 89% (n = 229) of parents felt that it is useful to receive the Pupil Profile report at the end of June. However, the qualitative feedback from the parent surveys and focus groups suggests that the introduction of an additional Pupil Profile report at a mid-point in a school year would be beneficial to allow for remedial action to be undertaken, on a timely basis, if a child is having difficulties;

¹ n = number of respondents to each question

- within the focus groups and questionnaires, parents voiced concerns that the diagnostic assessment aspect of the Pupil Profile would not reflect changes in a child's educational development during the school year, if undertaken at the start of the school year;
- also, within the focus groups, parents suggested that they were confused about the purpose of the Pupil Profile report. They were unsure if the report has been created to replace the current 11 Plus Transfer Test or whether it could be used to support an application to a post-primary school;
- parents who attended the focus groups felt that there needed to be a greater level of communication to them relating to the Pupil Profile; and
- 96% (n = 74) of parents strongly agreed or agreed that the information provided by the diagnostic assessments was useful for them to know about.

Positives expressed by parents

The Pupil Profile:

- provided a clear description of their child's progress throughout the school year;
- would be helpful when making decisions on post-primary education;
- provided a clear indication of their child's future learning needs;
- is useful to receive the Pupil Profile report at the end of June;
- the information provided by the diagnostic assessments was useful for them to know about.

Concerns expressed by parents

The feedback from focus group and questionnaires suggested that parents:

- felt that a number of areas of the report need to be further developed to make it clearer and to help make decisions relating to post-primary selection;
- suggested that the introduction of an additional Pupil Profile report at a mid-point in a school year would be beneficial to allow for remedial action to be undertaken, on a timely basis, if a child is having difficulties;
- voiced concerns that the diagnostic assessment aspect of the Pupil Profile would not reflect changes in a child's educational development during the school year, if undertaken at the start of the school year;
- were confused about the purpose of the Pupil Profile report. They were unsure if the report has been created to replace the current 11-Plus Transfer Test or whether it could be used to support an application to a post-primary school;
- felt a greater level of communication to them relating to the Pupil Profile is needed.

2. **Pupil Profile for Inclusion and Special Educational Needs (SEN) in primary school age learners**

In this paper the term Special Educational Needs (SEN) refers to any learner who carries a statement of special educational needs within the Northern Ireland primary school sector. Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) refers to learners with SEN accommodated within mainstream primary schools or within MLD schools. Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) refers to all pupils accommodated in special schools.

During development of the Pupil Profile CCEA consulted the following:

- The Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (Northern Ireland) Order, 2005
- Ongoing Department of Education Special Educational Needs Review

Advice was also taken from:

- CCEA Special Educational Needs Steering Group, including representatives from the Department of Education, ETI, Education and Library Boards, Regional Training Unit, Principal Psychologists, special schools and mainstream schools
- CCEA Pupil Profile Consultation Group, including representatives from mainstream and special schools

Two Pupil Profile report formats are proposed:

1. **Inclusive primary report format** – for use across mainstream schools (inclusion), in schools specialising in teaching pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) and with selected learners in schools specialising in teaching pupils with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) based on the decisions of the school management team and matched to the individual needs of the learner
2. **SEN primary report format** – for use with all learners with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) and with selected SLD pupils based on the decisions of the school management team and matched to the individual needs of the learner

SLD and PMLD pupils attending special schools will not take the diagnostic CAT.

Inclusive Pupil Profile report format

The Primary Pupil Profile trial (2005-2006) included teachers and Special Educational Needs co-ordinators from MLD units attached to participating primary schools.

External evaluation also targeted specific questions to address the appropriateness of the Inclusive Pupil Profile report format to meet the needs of SEN learners within mainstream. An inclusive Pupil Profile report format was found to be appropriate for all MLD learners.

SEN Pupil Profile report format

The SEN Pupil Profile report format was developed by teachers who specialise in Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD). Feedback was invited from all special school principals and all teachers of PMLD pupils.

SEN Pupil Profile report format was found to be appropriate for all PMLD learners.

Both the Inclusive Pupil Profile report format and the SEN Pupil Profile report format were examined by a group of teachers specialising in Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD). They felt that both report formats should be made available to report on SLD learners, that the decision should rest with school management teams in cooperation with parents and should be based on the needs of individual learners.

Feedback was invited from all special school principals and all teachers of SLD pupils.

It was confirmed that both report formats should be made available to report on SLD learners, that the decision should rest with school management teams in cooperation with parents and should be based on the needs of individual learners.

APPENDIX 1

Pupil Profile 2003 – 2007 Consultation with parents

Profile	Year	Method	Rate
Foundation	2004 – 2005	Questionnaire April 05	156 respondents
		Questionnaire June 05	83 respondents
		Focus Group June 05	17 parents
	2005-2006	Questionnaire May 06	208 respondents
		Focus Group June 06	13 parents
KS1&2	2003 – 2004	Questionnaire March 04	111 respondents
		Focus Group March 04	12 Parents
	2004-2005	Questionnaire Dec 04	395 respondents
		Questionnaire April 05	81 respondents
		2 Focus Groups	4 parents
	2005-2006	BDO contract Questionnaire Focus Groups	

Response by CCEA to Hansard evidence.

16 January 2007

Mr McNarry's question at the Schools Admission Policy Committee concerned the potential for a legal challenge from the parent of a child rejected from a post-Primary school after having disclosed their child's profile to the head teacher of that school.

Although parents are free to share their child's Pupil Profile report with a post-Primary school of their choice, a receiving school cannot use this information as the basis for selection.

The Pupil Profile report will contain a variety of information including informed professional judgements of teachers. In our view the grounds for challenging such judgements in the Pupil Profile report are no different than would currently exist in response to a school report or any professional judgement about a child.

Department of Education

From: David Woods
Department of Education

Date: 6 December 2006

To: Stella McArdle

Admissions to Post-primary Schools

To assist the Sub-Group in its consideration of this issue, and in advance of the requested oral brief from DE officials, I am enclosing the following factual material:

- Brief Chronology of post-primary review – Paper 1
- Current Legislative position and timetable for future decisions – Paper 2
- Pupil Profile: briefing note – Paper 3
- Admissions Criteria: information paper on non-academic criteria – Paper 4
- Admissions Process for parents (in non-selective scenario) – Paper 5
- Recent statistics on grammar school admissions – Paper 6.

It is noted that the Sub-Group's terms of reference include a requirement to identify 'any other appropriate arrangements that may be considered'. There are several dimensions to be considered in that connection and in the course of its deliberations the Sub-Group may find it helpful to refer to the broad factors listed in the annex to this note.

Officials attending the oral briefing will be Dr Robson Davison, Mr David Woods,

Mr Leslie Ashe and Mr John Leonard.



D Woods

Annex

Admissions Policy – Some Key Factors

The following are some of the key questions relating to Admissions Policy that have been part of the discussion of this issue. This is not an exhaustive list.

By whom should admissions decisions be taken?

- By schools?
- By Parents?
- By a third party – eg the new Education and Skills Authority or some other agency?

On what basis should admissions decisions be taken?

- By reference to a pupil's academic ability?
- Without reference to a pupil's academic ability?

If academic ability is to be an admissions criterion, on what basis should ability be ascertained?

- By use of tests? (Existing Transfer Tests to end in 2008, so necessary to determine the method of testing thereafter.)
- By means of teacher assessment or some other indicators?
- By some combination of these?

If there is to be selection on the basis of academic ability, at what stage should that be done?

- At age 11
- At a later age?

Note: The existing physical configuration of schools would still require pupils to transfer at age 11 even if selection were to happen later. Non-academic admissions criteria would therefore be required for transfer at age 11.

If academic selection is not to be part of the transfer arrangements, on what basis should pupils transfer?

- By reference to informed parental choice (and the application of non-academic admissions criteria if a school is oversubscribed)?
- By reference to pre-determined catchment areas or admission zones set by an external agency?

Brief Chronology of the Post-Primary Review

Autumn 1998	Education Minister Tony Worthington, MP, commissioned research into the effects of the selective system.
September 2000	Publication of the research report 'The Effects of the Selective System of Secondary Education in Northern Ireland' by Profs Gallagher (QUB) and Smith (UU).
September 2000	Following publication of the research findings, Martin McGuinness MP MLA established the independent Post-Primary Review Body, chaired by Mr Gerry Burns, to consult widely, identify key issues and make recommendations for new post-primary arrangements.
October 2001	'Education for the 21st Century: Report by the Post-Primary Review Body' (the Burns Report) was published for consultation. The multi-stranded consultation on this ended on 28 June 2002.
October 2002	'The Review of Post-Primary Education: Report on the Responses to Consultation' was published.
April 2003	After the suspension of devolution, Jane Kennedy, MP, established the Post-Primary Review Working Group, chaired by Mr Steve Costello. The group's task was to take account of the responses to the consultation on the Burns Report, including the diversity of views on academic selection, and provide advice on options for future arrangements.
November 2003	The Working Group submitted its report (Costello Report) to Jane Kennedy.
January 2004	Jane Kennedy published the advice from the Working Group, accepted its recommendations in full, including the ending of the Transfer Tests in 2008.
January 2005	Barry Gardiner, MP, published a consultation document on new admissions arrangements. The consultation ended on 30 June 2005.
December 2005	Angela Smith, MP, announced new admissions arrangements due to come into effect after 2009, and launched a consultation on the draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 which ran until March 2006. A summary report on the responses to the admissions consultation was published.
June 2006	Maria Eagle, MP, announced that the draft Education Order had been laid before Parliament and published a report on responses to the consultation on the Order. In recognition of the process to restore devolution, a vote by the Assembly will be required to end academic selection, provided the Assembly is restored by 24 November.
June/July 2006	Debates in both Houses of Parliament. Draft Order approved and made at the July Privy Council meeting.
November 2006	Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 extended the timeframe for restoration of devolution to 28 March 2007.

Consultations on new post-primary arrangements

Consultation	Dates
Public consultation (including household survey) on Burns Report	October 2001 - June 2002
Public consultation on new admissions arrangements	January - June 2005
Public consultation on Proposal for a draft Education Order	December 2005 - March 2006

Paper 2

Admission to Post-primary School

Legislative Position and Timescale for Future Decisions

The legislative framework for admissions to post-primary schools in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 has been amended by the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 as follows:

- The 2006 Order repealed and replaced some of the current provisions relating to selection and admissions in the 1997 Order from 1 October 2006 to take effect in relation to admissions after 31 July 2010. This allows the current arrangements to govern admissions up to and including the 2009/10 school year. Admissions regulations made under the 1997 Order lapse after 2009/10.
- The 2006 Order thus amended gives the Department power to:
 - make regulations governing the content of admissions criteria which will apply to admissions after 31 July 2010;
 - issue statutory guidance on admissions, to which schools must have regard;
 - make regulations empowering it to direct a school to reconsider unpublished admissions criteria if the Department has concerns about the content of those criteria.
- The regulations governing the content of admissions criteria may make different provision for different types of school. Options on admissions are not therefore constrained by having to determine criteria which apply to all schools in the same way.
- If the Assembly is not restored by 28 March 2007, the ban on academic selection as an admissions criterion will come into force immediately, to take effect in relation to admissions after 31 July 2010.

Timescale for Decisions on New Arrangements

The new admissions arrangements therefore need to be in place to apply to the admission of pupils to post-primary schools in September 2010 and there is a statutory requirement to consult on new admissions criteria regulations before they are made.

Final decisions will need to be made in sufficient time to allow schools to determine their admissions criteria and to enable parents to become familiar with the new arrangements well in advance to allow them to consider their choices.

Key milestones

Decisions on new arrangements agreed	Summer 2007
Admissions criteria regulations drafted	Summer 2007
Consultation on regulations	October - December 2007 (12 weeks)
Final decisions taken and regulations made (to take effect for September 2010 admissions)	Early 2008
Schools decide admissions criteria	By end 2008
September 2010 admissions process begins	April – June 2009

Notes:

Pupils currently in P5 will be the last to sit the existing transfer tests.

Pupils currently in P4 and below will transfer under the new arrangements.

Paper 3

Pupil Profile

What is the purpose of the Pupil Profile/what information will it contain?

The Pupil Profile replaces the annual report to parents and will provide a standardised format instead of the variety of formats currently used by schools. In line with what currently happens, schools will be required to provide the report towards the end of the academic year. The Pupil Profile is not designed or intended to be used as a tool for selection.

It is expected that the Pupil Profile will be phased in as follows:

Academic Year	Pupil Profile in for Year Groups
2007/08	Yrs 1 and 5
2008/09	Yrs 2, 6, 8, 9
2009/10	Yrs 3, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12

Manageability for teachers and provision of relevant information for parents and pupils are two key priorities in developing the Pupil Profile at all Key Stages. A consistent format should make it easier for teachers to complete the report, and for parents to access the information in it. The Pupil Profile will contain information about a child's achievements in the cross-curricular skills of communication, using mathematics and using ICT, as well as in the main areas of learning, and about the focus for their development.

Teachers will be able to complete the Pupil Profile electronically - this has been developed with CCEA and C2k, taking account of teacher requirements for ease of use.

During the Autumn term teachers will use a computer based **diagnostic** assessment tool in literacy and in numeracy for pupils in Years 4-7. The outcomes of these diagnostic assessments will be reported to parents in writing at a meeting with the teacher. This will be in the form of a reading age score and a mathematical age score set alongside the pupil's chronological age. This information will be used by teachers to inform and review their teaching.

CCEA are working with schools to investigate whether computer based diagnostic assessment should continue into Key Stage 3 and will provide advice to the Department in due course.

How will the Pupil Profile be used at transfer stage?

Over the 4 years of computer based diagnostic assessment information at primary school, a picture will build for each child of their progress in reading and mathematics. A summary of

this information will be provided to parents in the Autumn term of Year 7, and will form part of the information on which parents will base decisions on which post-primary schools to apply to for their children.

The information contained in the Pupil Profile is not capable of rank ordering pupils. Parents may choose to discuss their child's abilities, interests and achievements with post-primary schools before deciding whether to apply to them. It is up to the parent to decide if they wish to share the information contained in the Pupil Profile with the school: the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 provides that parents can request that the Pupil Profile is made available to prospective post-primary schools.

What progress has been made in trialling the Pupil Profile?

CCEA has been developing, testing and refining the Pupil Profile since 2003, including trialling it in a number of schools. During May and June of this year almost 100 primary schools were involved in trialling the Pupil Profile. Participants in the trial included approximately 200 teachers and around 5,000 pupils and their parents.

An independent evaluation of the pilot has been carried out by BDO Stoy Hayward. The outcomes of the evaluation have informed proposals about the content of the Pupil Profile in terms of manageability for teachers and the information parents wanted to see.

It is intended to introduce the Pupil Profile for Years 1 and 5 from September 2007. This means that those pupils transferring in 2010/11 will have three years' information contained in their Pupil Profiles.

Paper 4

Admissions Criteria

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Sub Group with information on the work to date on developing new post-primary admissions criteria to be used by schools from the 2010/11 school year. This paper deals only with possible non-academic admissions criteria. These would be required whether or not it is decided that academic selection should form part of future admissions policy: they would be used by non-grammar schools, and also by grammar schools where it is necessary to differentiate within a given 'ability' group.

Present Admissions Arrangements

The present admissions arrangements take place within a selective system of post-primary education with grammar schools able to select pupils by ability on the basis of grades achieved in the transfer procedure test. The system operates on the basis of open enrolment whereby parents can express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend and schools must comply with that choice up to the limit of their approved admissions and enrolment numbers. Boards of Governors are the admissions authorities and where schools are oversubscribed with applications they apply admissions criteria that they determine. Schools have a wide discretion in this respect: the only restriction in regulations is that grammar schools must admit by grade order save for the consideration of any special circumstances, and non-grammar schools must not admit on the basis of ability. Some 37% of the annual transfer cohort of 24,000 pupils are admitted to grammar schools each year.

Work on new Admissions Criteria

The Ministerial statement of 6 December 2005 set out the main elements of the proposed menu of criteria and signalled the intention to draft regulations for publication early in 2007. This timescale is to allow for detailed discussion and consultation well in advance of the regulations coming into effect, to apply to admissions in the 2010/11 school year and future years.

The intended regulations would prescribe the permitted criteria that oversubscribed post-primary schools would use to select pupils for admission. The permitted criteria would be in line with the principles underpinning the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools set out in the 6 December statement. These principles state that the new admissions arrangements should:

- put the interests of the child at the centre of the decision-making process;

- be transparent, consistent and easily understood by parents;
- be based upon informed choice by parents and pupils;
- be fair and free from any bias or indirect discrimination against particular groups or individuals; and
- acknowledge that schools normally serve local communities.

Additionally, the statement indicated that the guiding principles in relation to admissions criteria would be:

- to retain as much flexibility as possible, so that schools can reflect their local circumstances; and
- to ensure that the combined effect of the criteria does not result in postcode selection or social exclusion, and that it does not disadvantage pupils living in particular areas, e.g. rural areas, or pupils attending primary schools that are not given an appropriate degree of priority for admission.

Permitted non-academic admissions criteria to be included in the regulations

The 6 December 2005 statement also outlined the non-academic criteria that it is proposed to include in the regulations. The criteria are:

- sibling currently at the school;
- eldest child;
- feeder primary schools;
- parish;
- catchment area;
- nearest suitable school;
- random selection tie-breaker; and
- distance from home to school tie-breaker.

Open menu approach

The Education Order 2006 enables the Department to specify in regulations the order and sequencing in which criteria should be applied. However, to give schools as much flexibility as possible, the current intention is to provide an open menu approach, ie the menu would specify the permitted non-academic criteria but not restrict schools regarding which non-academic criteria they select or the order in which the criteria are applied. The vast majority of schools, parents and members of the public who responded to the admissions arrangements consultation in 2005 supported the open menu approach.

The proposed permitted criteria

Taking account of legal advice and research on definitions used in NI and GB, the following definitions have been developed for each criterion.

Sibling: this criterion could be defined: “children who have a child of the family currently enrolled at the school.” The phrase “child of the family” would cover children fostered, adopted etc. and avoids having to define all the various permutations of sibling. This criterion is very widely used at present and as with other elements of the menu would provide for continuity in the new arrangements.

Eldest child: this could be defined: “children who are the eldest child to be eligible to be admitted to the school.” This wording covers “only” children: twins (or other multiples) would be treated as joint eldest. The term “eldest” can include eldest boy/girl in the case of single sex schools. Again this criterion features in most schools’ criteria at present and would provide for continuity.

Feeder primary schools: it would be a matter for the school to define what constitutes a feeder school. This would give schools a great deal of flexibility to take account of particular local circumstances, but if any school sought to misuse this criterion to omit a nearby neighbourhood primary school from the list, the Department has a legislative power to intervene to prevent this happening.

Preparatory departments of grammar schools would be treated as feeder primary schools but grammar schools would not be able to single them out as a higher priority in admissions criteria than other feeder schools. Schools may, however, wish to give differing degrees of priority to different groups of feeder schools. In this case it would be acceptable for a grammar school to include its preparatory department in the highest priority group.

Parish: this is widely used in the maintained sector in a clear and straightforward manner as a de facto catchment area. The criterion could be defined: “children who reside in a named parish”. It is not proposed to define the term ‘parish’ but rather to rely on the widely understood meaning of the term.

Catchment area: the criterion could be defined: “children who reside in the named catchment area of the school”. It would be for the Board of Governors of the school to draw their catchment area. This criterion is also widely used at present, being defined variously by district council areas, geographical areas etc. If any school sought to misuse this criterion to unfairly exclude particular areas, the Department could intervene to prevent this happening. It would be acceptable for schools that wish to draw from a wide area to have more than one catchment area with a certain percentage of their intake drawn from these.

Nearest suitable school/nearest school in that school sector: the criterion could be: “children for whom the school is the nearest suitable school/nearest school in that school sector.” Nearest would likely be defined as: “nearest to the child’s normal place of residence.” When considering applications, the decision for the Board of Governors would be whether or not there is another school in the same sector as theirs (i.e. denominational grammar, non-denominational grammar, controlled, maintained, integrated, Irish medium), which is nearer to the child’s address. If not, the child would meet the criterion. This criterion is currently used by schools in rural areas to give a degree of priority to rural children and prevent rural

disadvantage because it means that no matter how far the child lives from the school, if it is their nearest suitable school, they can be selected. To address rural concerns about geographical criteria, the admissions guidance document would include a strong recommendation that schools serving rural areas should use this criterion.

Tiebreakers: The December 2005 statement listed two possible tiebreakers, namely **random selection** and **proximity from home to school**. The two criteria could therefore be: “a method of random selection” and “the distance of the school from the child’s home address”. The relevant definition for the latter would be: “home address means the child’s normal place of residence.”

It is recognised that there are concerns that the ‘proximity’ tiebreaker could have a detrimental effect for rural communities. It is expected that departmental guidance document would recommend that schools serving rural areas should therefore adopt the random selection tiebreaker.

If schools are to avoid legal challenge, random selection should provide a clear audit trail of the selection process. One option widely used by schools is a criterion that uses a randomly generated list of alphabet letters, which are then related to pupil surnames (and if necessary first names also).

Intervention power to prevent misuse of admissions criteria

As stated above, one of the principles underlying the new admissions criteria is “to ensure that the combined effect of the criteria does not result in postcode selection or social exclusion, and that it does not disadvantage pupils living in particular areas e.g. rural areas or pupils attending feeder primary schools that are not given an appropriate degree of priority for admission.” To address this principle the Department has a power in the Education Order 2006, which enables it to create regulations empowering it to:

- direct a school to reconsider any criteria drawn up but not yet published in the light of concerns of the Department about the likely effect of the application of those criteria on admissions to the school; and
- prevent the publication of any such criteria without the Department’s consent.

Examples of misuse would include where a criterion was unfairly excluding a specific local primary school from a list of feeder primary schools, or a catchment area was drawn in such a way that would unjustifiably exclude pupils from a local housing estate.

Guidance on Admissions

Additionally, the Education Order 2006 enables the Department to produce statutory guidance on admissions arrangements to which schools and other bodies “must have regard”. This guidance would supplement the regulations and guide and support schools in implementing the new arrangements.

Paper 5

New Admissions Arrangements – 2009/10 School Year

Step By Step Process For Parents

Many of these steps will be familiar to any parent whose child has gone through the transfer process recently.

P6 meeting with primary school – May/June of P6 year

- Parents attend one to one annual parent-teacher meeting with P6 teacher to discuss their child's progress, including their P6 Pupil Profile.

Primary School teacher/Principal will provide general information and advice, but will not recommend a specific school.

Parents gather/receive information on a range of schools – from September of P7 year

- Parents receive an information pack from their local Education and Library Board including the Transfer Booklet and a guidance leaflet explaining the transfer process.
- Parents and P7 pupils can attend Open Days/Evenings arranged by post-primary schools and obtain copies of school prospectuses. Schools will also have details on their websites which parents and pupils can access.
- Parents can arrange and attend informal discussions with prospective post-primary schools, if desired. Parents may take their child's P6 Pupil Profile to the meeting to inform discussions.

These meetings are not compulsory and parents can decide whether or not to show the Pupil Profile to the post-primary school at or before the meeting.

Parents complete Transfer Form – late November/early December

- Parents meet with the primary school Principal to complete the Transfer Form, taking account of the information in the Pupil Profile and what they have found out about prospective post-primary schools.

Applications are processed – January – March

- Post-primary schools receive Transfer Forms from their local Education and Library Board and begin processing applications. Where a school has more applications than places available, the school will apply its admissions criteria to decide which pupils to admit.

Schools will draw from a menu of admissions criteria, but will not be allowed to use any form of academic selection as part of their criteria.

Parents receive a letter confirming a school place – March

- Parents receive a letter from their local Education and Library Board advising of the post-primary school into which their child has been accepted.

Appeals Process – April

- Any parent who wishes to appeal the decision made must give notice of intention to appeal.

Paper 6

Intakes to grammar schools - transfer grades by %age of admissions

Transfer Test Grade	1998/1999 % of Admissions	2001/2002 % of Admissions	2002/2003 % of Admissions	2003/2004 % of Admissions	2004/2005 % of Admissions	2005/2006 % of Admissions	2006/2007 % of Admissions
As and Bs	95	91	91	90	90	89	89
Cs and Ds	4	8	8	8	9	10	11
Other	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total (+/-100 due to rounding)	100	100	100	(99)	100	100	(101)

Department of Education

Sub Group On Admissions Policy Admissions Arrangements for Children with Special Educational Needs

Background

The responsibilities on schools and Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in terms of making provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) are set out in the Education Order (NI) 1996 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005. The Department of Education has issued guidance in its statutory 'Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs' (1998) and the more recent 'Supplement to the Code' (2005). The Code sets out a five-stage process for the identification and assessment of children with SEN starting with school-based stages and ending, for those children with more complex needs, with a Statement of SEN, produced by the ELB.

Children who are assessed through the ELBs statutory assessment process, as having significant needs, may move to stage 5 of the process and a Statement of SEN may be put in place. In the 2005 Annual School Census some 11,961 children were identified as having Statements out of a total of 54,017 children with SEN at all 5 stages of the Code of Practice.

The Statement will set out the special educational and non-educational needs of the child and the special educational and non-educational provision to be made to meet those needs. In addition it will name the placement where the special educational provision is to be made. It is the responsibility of the ELB, in discussion with the child, the parents, potential schools and a range of health and education professionals, to determine the most suitable school for a child with a Statement. This school is then named in the Statement by the ELB and the child takes up placement there.

Current Admissions Arrangements

The current admissions arrangements include special procedures for children with special educational needs.

The post-primary placement of statemented children takes place outside the constraints of the normal open enrolment arrangements to ensure the child is placed in a school most suited to meet their needs. The placement for the child is therefore determined through consultation involving the child, the parents, the Education and Library Board and the post-primary school. This ensures that the placement is based on as comprehensive a picture as possible

of the child's needs and the school best placed to meet them. These statutory arrangements are in place to ensure the needs of the child are paramount.

The review of the statement takes place in consultation with parents and if a grammar school education is considered appropriate, then the child is placed in a grammar school. This ensures that statemented children have appropriate access to a grammar school education.

Children with special educational needs who do not have a Statement of Special Educational Needs are admitted to schools as part of the open enrolment arrangements. If they are seeking a grammar school place they do sit the transfer test.

The Department has, however, put in place a special procedure within the Transfer Procedure arrangements whereby pupils with special educational needs can bring their special circumstances to the attention of the Board of Governors of the grammar school to which they seek admission along with the relevant supporting medical and educational information. Grammar schools must consider any claims and have the power to admit such pupils, irrespective of the test grade achieved.

Review of Special Educational Needs

The Department of Education commenced a review of SEN and Inclusion in April this year to review and further develop policy on special education and inclusion. The purpose of the review is to bring forward comprehensive recommendations having regard to continuity and quality of provision; equality of access; consistency of assessment and provision; delivery and funding and accountability mechanisms; value for money; affordability; and monitoring arrangements. The review is being taken forward in 3 phases: SEN Audit and Benchmark; Policy, Research and Development; Legislation and Code of Practice.

Key stakeholders have been consulted throughout to assist in the identification of the main issues and possible solutions. A model is being developed but since that work is not yet complete and has not been discussed and agreed with the Minister, it is not possible to debate potential outcomes with the Sub Group.

Departmental Response to Queries on Feeder Primary Schools From the Assembly Subgroup on Schools Admission Policy

1. The Programme for Government Committee's queries on Feeder Primary Schools are:
 1. How will feeder primary schools be designated?
 2. Who approves the process of designated feeder primary schools by post-primary schools?
 3. Are there any restrictions on the feeder primary schools that post-primary schools may want to include?
 4. What intervention will the Department have in the event of misuse or complaint? What will the role of the proposed ESA be in this process?

General Context

2. Specific answers to queries are below. An important general point is that Feeder Primary schools will operate within the context of the stated aim of admissions policy. In her 6 December 2005 statement on the new post-primary arrangements, the Minister stated that the guiding principles in relation to admissions criteria are:
 - to retain as much flexibility as possible, so that schools can reflect their local circumstances; and
 - to ensure that the combined effect of the criteria does not result in postcode selection or social exclusion, and that it does not disadvantage pupils living in particular areas, e.g. rural areas or pupils attending primary schools that are not given an appropriate degree of priority for admission.

On Query 1

3. It would be a matter for a post-primary school to define what constitutes a feeder school. This will give schools a great deal of flexibility to take account of particular local circumstances but if any school sought to misuse this criterion to omit a nearby neighbourhood primary school from the list (where there would be a reasonable expectation that it would be included), the Department has the power to intervene to prevent this happening (more on this below).

On Queries 2, 3 and 4

4. These queries all relate to how the use of Feeder primary schools within admissions arrangements will be monitored and regulated. The answers to these queries are the accounts below of the new powers taken by the Government within the 2006 Education Order:

- A new intervention power to prevent misuse of admissions criteria; and
 - The power to issue statutory guidance on admissions.
5. *New intervention power to prevent misuse of admissions criteria:* in line with the need to have flexible, local arrangements (according to the principle outlined above), and based on previous experience of a system in which, for instance, Feeder primary schools have been widely used as an admissions criterion without problems for many years, it is not envisaged that the Department or the ESA will have a formal approval role in relation to schools' admission criteria. Instead, it will be appropriate for the Department to have the ability to intervene in the small number of cases where, in its view, an individual school is planning to use permitted admissions criteria in a way that is unacceptable and unfair. Therefore, the Department has a power in the Education (NI) Order 2006, which enables it to create regulations empowering it to:
- direct a school to reconsider any criteria drawn up but not yet published in the light of concerns of the Department about the likely effect of the application of those criteria on admissions to the school; and
 - prevent the publication of any such criteria without the Department's consent.
6. Examples of unacceptable use of admissions criteria would include where a criterion was unfairly excluding a specific local primary school from a list of feeder primary schools, or a catchment area was drawn in such a way that would unjustifiably exclude pupils from a local housing estate. In the past there have been very few examples of schools adopting exclusionary practices but the Department believes it will be important that it has the power to intervene should that become necessary. The ESA will publish the admissions criteria of post-primary schools as the ELBs do now. If the Department decides to prevent publication of any school's criteria it will of course instruct the ESA accordingly.

Guidance on Admissions

7. *The power to issue statutory guidance on admissions:* additionally we have taken a new power in the Order to enable the Department to produce statutory guidance on admissions arrangements which schools and other bodies "must have regard to". At present we issue comprehensive (but non-statutory) guidance and circulars to schools, parents and education authorities each year about the current admissions arrangements.
8. From 2008 we will issue stronger guidance to supplement the regulations and to guide and support schools in implementing the new arrangements. This will be particularly critical in the period from 2008 onwards when schools will start to draw up their new admissions criteria.
9. As well as providing guidance on the new menu of admissions criteria, the guidance will also cover all other aspects of the new admissions arrangements. Information to be included would cover: the admissions timetable, advice to schools and parents on the use of the pupil profile and their roles and responsibilities, the expression of parental preferences, admissions criteria, exceptional circumstances, appeal arrangements etc.

General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland

Consultation on New Admission Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools Council Response.

June 2005

Consultation on New Admission Arrangements for Post-primary Schools

1.0 Introduction

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) was established to promote the professional interests of teachers and has been in existence since October 2002. It is the statutory, independent, self-regulatory body for the teaching profession and is dedicated to enhancing the status of teachers and to upholding the highest standards of professional conduct and practice.

- 1.1. In seeking to respond to this consultation, the Council has found itself in a difficult situation. In short, the Council is concerned that the timing of this consultation exercise is out of kilter with the ongoing work of the Costello implementation team. That team is presently considering a variety of issues in terms of the entitlement curriculum, specialist schools and how best to expedite the cooperative working that the new entitlement curriculum will require. Whilst the Council might have reservations about the introduction of specialist schools into an educational landscape already fraught with uncertainty, it is the issue of how the system will facilitate cooperative working that the Council is most concerned with at this stage.

Cooperative working logistics.

At the moment all the system is aware of is the introduction of an entitlement curriculum, presumably with a requirement that schools admitting pupils are in a position to ensure that all pupils will have access to it. What is not clear is the nature of the practical arrangements that need to be put in place to facilitate access for all to the new entitlement curriculum.

In essence this consultation process requires that we reflect on how best to facilitate admission to the post primary system but with no real understanding as to:

- How that system will be structured?

- What the relationships – contractual or otherwise – will be between diverse schools?
- How “specialist schools” will impact on demand and how these will integrate into the new collective arrangements? Indeed, there is some evidence that the move to greater school diversity can distort local admissions arrangements. In this context there is a danger that the development of specialist schools could distort schools’ admissions within a given area and consequently arouse feelings of injustice among those denied places by virtue of the application of admissions criteria which may generally favour those living within the relevant (frequently highly favoured) catchment areas.¹
- What arrangements will be put in place to preserve “integrity of entitlement” at a time of demographic decline and consequent financial retrenchment? If the entitlement curriculum is delivered by consortia of schools how will the constituent parts be assured in an environment that is inherently volatile?
- What will be the final format of pupil profiles? The Council has had some insight into CCEA thinking but thus far does not feel that it would be in a position to make a definitive evaluation of this particular aspect of policy.

The Council recognises that the issue of admissions criteria is vital in a post-academic selection era but would suggest that the timing of this consultation is inappropriate. The Council believes that the structural issues, some of which are mentioned above, should be resolved in advance of any consultation on admissions. Our response must therefore be contextualised within these reservations.

The response is in keeping with the Council’s aim to contribute to the development of a world class education system for all children and young people in Northern Ireland. Moreover, the Council’s Mission Statement, which dedicates it to enhancing the status of teaching and promoting the highest standards of professional conduct and practice, will be assisted by admissions procedures for post-primary schools which take account of the professional experience and wisdom of the teaching profession. Moreover, it is important to emphasise that whatever admissions criteria are put in place, that the pressures on children and parents must be greatly diminished under any new arrangements.

2.0 Principles and Objectives

- 2.1. The principles outlined at paragraph 2.2, chapter 2 of the consultation document are laudable and provide a sound basis for the development of detailed policy. The principle which puts the interests of the child at the centre of the decision making process is in keeping with articles enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which the UK is a signatory [ratified by the UK on 16th December 1991]. Article 3(1) states:

“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”

¹ Meredith, Paul – *Diversity, Diversity, Diversity – Education and the Law*, Vol. 13, No.3, 2001.

The above article emphasises that all actions concerning the child should take full account of his or her best interests. Indeed, the state has an obligation to provide adequate care when parents or guardians fail to do so.

- 2.2. Furthermore, Article 12 enshrines the child’s right to express an opinion, and to have that opinion taken into account, in any matter or procedure affecting the child. Article 12(1) says that:

“State Parties shall assure the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

It is suggested that this obligation is met implicitly in the principles outlined at 2.2 but that for greater clarity the obligation should be made explicit.

- 2.3. It should also be pointed out at this juncture that schools often have to achieve a balance of rights and meet a range of legal responsibilities. It is therefore important that new admissions arrangements do not place schools in contradictory situations. The principles in 2.2 which uphold transparency and consistency are therefore important.

- 2.4. Moreover, the commitment that the new admissions arrangements be fair and free from any bias or indirect discrimination against particular groups or individuals is in keeping with Article 2 of the convention which places an obligation on states to protect children from any form of discrimination. Again, the state must not violate any right and must take positive action to promote anti-discriminatory practice. The principle that refers to the relationship between schools and the communities they serve reflects competence 12 of the new revised teacher competences being proposed by GTCNI which states:

“Teachers will have developed a knowledge and understanding of the interrelationship between schools and the communities they serve, and the potential for mutual development and well-being.”

- 2.5. The objectives for the new admissions arrangements outlined at 2.3 are built on, and in keeping with, the principles outlined at 2.2. The objective which states:

“.....ensure as far as possible that the admissions criteria of schools in a local area are complementary, so that each child is given some priority under at least one set of admissions criteria in that area;”

is particularly important but will present schools with complex coordination arrangements to ensure that this objective is met. This will require greater cooperation among schools and more coordinated planning. Partnership relationships among schools will be of paramount importance to ensure that the new admissions arrangements work. It is important that all necessary steps are taken to ensure that the demographic downturn does not exacerbate the existing competitive ethos which often bedevils school relationships.

- 2.6. Furthermore, in keeping with the principles of the new Northern Ireland Curriculum which will necessitate greater co-operative working among schools, it is important that some management arrangement is put in place to ensure that this objective is met as well as the other objectives outlined at 2.3. Given that the Education and Library Boards currently

provide data and manage the post-primary transfer arrangements, including school admissions criteria, they might be best placed to take this work forward. The objectives outlined will only be achieved if schools work in partnership and the quasi-market which has negatively impacted on school relationships in the post-Education Reform era is finally put to rest. The objective which also allows schools flexibility in setting their criteria to reflect their local circumstances is in keeping with the philosophy that schools should be responsive to their local communities (although the format of the menus presented for consultation can either maximise school responsiveness or consistency and standardisation and Council takes the view that more detailed modelling analysis is required in this area before decisions can be taken, see paragraphs 18.0 to 18.2). Moreover, some schools might want to interpret this objective more broadly to include the school's ethos and traditions. The objective that takes into consideration the particular circumstances of pupils with special educational needs is important and must impact on the detailed criteria to ensure that the new admissions arrangements are in keeping with the new SENDO legislation.

3.0 Choosing a Post-Primary School

- 3.1. In keeping with the principles and objectives outlined at 2.2 and 2.3 in the consultation document, the process of choosing a post-primary school will require that parents decide which schools best meet their child's educational needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations. Parents will then list those schools in order of preference on the Transfer Form. As stated in paragraph 3.3 parents should feel confident about being able to secure a place for their child in a school which will be suited to his or her educational needs, interests and aspirations. It is in this context that the new Pupil Profile will be of pre-eminent importance in ensuring that parental confidence in the system is maintained and that children's educational needs are met. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that the new primary assessment procedures and the pupil profiles are fit-for-purpose. The consultation document does not provide sufficient details about the profiling process for an informed comment to be made and it has to be acknowledged that this is a significant weakness in the consultation process given the undoubted importance of the proposed profiles and the implications that they will have for children in the primary sector and young people in the secondary sector and their parents. Indeed, the profiling process will have major implications for teachers and schools in general.
- 3.2. The development of a pupil profile mechanism will raise many complex theoretical, policy and practical issues which will have to be resolved if confidence in the new admissions procedures is to be established and maintained. This work will, of necessity, fall to CCEA and it is therefore not the intention of GTCNI to go into the issue of pupil profiling at this juncture. However, Council feels strongly that the profiling must reflect the whole curriculum experience of children in the primary school and that the integrity of the curriculum must be supported by the profiling process. The Council has had some insight into the ongoing work being carried out at CCEA on this issue and looks forward to a more detailed consideration of the issue at a later date. The pupil profile, although only at the embryonic stage of development, has the potential to increase choice for parents. For the first time the opportunity exists to establish a coherent process to enable teachers to identify pupils' aptitudes and developmental needs in a structured and coherent manner.

4.0 **Advice from the Primary School**

- 4.1. The key to parents getting appropriate advice from their child's primary school will be dependent on the quality of the information provided in the pupil profile. However, teachers in primary schools will have a key role in providing appropriate information to parents and this will depend to a large extent on the confidence that teachers have in the assessment and profiling arrangements. Furthermore, the issue of the availability of the pupil profile for post-primary schools during the transfer process and the use to which it can legitimately put needs to be clarified. Council takes the view that the profiles should not be made available to post-primary schools prior to admissions.

5.0 **Advice from the Post-Primary School**

- 5.1. The procedures to enable parents to obtain advice from post-primary schools is in keeping with the best practice now taking place. However, the practicalities of making such arrangements should not be underestimated. Schools in general put an enormous amount of work into organising open evenings/days and setting up meetings with parents. These arrangements usually cause significant disruption to teaching and learning. It is important that no additional burdens are placed on schools. For example, if post-primary schools had an obligation to meet individually the parents of every prospective pupil, this could place an intolerable burden on the principal and senior staff of post-primary schools. Furthermore, what situation would arise if particular parents did not attend these meetings and what impact would this have on decision making?

6.0 **Advice from DE/Education and Library Boards**

- 6.1. The suggested advice which the Department will issue should help parents understand the transfer process. However, the Department will have to ensure that the advice it issues does not place intolerable demands on schools and in particular principals and senior staff. Many senior staff in post-primary schools have a range of teaching and management commitments which are at present extremely demanding and no undue additional burdens should be added to existing workloads. The Department will also have to ensure that intolerable demands are also not placed on principals of primary schools who will be at the forefront in ensuring the efficiency of the new admissions arrangements. Moreover, on an annual basis it might be useful if DE and the ELBs could provide each school with a summary breakdown about how the admissions criteria are operating locally in terms of applications and actual admissions.

7.0 **Continuing Advice during Post-Primary Education**

- 7.1. The points raised in paragraphs 3.14, 3.15 and 3.17 acknowledge that children mature intellectually at different rates and as they grow up develop particular aptitudes and interests. It is suggested that the issues raised in paragraphs 3.15 to 3.17 need to be dealt with within an educational framework that has as its *raison d'être* the promoting of lifelong learning. Such a framework would be coherent and comprehensive and enable pupils to map out their learning routes, whether academic, vocational or both. The development of such a framework will require better co-ordination of educational policy by the Department and cross-departmental

cooperation at government level. The proposals in the Tomlinson report provide policymakers with the beginnings of such a framework and should inform policy discussions on this matter. The practical arrangements for the ongoing review of individual pupil achievements, interests and aptitudes could then be contextualised within this enabling framework. In the absence of any clear understanding of the “collective working arrangements” likely to emerge as a result of Costello, it is difficult to envisage how paragraph 3.16 arrangements might work out. Several questions emerge:

- Are there likely to be schools within such arrangements that effectively cater solely for academic provision, with “vocational pupils” to be farmed out?
- If it is envisaged that there may be significant movement of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3; how is this to be managed? Is it envisaged that there will be a series of “mini Craigavon” scenarios?

It is also difficult to consider educational pathways given the government’s response to Tomlinson and the fact that DE only offered initial advice about the entitlement framework on the 15th June 2005. (circular 2005/18)

8.0 **Timetable for the Admissions Process**

- 8.1. It is essential that the timetable for the New Post-Primary Admissions Process is coherent and streamlined to make it manageable for all parties involved. It is important that the process does not cause undue disruption to the normal life of both primary and post-primary schools. The management of the admissions process will be streamlined by ensuring that all partners in the service co-operate to ensure that the educational needs of children are met. Unfortunately, until now the quasi-market which operates in the school sector has not been conducive to the promotion of a cooperative ethos among schools. The whole admissions process will have to be underpinned by a greater commitment to cooperation and the Department of Education will have a key role in promoting such cooperation. Furthermore, the whole admissions process might need to be reviewed in the light of experience.
- 8.2. The proposed timetable outlined on page 27 of the consultation document does appear to be fit-for-purpose, except the requirement for post-primary schools to have discussions on an individual basis with prospective pupils and their parents during the month of November in the primary 7 year. Our concerns about this responsibility being placed on post-primary schools has already been raised [see paragraph 5.1].

9.0 **Pupils with Compelling Individual Circumstances or a Statement of Special Educational Need**

- 9.1. It is recognised that children with compelling individual circumstances or a statement of special educational needs necessitate arrangements which ensure that the educational and other needs of these children are met by schools. Paragraph 4.1 of the consultation document acknowledges that sufficient provision and flexibility within the new arrangements are therefore required to ensure that those needs are met.

10.0 **Compelling Individual Circumstances**

10.1. In drawing up admissions arrangements for children with compelling individual circumstances it is imperative that objectivity and fairness is maintained. It is envisaged in the consultation document that such cases would be few in number. However, it is often the few cases that provide the greatest problems for schools and stress for individual pupils and their parents. The consultation document quite rightly points out that it is impossible at this juncture to give a definitive list of the types of cases which should be considered under this category. It is suggested that, rather than trying to predict what type of case might, sometime in the future, fall under this category, it would be better to develop criteria to judge if individual cases fall within the category and to test individual cases as they arise against the criteria. The criteria could be as follows:

- an objective medical condition which necessitates a child being placed in a particular school, confirmed by a GP;
- a personal or social circumstance which necessitates a child being placed in a particular school, confirmed by:
 - i health and social services;
 - ii the criminal justice system, including the courts or PSNI.

It is suggested that pupils admitted under compelling individual circumstances should be supernumerary to the school's admissions and enrolment numbers. However, schools will require an appropriate level of resource allocation to ensure that the needs of these pupils are met. This could require additional funding to provide such pupils with the necessary pastoral, welfare and educational support. Furthermore, the Department would need to clarify the guidance it provides to schools in these circumstances, on class and group sizes in practical subjects and especially if such pupils are to have classroom assistants as this can also impact on compliance with class/group size regulations. These problems can also be variable in different year group cohorts and make timetabling of groups in practical subjects unnecessarily complex if not impossible. (DENI circular - Class Sizes in Practical Subjects in Post- Primary schools 2001/14)

11.0 **The Proposal to Establish a Central Panel to Consider Special Circumstances**

11.1. GTCNI acknowledges the sensitive issues surrounding the admission of pupils with compelling individual circumstances. The suggestion to establish a central panel to consider such cases (suitably established) would indeed bring a degree of objectivity to the decision making process. However, the consultation document emphasises that schools serve local communities and Boards of Governors have a key role in representing the interests of the local community which a school serves. It is therefore not good practice to exclude Boards of Governors from the decision making process on school admissions. It is therefore recommended that Boards of Governors should still consider the admissions of pupils with compelling individual circumstances. Procedures could be put in place to assist Boards of Governors with their decision making and statutory obligations. Boards of Governors could also receive professional background information (medical, social service based or legal) to enable them to consider individual cases.

- 11.2. If the admission of pupils with individual compelling circumstances cannot be achieved at the Board of Governor level, then cases could be referred to a Central Panel, at which a final admissions decision would be made.

12.0 **Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs**

- 12.1. In the light of the overall changes to school admission procedures it would be appropriate to include pupils who already have a statement, prior to the beginning of the transfer process, within a school's admission numbers. This would remove some of the operational difficulties that schools can have when required to place statemented pupils as supernumeraries, (class size, group size, deployment of classroom assistants etc). The counting of pupils who are statemented after the transfer process has begun as supernumeraries could take place as the number of such instances would be small.

13.0 **Admissions Criteria for Oversubscribed Schools**

- 13.1. The consultation on the admissions criteria for oversubscribed schools is of central importance for the overall new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools. The consultation document has already made it clear that informed parental choice and the needs of the child are to be the pre-eminent consideration in shaping the new admissions arrangements. It is noted that the current open enrolment arrangements will continue to apply, i.e. where a parent applies to a school and that school has places available, the child will be admitted (paragraph 5.1). Moreover, the principles and objectives outlined in paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 set parameters against which new admissions criteria must be tested. Indeed, the objective at 2.3 which states that as far as possible the admissions criteria of schools in a local area must be complementary, so that each child is given some priority under at least one set of admissions criteria in that area, is particularly significant.
- 13.2. It is also important that the new admissions criteria are unambiguous and fit-for-purpose. The Council welcomes the consultation document's emphasis on consistency, fairness and transparency in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4. It is also the case that admissions criteria should be expressed positively so that children and their parents have a positive experience during the decision making process. Under no circumstances must the new admissions criteria create the sense of stigma which bedevils the current transfer arrangements. For this reason Council agrees with the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee that acceptable admissions criteria once established should be identified and clearly defined in regulation or primary legislation. The Council suggests that this will ensure that the same menu of admissions criteria would be available to all schools, including integrated schools. (Council's reservations about the range of menu formats is discussed in paragraphs 18.1-18.2) The emphasis that integrated schools will continue to sort applications on the basis of religion and apply admissions criteria to each group separately is in keeping with the particular characteristics of integrated schools. The issue of admissions criteria for specialist schools has not been addressed in the Consultation and this is a serious omission which affects Council's ability to come to an informed opinion.

14.0 Admissions Criteria – Family-Focused Criteria

- 14.1. The criteria identified in Table 2, Appendix 3 of the consultation document identifies quite clearly the significance of family-focused criteria used by oversubscribed schools during 2004-2005. The criterion, “a brother or sister already at the school” was 72.5% and eldest child was 45.0%. The criterion, “parent is a past pupil of the school”, is also quite important with 22.5% of schools using this. (figures for all post-primary schools)
- 14.2. It is clear that schools have an expectation that family-focused criteria would form an important part of a menu. The two criteria suggested in the consultation are appropriate; however, the proviso that this would not include siblings who formerly attended the school could weaken schools family ties which are significant for many of our schools. Many families and schools are proud of the strong, even intergenerational ties between them. However, it must also be noted that there is an inherent bias to mixed schools with regard to family- focused criteria in that the sibling criterion affords greater opportunities to families.

15.0 Admissions Criteria – Community-Based Criteria

- 15.1. Paragraph 2.2, Principles and Objectives, acknowledges that schools normally serve local communities. It is therefore appropriate that community-based criteria should feature as part of a school’s admissions criteria. However, the term “community” is not unproblematic in terms of:

- definition; and
- territoriality, boundary limits and geographical stability.

The consultation document quite rightly acknowledges the part that criteria such as feeder primary schools and/or parishes play in school admissions. Defining community in terms of parishes or feeder primary schools will be a significant challenge for schools and the wider service. However, if schools are to embark on new cooperative, non-competitive relationships, then it should be possible to draw up admissions criteria which facilitate these new relationships. These criteria should be guided by the underpinning rationale set out in Chapter 3, paragraph 3.2 of the consultation document:

“In the coming years, the range of educational opportunities will be extended through the Entitlement Framework and the development of Specialist Schools. It will also be normal for local schools to collaborate with one another and with their local FE college in order to ensure greater flexibility and choice for pupils.”

The paradigm shift from the past ERO quasi-competitive market among schools to more cooperative relationships, which is outlined at paragraph 3.2, should enable schools, CCMS and the Education and Library Boards to draw up community-based criteria in keeping with the new ethos of cooperative relationships.

16.0 Admissions Criteria - Geographical Criteria

- 16.1. School-centred catchment: There are significant problems associated with this proposal. The operationalisation of a school-centred catchment criterion would be complex and possibly

bureaucratic. The proposal that catchment areas could be drawn up by the school or by an independent body would involve work of labyrinthine complexity and increase the likelihood of disputes both of a political and legal nature which would not be conducive to the philosophy underpinning the consultation document. Indeed, a school-centred criterion could be interpreted to go some way to undermine the principles of the consultation document outlined in Chapter 2, paragraph 2.2 in particular, which states that:

“new admissions arrangements should put the interests of the child at the centre of the decision-making process.”

Furthermore, catchment areas are not stable over time because of demographic trends and socio-geographical pressures. Therefore, the amorphous nature of many catchment areas would necessitate continual revision and again this would be a potential for increased bureaucracy and dispute. However, if a system of geographical boundaries were to be drawn up in a central manner or by consortia of schools, the consortia should be given access to appropriate expertise including Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Geographical criteria raise the important issue of school transport. It is therefore essential that school transport arrangements are factored into any new admissions arrangements. Of course, apart from the technical issues associated with school transport arrangements in terms of availability, routes and cost, the safety of children must be of pre-eminent importance.

- 16.2. The child-centred catchment criterion outlined, although not without its own difficulties would be more in keeping with the overall philosophy of the consultation document. This criterion is also in keeping with the objective 2.3, Chapter 2.3 which states that the new admissions arrangements are to:

“ensure as far as possible that the admissions criteria of schools in a local area are complementary, so that each child is given some priority under at least one set of admissions criteria in that area.”

It is also likely that a child-centred criterion would reduce the level of bureaucracy which would be associated with a school-centred catchment approach. Moreover, the child centred criterion might be viewed favourably by the Integrated and Irish Medium Sector.

- 16.3. With regard to the practical application of geographical criteria, schools would require assistance in drawing up clear maps so that parents are able to see clearly at which school their child would be given priority. Of course, drawing boundaries is not just a technical exercise (which could be expedited with assistance from the Ordnance and Survey) but also involves micro-political considerations which would need to be resolved before catchment areas could be technically delineated. Table 4 of Appendix 3 provided figures for the distance travelled by pupils to post-primary schools (2002/03) and it is clear that significant numbers of pupils travel between 10 and 20 kilometres, both in the grammar and secondary schools sectors (13,491 or 22% and 10,531 or 12% respectively). These figures illustrate just how difficult it will be to draw up geographical catchment areas.

16.4. In response to question 6, paragraph 5.13, it would be very difficult to set a percentage limit for places allocated by geographical criteria unless some average historical figure could be set for each school, but this would be an unsatisfactory additional complexity, again open to dispute and contested definition.

17.0 Tiebreakers

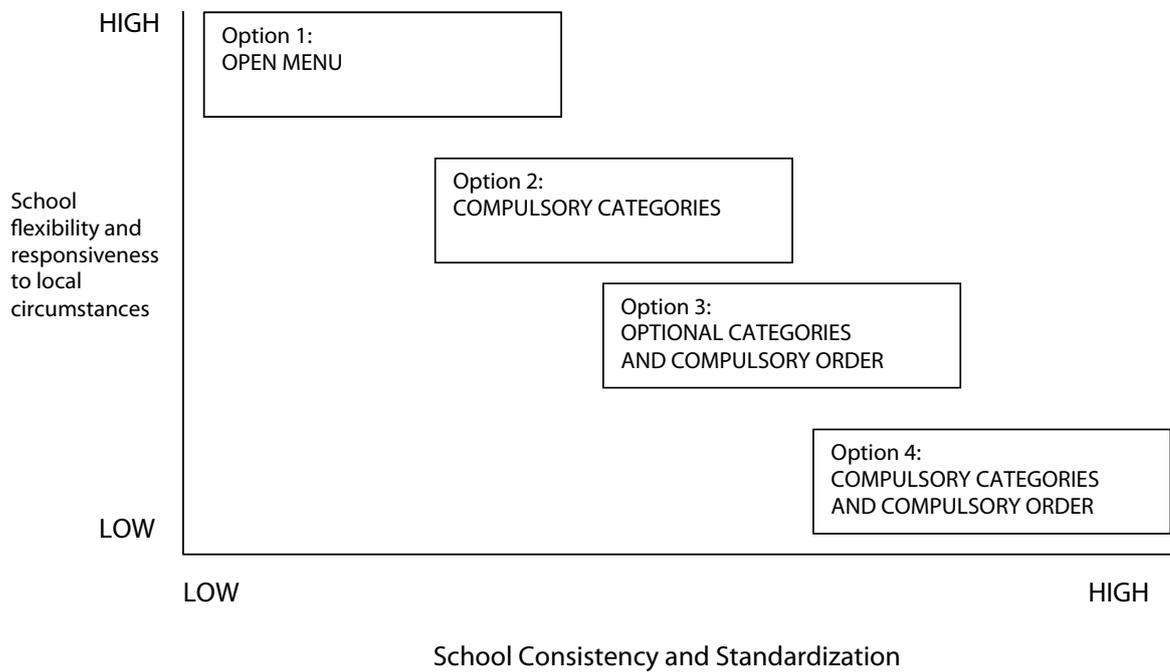
- 17.1. It is the Council's view that random selection would be the most appropriate method for resolving tiebreakers. The use of "proximity from home to school" as a method for resolving tie break situations could have unintended consequences which would impact on local communities.

18.0 Format of Menu

- 18.1. It is difficult to predict what the outworkings of each of the options provided in paragraph 5.17 (Open Menu, Compulsory Categories, Optional Categories and Compulsory Order, and Compulsory Categories and Compulsory Order). Without knowledge of past enrolment patterns either at regional and school level it is impossible to come to a definitive decision. The key question with regard to each option is to decide which one can be best reconciled with the continuation of open enrolment and the principles outlined in Chapter 2, paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3.
- 18.2. Council considered each of the menu options in turn and would have found it useful if the Consultation document had provided some models as to how each menu might operate at a regional and sub-regional level. Council itself modelled the menu formats against the criteria outlined in the consultation (paragraphs 5.3 and 5.15), namely school flexibility and responsiveness to local circumstances, and school consistency and standardisation. The model produced, figure 1, suggests a relationship between the menu formats and the criteria, school flexibility/responsiveness and school consistency/standardization.
- 18.3. The continuum illustrated points to variable relationship between the conditions outlined in the Consultation (school flexibility and school standardisation) and the Council therefore takes the view that the Department of Education needs to provide some additional exploratory modelling analysis which would then enable it to come to an evidentially based decision about the most appropriate menu format.

The New Post-primary Admissions Arrangement

Modelling the Menu Formats. Figure 1.



18.4. Appeals procedures

The Admissions Appeals process outlined in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.8 is fit-for-purpose with the proviso that paragraph 6.5 is amended to include a reference to teachers with any professional or personal interest in the child and its parents.

19.0 Conclusion

The Council has responded to this consultation with some misgivings. The issues are complex and there is an inadequate evidence base on which to make decisions. DE must ensure that the necessary further work and follow-up consultations take place when the other relevant policy proposals are clear or in place.

General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland Second Paper

Our ref: EMcA/ni

13 December 2006

Dear Valerie

Thank you for your recent email. The paper that I sent Stella McArdle was the Council's official response to the DE Consultation on New Admission Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools.

The Council's response highlighted a range of difficulties arising from the high degree of uncertainty surrounding educational policy and administration in Northern Ireland generally and specifically how Costello and the Specialist Schools initiative will impact. It was also emphasised that a greater evidence base will be required in order that decision making is fully informed. This will be particularly important in the complex area of deciding on admissions criteria for over subscribed schools and the relationship between family-focused criteria, community-based criteria and geographical criteria. It is highly unlikely that these criteria will be independent of each other and there is potential that the practical application of these, in local situations, will give rise to confusion, undue complexity and even contradiction.

It was with these potential problems in mind that the Council called on the Department of Education to provide some additional exploratory modelling analysis relating to how the various proposed menus (open menu, compulsory order etc.) would operate practically at regional and sub-regional level. For its part the Council sought to model the menu formats against a continuum from school flexibility and responsiveness to local circumstances as opposed to school consistency and standardization and to place the four options on offer along that continuum. It might be said that before considering the specifics we need to decide where along that continuum we want to be. The Council takes the view that this is a fundamental issue that needs to be resolved before the potential combinations of family-focused, community-based and geographical criteria can be applied and assessed.

I hope this further elaboration is of some help.

Yours sincerely

Mr Eddie McArdle

Registrar

The Governing Bodies Association

The Governing Bodies Association (GBA) represents the 53 Voluntary Grammar Schools in discussions with the Department of Education and other stakeholders in education. For over ten years the GBA has been seeking agreement on a new transfer procedure which would allow our system to move away from the 11+ process. When the Assembly was last in place there was a serious effort by all concerned to gather evidence and opinions in the hope of making a significant change with the past. The then Minister of Education carried out a major sampling of public opinion in the Household Survey. The GBA believed that this major survey of public opinion, backed as it was by an opinion poll, offers the best insight into the settled opinion of the population of Northern Ireland. As the Minister reminded us at the time these are ‘the people who really count’ and he recorded his pleasure when we passed the 50k mark and he noted the unprecedented size of the survey population when it got to the hundred thousand mark. The final number of significantly over two hundred thousand was truly impressive and unprecedented in Northern Ireland history. The opinion poll and the Household Survey had remarkably similar figures. Almost two thirds of those who voted wanted to see an end to the 11+ and wanted to retain academic selection. This, the GBA was confident, reflected the almost two thirds of parents who allow their children to sit the transfer procedure. The GBA was particularly pleased that the teaching profession voted in such large numbers and there again the percentages wishing to retain academic selection was a similar majority. A second strand of popular opinion highlighted by the Household Survey was the general approval for pupil profiles. GBA felt that this consensus offered the community of Northern Ireland a real secure foundation on which to build --away from the sixties thinking of the educational gurus.

The GBA has passionately argued that we wish to match pupils to schools. This will we believe offer the young people the very best opportunity to succeed. To do this it

is reasonable to suggest that any set of arrangements for transfer that is likely to have the sort of general support that would enable it to be widely adopted will need to have a number of important characteristics, among them, the following

- it must be simple, straightforward and easy for all those involved to understand : it must therefore be transparent
- it must be workable, requiring the minimum bureaucracy
- it must operate consistently and fairly, which means, among other things, that there must be access to an appeals process
- it should be used only (a) where schools are over-subscribed and (b) if they wish to use it : schools should be free to determine for themselves what their arrangements should be, the only requirement being that they are consistent with public policy guidelines
- it should be open to all over-subscribed post-primary schools, regardless of management type or sector : it should not be confined to grammar schools only

- it must not be open to the charges of “distorting the curriculum” or give unfair advantage to those from a more affluent background
- it should be based on the pupil profile, which will include objective data common to all pupils; no other form of school-based test, examination or interview may be used
- it should aim to ensure that, if or when a school is over-subscribed, places are allocated to pupils on the basis of best fit : it should, in other words, seek to ensure that children are appropriately placed in post-primary schools
- the criteria which any school wishes to use to determine which pupils would be most and least likely to be appropriately placed in it must be directly based on the description this schools offers of itself in its published prospectus : there must be consistency between the criteria which the school expects pupils applying for places in it to meet and the criteria which it uses to allocate places if it is over-subscribed

Since the fall of the Assembly there have been efforts to find a consensus. Unfortunately we in the grammar sector believe these efforts often appear to have been driven by those who seek to win by committee what they had lost by public opinion. We welcome this opportunity to once again seek to implement the clearly ‘settled opinion’ of the population of Northern Ireland as indicated by every opinion poll. If we could agree this procedure then our whole society could focus on improving the educational opportunities of all our young people in a school setting that values their talents and is capable of helping them to succeed.

Irish National Teachers Organisation

INTO Briefing Paper for NI Assembly Sub Group on Schools Admission Policy

INTO Representative: Mr Brendan Harron Senior Official

Pupil Profile

INTO agrees, in principle, with the concept of the Pupil Profile. INTO will cooperate fully with the introduction of Pupil Profiles, provided they are manageable and fit for purpose. INTO has been mandated to refuse to cooperate with Pupil Profiles if they are used as a selection tool for grammar schools. INTO's current concerns are:

- as they stand, the Profiles are not manageable, it is now taking 60 minutes to do what was previously capable of being done in 30 minutes
- the Profiles are not yet fit for purpose
- there is a presentational problem with the boxes and graphs
- the timing of the tests is not appropriate
- there is insufficient hardware to carry out the computer tests, major investment would be needed before implementation
- testing is too disruptive of the class and takes too long to carry out
- the tests themselves demonstrate improved accuracy but the very concept of awarding 'scores' flies in the face of the whole thrust of the revised curriculum
- INTO is opposed to Northern Ireland averages or class averages being included in the Profiles

Admissions Criteria for Over-subscribed Post-Primary Schools

Family-Focused Criteria.

INTO is of the view that the criteria to be used should be kept simple, be centrally administered and monitored, and uniformly applied across all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland by a central body. The central body should draw up the criteria and the guidance on how they are to be applied. In applying this process many of the criteria proposed in the consultation document, including family-focused, would not be necessary. The criteria and the guidance should be the subject of meaningful consultation with the education partners. The central body should be representative of the social partners.

Community-Based Criteria

INTO supports the use of Feeder Schools as the first criterion for determining admissions to an oversubscribed school. The guidance on determining the Feeder Schools for the post-primary schools should be the subject of meaningful consultation with the education partners. The guidance should ensure that, in determining feeder primary schools to individual post-primary schools, a socially balanced intake of pupils is achieved. INTO does not support the use of *parish* as a criterion.

Geographical Criteria

INTO supports the use of school-centred and then pupil-centred criteria as the second and third criteria to be applied, respectively. Percentage limits should not be necessary, using this approach.

Tiebreakers

INTO is of the view that Random Selection is the best method to apply in a tie-break situation. The criteria should be applied by a central body, thereby removing the potential for different methods to be applied in different schools.

Format of Menu

INTO supports the option – *Compulsory Categories and Compulsory Order*.

INTO is of the view that the criteria should be prioritised in the following order;

1. Feeder Primary schools
2. School-centred
3. Pupil-centred
4. Random Selection

NAHT

National Association of Head Teachers(NI)

Stella McArdle
Clerk
Room 245
Parliament Buildings
Belfast
BT4 3XX

15 December 2006

Dear Stella,

Please find herewith the NAHT Response for the Sub Group on Schools Admission Policy.

NAHT Response for the Sub Group on Schools Admission Policy

Admissions to Post Primary Schools

NAHT is convinced that our selective education system has had a detrimental impact on;

- The quality of education delivered at primary level
- The self confidence and self image of young people who do not "Pass the 11+"
- The quality and range of provision at post primary level
- Educational achievement
- Social cohesion
- The NI economy.

In addition we know from Gardiner's research that the tests which have been used to select children do not work and cannot be made to work. Contrary to popular belief, the tests which have been used to select children;

- Cannot measure or assess a pupil's level of intelligence.
- Cannot be used to measure or predict future ability or potential achievement.

Even at the most basic level the test is flawed. The way that it is set and marked has resulted in a system where children with roughly similar marks could be placed at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of grade (A-D).

The attempts made to take into account the age or sex of the child does little to address the underlying difficulty of administering a test which simply does not do what it purports to do.

However, for a variety of reasons, including the fact that a substantial number of middle class parents have been willing to pay for tutoring and the type of questions and language used in the test, it has been effective in selecting children in terms of social position.

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As a consequence, and for all of the reasons listed above, NAHT is convinced that we cannot select children for post primary education at the age of 11 using a test which purports to select on the basis of academic ability. NAHT is also totally opposed to proposals that the pupil profile could be used to select children at 11.

The Pupil Profile was developed to provide in-depth information about an individual child for parents. It is not an assessment tool and cannot be used in this manner. Placing Primary Schools in the position where on the basis of work at Primary School, they would be required to allocate children to a particular type of post primary education or a particular school, would inevitably detract from the child focused, home and school partnership which exists at present. We know from past experience that it would also create conflict between the Primary school and the home. Any attempt to move in this direction would be strongly resisted by all of the teachers unions.

NAHT is also strongly opposed to any form of computer based selective assessment on the basis, again, that while we might be able to assess a child's knowledge and understanding on a particular day, a computer based system would be as flawed as the paper based tests which are used at present and would not work for the same reasons.

NAHT is opposed to any form of academic selection at 11. We believe that it distorts the primary curriculum, damages the self-esteem and self-confidence of children, destroys social cohesion and is detrimental to our economy. We fully accept that all children are different and that education has to meet the needs of all of those individuals and the needs of society. We are not against competition or academic selection but do not believe that this should be done at 11yrs (most children are in practice only 10). Delaying selection to the age of 14 would create a system where children and their parents could, on the basis of knowledge and experience of the pupils academic ability and indeed on their plans for the future, choose the type of education which best meets the needs of the pupil.

However, we do have concerns about the traditional division of academic versus vocational education. If we believe in a shared future and want to create a society which values all people, strives for equality of opportunity and is vibrant and responsive to market changes and the economy, we need to consider again how we educate young people and the values which we place on the range of educational opportunities and experiences available.

The Costello proposals attempted to retain our present structures. Bain has left us in no doubt about the level of change necessary to bring our education system into the 21st century. We must be prepared to think outside traditional boundaries and consider new options. Strabane's proposed bilateral school, Holy Family School, where it is proposed that vocational and academic education will be offered on a single campus, is one option but there are others. I would respectfully suggest that the "school estate" in many areas would facilitate the wider implementation of the Dixon Plan. There is certainly need for greater collaboration within and across sectors.

If we are to create a superior education system for Northern Ireland we must all be prepared to make children our first and indeed sole priority, rather than self interest.

Yours sincerely

Fern Turner
Regional Officer
NAHT(NI)

National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers

NASUWT

Sub-Group to Consider the Schools Admission Policy

15th December 2006

NASUWT is the largest union representing teachers and principals in Northern Ireland and throughout the UK.

NASUWT believes that consistency and equity in the school admissions system can only be secured through a coherent framework within which schools can operate. A comprehensive and fit for purpose Code of Practice is therefore an essential feature of effective policy in this important area.

NASUWT believes that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will have a key role to play in ensuring that fair, transparent and effective admissions arrangements are in place for schools falling within its jurisdiction. This is to ensure that admissions arrangements do not disadvantage, either directly or indirectly, children from particular social or minority ethnic groups or children with disabilities or special educational needs.

Parental Choice

NASUWT continues to be concerned about the way in which some interpretations of the concept of parental choice have undermined the development of effective and co-operative relationships between parents and schools.

The existing model deliberately fosters competition between schools rather than the greater levels of institutional collaboration that are essential to key areas of Government policy on education. There are clear tensions between policies which encourage competition between schools and those which seek to establish greater co-operation. The development of policies designed to extend collaboration and networking in the school system will create further pressure for a review of the way in which policies such as parental choice operate in practice if the development of greater co-operation is not to be put at significant risk.

It is also important that Government policy on parental choice in respect of school admissions does not lead to unrealistic expectations on the part of parents on the degree to which they are able to exercise choice within the context of an education system where it is not possible to meet parents' first choice options for schools in all circumstances.

Family-Focused Criteria

NASUWT is concerned that giving priority to siblings of children at the school may result in a disproportionately high number of children living close to the school being denied places. This can lead to indirect discrimination against children from poorer families or certain social groups.

Given the potential implications of sibling criteria on the intake of partially selective schools, NASUWT believes that it should be made clear that such schools must not give higher priority to the siblings of existing pupils.

Geographical Criteria

NASUWT is cautious about the use of catchment areas by admission authorities to address oversubscription. While the 1997 ‘Rotherham Judgement’ determined that catchment areas are not unlawful, such arrangements can lead to significant degrees of discrimination where, for example, a school is situated in an area of particularly high-cost housing. NASUWT believes that, where catchment area criteria are used, there should be a requirement to demonstrate that the use of such criteria allows for pupil intakes to reflect the diversity of the community served by the schools.

Tie Breakers

Where random allocation is used to settle potential cases of over-subscription, NASUWT insists that the way in which this system will operate must be explained clearly by the Code of Practice. NASUWT believes that it is good practice to undertake a fresh round of random allocations when deciding which pupil should be offered a place from the waiting list. The disadvantage caused to some families in cases of oversubscription where the results of an earlier round of random allocations are used can lead to perceptions of unfairness and can create distracting and protracted conflicts.

For further information on the Union’s response contact.....

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Northern Eastern Education and Library Board

Consultation on New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools

The North Eastern Education and Library Board's Response

June 2005

Q1 The Department is seeking your views on whether the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements

The Principles and Objectives outlined are generally acceptable. However, there are a number of key factors which need to be given urgent consideration.

- There is an increasing need for strategic cooperation and planning to ensure equitable school provision. The demographic downturn needs to be managed at a strategic level if the new arrangements are to be successfully established after 2008. The Boards are well placed to have a central role in taking this forward.
- The NEELB wishes to place on record its concerns regarding the lack of effective communication with the Northern Ireland public about the proposals for the future of post primary education.
- Increasing the awareness and understanding of the new admissions arrangements is crucial. To date the campaign to help inform parents and the wider community has not been effective. This has led to considerable apprehension about the proposed new arrangements, particularly amongst parents.
- Existing transport policy militates against maximising parental preference and may need to be reviewed in the context of the new arrangements. The Board would urge the Department of Education to review the existing arrangements which facilitate parental choice but within a policy framework which minimises exposure to transport costs. The Board would support a range of provision being available within each designated learning community which would afford parents a range of choices (eg controlled, integrated, maintained). Parents exercising a choice beyond schools in a designated learning community would be liable for associated transport costs.
- The reference to “in that area” within the third objective is much too vague.
- The reference in the fourth objective to special educational needs is very general and requires greater definition.

Q2 The Department is seeking your views on:

(a) whether the Pupil Profile should be used in the way described in the Consultation Document:

- The Board would support the development and use of the Pupil Profile.
- It is essential that the Profile is an objective record of a child's educational needs, interests and aspirations and it is used for the intended purpose. Rigorous quality assurance arrangements will be vital to its success.
- There would be some concern that if used as part of the Transfer Procedure the Profile would become a contentious document and potentially result in litigation.
- There will need to be a comprehensive training programme for teachers to support the introduction of the Pupil Profile. An information campaign for parents and the wider community will also be necessary.

(b) whether there are alternative or additional ways in which the Pupil Profile should be used to help parents decide on future post-primary provision for their child

- The role of the Primary 6 teacher as an active participant at the annual parent – teaching meeting to discuss the Pupil Profile needs to be stressed. Furthermore, greater emphasis should be placed on input from pupils if the Profile is to become developmental. The inclusion of information relating to aptitude and interests is also welcomed.
- Consideration should be given to the inclusion of a section where parents could provide additional information (eg activities the school was unaware of) and this would encourage greater ownership of the document by parents.

Q3 The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from the primary school to help parents make informed decisions.

- The information identified is sufficient providing the post primary sector makes available all relevant information to enable primary schools to inform parents. The content must be “easily understood by parents” and this will require an effective information and training strategy.

- Concerns have been expressed by primary schools about the pressure that might be exerted on them when preparing the pupil profile. The new arrangements should address this matter.
- At present schools are allowed substitute costs to provide cover for the period of the Transfer interviews. The new proposal requires interviews in P6 to discuss the Pupil Profile and interviews in P7 to nominate preferences. This will result in an increased burden on schools and will have significant resource implications not least additional expenditure on substitute cover to ensure pupils do not suffer.
- The proposals should include consideration of ‘parental responsibility’ and how this is sometimes shared with social services. This may have timescale implications in some cases.
- The Board would advise that greater consideration be given to provision for people with sensory impairments and/or where English is not the first language.
- The integrity of the process will depend on the extent to which primary school principals restrict comments to offering general advice but not recommending specific schools to parents. This is an area where specific guidance within a regulatory framework may be necessary.

Q4 The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the range of information outlined in the Consultation Document to help parents make informed decisions;**
- (b) the role of the post-primary school in advising parents; and**
- (c) whether any other information/support should be provided to parents to assist the decision-making process**

- (a) The Board agrees with the information outlined.
- (b) It is unrealistic to require post-primary schools to undertake formal one to one consultations with parents prior to places being allocated. Each post-primary school would have to arrange interviews for all potential preferences with nugatory effect thus creating a massive burden on schools. It could also raise unrealistic parental expectations and possibly lead to an increase in the number of appeals particularly where Principals comment on the suitability of the school for individual pupils.

- (c) There should be a strengthening of information currently available in school prospectuses to assist a parent make preferences.

Q5 The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from DE/ELBs to help parents choose the most suitable post-primary school.

- The Board would generally welcome these proposals but would stress that a Helpline and web-based information service would require a considerable investment in staffing and training.
- The format of the current Transfer Booklet should be reviewed in the light of strengthened prospectuses and the development of web-based information.
- Consideration should be given to revising relevant legislation to ensure that all school based information is obtained directly from the school with ELBs/DE providing an overview of the procedure. ELBs would still require admission criteria however the feasibility of only publishing electronically and thus saving printing costs should be examined.
- The Board would be concerned that the new arrangements, particularly in the early years, place a considerable burden on parents to understand the process in addition to informing themselves about the schools they may wish to consider for their children. This highlights yet again the need for a clear communication strategy underpinning the entire proposal for post primary education.

Q6 The Department is seeking your views on what information/advice should be available to a young person with choices of educational pathway, during post-primary education

- The proposed role of ELBs in providing independent advice requires clarification. A Board would be in a position to provide information about alternative settings but would not have access to information about a young person's educational development to enable advice regarding suitability to be provided.
- Decisions about a pupils' educational pathway (s) after 11 years of age needs to be underpinned by independent, quality careers advice. The Department should liaise with the Department for Employment and Learning with a view to establishing a Careers Service with a more proactive role in providing careers information and advice to pupils.

Q7 The Department is seeking your views on the broad timetable for the new admissions Process

- **Commentary on Timetable**
- The Admission/Enrolment numbers need agreement by April
- The overlap of appeals and information gathering of admissions criteria place a considerable additional burden on the Transfer Section in each Board.
- There is real concern about the tight deadline for gathering information, publishing and distributing the Transfer Booklet. This would be alleviated if the earlier recommendation for revising the format of the Transfer Booklet was implemented.
- November : The 4 weeks for discussion would only be realisable if the current Transfer Booklet requirements are reviewed and parents have earlier access to strengthened prospectuses and web based information.
- The proposed timetable would be difficult to meet for receipt and processing of Transfer Forms.
- The proposed timetable should include consideration of Compelling Individual Circumstances.
- The proposed June deadline for appeals is welcome. This should facilitate attendance by school representatives and parents.
- At present there is duplication of the letter confirming school acceptance of a pupil. It is suggested that the school issues this letter.
- There is concern about the implications for post primary schools in trying to organise induction activities during May/June not least from the practical point of view of large numbers of additional young people on site when examinations are taking place.

Q8 The Department is seeking your views on the types of cases which should be considered as Compelling Individual Circumstances

- The Board strongly supports the establishment of a Central Panel for Northern Ireland.
- It is recommended that it consist of three members: legal, medical/social and educational background plus clerk. There should be a pool of Panel Members which would serve the 5 Boards but clerked on an individual Board basis.
- Timing is crucial because these cases have to be considered before other applications are processed regardless of whether they are supernumerary or not.

Q9 It is the Board's view that:

- Regular review of enrolment numbers in the context of demographic trends could be one method of addressing downturns strategically. The current practice of review only when considering rebuild is unsatisfactory.
- Pupils admitted under Compelling Individual Circumstances should be supernumerary but only in the year of enrolment.
- The procedure and timing of consideration of these cases has not been addressed in the timetable.
- Consideration should be given to the impact on numbers if supernumerary of: children with statements and children admitted on Appeal.

Q10 The Department is seeking your views on whether individual BOGs or a Central Panel should consider cases of CIC. If a Central Panel, your views are sought on its size and composition.

- It is difficult to envisage that there would be many cases falling within this category. At present the numbers falling within 'special circumstances' is small.
- Such cases could be:
 - those children who have had a serious accident or serious medical condition – possibly deteriorating – during their transfer year.

- those children who are in the process of statutory assessment but who do not yet have a statement at the time transfer/enrolment decisions are being taken.
- recent family bereavement.
- A Central Panel has the advantages of
 - being independent of school therefore removing from them the possibility of expensive legal challenge.
 - developing expertise in making such decisions is unlikely at school level because of the small numbers.

Q11 The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils with statements of special educational need should continue to be admitted as supernumerary

- Pupils with statements of special educational needs should be admitted as supernumerary otherwise placement would be difficult. An alternative may be to allow schools an additional percentage of places for SEN to ensure a more equitable distribution.
- Currently pupils with statements are placed by May of the P.7 year. It would be feasible to complete all P.7 reviews by September/October, make amendments to statements by November and finalise placements by January which would be in accordance with the proposed transfer procedure.
- It is important that pupils with specific mobility requirements are identified as early as possible to ensure adequate provision can be made.

Q12 The Department is seeking your views on the family – focused criteria listed and their inclusion within a menu

- Sibling at the school – there are sound practical reasons why a family with pupils at a particular school should be given preference and encouraged to keep children at one school.
- It is difficult to see any clear justification for giving the eldest child priority over a child whose family had attended the school but because of age gap had left.

- The changing nature of what constitutes a family means the definition of eldest child is proving increasingly difficult to define. If “eldest child” is to remain as a criterion careful definition would be required eg it would be important to ensure that a child is not disadvantaged because an older sibling has a statement.

Q13 The Department is seeking your views on the community based criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and how they should be defined.

- The Board would be sympathetic to the use of feeder primary schools however this would require more specific guidance from D.E. as to the definition of “feeder primary school”. Furthermore the Department would have to ensure that the use of this criterion complies with equality legislation.
- There are practical difficulties about the use of parish as a criterion. Parish boundaries can be difficult to define. In some cases there is more than one post-primary in a parish and currently the criterion is restricted to one sector only.

Q14 The Department is seeking your views on

- (a) the geographical criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and the most appropriate means of operating them; and**
- (b) what percentage limit, if any should be set for places allocated by geographical criteria**

- The Board would be concerned about the use of “school centred catchment” as it could have the effect of reinforcing social divisions within education. “Child centred” would be preferred as each child would have one nearest suitable school.
- Percentage limits are difficult to apply and likely to result in an increase in appeals due to the non-transparent nature.
- The Board would be in agreement with the proposal that a pupil would be given priority at the school closest to their home, taking account of suitability in terms of denominational, non-denominational, integrated and Irish-medium.

Q15 The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the tiebreakers, random selection and proximity from home to school, as a means of admitting pupils down to the last available place;**
- (b) the most appropriate method of operating random selection and/or measuring proximity; and**
- (c) whether schools should be free to use different methods of operating random selection or proximity.**

- The Board considers a standard ‘tie breaker’ used across N.I. to be the best option.
- Random selection by surname would be the preferred option for reasons stated in 5.14. Distance is contentious and expensive if an independent body is to measure and is likely to lead to delay decisions for schools.

Q16 The Department is seeking your views in any other criteria that you believe should be included in the menu bearing in mind the principles and objectives outlined in Chapter 2.

- If the eldest child is used as a criterion it is essential that a child with an elder sibling who has a statement is not penalised.
- D.E. needs to give more consideration to the issue of children moving into N.I. from outside the U.K., particularly if they are not EU nationals as they will not readily meet the criteria listed.

Q17 The Department is seeking your views on the possible options for the menu

A key objective of the new arrangements is to have a transparent system which is manageable and easily understood. At present parents are confused about how the criteria are defined and applied. The Board is very supportive of the menu approach but would also be sympathetic to giving the flexibility to schools wishing to reflect local circumstances.

- The Board considers that getting this right is central to the success of the new Transfer Arrangements.

- If the system is to meet the needs of all children and provide choice as well as build on existing strengths then a certain degree of flexibility is required.
- There would be reservations about Option 4 and while each of the options have advantages and disadvantages on balance the Board would express sympathy for Option 2.

Q18 The Department is seeking your views on whether the process for appealing the decisions of BOGs not to admit a child to the school should be altered in any way

- It is the Board's view that a review of the appeals procedure should take place after the new arrangements have been established.

Other Issues

None.

Do you think any of the issues contained in the Consultation Document would have any adverse implications for any of the Section 75 categories?

Yes criterion using feeder primary schools.

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

NICEM submission to the Transitional Assembly's Programme for Government Committee Sub-Group on the Schools Admission Policy

Introduction

NICEM is an umbrella organisation representing the interests of black and minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland. Currently we have 23 affiliated black and ethnic minority groups as full members, which represents most of the black and minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. Our vision is of a society free from all forms of racism and discrimination, where human rights are guaranteed. NICEM works in partnership, to bring about social change, by achieving equality of outcome and full participation in society.

NICEM welcomes the department's overview of the changing education landscape before 2010, including the end of the transfer exam, the introduction of the pupil profile and the new curriculum, increased cooperation between schools and with further education and the encouragement of specialist schools.

In our perspective there is insufficient attention to the overarching imperatives of promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, human rights and new TSN. We are also surprised that a policy affecting our children and young people contains no reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Therefore we support the principles and objectives for new admissions arrangements with the following caveats:

1. One of the principles should be to ensure equality of opportunity for every child in our society;
2. Arising from 1 education should also use as a means to bring about social change to improve the life chances of every member of the society, in particular those disadvantaged groups; and
3. We would also like to see the new government policy on Shared Future and Racial Equality Strategy take a central place in new educational arrangements.

NICEM should state at the upfront that black and minority ethnic communities face both relative and absolute disadvantaged position in the exercise of choice for post-secondary admission policy and criteria due to language, culture, religion and unfamiliar with the local

system. It affects those settled black and minority ethnic communities, as well as the new comers such as asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers. Therefore any principles and criterion of admission should take into account of such disadvantaged. The same principle should also apply to other disadvantaged groups and/or areas.

Pupil Profile

NICEM has serious concerns if prospective post-primary schools were to have access to pupil profiles before the allocation of places. In our view this would be tantamount to academic selection by the back door. Moreover it would reinforce the impression that the introduction of some specialist schools focused on an ‘academic’ approach will perpetuate the grammar/secondary division.

Admissions criteria for oversubscribed schools

NICEM supports the use of feeder schools only if a socially-balanced intake can be achieved by prioritising pupils from a mix of prosperous and disadvantaged areas. If feeder schools drew their intake from areas which included social housing, for example, then the opportunity is reduced to buy property near a desirable school, thus pushing up house prices and achieving a kind of social selection by proxy. We suggest that more research is needed to provide guidance about achieving a social mix for every post-primary school as the department does not present any evidence about what would be possible in different areas across Northern Ireland and what the implication would be.

We note the arguments in favour of using the geographical criterion. However it is known that neighbourhood deprivation and educational underachievement are connected due in large part to the nature of school admissions based on geographical criteria. Numerous studies show that this type of admissions policy leads to higher house prices as outlined above, reducing the opportunity for poorer families to access more ‘effective’ schools. Research also shows that parental choice tends to lead to separation in schools on the basis of factors like race and class.¹

The department acknowledges: ‘it would be important from an equality perspective that geographical catchment criteria do not create artificial areas of exclusivity. It may be necessary to set a maximum percentage of places in each school that may be allocated in this way.’ However, we would argue that more intervention is necessary to help encounter this link between geographical and educational segregation, or selection by postcode.

Some suggest that a robust TSN approach should direct greatly increased funding to schools and teachers’ salaries in deprived areas. Others argue that there is merit in attaching additional resources to deprived children in order to make them more ‘attractive’ to more popular schools. This is currently done in Northern Ireland for nursery places. London schools are experimenting with a clearing system traditionally used in matching choices and available places in higher education. There are also strong arguments that a ‘blind’ or random selection mechanism for allocating oversubscribed places should replace all the proposed criteria. We

¹ Paul Gregg, ‘Is Britain Pulling Apart? Area Disparities in Employment, Education and Crime’ *Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (Scott Policy Seminar Series) April 2004, p23*

believe that all of these options should be investigated, taking into account that in rural areas there will be issues of distance from schools.

In our final analysis, there is not enough information about each of the criteria to make an informed decision. We would therefore argue that the proposal should contain EQIA and new TSN analyses. These would help tease out the implications of each option and the potential adverse or differential impacts on those disadvantaged groups and/or areas. They would also underscore the case for investing additional resources to improve the educational and life chance of disadvantaged children who are some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Consultation based on this enhanced information should then follow as a second stage to current consultation. We believe this would be important also due to concerns about the number of parents who have been engaged by this consultation and lack of involvement of young people themselves in the process as set out below.

Therefore we would propose that the finalised criteria should be applied by a central body to encourage a consistent and fair approach across all schools.

Human Rights, Equality, Good Relations and TSN consideration

NICEM sees there is an opportunity to build a more equitable education system for Northern Ireland based on human rights and equality principle. We strongly suggest that an integrated impact analysis should be undertaken to highlight inter alia human rights, equality, good relations and new TSN implications of the proposals.

The lack of consultation is very disappointing in light of the government's obligation under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Based on our experience we strongly feel that consultation with parents should amount to more than the distribution of leaflets and as we mentioned at the beginning a lot of black and minority ethnic people do not familiar our school system, as well as the language, cultural, religious barriers in these consultation.

Over the last three years we witness the dramatic change in our demography as the result of migrant workers from overseas and the EU new 10 members. According to the home office figures in 2004-2006 there were around 7,000 approved work permit holders in Northern Ireland in addition to the unknown figures of those from EU new member states (Home Office registration scheme only indicated that just less than 15,000 people and majority are from Poland). These sea changes require more robust monitoring data within the educational system to reflect the needs of black and minority ethnic children and young people. We would suggest a robust needs assessment should be conducted to identify the issues and gap.

Admission arrangements will need to take account of increased inward migration, including the need to provide information to parents in different languages. This is why the equality and good relations assessments are needed to identify the potential impacts on a range of people. The Shared Future proposals make it clear that good relations should be an imperative for all policy development and we suggest that they should be central to the new admission arrangements to work towards a more tolerant and just society.

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education

Overview paper presented to Sub Committee Friday 15th December 2006

General

The educational landscape is changing rapidly with a plethora of reform and review beginning with the RPA and ranging from curriculum, through the review of capital development and planning to the Entitlement framework arrangements. In addition A Shared Future has firmly placed “sharing over separation” at the core of education provision for the 21st century, something re-inforced in the recently published Bain review and the subsequent statement issued by Maria Eagle both issued in the past week.

It is vital that the twin issues of admissions criteria and pupil profile be set in this wider debate.

Specifically, referring to the area of my own work, that of the development of integrated schools, there are a number of general comments to be made before raising specific issues on the two areas in question. Integrated schools serve substantially wider catchments than most other schools, with some colleges drawing children from over 30 miles radius. In 2003/4 integrated schools at post primary level had 50% more children with statements than their counterparts. They are in the main created and supported through a high level of parental commitment which is reflected on the Boards of governors of grant maintained schools. They are also required by law to ensure community balance in the yearly intake and overall enrolment. In this context it is very difficult to define “catchment” or “local”.

A) **Pupil Profile:**

N.I.C.I.E. broadly welcomed the pupil profile which we believe will help inform decisions for post primary schools.

We would not have a major issue with post primary schools receiving the profiles provided they are not used for selection.. so this needs to be made clear. Why?

Policy context

- we have tried many methods to select at 11 and all have been abandoned because in our view, they were inaccurate, unfair or both – For us this seems to offer the conclusion that trying to select at that early age is probably impossible
- the idea of using the pupil profile for selective purpose does not make sense as the profile was designed as a formative instrument to provide information to parents across a wide range of educational domains. The purpose of academic selection is not to find out what a pupil knows, but rather aims at placing them in a line so that a set percentage can be allocated places in grammar schools – the ‘pass’ mark relates to the number of places available, not what the young people know.
- since selection is little more than a ranking exercise, inevitably any selection instrument will have to end up with a single score of grade, so that the holistic value of the pupil profile would be collapsed to a single score if anyone tried to use it for selective purposes
- the ideas of using computerized adaptive testing as a high stakes selective instrument also does not make sense: it is based on measures of a limited set of domains (it is an unpublished paper, not peer reviewed as we understand), but does not explain why this offers any predictive accuracy for performance across the range of subjects typically studied at post-primary school. It is, anyway, predicated on the erroneous assumption that selection is about finding out what young people know, when in fact it is simply about ranking them for the allocation of places.
- If the test has been around for years why was it not considered by Burns or Costello? Why did the GBA not raise it during earlier meetings? Why does no other country in the world use CAT for high stakes tests?
- It would be better to consider abandoning the idea of separating out pupils at age 11, and consider instead how we might encourage young people to follow appropriate pathways at ages 14 and 16. (Craigavon etc)

Specific comment

We believe that the role and responsibility of teachers needs to be made clear as there is a concern from teachers that parents will wish to influence profile.

The profile needs to be fit for purpose and clearly delineate information and advice. It needs to reflect “whole child” development and it is important that the profile informs parental choice.. so it must be easily accessible and easily translatable..

Time needs to be allocated to teacher training and administration in school.

N.I.C.I.E. would not be happy including class averages in the profile or with extensive use of tests to determine outcomes.

B) Admissions criteria

It remains a fact that parental choice is not a reality for all and that annually many schools remain oversubscribed. For example in 2004/5 – 96 (almost all grammar almost all GMI and 30% Secondary schools) were in this category at post primary level.

Currently schools use a range of criteria including those based loosely on family, school connections, geography and some other.

The vast majority of oversubscribed schools(73%) use siblings with 45% using eldest child, and 23% using parent who was a past pupil.

On average, Grammar schools use

1st criterion sibling, prep, boarders special circes,

2nd Eldest child, proximity and parent employee,

3rd parish/area

In the same way most secondary schools use

1st feeder, named school parish,

2nd sibling, parent employee

3rd parent past pupil special circes,

4th eldest child

Integrated schools in the main use attendance at an integrated primary, eldest child, siblings and eldest child

Current tie breakers...in order are geography, family, age and random selection. The consultation indicated a vast majority agreed with the use of computer generated random selection as tie breakers.

N.I.C.I.E. feel that there needs to be a common menu but that there should be no selection used.

There should also be minimum use of exceptional circumstances

We believe that compelling individual needs should not be supernumerary.. except if identified after the transfer process is completed

We also welcomed the establishment of a central panel to consider what “compelling individual circumstances” are... but needs to be representative and should be open to appeal.

We accept the concept of setting of limits on the number of special needs children per school... e.g. 2/3% but feel that schools should not be compelled to go beyond that but can choose to.

All this change needs adequate resources and communication flow.

a) **general:**

We would accept compulsory order with optional categories e.g. family (range) geography (range) schools (range)

We believe that the criteria should be fair and free: in our schools we need to ensure community balance and this needs to be protected.

The concept and definition of “Local communities” causes problems for N.I.C.I.E. given our schools wide catchments and this needs attention.

Again while agreeing on the concept of “Flexibility” to reflect local communities we would need to have a debate around the meaning of local.

b) **criteria:**

family: all siblings should be included,, including pupils who had attended in past -second families as well as step children.

This criterion should also include governors/employees children

c) **community based:**

WE believe that feeder primaries and parish based limits will restrict shared future. Integrated primaries need to be feeders for integrated colleges to ensure systemic integrity. But integrated colleges should still be able to attract young people from other schools too! (this raises the question of capacity)

School-centred catchments cause problems for integrated schools as this has the potential to affect balance, travel distance and numbers of schools. This is also the problem for potential transforming schools which are located in “single identity” communities.

d) **Tie breakers**

We support the use of random selection based on surname, computer generated (as did the majority of responses)

We believe that it is important to consider again the potential of reintroducing first preference.

We do not support the use of postcode!

e) **Appeals**

We believe that these should be held during May or June (at the latest)

South Eastern Education and Library Board



Response of the South Eastern Education and Library Board

To the New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools Consultation Document

30 June 2005

Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1 Context for the New Admissions Arrangements

Chapter 2 Principles and Objectives
Question 1

Chapter 3 Choosing a Post-Primary School
Questions 2 - 7

Chapter 4 Pupils with Compelling Individual Circumstances or a
Statement of Educational Need
Questions 8-11

Chapter 5 Admissions Criteria for Oversubscribed Schools
Questions 12 – 17

Chapter 6 Admissions Appeals
Question 18

Other Issues

Conclusion

Introduction

The South Eastern Education and Library Board welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Education's proposals on the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools as presented in the consultation document (January 2005).

The SEELB places children and young people at the centre of all its work through the provision of high quality education, youth and library services.

The Board agrees that the admissions arrangements should work for the benefit of all children, should be based on the principle of informed parental and pupil choice and should be as straightforward as possible for parents to use.

This has implications for educating parents and for greater parental involvement throughout the pupil's education. It will also require adequate resources.

The Board welcomes the importance placed on taking account of parental views and aspirations "as well as professional experience and wisdom of the teaching profession and the wider education service".

The Board is very aware that, although the ending of the Transfer Procedure will help increase parental choice, this does not necessarily mean an even distribution of applications and places. The procedure merely allows for a statement of a preference and not a commitment to offer places in any school of choice.

The Board notes the government's aspiration that it intends to ensure that parents have the confidence that "all schools are good enough" for their child, through its commitment to the capital building programme, and the development and implementation of the Revised Curriculum and the Entitlement Framework. Such programmes will however impact over a longer period of time -10 to 20 years. The most pressing challenge for all stakeholders remains over the next 5 to 10 years to ensure that all schools which are in need are adequately funded and supported to enable them to provide the highest quality education for their pupils and to have the confidence of pupils and parents. **The substance of this response is realisable only if the above developments are successfully implemented.**

The most pressing challenge remains that parents do not consider that all schools are yet "good enough" and this can result in disappointment if their first choice is not met.

The Board has always recognised the importance of creating an educational structure which provides for and develops, the unique attributes of each person to enable them to achieve their full potential. For that reason the Board strongly commends that the key motivation intrinsic to these proposals is to enhance the life chances of all young people in Northern Ireland. However the Board regrets that the new admissions arrangements are being put in place in the absence of new post-primary arrangements.

Central to the Board's response to consultation on the new admissions arrangements is the premise that the proposals for the revised curriculum and arrangements for post-primary education need to be considered in parallel.

In presenting this response, the South Eastern Education and Library Board would wish to express its recognition and appreciation of the valuable contribution made by all schools to the education and development of young people in Northern Ireland. Moreover, the Board would wish to emphasize that in any change to the new admissions criteria or reorganisation of post-primary education, the focus must be on the improvement and enhancement of the educational experience of each young person, while at the same time retaining and building upon all that is excellent within the present system.

The Board, in formulating its view on the proposed admissions arrangements, consulted with the Curriculum Service - CASS, Transfer and Open Enrolment, Special Education sections within the Board.

The response by the Board is presented under headings which reflect the relevant chapters and questions.

Chapter 1

Context For The New Admissions Arrangements

The document highlights the key factors effecting change in schools over the next few years such as the post-primary review, the new curriculum and the declining pupil numbers, and notes that the new admissions arrangements will take effect in an educational landscape which will be quite different to the current one.

The Board is concerned that these new admissions arrangements are being put in place for a post-primary structure which is not yet in place. Many of the recommendations are dependent on a number of changes still under discussion, for example, the Revised Curriculum Implementation, Specialist Schools, and the Entitlement Framework.

Pupil Profile

The Board welcomes the principle of a Pupil Profile which will replace the annual report and will provide parents with clear, objective and comprehensive information about their child's progress, achievements, attitudes, aptitudes, interests, capabilities and skills in order to inform key decisions on post-primary education.

The Board maintains that for pupil profiling to be successfully implemented, it needs to be adequately resourced in terms of educating parents, training for Boards of Governors, pre- and in-service training for teachers and teacher release time for profiling, administration and consultation with parents.

Although the profile is a tool to help parents choose, the Board believes that the profile should form the basis of discussions between parents and post-primary schools.

The profile must be rigorous and provide specific information to enable those schools which are oversubscribed to ensure equity of opportunity.

The New Curriculum

The Board welcomes the increased choice and flexibility within the Revised Curriculum, the greater emphasis on real-life skills and Learning for Life and Work and the improved relevance of the curriculum for young people.

The Revised Curriculum will give schools greater flexibility to develop their own approaches to meet the needs of their pupils.

Entitlement Framework

The Board welcomes the Entitlement Framework which guarantees each pupil a minimum of 24 courses at Key Stage 4 and 27 courses post 16, of which at least 1/3 courses must be vocational and 1/3 academic, allowing schools to reflect their ethos and the pupils to have access to more than one style of curriculum.

The Board highlights the need for the Department to provide adequate funding to bring all schools up to a standard of accommodation, equipment and provision or to enable them to engage in collaborative arrangements which will ensure that they are all able to provide the Entitlement Framework. In the short to medium term the disparity in provision will remain unless this funding issue is addressed.

Co-operation and Collaboration

The Board has always advocated collaboration and partnership in the interests of enhanced provision for our young people. The collaboration arrangements in this document and outlined in the post-primary consultation document take the current collaborative arrangements a stage further. If they are to be successful, time and funding must be available to plan, to build and if necessary, to restructure.

Specialist schools

The Board supports the principle of schools developing their strengths and sharing good practice.

The Board has serious concerns about the implications for schools and the whole education system with regard to the funding and staffing for support to specialist schools given the financial crisis in education in Northern Ireland.

Oversubscribed Schools and Demographic Trends

The demographic trends in the South Eastern Education and Library Board show a marked decline in the 11-17 year old population by 2015 ranging from 21% in North Down to 6% in Ards.

The Board agrees that there will be popular schools and a number will continue to be oversubscribed while in some areas demand for places will be less and fewer schools will have to apply admissions criteria. This will in turn reduce pressure on parents.

The Board is concerned that some schools may in the interim become “sink schools” and may be unable to provide a quality education for the remaining children as their pupils are drawn away to schools in other areas.

The potential for increased movement of children from the South Eastern Education and Library Board area to schools in other areas has implications for increased transport costs.

Chapter 2

Principles And Objectives

Question 1

The Department is seeking your views on whether the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions criteria.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board broadly supports the principles and objectives for new admissions arrangements, with the following observations:

- All stakeholders, including parents and schools, should put the educational well being and the interests of the child at the centre of the decision-making process. This should ensure that there is no bias or indirect discrimination against any group or individual.
- There should be a greater emphasis on the active participation of both parents and pupils in the process.
- “Informed” choice by parents and pupils is dependent on the ongoing active engagement of parents in the child’s education and in the pupil profiling process from Year 1 through to Year 7. This will ensure that the profile does not come as a shock to parents in Years 6/7.
- The principle of informed “choice” could be misleading. Parental “preference” would be more realistic given that admissions numbers are set by the Department. It is not a given that ‘informed parental choice’ will determine a pupil’s post primary provision and parents may be disappointed to learn that the expression of their choice will not always result in securing a preferred place. This may lead to the creation of an unrealistic expectation that parental choice will prevail.
- There should be inbuilt flexibility to facilitate easy transfer of pupils in cases where schools may be oversubscribed or where it is in the best interests of the child’s educational development.
- It is our view that preference may be curtailed by school provision in the local area particularly in rural areas.
- The new admissions criteria should be consistent across schools and all stakeholders should have access to and a thorough understanding of all arrangements. The Freedom

- of Information Act and data protection legislation will contribute to greater transparency within the system.
- A definition of “normal” and “local” is needed to bring clarity to the process.
 - While endorsing that the admissions criteria of schools in a local area should be complementary the Board has a number of concerns:
 - Complementarity can only be fully realized once an agreed secure post-primary infrastructure is in place.
 - To ensure equity and equality of opportunity a careful review of what constitutes legitimate criteria should be undertaken and exemplification provided by the Department.
 - The Board has concerns regarding the issue of “each child given some priority under at least one set of admissions criteria”.
 - In the absence of a transfer test there are concerns that some schools may apply an admissions test as one of their criteria.
 - In the interests of equality of opportunity and inclusiveness, the admissions criteria of each school should ensure full and equal access to the curriculum. Under equality of opportunity the admissions criteria should be exactly the same for each child and it is incumbent upon any school to ensure that whatever the child’s physical need it must have the ability to ensure that the child has equal access to the full curriculum.
 - If schools are given sufficient flexibility to set their criteria it is unrealistic to expect that each child will be given priority under one set of criteria within a particular area.
 - It is a fallacy to think a reduction in the number of pupils will reduce pressure on ‘popular’ schools.
 - Existing transport policy militates against maximising parental preference.
 - It is important to ensure that parents have the confidence that all schools are good enough for their child. However, the Capital Building Programme, New Curriculum, Entitlement Framework along with an overall reduction in numbers will not by themselves ensure this objective. The Department must be prepared to implement appropriate measures in support of raising standards in schools which parents perceive are not yet ‘good enough’. First preference applications are a sound indicator.
 - The exercise of choice should be deferred to 14 when it is educationally more appropriate.

Chapter 3

Choosing A Post-primary School

Question 2 Pupil Profile

The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) whether the Pupil Profile should be used in the way described in the Consultation Document; and
- (b) whether there are alternative or additional ways in which the Pupil Profile should be used to help parents decide on future post-primary provision for their child.

(a)

The Board agrees with the fundamental principle underlying the new admissions arrangements of “informed parental and pupil choice”. However, some issues need to be considered to ensure that information is relevant and wide ranging and that parents are actively engaged as contributing partners throughout the process to ensure that the evidence in the Pupil Profile is both legitimate and agreed by all stakeholders.

In particular it is the view of the Board that it is too late in the process to begin discussion on the child’s Pupil Profile in Year 6. We cannot overstate the need for parental contribution, reciprocal debate and agreement by all stakeholders throughout the process. The parent – child – teacher consultation and their understanding of the process are central to its success.

The Board foresees difficulties arising in defining ‘Aptitudes for Learning’. Every child has an aptitude for learning, so defining a progression which is educationally valid may pose a challenge.

The Board is of the view that the recommendations proposed would place a significant burden on principals and teachers. It is essential that the Pupil Profile is completed objectively and reflects the child’s educational needs, interests and aspirations. The Board would be genuinely concerned that educational objectivity could be tempered by fear of litigation and challenging parental opinion.

The Board notes that, if the Pupil Profile is to be used as an objective assessment of a child’s achievements, there is a challenge to the ‘subjective’ opinions aspect of the document.

The Board recognises the significant professional development implications raised in the document. There is an indication that all teachers would need to have quality training in standardised testing, profiling and the use of a range of external tests. Training for teachers would need to be in place very soon, especially in the areas of Personal Development, Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities and Aptitudes for Learning, in preparation for implementation from Year 5 in 2007. There are also ongoing professional development implications for teachers and Boards of Governors. This staff development issue must be resourced through the CASS services.

The Board has concerns about the potential increase in the bureaucratic burden on schools and teachers. In addition to teaching, primary teachers are also required to spend valuable time on profiling and related administration and paperwork, as well as parental interviews.

The Board has further concerns over the introduction of the Pupil Profile from Year 5 in 2007 for use in transfer in 2009-2010. Schools would need to have procedures and information in place now to ease the introduction of the scheme, otherwise validity and reliability of information will be brought into question.

The Board recommends the development of a 'model profile' in advance which could be used to illustrate 'educational pathways' to parents. This potential education and career pathways could be 'matched' to Pupil Profiles thus providing parents with a range of examples of possible ways forward.

The Board agrees that parents should receive information on and have opportunities to visit post-primary schools. The Board believes that the profile should be used by parents to form the basis of an informed discussion with potential post-primary schools. The Board believes that post-primary schools should not receive the Pupil Profile in advance of these interviews.

Where the Pupil Profile is used as part of the post-primary admissions process, it may be potentially contentious, when the views of parent and teacher conflict.

The Board recommends that the development of a Pupil Profile should be set within a process which develops capacity for the right choice to be made. If the profile is the only document then the process could be manipulated.

(b)

The Board believes that the analysis and consultation would have been significantly enhanced if the consultation exercise had contained examples of profiles.

The Board believes that the Pupil Profile would be enhanced by the inclusion of the opinion of the pupil. If the whole process is predicated on the 'centrality of the child' then the 'voice' of the child should be expressed in the profile.

The place of 'formative assessment' as the 'glue' of the revised curriculum and assessment proposals will necessitate the pupil engaging in setting and achieving personal learning targets. The Board believes that this should be catered for in the profile and the profile should not be a process 'done to' but 'done with' pupils. It should encompass and provide for the opinion and learning of the child.

The Board further believes that there should be greater partnership between parent and teacher in the completion of the Pupil Profile. If there was a section where parents could identify additional information, for example, activities the school were unaware of, then this could encourage parents to 'buy in' to the process and at the same time emphasise that the Profile is not for use as part of the selection procedure.

The Board would caution that when the Pupil Profile envisages subjective as well as objective matters being taken into account then there is significant room for third parties to disagree with the manner in which the judgement is exercised and decisions reached.

Question 3 Advice from the Primary School

The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from the primary school to help parents make informed decisions.

The Board agrees that the Pupil Profile should play an important role in the discussions between schools and with parents of the children in Year 6 regarding their progress, achievements and future educational needs.

The Board would draw attention to a number of issues which it believes need to be addressed to ensure rigour, the credibility and the integrity of the process:

- The roles and responsibilities of the parent, child and teacher as contributors to the process and the whole-school responsibility need to be clarified. Clear guidance needs to be provided for schools as to how primary schools will stand over judgements made and advice given.
- Standardised tests are currently in common use in primary schools to confirm or challenge teacher assessment and thinking on pupil achievement but the choice and use of tests are not currently consistent across schools. The Board contends that for credibility in the process, there needs to be consistency across schools.
- The timing of the process has major implications in that it shifts the emphasis from Year 7 to Year 6. Year 7 would now appear to be a transition year. End of Key Stage 2 summative assessments could be redundant. They may be used by government to monitor overall standards but little else. The Board would have concerns that there is potential for a drive to achieve higher levels by the end of Term 2 of Year 6 and the possible emergence of a new culture of private tutoring, which could distort results and the curriculum provision.
- The Board believes that academic achievement will initially remain the main focus for many parents in making the decision about transfer to a post-primary school. The Board therefore recommends that a training strategy for parents be agreed and implemented to develop parents' knowledge about the curriculum and assessment process and their role in it.
- The Board notes that primary schools will need to plan for the parent – child – teacher consultation including, the timing and number of consultations, and that there should be a consistent approach across schools.
- The Board is aware that there are concerns about children who develop late or who are misplaced. The Board therefore would seek clarification as to the process and procedures to enable movement within the system.
- The Board believes that, to ensure rigour and consistency in the process, there needs to be training for teachers.

- The Board would also have concerns that assessing Aptitudes for Learning might lead to a return to measuring IQ to provide evidence. This would be incompatible with the whole philosophy underpinning the Revised Curriculum and current research findings.

With regard to advising parents on their children's future educational needs, the Board agrees that post-primary schools should make available to primary schools all relevant information which will enable them to better inform parents.

The Board would highlight the need for training for primary principals and teachers on post-primary provision, including the range of post-primary opportunities and pathways.

The Board feels that supplementary information should be made available from other sources, including the Department and Education and Library Boards.

The Board is aware of the resource implications of the proposals which will require additional time and resources to allow teachers and principals to complete the necessary administration procedures. Currently schools receive funding to provide substitute teacher cover for the period of the transfer interviews in Year 7. The new proposals require interviews in Year 6 with regard to the Pupil Profile and interviews in Year 7 to nominate preferences. The government should be aware of the increased bureaucratic burden placed on schools and be prepared to fund this additional expenditure to ensure that teaching time does not suffer.

The Board would agree that primary principals should continue to offer general advice and guidance to parents and pupils on "choice" but that they should not recommend specific schools. The Board believes that the final "choice" of post-primary school must remain with parents and pupils.

The Board would seek clarification from the Department as to the process, procedures, roles and responsibilities for the Quality Assurance of the Pupil Profile.

The Board also requests/seeks guidance from the Department on the management of cases where parents do not attend annual parent consultations and on how schools might deal with parents who do not accept the schools' advice.

The Board would welcome clear guidance as to how disputes might best be managed to avoid litigation and cases being taken by parents or by the child at a later date against a school or indeed by a child against a parent.

Question 4 Advice from the Post-Primary School

The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the range of information outlined in the Consultation Document to help parents make informed decisions;**
- (b) the role of the post-primary school in advising parents; and**
- (c) whether any other information/support should be provided to parents to assist the decision-making process.**

Prospectuses should include details of 'pathways' available to pupils via academic or vocational routes.

The Board believes that the post-primary school role in ‘providing advice’ could prove contentious with potential for litigation. Therefore, the process should be consistent and clear guidelines should be agreed on the extent and range of information expected beyond the current headings.

The Board agrees with the information to be provided in the post-primary prospectus, as set out by the 2003 regulations with the suggested additions on the Entitlement Framework, focus of the curriculum and progression routes within and beyond the school. While recognising that the range of information on schools has evolved and will continue to evolve over time, the Board would welcome a greater emphasis on and further review of information provided on the ‘school ethos’ and the strengthening of the information currently available to include school policies.

The Board supports the use of school prospectuses, open days/evenings and other opportunities for informing transferring pupils such as shadowing Year 8 pupils.

The Board is not in favour of formalising, into the procedure, one-to-one meetings with the post-primary school. The present system allows for meetings to take place informally, where necessary. If formalised into the procedure parents could feel pressurised into attending these meetings as well as attending Open Nights/Days. This could result in a disadvantage for families who are unable to attend such meetings through family or work patterns circumstance or finances. Further each post-primary school would have to arrange interviews for all potential preferences thus creating a massive and costly burden on schools. It could also result in raising parental expectations in the case of oversubscribed schools. This proposal could give rise to a substantial increase in the number of appeals particularly where principals make any comment on the suitability/non-suitability of the school for individual pupils.

The Board is concerned with the Department’s departure from its initial advice that the Pupil Profile would not be used for selection purposes. The Board would not be in favour of the Pupil Profile being given to the post-primary school in advance of any meeting.

The Board supports the proposal that parents should have access to information all year round so that transfer is not concentrated in the last few weeks and would therefore encourage post-primary schools in the short-term to make information relating to their school available on-line. The Board would be of the view that in the long-term all post-primary schools should make this information available on-line throughout the year. The on-line information should however supplement and not replace the prospectus.

Question 5 Advice from DE/Education and Library Boards

The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from DE/Education and Library Boards to help parents choose the most suitable post-primary school.

The Board should continue to provide information and guidance on the different stages of the transfer process, the roles of the parents and other stakeholders, including primary schools, post-primary schools, Education and Library Boards and the Department.

The Board should provide the transfer booklet with information on the process, descriptions of each school and their admissions criteria.

The Board welcomes acknowledgement by the Department of the support already provided by the Education and Library Board Transfer Officers to parents to help them through the admissions process.

While acknowledging that the Transfer Officers should continue to be accessible to parents and provide factual information, through a help-line during the transfer process supported by extensive web-based information, such a help-line and web-based information, would have to be resourced and staffed at an appropriate level and not an 'add-on' to existing commitments.

The Transfer Officers are also responsible for admission to primary and pre-school and the subsequent appeal procedure. Account would have to be taken of the diverse procedures operating. These admissions procedures and processes for the latter should be reviewed to ensure greater consistency and accessibility for parents.

The current Transfer Booklet should be reviewed in light of strengthened prospectuses and development of web-based information. All school-based information could be obtained directly from the school with the Education and Library Boards/Department providing an overview of the procedure. Education and Library Boards would still require admissions criteria but the possibility of only publishing electronically and thus saving printing costs should be examined though this may give rise to equality of access issues.

The Department and Education and Library Board websites could provide a central portal through which parents could access the websites for schools in the local area.

The Education and Library Board would provide information and advice on procedure and information on the post-primary schools.

Question 6 Continuing Advice during Post-Primary Education

The Department is seeking your views on what information/advice should be available to assist the choices of educational pathway, during post-primary education.

The Board agrees that the Pupil Profile should provide a more structured basis for the informed ongoing dialogue (throughout the child's education) to ensure that needs and aspirations are being met.

The Board supports the proposal that there should be a range of advice including discussion informed by the Pupil Profile with the school, careers guidance from the school and the Careers Service of the Department for Employment and Learning and, where appropriate, advice from the Board.

The discussion of appropriate educational pathways and settings is particularly important at the end of Key Stage 3 at age 14 and Key Stage 4 at age 16 which mark the child's transition from general to more differentiated provision.

The Board believes that “the choice of post-primary school at age 11 should not necessarily be the only or final determinant of a child’s educational pathway until they leave school” and that post-primary education needs to be sufficiently flexible to respond to the child’s changing needs, and alert to whether a child is struggling or not being sufficiently challenged.

Question 7 Timetable for the Admissions Process

The Department is seeking your views on the broad timetable for the new admissions procedure.

In the first year there will be an overlap where Transfer Officers will have to manage existing and new procedures alongside Open Enrolment, primary and pre-school procedures and appeals. All admission timetables must be clearly established and integrated to ensure delivery. It is essential that resources are made available and appropriate structures put in place to permit delivery of services.

The Board has reviewed the timetable and makes the following observations:

- April: Admission and Enrolment Numbers need to be agreed by April.
- May/June: Overlap of appeals and information gathering of admissions criteria are traditionally two very busy periods.
- September : Concerns with regard to tight deadline for gathering information, publishing and distributing Transfer Booklet. However, if earlier recommendations with regard to format of Transfer Booklet are implemented these concerns would be alleviated.
- November: 4 weeks would not be long enough to provide time for school discussions with parents and pupils. However, if previous recommendations are implemented this would not happen.
- December: Timetable tight for receipt and processing of Transfer Forms.
- Timetable should include consideration of Compelling Individual Circumstances (CIC)
- June deadline for appeals welcomed. This should facilitate attendance by both school and parents and curtail uncertainty for parents.
- March: Parents receive letter from school into which child has been accepted. The Board recommends that the Department explore the possibility of schools sending out acceptance letters rather than Boards. Schools currently send out letters with regard to induction arrangements, uniforms etc. This would eliminate duplication and save costs.
- May/June: Concerns with regard to pressure of time and space and staff in post-primary schools to provide induction for new pupils in May and June during school, end of key stage and public examinations, including GCSE, non-GCSE, AS and A2 examinations, as well as annual parent meetings to discuss progress.

Chapter 4

Pupils With Compelling Individual Circumstances or a Statement of Special Educational Need

Question 8 Compelling Individual Circumstances

The Department is seeking your views on the types of cases which should be considered as compelling individual circumstances.

The Board agrees that sufficient provision and flexibility within the new arrangements are required to ensure that the requirements of children with specific needs, which can only be provided for at particular mainstream schools, are met.

The Board welcomes the Department's confirmation that Compelling Individual Circumstances relate to circumstances affecting a child that are "so compelling that they necessitate a child's attendance at a particular named school rather than another" and that cases most likely to be considered are those involved with "looked after children" and children with serious medical illness who require to be near a hospital or have access to a nurse on site.

While agreeing that it is not possible to produce a definitive list, the Board proposes that the Central Panel should adjudicate according to a limited range of criteria drawn up by the Department and have discretion in to respond to individual cases.

The Board would seek clarification as to whether or not there is right of appeal against the decision of the Central Panel.

While agreeing that there should be sufficient flexibility to respond to individual cases, and while the Board recognises that there will always be compelling individual circumstances, it would highlight the need for external verification of the existence or otherwise of those circumstances to confirm the validity of those claims. The Board therefore welcomes the proposal that there should be "strong and equivocal documentary evidence from a statutory body to support any claim".

The Board agrees that a Compelling Individual Circumstance should be one that dictates attendance/non-attendance at a particular school(s) on the grounds of personal safety and should not include educational arguments.

It is essential that Compelling Individual Circumstance be endorsed by the school in question and that it is subject to the overriding principle that the child is placed in a school which can offer him/her a form of education which is best suited to his/her needs and aptitudes and afford him/her the opportunity to develop his/her potential to its fullest.

The Board would caution that, when considering such cases, due care and attention should be given to the "actual" number of children in the year group, especially those who are supernumerary and in particular the issue of health and safety with regard to class size in practical subjects, the number of specialist rooms and the availability of specialist teachers.

Question 9

The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils admitted under compelling individual circumstances should be supernumerary to schools' admissions and enrolment numbers.

Admissions and enrolment numbers broadly reflect the physical capacity of schools. It is therefore important that as far as possible the actual enrolment number reflects that capacity.

The Board believes that admissions of even small numbers of pupils with Compelling Individual Circumstances as supernumerary cases would have an impact on class size and could create difficulties for the internal management arrangements of practical classes, as well as staffing and resources. There could also be a possible impact on neighbouring schools. For this reason, the Board is of the view that Compelling Individual Cases should not be supernumerary.

The Board also recommends that the procedure and timing of consideration of these cases, which have not been included in the timetable, are addressed by the Department.

Question 10

The Department is seeking your views on whether individual Boards of Governors or a Central Panel should consider cases of compelling individual circumstances. If a Central Panel, your views are sought on its size and composition (see paragraph 4.7).

The Board supports the proposal for a Central Panel to consider cases of Compelling Individual Circumstances.

The Board agrees that such a Panel “could bring consistency, objectivity and the necessary expertise required to consider what are often sensitive and problematic cases involving medical/psychological issues”. (para 4.7)

The Board proposes that the Central Panel consist of three to five members - a legal practitioner; a medical practitioner/social worker; an educationalist, the principal (or nominated deputy from the school in question) plus a clerk.

There should be a regional pool of Panel members to serve the five Boards, clerked on an individual Board basis.

Criteria should be drawn up by the Department to assist the Panel in its decision making process.

The timing of Panel meetings is crucial, as these cases must be dealt with before other applications are considered, regardless of whether or not they are supernumerary.

Question 11 Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need

The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils with statements of special educational need should continue to be admitted as supernumerary.

The Board supports the continuation of the admission of pupils with a statement of special educational need, as supernumerary.

Statemented children are not subject to the normal admissions arrangements under Article 16(5)(b) of the Education (NI Order 1996) which provides that if a grant-aided school is specified in the statement maintained by the Board, the Board of Governors of that school shall admit the child to the school.

Pupils who are statemented should be admitted as supernumerary. The alternative would require all schools to provide that the first criterion for selection is that the pupil has a statement of special educational needs.

In accordance with the Education (NI) Order, the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (1998) page 48 Point 4.44 states:

“There may be instances where the admission of a child with a statement to a mainstream school will take the school over its approved admissions number or enrolment number for that year. The statutory requirements relating to approved admissions and enrolment numbers do not apply to children with statements, and Departmental approval to such admissions is not therefore required.”

If the admission of statemented pupils as supernumerary were to be discontinued, the following issues may arise:

- There may be difficulty in accessing places for pupils with statements.
- Statemented pupils may be treated unfavourably.
- Statemented pupils may be substantially disadvantaged.
- Bureaucracy would increase in relation to seeking Departmental approval in relation to admission numbers and class sizes.

The implementation of SENDO, and the potential increase in demand for places for statemented children in mainstream schools, will lead to possible difficulties in relation to:

- Physical capacity of the school.
- Class size – an increase in the number of people in classrooms, because many children will have classroom assistants. This could be a health and safety issue especially in subjects where the maximum size of class is determined by the Department e.g. Home Economics and Technology.

The Board would support the continuation of supernumerary status because of the difficulty with current statementing and transfer timetables. However, schools should be able to take account of the presence of the pupil when considering admission requests to the year group.

The Board believes that the Department should review and set regularly, enrolment numbers, admissions numbers, physical capacity and, in particular, the actual numbers which include pupils with a statement of educational needs.

Chapter 5

Admissions Criteria For Oversubscribed Schools

The SEELB welcomes the Department’s proposal to streamline and simplify the admissions process where currently “there is limited consistency in how the criteria are defined or applied” which makes the process “complex for parents to understand” (para 5.2) and to draw up a “menu of admissions criteria” from which schools should choose when oversubscribed.

The Board agrees in principle with the 3 broad categories of criteria (family-focused, community-based, geographical) and accepts the need to have agreed and transparent tiebreakers.

Question 12 Family-Focused Criteria

The Department is seeking your views on family-focussed criteria listed and their inclusion within the menu.

The SEELB believes that schools should be family-focused and agrees with the two proposed family-focused criteria - siblings currently at the school and eldest or only child.

The Board believes that there are practical domestic, social and emotional reasons why a family with pupils at a particular school should be given preference and encouraged to keep children at the one school.

The Board would question the rationale behind why the eldest child should be given priority over a child whose family had attended the school but, because of age gap, had left. Where schools have used this second criterion, parents with siblings previously at the school have found the logic difficult to comprehend.

The Board would see no merit in any other family relationship apart from sibling as a principle criterion.

The Board agrees that children without older siblings should not be disadvantaged.

In the case of single-sex schools, the eldest child of that gender should not be penalised because the eldest child in the family may have attended another school.

The Board would point out however that the changing nature of what constitutes a family means the definition of eldest child is proving increasingly difficult to define, as illustrated in recent High Court cases. If ‘eldest child’ is to remain as a criterion, careful definition would be required.

The Board would also wish to ensure that a child is not disadvantaged because an older sibling has a statement of special educational need.

Question 13 Community-Based Criteria

The Department is seeking your views on the community-based criteria listed, their inclusion within the menu and how they should be defined.

The Board acknowledges that many schools serve their local community. The Board therefore broadly supports the criteria of feeder primary schools and parish which reflect historical patterns of enrolment and local communities and which are widely used at present by schools.

The Board supports feeder primary schools provided guidance is given from the Department as to the designation of feeder primary schools. The Department would have to ensure that the use of this criterion is robust enough to ensure that these criteria are effective, fair and transparent and to withstand equality legislation.

The Board concurs with the Department that it is important for schools not to name so many feeder primary schools or parishes that the community basis of the criteria becomes meaningless and, that from an equality point of view, some primary schools are inadvertently excluded.

Question 14

The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the geographical criteria listed, their inclusion within the menu and the most appropriate means of operating them; and**
- (b) what percentage limit, if any, should be set for places allocated by geographical criteria.**

The Board does not support the school-centred catchment criterion which proposes giving priority to pupils who live within a defined area. The Board views this as potential admission by postcode. The Board agrees that there would be potential for difficulties arising from overlapping boundaries and disadvantage caused to children because of gaps between adjacent areas. Additional mechanisms would need to be put in place to ensure this does not happen.

The Board supports the child-centred catchment criterion which, by ensuring that each child is given priority for a place at their closest suitable school, is in line with the first principle which puts “the interest of the child at the centre of all decision making”.

The Board concurs with the benefits as identified by the Department in terms of practicality and costs. The Board would add to the potential benefits in terms of the pupils’ health for those walking or cycling to their school.

The Board agrees that parents and pupils will need to receive clear information and maps measuring the catchment area well in advance of completing the Transfer Form.

It is the view of the Board that percentage limits are difficult to apply and likely to result in an increase in appeals due to their non-transparent nature.

The Board also feels that it is particularly difficult to respond vis-a-vis to the geographical and community based admissions criteria due to the uncertainty regarding the future post-primary educational infrastructure.

Question 15 Tiebreakers

The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the tiebreakers, random selection and proximity from home to school, as a means of admitting pupils down to the last available place;**
- (b) the most appropriate method of operating random selection and/or measuring proximity; and**
- (c) whether schools should be free to use different methods of operating random selection or proximity**

The Board acknowledges that, although most children will be admitted to post-primary schools on the basis of the criteria already considered, the admissions criteria must be capable of admitting pupils down to the last available place. A tiebreaker criterion will be needed to facilitate particular decisions.

The Board would support random selection by surname as the preferred option for reasons stated in paragraph 5.14. The letters of the alphabet are selected in random order by computer and published in the Transfer Booklet in advance of the transfer process so that parents could make an informed decision. Pupils are offered places on the basis of the initial letter of the surname in the order set out in the Transfer booklet. Care should be taken with M's and Mc's.

The Board feels that the criterion of proximity from home to school or distance is contentious, could be expensive (if Ordnance Survey or geo-mapping techniques are needed to measure distances) and can only delay decisions for schools. This could potentially disadvantage children living in rural areas and not resident within close proximity to post-primary schools.

The Board does not support any form of random lottery as it is not transparent.

The Board contends that, in the interest of consistency and transparency, all schools should be required to use the same process for randomly selecting pupils.

Question 16 Other Criteria

The Department is seeking your views on any other criteria that you believe should be included in the menu, bearing in mind the principles and objectives outlined in Chapter 2.

All major criteria have been identified.

If the 'eldest child' is used as a criterion it is essential that a child with an elder sibling, who has a statement of special educational needs, is not penalised. In the case of single-sex schools, the eldest child of that gender should not be penalised because the eldest child in the family may have attended another school.

In the case of single-sex schools, the second child should not be penalised

Criteria for children living outside Northern Ireland e.g. Irish Republic and children living within Northern Ireland whose parents are not EU nationals, should be clearly defined by the Department in consultation with the Immigration Department.

The Board recommends that the Department clarify whether or not children moving into an area should be given special consideration as they will not readily meet the criteria outlined in the menu.

The Board would not support the use of interviews for admissions as they cannot be standardised over the time period and are open to claims that they assess aptitude, ability or social circumstance.

Particular difficulties which arise should be dealt with by the admissions support body in consultation with the Department with regard to variations in admissions or enrolment numbers.

Question 17 Format of Menu

The Department is seeking your views on the possible options for the menu.

As outlined earlier the Board agrees with the four main categories as outlined in the menu.

Chapter 6 Admissions Appeals

Question 18

The Department is seeking your views on whether the process for appealing the decisions of BOGs not to admit a child to the school should be altered in any way.

If implemented the Central Panel's consideration of Compelling Individual Circumstances will impact on the current admissions appeals process. There is a lack of clarity on how appeals relating to CIC will be dealt with.

It is recommended that a review of the whole admissions appeals procedure should take place after revised procedures for admissions arrangements have been established and implemented.

Consideration could be given to a single set of regulations governing the membership of admission and expulsion appeals tribunals.

Consideration should also be given to alignment of the Central Panel and Admissions Appeals Tribunals.

Other Issues

Are there any other issues you would like to comment on in relation to new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools? If so, please use the box below.

The Board recommends that procedures for transfer between Schools in Years 9-14 should be reviewed.

The Board further proposes that regulation should be set in place to require proof of address in any application.

The Board suggests that the existing parental preference system should be maintained.

The Board proposes that the same admissions criteria should apply to entry to schools during and subsequent to entry in Year 8.

Do you think any of the issues contained in the Consultation Document would have any adverse implications for any of the Section 75 categories?

Yes.

The Board believes that the criterion using feeder primary schools could impact on persons of different religious belief.

Conclusion

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has maintained consistently the view that developing the unique attributes of each young person should lie at the heart of our education system. Therefore the Board's aim has been to identify clearly the curriculum and structural arrangements necessary to encourage and support an enrichment of the quality of life for individuals, local communities and society through co-operation, mutual respect and partnership. The Board believes that the comments and proposals offered throughout this response would create such an education system; one that is of the highest quality as well as the most appropriate for all young people in Northern Ireland.

The abolition of the transfer test and its replacement by a new common curriculum for all pupils in years 1-10 realises and puts into practice the Board's aim.

For reasons of equity, equality of opportunity and excellence, the Board has concluded that progression from a Year 1 to Year 10 all-ability school system, to one of a range of types of post Year 10 provision should occur at age 14. The introduction of a lifelong learning profile would facilitate progression by choice through guiding and informing pupils, parents, teachers and schools.

The Board is firmly of the opinion that any changes to the admissions arrangements, as for the post-primary system, should be gradual and planned carefully to take account of the demands which will be placed on teachers, pupils, parents, governors and Boards.

The Board recognises that the review of the admissions arrangements, post-primary education and the curriculum are inextricably linked. However, it is important to emphasise that any decisions about future post-primary structures should follow on from agreement about the

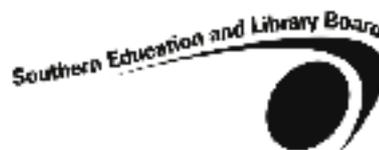
aim and new objectives of the curriculum. Likewise new admissions arrangements should follow on from agreement about post-primary structures.

Successful change in post-primary education will only be possible if the resource implications are fully addressed. The Board would wish to emphasise that, in the interests of creating genuine parity of esteem for schools, extra funding will need to be made available.

The Board does not underestimate the challenges which these comments and proposals will present. However, the Board looks forward to working with all those concerned in shaping the future structure, content and, above all, the purpose of the education system for young people in Northern Ireland.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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18 December 2006

Ms Stella McArdle
Clerk
Room 245
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Dear Ms McArdle

SCHOOLS ADMISSION POLICY

I enclose a copy of the response sent in June 2005 from the Southern Education and Library Board to the Department of Education Consultation Document on New Admission Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools.

The Southern Education and Library Board welcomed the opportunity to respond to the Department of Education consultation document on New Admission Arrangements for Post Primary Schools (January 2005) since there are implications for primary and post primary schools, as well as for the support services provided by Board personnel to schools and parents in respect of this important aspect of a child's education.

The board agreed that it is vital that parents have access to sound advice from all the participants in the process, that parents are aware of the role that they themselves and others have to play in the process, and that the process is transparent and clearly understood and accepted by all particularly in the climate of change that lies ahead.

The need for adequate resourcing and training of school personnel, governors and board services is equally important to ensure that the proposals can be effectively implemented.

Within the Southern Board, the Two Tier System is unique, with children being subject to the application of admissions criteria not just at Year 8 but also at Year 11 when application is made to the Senior High Schools. Schools within the Craigavon "Dixon Plan" specifically requested that a statement be included in the Southern Board's response to the consultation that the Board of Governors of these schools are happy with the arrangements that presently exist for their schools and do not want these to change. The board would strongly emphasise the high level of satisfaction of parents with the Two Tier System (as evidenced by the small number of children whose parents opt out of the System) and would wish to put on record their strong view that any changes to the admission arrangements for post primary schools should not destabilise the Two Tier System.

The board's response to the consultation document is attached, with the responses detailed in the order contained in the response booklet.

Because of the significance of the proposals for pupils, parents, schools and the board a number of discussion sessions were held with primary and post-primary school representatives. These were not designed to achieve consensus on the proposals but rather to provide opportunities for school authorities to discuss the proposals in detail and to encourage schools to respond individually to the document. A copy of comments from these sessions is available should you wish to have sight of them.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mairead Maguire".

Mairead Maguire (Mrs)
Head of Pupil and Parent Unit

MM/sm
Telephone No (028) 37512411
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Southern Education and Library Board



New Admission Arrangements for Post Primary Schools Response from the Southern Education and Library Board

Q1 The Department is seeking your views on whether the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements.

The board agrees with the principles and objectives outlined. In order to achieve these it is necessary to identify some of the weaknesses within.

- It is a fallacy to think a reduction in the number of pupils will reduce pressure on ‘popular’ schools.
- If schools are given sufficient flexibility to set their criteria it is unrealistic to expect that each child will be given priority under one set of criteria within a particular area.
- The existing transport policy militates against maximising parental preference.
- It is important to ensure that parents have confidence that all schools are good enough for their child, however, the Capital Building programme, New Curriculum, Entitlement Framework along with an overall reduction in numbers will not by themselves ensure this objective. The government must be prepared to identify and take remedial action against schools which parents perceive are not yet ‘good enough’. The current number of first preference applications are an indicator of parental perceptions.

Q2 The Department is seeking your views on:

(a) whether the Pupil Profile should be used in the way described in the Consultation Document;

It is essential that Pupil Profiles are completed honestly and objectively and reflect the child’s educational needs, interests and aspirations. There is concern that if used as part of the Transfer Procedure the Pupil Profile will become a legal document which will be contentious and could lead to litigation against the primary school principal. Honesty and objectivity could be tempered by fear of litigation and the need to appease demanding parents.

(b) whether there are alternative or additional ways in which the Pupil Profile should be used to help parents decide on future post-primary provision for their child.

There should be more of a partnership between parent and teacher in completion of the Pupil Profile. If there was a section where parents could identify additional information (eg activities the school are unaware of) this could encourage parents to ‘buy in’ to the system

and emphasise that the Profile is not used as part of the selection procedure. The board would query how/when the information from a child's P7 year is included in the Pupil Profile, particularly when many children (especially boys) develop/mature significantly in this final year of their primary education.

Q3 The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from the primary school to help parents make informed decisions.

The information identified in the consultation document is sufficient providing the post-primary sector make available all relevant information to primary schools to enable them to pass it on to parents.

At present schools are allowed substitute teacher costs to provide cover for the period of the Transfer interviews. The new proposal requires interviews in P6 re the Pupil Profile and interviews in P7 to nominate preferences. The government should be aware of the increased bureaucratic burden placed on schools and be prepared to fund this additional expenditure in order that teaching time does not suffer.

The board would agree that primary school principals should continue to offer general advice to assist parents and pupils but not recommend specific schools.

Q4 The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the range of information outlined in the Consultation Document to help parents make informed decisions;**
- (b) the role of the post-primary school in advising parents; and**
- (c) whether any other information/support should be provided to parents to assist the decision-making process.**

The board agrees with the information as suggested apart from one-to-one meetings with post-primary school. As the rationale for the meetings is disputed the board reserves comment on whether or not such Pupil Profiles should be provided in advance of any such meetings. The present system allows for meetings to take place informally, where necessary, if formalised into the procedure parents could feel pressurised into attending these meetings as well as attending Open Nights/Days. Each post-primary school would have to arrange interviews for all potential preferences with nugatory effect thus creating a massive burden on schools. It could also result in raising parental expectations that in the case of oversubscribed schools cannot be realised. This proposal could result in a substantial increase in the number of appeals particularly where principals make comment on the suitability/non-suitability of the school for individual pupils.

There should be a strengthening of information currently available in prospectuses before a parent chooses preferences eg school policies, guidance on the amount of homework etc.

Q5 The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from DE/ELBs to help parents choose the most suitable post-primary school.

A Helpline and web-based information would have to be resourced and staffed at an appropriate level and not as an 'add-on' to existing commitments. The boards are also responsible for admission to primary and pre-school and the subsequent appeal procedure. Account would have to be taken of the diverse procedures operating throughout the course of the year.

The board feels that the current Transfer Booklet should be reviewed in light of strengthened prospectuses and development of web-based information. All school based information could be obtained directly from the school with the Education and Library Boards/Department of Education providing an overview of the procedure. Education and Library Boards would still require admission criteria but the possibility of only publishing electronically and thus saving printing costs should be examined (currently evidenced by number of 'hits' on Board websites). This would require an amendment to relevant legislation.

Q6 The Department is seeking your views on what information/advice should be available to assist with choices of educational pathway, during post-primary education.

With reference to Paragraph 3.17 the board would question where independent advice would be sourced and how board staff could give qualitative advice regarding 'alternative settings'. The wording of the final sentence would imply a guarantee of acceptance at the chosen school irrespective of numbers etc.

Q7 The Department is seeking your views on the broad timetable for the new admissions process.

In the first year of operation there will be an overlap whereby the board will have to manage existing and new procedures alongside open enrolment primary and pre-school procedures and appeals. All admission timetables must be clearly established and integrated to ensure delivery. It is essential that resources are made available and appropriate structures are put in place to permit delivery of services.

Timetable:

- The board would suggest that Admission/Enrolment Numbers need to be agreed by April
- The board would express concern at the overlap of appeals and information gathering of admission criteria (traditionally two very time demanding periods for the Transfer Section)
- The board would also express concerns about the tight deadline for gathering information, publishing and distributing Transfer Booklets however, if earlier recommendations re format of Transfer Booklets were implemented these concerns would be alleviated.

- November: 4 weeks would not be long enough to provide time for discussions with parents and pupils. Again, if previous recommendations implemented this would not happen.
- Timetable tight for receipt and processing of Transfer Forms (especially with the proximity to Christmas)
- The timetable should include consideration of Compelling Individual Circumstances.
- The board welcomes June deadline for appeals. This should facilitate attendance by both school and parents and curtail uncertainty for parents.
- The possibility of schools sending out acceptance letters (as in the primary and pre-school sectors) rather than Boards should be explored. (Schools currently send out letters re induction arrangements, uniforms etc). This would eliminate duplication and reduce costs.

Q8 The Department is seeking your views on the types of cases which should be considered as Compelling Individual Circumstances

The board agrees with paragraph 4.4 but feels it is not possible to produce a definitive list.

Compelling Individual Circumstances should be a case that dictates attendance/non-attendance at a particular school(s) on grounds of personal safety and should not include educational arguments.

The board queries whether there is any right of appeal against the decision of the Central Panel/Board of Governors?

Q9 The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils admitted under Compelling Individual Circumstances should be supernumerary to schools' admissions and enrolment numbers

The board has differing views on whether such pupils should be supernumerary. One view is that no individual child should be disadvantaged by another child's Compelling Individual Circumstances and that admission should be supernumerary but only in the year of enrolment. If such children are supernumerary they should not be part of the admissions criteria.

The opposing view is that they should not be supernumerary because of their impact on class size, practical classes and possible impact on neighbouring schools.

The procedure and timing of consideration of these cases have not been addressed in the timetable.

Consideration should be given to the impact on numbers, if supernumerary of:

Compelling Individual Circumstances, Children with Statements, Children admitted on Appeal. Whilst each category may be small in number the combined total of these children could be significant, year on year for some schools.

The decision as to whether or not such pupils are to be classified as supernumerary should be considered in the context of inclusion generally and the SENDO legislation which is to take effect later this year.

Q10 The Department is seeking your views on whether individual Boards of Governors or a Central Panel should consider cases of Compelling Individual Circumstances. If a Central Panel, your views are sought on size and composition.

The board believes that there should be a Central Panel for the reasons outlined. The panel should be comprised of three members: legal, medical/social and educational background plus clerk. There should be a pool of Panel Members which would serve the Five education and Library Boards but clerked on an individual board basis. However the board acknowledges that the existence of a Central Panel could be perceived as diminishing the role of the Board of Governors in determining who should be admitted.

The timing is crucial, these cases have to be dealt with before other applications are considered regardless of whether they are supernumerary or not.

Q11 The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils with statements of special educational need should continue to be admitted as supernumerary.

The board would prefer such pupils remain supernumerary because of difficulty with current statementing timetable/transfer timetable. However schools should be able to take account of the presence of the pupil when considering admission requests to the year group.

Q12 The Department is seeking your views on the family-focused criteria listed and their inclusion within a menu.

The board support the concept of admissions criteria which relate to a sibling at the school. There are practical and ecological reasons why a family with pupils at a particular school should be given preference and encouraged to keep children at the one school. Why the eldest child should be given priority over a child whose family had attended the school but because of an age gap had left is not clear and where schools have used this second criterion parents with siblings previously at the school have found the logic difficult to comprehend.

The changing nature of what constitutes a family means the definition of eldest child is proving increasingly difficult to define as illustrated in recent High Court cases. If 'eldest child' is to remain as a criterion careful definition would be required. The board would also want a reassurance that no child is disadvantaged because an older sibling has a statement.

Q13 The Department is seeking your views on the community based criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and how they should be defined.

Experience at appeals shows the use of parish boundaries are difficult to define. In some cases there is more than one post-primary in a parish. Current practice shows that the parish dimension is largely restricted to the maintained sector.

The board broadly supports the concept of feeder primary schools provided guidance is given from the Department of Education as to the designation of feeder primary schools. The Department would have to ensure that the use of this criterion is robust enough to withstand equality legislation.

Q14 The Department is seeking your views on

- (a) the geographical criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and the most appropriate means of operating them; and**
- (b) what percentage limit, if any, should be set for places allocated by geographical criteria**

The board would not support school centred catchments which equates to admission by postcode. Whilst perhaps contributing to the concept of children attending their local school this could potentially distort enrolments and disadvantage children whose parents were unable to move house to the 'right area'. There is also the potential for overlap where there are a number of schools within close proximity. The child centred concept is more in line with principles of the document as each child would have one nearest suitable school.

Percentage limits are difficult to apply and likely to result in an increase in appeals due to the non-transparent nature.

Q15 The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the tiebreakers, random selection and proximity from home to school, as a means of admitting pupils down to the last available place;**
- (b) the most appropriate method of operating random selection and/or measuring proximity; and**
- (c) whether schools should be free to use different methods of operating random selection or proximity**

Random selection by surname would be the preferred option of the board for the reasons stated in paragraph 5.14 of the document, but care would be required with M's and Mc's.

The use of distance is contentious and expensive if Ordnance Survey is to measure, can only delay decisions for schools.

Random lottery is not transparent.

Q16 The Department is seeking your views on any other criteria that you believe should be included in the menu, bearing in mind the principles and objectives outlined in Chapter 2.

If eldest child is used as a criterion it is essential that a child with an elder sibling who has a statement is not penalised.

Criteria for children living outside Northern Ireland should be clearly defined by the Department of Education in consultation with the Immigration Department to address the uniqueness of

children from the Irish Republic seeking admission as well as children living in the province whose parents are not EU nationals.

A decision should be made regarding whether or not children moving into an area should be given any special consideration as they will not readily meet the criteria listed.

Q17 The Department is seeking your views on the possible options for the menu.

The board has no comment to make on whether or not any category should be compulsory, or whether the categories should be applied in a particular order. However, the board does query how either of these scenarios can be balanced easily against the principle of a Board of Governors having the flexibility to set its own admission criteria. Furthermore, how will this flexibility be managed if the admission criteria of various schools in an area are to be complimentary and who can monitor, let alone guarantee that every child will receive priority in at least one school's admission criteria.

Q18 The Department is seeking your views on whether the process for appealing the decisions of Boards of Governors not to admit a child to the school should be altered in any way.

If implemented the Central Panel's consideration of Compelling Individual Circumstances will impact on the present appeal process. There is a lack of clarity on how appeals relating to Compelling Individual Circumstances will be dealt with.

It is recommended that a review of the appeals procedure should take place after revised procedures have been implemented/established.

Some consideration should be given to zero-rating pupils admitted on appeal, at least in those schools which lose a significant number of appeals or where there is a pattern of lost appeals.

Other Issues

The procedure for Transfer between Schools (Years 9-14) will have to be reviewed as well as any implications for the Two Tier System within the Craigavon area.

Do you think any of the issues contained in the Consultation Document would have any adverse implications for any of the Section 75 categories?

The criterion using feeder primary schools could potentially impact on persons of different religious belief.

Conclusion

The board acknowledges that the proposals contained in the document will require a change of culture on the part of stakeholders in the process. The board would emphasise that any new arrangements should promote what is good for the child and that it would wish to see every opportunity availed of to move forward in a spirit of co-operation with this vision in mind.

The Transferors Representative Council

TRC paper to Assembly programme for Government Sub-Group

15th December 2006

The following are some general comments we would like to make with regard to the matters within the terms of reference of this Sub-Group.

1. Pupil Profile

- 1.1. An effective Pupil Profile along with a primary principal's advice should provide parents with helpful guidance about an appropriate educational pathway for their child as he/she enters Key Stage 3. Parents may decide to show their child's Pupil Profile to the Post-Primary school; this will provide valuable information to parents about the probable suitability for their child of the programmes the schools offer.
- 1.2. The Minister's statement of December 2005 on 'New Post-primary Arrangements' indicates that there has been ongoing testing and refining of the Pupil Profile. We consider that honest and accurate feedback of the results of this testing must be put in the public domain.

2. Admissions criteria

- 2.1. It is difficult to make any informed comment on the effect of community/ geographical criteria not knowing what regulations will be proposed by the Department regarding the number, nature and sequence of such criteria. We are however aware that some schools already apply such criteria. In oversubscribed schools it is likely that decisions will quickly fall to a tie-breaker criterion.
- 2.2. We are particularly concerned that the proposed admissions criteria may discriminate against pupils in rural communities who live a considerable distance from post-primary schools. The Recent Review of Public Administration Policy Papers gives cause for concern in this regard; Paper 15 'Home to School Transport' indicates that a Parental Charge is likely to be introduced in the future.
- 2.3. It is likely that disputes about distance calculation, post-codes, and trueness of any random order will become a reality and may lead to an increased number of appeals and legal challenges.

3. Other appropriate arrangements – general comments

- 3.1. We recognize the need for an educational system that is flexible and adaptable, keeping options open for as long as possible. Pupil's abilities and aptitudes develop at different rates; it is essential to have a continuous process of adaptability within the system.
- 3.2. The present selective system has diminished the esteem of non-grammar schools in the eyes of many parents. Even if a non-selective system is agreed, a prolonged investment of resources will be required in such schools.
- 3.3. There is likely in some areas to be an oversubscription of grammar schools, particularly in some urban areas. It is regrettable that at present there are no researched estimates available of the likely extent of oversubscription in popular schools.
- 3.4. The end of Key Stage 3 is an important educational pathway decision point. Pupils at the age of 14+ are likely to be more able to make an informed decision about their aspirations at Key Stage 4.

UTU Presentation to Assembly Sub-group

Friday 15th December 2006

The UTU welcomes the opportunity to address this sub-group and at the outset I would wish to emphasise this union's continued opposition to any form of academic selection. This has been the consistent policy of UTU over many years and we are delighted that this sub-group is now examining what is to happen after the termination of the existing iniquitous transfer procedure.

The terms of reference highlight two areas on which the UTU has previously made considered response. The Pupil Profile is viewed by UTU as an excellent tool if properly used, but if it is not used in the way it was intended then it could become a very dangerous weapon. Indeed, if it were to be hi-jacked and turned into a selective instrument then I think all the good work that teachers, under the leadership of CCEA, have done in its development could well be lost.

The Pupil Profile is essentially an extension of the kind of assessments teachers make about pupils on an ongoing basis in every school already. The fact that it will become standardised will be of benefit to all. It should give a broad and balanced picture of a young person's strengths and interests, of what they have achieved to date across the whole range of curricular and extra-curricular activities. Teachers have certain concerns about the workload implications but I am sure we can work through the appropriate negotiating machinery to resolve any issues that arise.

Teachers – particularly in the primary sector – welcome the prospect of a wider curriculum at the top end of the primary school. They will embrace the Pupil Profile, as they have embraced very many worthwhile initiatives in recent years. They see it as a way of ensuring that parents have the fullest possible information to advise them of the best pathway for their children. What they will NOT do is allow themselves to be put in a situation where the professional advice they have given is used within a selective situation. In fact, teachers have indicated that if any pressure were to be put on them to do so, they would refuse to co-operate.

The UTU is convinced that even if the Pupil Profile is not entirely finalised on the date envisaged in the original time schedule it would still be possible for teachers to supply sufficient information to advise a parent of their child's strengths and weaknesses. That is, after all one, of a teachers professional competencies.

In addition the UTU believes that it is imperative that there is a radical change in how the public perceives the change of school at age 11. I believe that the concept of lifelong learning has impacted upon the traditional views of the timeframe for education and I think the time is now right to shift the emphasis from 11 to 14 in terms of choosing career pathways. I hasten to add that even at 14 it should be an elective system rather than a selective one. This change of emphasis would have the effect of reducing the impact of the Pupil Profile at age 11 in any case, so if there are any concerns about there being insufficient time left to put a system in place that that would take the pressure off.

We are facing an unprecedented period of change in Northern Ireland in the public sector. Schools must, and will, change. Rationalisation is an inevitable fact and whether we like it or not the traditional institutions, particularly the grammar schools, must adapt to customer demand. When so many aspects of our lives are client-driven it is incredible that in this one very important area of life we still allow the institution rather than the customer to make the choice.

Before moving on to talk about the Admissions criteria I would just like to flag up the very important issue of funding any new post-primary arrangements. One of the challenges will be to ensure that collaboration between providers is not hampered by a system where schools are competing for funds based on pupil numbers. This must be radically overhauled to suit the needs of the new system.

The choice of Admissions criteria has been seen by many as critical to the success of future post-primary arrangements. UTU agrees with the four broad categories outlined in the consultation document and is firmly of the belief that there should be a compulsory order for listing criteria, but that not all schools might wish to use all of the approved criteria. Indeed, UTU believes that the only compulsory category for any school should be the tiebreaker.

UTU believes that the family-focused criteria are important and should feature as high priority. The geographical criteria support the idea of a school serving a local community and the UTU would wish to ensure that where possible young people were not denied access to their local school, if that was their preferred choice.

The community-based criteria have the potential to perpetuate existing social bias. The UTU also believes that if the number of named feeder schools is high then its usefulness is decreased as a determinant in cases of oversubscription.

In the final category – tie-breakers – the UTU is comfortable that either geographical or random selection would be acceptable for what by this time would be a very small number of pupils. If forced to choose between the two then UTU would narrowly opt for the geographical criterion on the grounds that proximity to home means less travel for children of 11 years of age.

The UTU suggests that the appropriate order for the criteria are:

- (1) Family-focused
- (2) Geographical
- (3) Community-based
- (4) Tiebreaker

The UTU would be strongly opposed to selection of pupils by a school by means of interview or entrance test. As I said earlier, pupils should be choosing schools, not vice-versa.

Before ending I wish to make a heartfelt plea on behalf of teachers – PLEASE ACT WITH URGENCY TO GET A CONSULTATION DOCUMENT TO THE TEACHERS UNIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Teachers will do all in their power to implement policy, but they need time to prepare for it. At present teachers and schools are in a state of limbo. They need direction; they need to be reassured that there is no going back to the 11-plus test and most of all they need to know what lies ahead.

UTU response on the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools consultation document

Context

The Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU) is the only professional teachers' organisation that is based solely in Northern Ireland. It has a membership of almost 7000 and represents teachers and principals in nursery, primary, secondary (including grammar) and special schools.

The UTU operates only in Northern Ireland, while maintaining close links with the other major teacher organisations in the British Isles. This allows UTU to concentrate on policy issues that specifically affect the teachers in Northern Ireland.

UTU is part of the worldwide teacher union network through its membership of Education International. This ensures that in formulating policy UTU takes into account the global perspective, and where appropriate draws on the research evidence produced by a range of institutions including the OECD. OECD research is commissioned by government ministers to assist them in defining government policy.

The UTU has consistently campaigned for an end to selection at age 11. UTU wholeheartedly welcomed the recommendations contained in the Costello Report and at its 2005 Conference called on the Department of Education to implement the Report in full.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has put in place a new school curriculum that will encourage schools to examine what is on offer to pupils. The UTU believes that this provides an ideal opportunity to not only look at the content but the existing structures for delivery of the new curriculum.

The UTU acknowledges the need for careful forward planning in order to accommodate the continuing decline in pupil numbers. The UTU recommends that the Department of Education seize this opportunity to enhance the education service by improving the pupil/teacher ratios in schools.

The UTU also acknowledges that the changes in provision will require radical changes in physical provision of facilities. The kind of facilities on offer to pupils must reflect the rapid advances in technology that have and will continue to take place. The Department of Education must ensure that schools are fit for the requirements of the 21st Century and are able to provide the range and balance of learning opportunities that will allow each young person to achieve their full potential. This will not be possible unless there is sufficient allocation of resources to ensure that the changes can be fully implemented throughout Northern Ireland, in both urban and rural areas.

The UTU fully supports the use of the Pupil Profile provided it is used as it is intended to inform parental/pupil choice. The UTU believes that the Pupil Profile should not be used in

a negative way to prevent a pupil from choosing a pathway and endorses the view that the crucial choice of pathway is not at age 11, since all pupils will follow a common curriculum up until age 14. The UTU will vehemently oppose any attempt to link the information contained within a Pupil Profile to the admissions criteria for a school.

The UTU welcomes the flexibility and increased choice that the new curriculum will provide, including the broadening of the range of vocational courses.

The UTU also welcomes the increased range of options that will be guaranteed to all children under the new post primary arrangements as this will ensure equity of range of opportunity for all children, regardless of where they live.

The opportunity for cooperation and collaboration is perhaps the most exciting and challenging aspect of the proposed changes. The UTU would encourage all those involved in the process to maximise the opportunities for cooperation and collaboration and to embrace a new concept of education that puts the needs of each young person before the needs of any existing institution.

In the primary sector a system of parental choice has operated successfully and the UTU sees no reason why this should not be the case at post primary level also. The out-dated selective system must be replaced and the systems already used in the primary sector provide a very valuable model for replication. Examination of the current statistics on over-subscription and the recognition that the demographic downturn will further reduce the extent of over-subscription leads the UTU to conclude that the need for widespread use of admissions criteria may not be substantial.

Principles and Objectives

The UTU wholeheartedly endorses the principle of putting the child at the centre of the process. As previously stated, it should be the child who is considered first and not the existing institutions.

It is vital that the processes used in the new transfer arrangements are transparent and consistent so that all involved in the process can have faith in the system. Parents must be advised on how the admissions arrangements may impact on their child choice of school.

The concept of informed choice is a crucial element in the proposed changes. The new arrangements must reflect real choice, unfettered by any admissions criteria that would introduce social bias into the process.

The UTU believes that discrimination of any kind must not be allowed to contaminate the new admissions process otherwise the new arrangements will be discredited. Any such bias would be inconsistent with current anti-discrimination and equality legislation and would be open to challenge.

While UTU agrees that in very many cases schools already serve their local communities and this has many strengths, it believes that there are also negatives in that it may create schools that do not have a true social mix. UTU would however wish to uphold the right of a child not to be excluded from their local school if that is where they choose to go, and this should be taken into consideration in the admissions criteria.

UTU believes that it is vital that pupils and parents, not schools, have the lead role in the decision-making process. The role of the pupil in making pathway choices should be given increasing importance with age.

An objective of the new arrangements should be to maximise the opportunity for young people to achieve their full potential and to maximise the flexibility of the system to allow them to change pathways easily at key points if the decisions previously taken prove not to be fulfilling their needs. The UTU believes this needs to be incorporated into the objective on maximising parental choice.

It is essential that the admissions criteria are complementary within an area. It would be unacceptable for a child to have to travel some distance away from his/her local area. (See 2.5 above).

The area of special educational needs must be addressed within the admissions criteria. The UTU believes that all pupils, including those with special needs at both ends of the learning spectrum, should be provided with equality of opportunity to succeed to their own potential.

The degree of flexibility given to schools should not be so great that it is open to abuse. The greater degree of commonality, then the greater chance that true equality of opportunity will prevail. The UTU would acknowledge that some element of flexibility may be necessary, but that this should be carefully controlled and monitored externally to ensure maximum uniformity of the system.

Choosing a post-primary school

The UTU has supported the development of the Pupil Profile which is simply an extension of the good practice that goes on already in the vast majority of schools. The UTU has consistently stated that a common document is not essential in the process, but nevertheless has welcomed the Pupil Profile as long as it is not used in any way to limit parental choice.

The fact that only two years of the Pupil Profile will be available in the agreed format for the first cohort of pupils transferring under the new system should not be seen as a negative. As previously stated, teachers currently monitor and record their pupils' progress in a variety of formats.

The UTU believes that used properly the Pupil Profile will be an excellent tool for assisting informed choice. It would reiterate its absolute conviction that it should not be used in any way to prevent a child from entering a particular school. If this were to be the case, teachers would not continue to support its use.

The UTU would suggest that the views of teachers be carefully considered in relation to the Pupil Profile. The system will only work if teachers have faith in it. If they believe that the information contained in the Pupil Profile will be used by anyone other than the pupil and his/her parent then this may distort or restrict the information supplied.

The UTU believes that the advice from the primary school should include a reminder to pupils that the real choices for their child should be made at 14, not at 11, when the child is still developing and maturing. The great number of older teenagers and adults who return to

courses of study later in life is testimony to the fact that it is not possible to accurately assess what a person is capable of so early on.

It is important that the dialogue between the school and the family starts early. It is also vital that the advice given by the teacher remains general and that it is emphasised that the parent and pupil are completely in control of the choice.

The UTU agrees that open days/evenings are an excellent tool in assisting parents to make their choices. It also agrees that such visits should take place in the first term of the P7 year. With the pressure of the transfer test removed from that particular time period children should be free to consider their options at this time.

School prospectuses are another excellent way for schools to provide information on what is available to pupils. The UTU would suggest that all post-primary schools be given a common ring-fenced sum to be used for the production of the prospectus or alternatively, the information should be centrally collated and distributed, in order to create “a level playing field” for all post-primary schools.

Web-based information is important but it should not be assumed that all parents/pupils have access to it. The reliance on such a means of disseminating information could be potentially discriminatory.

The UTU would refer back to one of its opening statements in relation to resourcing. If post-primary schools are to provide the level of information suggested on a one-to-one basis then there are serious funding implications that must be addressed. The demographic downturn should be used as an opportunity to allow time to be made available to teachers, both at primary and post-primary level, to provide the kind of advisory services that are suggested.

If the new system is to work effectively then there are two essential elements that must be accepted:

the current funding arrangements for schools must be revised to remove the element of competition for pupils

post-primary schools must not be asked to supply any “league table” information for publishing, including any so-called “added value” information.

These two areas must be examined to ensure that the proper conditions prevail for cooperation, not competition, and to ensure that there is no external pressure that might influence the advice offered to a pupil or parent.

The UTU believes that there may be a role for an external advisory agency in assisting parents to choose the correct pathway. Again the UTU would reiterate that this type of advice might well be more appropriate at age 14 when the pupil has a clearer idea of what he/she wishes to do measured against his/her developing strengths and interests.

The UTU also believes that the ELBs have a definite role to play in supplying information. Indeed UTU would suggest that the ELBs or other central body might be best placed to administer the transfer process much in the way that it currently manages the admissions process into primary schools.

The UTU envisages ongoing communication on a regular basis between the school and the pupil. As previously stated, this will require sufficient staff time to be available for interviews with parents/pupils as well as adequate time to maintain the Pupil Profile and prepare for the interviews.

There must be real opportunities for transfers between different schools/campuses should a pupil decide that their chosen pathway is not suitable. There must also be some element of control to prevent abuse of the ability to easily transfer.

The UTU broadly agrees with the timetable for the new admissions process. There may be those who might argue that because the choice of school is made early in the P7 year less than two years of the pupil profile would be available. The UTU believes that since processes comparable to the Pupil Profile are already carried out by schools then this criticism is unjustified.

Pupils with compelling individual circumstances or a statement of special educational need

The UTU believes that there should be provision for separate consideration of cases where there are deemed to be compelling individual circumstances. There should, however, be central monitoring of such cases by ELBs to ensure that all schools are applying similar standards. This will ensure equality of opportunity for all is maintained.

The UTU would agree that since numbers of pupils with compelling individual circumstances should be very small they should be treated as supernumerary.

A Central Panel to consider such cases would be the UTU's preferred option. Such a panel should be drawn from a panel of nominees to include teacher representatives as partners in the process.

The UTU has concerns about the ability of schools to cope with numbers if all pupils with statements of special educational need are treated as supernumerary. The increase in the number of statemented children, especially those on the autistic spectrum, means that this could amount to a significant increased intake for a school. At very least if this approach were to be adopted then there would have to be an agreed formula to increase staffing in line with the increased numbers.

Admissions criteria for oversubscribed schools

The UTU agrees that the four broad categories listed at paragraph 5.6 are appropriate and sufficient to ensure that decisions can be made in cases where a school is oversubscribed.

The UTU concurs with the statement at 5.4 that the admissions criteria should be consistent with the principles and objectives and conform to statutory duties under Equality legislation.

The family-focused criteria would both be acceptable to UTU and should have high priority in any listing of criteria.

The community-based criteria are less acceptable in that there is potential for them to perpetuate existing social bias. There is also a danger that the number of named schools makes the criterion meaningless as a determinant in cases of oversubscription.

The geographical criteria support the notion of a school serving its local community and the UTU believes that some element of geographical determinant should be included to ensure that the majority of children who choose to do so may attend their local school.

The UTU is aware of the concerns of those living in rural areas and believes that they must feel confident that they will receive parity of treatment. For this reason the UTU would wish to have a child-centred criterion included immediately after the family-focused criteria. This should be compulsory for all schools to ensure that every child has a fair chance of getting into their closest suitable school.

The UTU has mixed views on the tiebreaker criteria. While the use of random selection is attractive to ensure a wider social mix, the desire to ensure that no child must travel too far from home to school at age 11 has persuaded the UTU to opt for the proximity from home to school as the tiebreaker.

As suggested previously, the UTU believes that schools should not be allowed unfettered choice of admissions criteria. UTU would prefer that all schools followed a compulsory order but might choose to omit a particular category or categories if they so desired. The only compulsory category would be the tiebreaker and if the tiebreaker chosen was random selection, then the school would be required to include either a community-based or a geographical criterion to ensure that children had a fair chance of getting admitted to a local school if that was their choice.

The UTU would suggest that the appropriate compulsory order of the categories should be as follows:

- Family-focused criteria
- Geographical criteria
- Community-based criteria
- Tiebreakers

Admissions appeals

The UTU would want to ensure that the principles of transparency and consistency are upheld throughout the Admissions Procedure and would suggest that in line with this the entire process should be changed to a centrally administered one. This would include the Appeals stage which would not have to change significantly.

The UTU agrees with the current rules on the composition of the Appeals Panel and the format of the Appeal Tribunal.

The new timetable is to be welcomed as it would allow schools to receive the outcome of appeals prior to the end of the summer term when preparations are being made for the September intake.

Conclusion

The UTU welcomes this opportunity to influence the future shape of post-primary education and would be glad to elaborate on any of the views expressed within the document on request.

While consultation is a necessary and time-consuming process, the UTU would urge the Department of Education to proceed with haste following the end of the consultation period and end the uncertainty about future arrangements. The end of the current selective system is very much welcomed but teachers now require a clear picture of the way ahead so that they may put in place the building blocks for a new system that is fit for the needs of today's children.

The UTU would refer to the PISA research commissioned through the OECD which compared attainments in a large number of countries worldwide. It is clear from that research that while the current education system in Northern Ireland provides excellent results at the upper end of the scale, the system fails to cater for the needs of those at the lower end.

The UTU believes that Northern Ireland teachers are among the best in the world. The current education structures must be changed in order to allow them to maximise the learning opportunities for the full range of pupils, not just for those who are deemed to be academic.

From: Rosemary Watterson [Rosemary_Watterson@welbni.org]

Sent: 18 December 2006 13:46

To: Artt, Valerie

Cc: Barry Mulholland; Jean Baxter; Anne Moore

Subject: Sub Group on the Schools Admission Policy

Dear Valerie

I am sending this email and attachment on behalf of our Chief Executive, Mr Barry Mulholland, in response to the letter received from Ms Stella McArde on 14 December 2006, requesting the Board's views on the New Admission Arrangements for Post Primary Schools. I will deal with the terms of reference in the order in which they are set out in the letter:

1 (a) Pupil Profile

The Pupil Profile is still under development by CCEA and therefore the Board is not in a position to comment on it at this point in time.

1 (b) Admissions Criteria for Over-Subscribed Schools

In its response to the Department of Education's Consultation on 'New Admission Arrangements for Post Primary Schools, January 2005', submitted on 28 June 2005, the Board set out its views on Admissions Criteria for Oversubscribed Schools. Pages 11 to 14, Chapter 5, Q12 – Q15, of the attachment above, deal with Family-Focused, Community-Based and Geographical Criteria and Tiebreakers.

2 Other Appropriate Arrangements

These are also dealt with on Page 14 in the response to Q16 of DE's questionnaire.

I understand that DE will be carrying out a major consultation exercise early next year on New Admissions Arrangements for Post Primary Schools with all the appropriate stakeholders/ interest groups.

I hope this information is helpful and if there is any other information you need please feel free to come back to me.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Rosemary Watterson

Chief Administrative Officer

Enc

Western Education and Library Board

Response to the Consultation on New Admissions Arrangements for Post-primary Schools

Submitted

Tuesday 28 June 2005

Western Education and Library Board Response to the Consultation Document on New Admissions Arrangements for Post-primary Schools

The Western Education and Library Board welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the response to the Consultation Document on New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools, January 2005. The Board has attempted to consider the questions in the Consultation Document in a pragmatic manner, in light of the practical implications of the outcomes, based on the experience of the members and officers of the Working Group.

Chapter 1 Context for New Admissions Arrangements

Paragraph 1.11- 1.16 Specialist Schools

The Board would suggest that the following issues need to be taken into account in any consideration of plans for the development of Specialist Schools:

- the potential adverse implications for schools not deemed Specialist Schools;
- how transport policy might possibly inhibit parental preference;
- the rurality issues in the Western Board that might militate against the effective implementation of Specialist Schools; and
- the need to support those schools that will not become Specialist Schools to ensure their continuous improvement.

Oversubscribed Schools

Since pupil enrolment is central to the allocation of school budgets, the new arrangements should promote parity of esteem for all schools within their communities, including unpopular schools. The Board recommends that significant resources, financial and human, be provided to ensure high quality provision is available for all pupils.

Chapter 2 Principles and Objectives

Paragraphs 2.1- 2.3

Q1 **The Department is seeking your views on whether the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements.**

The Board agrees that the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop the new admissions arrangements but would suggest that with regard to:

Paragraph 2.2 (i)

The interests of the child may be better served if he/she is given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, as is the norm in the Code of Practice which highlights the importance of pupils participating in all decisions about their education.

Paragraph 2.2 (iii)

‘Informed choice’ may raise parental expectations. As it will always be constrained by the physical capacity of a school, parents will need to be made aware of the actual number of places available in the post-primary schools they are likely to be considering for their children. The arrangements will enable parents to make choices but providers may not have sufficient places available;

Paragraph 2.2 (v)

The term ‘local community’ needs to be legally defined. There needs to be clarity as to what it actually includes in terms of variables such as traditional catchment area, county. etc.

Paragraph 2.3 (ii)

The objective ‘maximise opportunities for parents to exercise their preference’ may be inhibited by the fact the Government is reducing places in schools. Thought needs to be given to the transport assistance that will need to be available to support the exercise of preference;

Paragraph 2.3 (iii)

There will need to be a consistent approach to admissions criteria. The Board recommends that there should be a statutory requirement, possibly in the form of an external moderation

process, on all post-primary schools to use consistent admissions criteria. The Department of Education should also consider ways to cater for unique circumstances pertaining to particular sectors within a common admissions framework. Each pupil should have an opportunity to be placed in a suitable school of his/her realistic choice. Boards of Governors would also need to have tie-breaker arrangements in place so they can place pupils down to the last available place: and

Paragraph 2.3 (iv)

The term ‘special education needs’ needs to be legally defined to include high as well as low achievers.

It is important to ensure that parents have confidence in the fact that all schools are good enough for their children. The Capital Building Programme, the New Curriculum and the Entitlement Framework, along with an overall reduction in pupil numbers, will not in themselves ensure this objective. It is unduly optimistic to assume that parents will feel confident about being able to secure a place for their child in a school which will be suited to his or her educational needs, interests and aspirations. The Government must be prepared to identify and take remedial action against schools which parents perceive are not yet ‘good enough’. First preference applications are a sound indicator.

The Board would have reservations that the ‘Entitlement Framework’ will be extended enough by 2008 to enable pupils to have access to the full range of choices at Key Stages 4 and 5. Government decisions need to be made quickly, and funding made available, to ensure that parents are confident schools will be able to deliver the ‘Entitlement Framework’.

Chapter 3

Choosing A Post-primary School

Paragraphs 3.1 – 3.20

Q2 The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) whether the Pupil Profile should be used in the way described in the Consultation Document; and**
- (b) whether there are alternative or additional ways in which the Pupil Profile should be used to help parents decide on future post-primary provision for their child.**

The Board believes that it is essential that the Pupil Profile is completed honestly and objectively and reflects the pupil’s educational needs, interests and aspirations. With regard to the Pupil Profile, there is a body of ‘good practice’ already existing in some primary schools and this should be recognised. Uninformed parental perception with regard to the Pupil Profile could result in the potential for litigation against the Primary School Principal, where parents perceived they were not fully informed as to their child’s attainments and/or achievements.

Quantitative and qualitative information, such as attitudes to and aptitudes for learning, should be high quality information that is ‘parent friendly’ and can be ‘backed up’ by hard evidence. Tools such as the NFER Tests and Cognitive Ability Tests (CATS) might be used to both substantiate the quantitative information and bring more objectivity to the qualitative information contained therein. It is essential that some form of standardisation and external moderation be employed to further promote objectivity across all schools. Standardised tests will need to be designed more specifically for Northern Ireland pupils and this will mean including a higher number of pupils in the sampling process to make the tests more accurate for the province. These tests would also give a clearer picture, across the province, of pupil attainment and allow for direct comparisons. However, the Board recognises that the assessment tools schools use to inform their judgments are in the public domain and could be accessed by anyone wishing to influence a pupil’s progress, or the evidence of a pupil’s progress.

There is concern, that if used as part of the transfer procedure, the Pupil Profile will become a legal document that will be contentious and could lead to litigation against the Primary School Principal. Honesty and objectivity could be tempered by fear of litigation and the need to appease demanding parents.

However, the Board has major concerns about the time implications and would seriously question if the new curriculum and assessments arrangements are being taken forward concurrently with the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools. There is an urgent need for the Department to issue clear guidance as to how these arrangements can be fully implemented within the limited time available.

Q3 The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from the primary school to help parents make informed decisions.

Every parent and every child must be involved in the transfer process. Information for parents is paramount. The Pupil Profile should carry all information to help teachers teach the pupil and be a vehicle to help parents make informed decisions. Parents should have the opportunity to inform the Pupil Profile with regard to their child’s achievements outside of school. As a result, it should be easily used by parents and pupils in making an informed decision on their choices of post-primary schools. However, the Pupil Profile will make little impression on those parents who take relatively little interest in their children’s educational progress.

Q4 The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the range of information outlined in the Consultation document to help parents make informed decisions;**
- (b) the role of the post-primary school in advising parents; and**
- (c) whether any other information/support should be provided to parents to assist the decision-making process.**

The discussions envisaged at the annual parent-teacher meetings with P6 teachers and with Principals of potential post-primary schools will involve a significant amount of time on the part of both teachers and parents and could result in an increased administrative burden with

regard to transfer arrangements. The Board has major concerns about the time implications of the proposed arrangements and would encourage those framing them to consider the need for reasonable time and resources to be built into the system for both sectors so that teaching time does not suffer.

Each post-primary school would have to arrange interviews for all potential preferences with nugatory effect, thus creating a massive burden on schools. It could also result in raising parental expectations that in the case of over-subscribed schools cannot be realised. This proposal could result in a substantial number of appeals – particularly where Principals make any comment on the suitability or non-suitability of the school for individual pupils. There should be a requirement that post-primary schools give information – not advice – since they cannot accept/refuse a pupil a place on the information in the Pupil Profile. There should be a strengthening of information currently available in prospectuses before a parent nominates preferences.

The process for parents to follow should be to:

- (a) gain a thorough understanding of the Pupil Profile of their child;
- (b) access appropriate prospectuses based on the information gained at (a) above; and
- (c) nominate their preferences in line with the published admissions criteria, which should be easily understood by parents.

In indicating the need for the above process the Board is very conscious of the fact that it will take a considerable time for it to become ‘a way of working’ for both teachers and parents.

The Board has reservations about how reasonable, or practical, it would be to expect post-primary schools to meet parents on a ‘one to one basis’ to discuss how their child’s needs could be met at a particular school. The hours spent on such an exercise would be immense. Parents should be adequately informed through information provided in prospectuses and open days/evenings.

Statements and declarations in prospectuses should be written in such a way that they are not open to legal challenge. With respect to collaboration with other institutions, schools would need to ensure they do not make commitments about future provision that may not materialise for various reasons beyond their control eg viability of certain courses.

Q5 The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from DE/Education and Library Boards to help parents choose the most suitable post-primary school.

The Board would suggest that parents should receive information about the transfer process much earlier than September of the P7 year. Information from the Department, currently being released in June and August, should be released to parents early in the P6 year and the admissions criteria for post-primary schools could be provided early in the P7 year.

A help-line and web-based information would have to be resourced and staffed at

an appropriate level and should not be an ‘add-on’ to existing commitments. The Board would wish to draw the Department’s attention to the fact that the present Pre-School Admission Arrangements were assigned to the Boards’ Transfer and Open Enrolment Sections without any additional resources being made available to them for their administration. Transfer and Open Enrolment Officers are currently responsible for admission to pre-school, primary, post-primary and transfer between schools and the subsequent appeal procedures. A more realistic approach needs to be taken into account with regard to the diverse procedures operating simultaneously within the Transfer and Open Enrolment Sections.

The Transfer Booklet should be reviewed in light of strengthening prospectuses and the development of web-based information. All school-based information could be obtained directly from the school with DE/Education and Library Boards providing an overview of the procedure. The Education and Library Boards would still require to publish admissions criteria. However, the possibility of reducing hard-copy publications, with a view to posting the admissions criteria electronically, should be investigated as this would result in substantial savings to Boards. The number of ‘hits’ on Board websites at present would suggest that there is an increase in the number of parents using this facility. The relevant legislation would have to be amended to include this change to the procedure.

Q6 The Department is seeking your views on what information/advice should be available to assist with choices of educational pathway, during post-primary education.

Initially the interface between Year 7 and Year 8 should be enhanced by including careers advice in prospectuses about the availability of academic and vocational pathways, to assist parents in their choice of school. However, the Board believes that careers guidance should start in Year 8 if pupils are to make informed judgements about the appropriate choices of subjects at Key Stages 4 and 5.

Providing pupils with guidance as to the range of subjects they may combine at both post-14 and post-16 will be very important as will the mix of academic and vocational subjects. The Board believes that every pupil should have an entitlement to independent and objective careers advice which focuses on all the potential career options at 16+.

Q7 The Department is seeking your views on the broad timetable for the new admissions process.

The Board feels that the ‘Timetable for New Post-Primary Admissions Process’ (Page 21) is too closely aligned to the Department’s present timetable for the Transfer Procedure and needs to take more account of the needs facing schools and Boards with regard to the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools. The broad timetable for the new admissions process should reflect the following concerns:

- admissions/enrolment numbers should be agreed by April of the P6 year;
- the overlap of appeals and information-gathering of admissions criteria (traditionally two very time consuming periods for Transfer and Open Enrolment Sections);

- the tight deadline for gathering information, publishing and distributing the Transfer Booklet. (If earlier recommendations regarding the format of the Transfer Booklet are implemented these concerns would be alleviated);
- four weeks in November would not be long enough to provide time for discussions with parents and pupils. However, if previous recommendations regarding parental involvement in the P6 year are implemented the four week timescale in November would be more realistic;
- the timetable is tight for the receipt and processing of Transfer Forms;
- the timetable for one-to-one annual parent teacher meetings during May/June (Pg 21) is not practical and these interviews could leave teachers vulnerable to parental pressure;
- the timetable should include consideration of compelling individual circumstances); and
- the June deadline for appeals should facilitate attendance by both schools and parents. The possibility of schools sending out acceptance letters, rather than Boards, should be explored. Schools currently send out letters regarding induction arrangements, uniform, etc. This suggestion would eliminate duplication and effect financial efficiencies.

In the first year of the new admissions arrangements there will be a transition process in that there will be an overlap where Transfer and Open Enrolment Officers will have to manage existing and new procedures alongside open enrolment pre-school and primary procedures, transfer between schools and appeals. All admission timetables will need to be clearly established and integrated to ensure timely delivery. It is also essential that resources are made available and appropriate structures are put in place well in advance to permit delivery of services. The Local Best Value Review of Transfer and Open Enrolment carried out recently in the Western Board would indicate that the present system is not adequately resourced. As a result, the Board believes that there will need to be a radical review of present and future workloads to ensure the service is adequately resourced to deliver on the new arrangements. The Western Board has progressed some way towards developing collaborative partnerships with the other Boards and the Interboard Group is working together in taking forward the strategic recommendations in the Local Best Value Review.

The Board would suggest that the term ‘induction arrangements’ as referred to in Paragraph 3.19 needs to be defined more clearly. The Board’s Key Stage 2/3 Transition Programme, quality assured by DENI 1998/99, has been in place since 1997. Its aim is to improve the quality of learning and teaching by promoting continuity in the curricular and pastoral experiences of pupils transferring from primary to post-primary schools.

In the course of this programme a number of concerns have been identified about continuity and progression at the Key Stage 2/3 interface. The programme has consistently revealed evidence that much remains to be done to ensure a smooth transition for pupils from primary to post-primary education. There is generally no shared vision between post-primary schools and their ‘feeder’ primary schools regarding the Key Stage 2/3 transition process. There is, generally, a lack of consistency and coherence with respect to:

- the timing of the transfer of information, so that it can enable the receiving school to plan curriculum provision;
- agreement about the amount of information required;

- discussion between teachers from the primary and post-primary schools about approaches to learning and teaching;
- dialogue with parents about ways in which they can be involved in the education of their children in post-primary schools, including the new admissions process; and
- the resources (human and financial) available to agree and implement procedures which will facilitate planned continuity and progression.

The absence of some, or all, of the above ingredients, combined with a change in schools, can have negative effects on pupils' performance in Key Stage 3. The issues raised have important implications for both primary and post-primary schools, and need to be taken into account in the consideration of any new admission arrangements for transfer to post-primary education.

Chapter 4

Pupils with Compelling Individual Circumstances or A Statement of Special Education Need

Paragraphs 4.1 – 4.10

- Q8 The Department is seeking your views on the types of cases which should be considered as compelling individual circumstances.**

The Board accepts that it is not possible to give a definitive list of compelling individual circumstances. A compelling individual circumstance should be one that dictates attendance/non-attendance at a particular school on personal safety or welfare and should not take account of arguments based on pupil attainment or aptitude.

With regard to Paragraph 4.5 and the statement: 'it is recognised that these may only emerge in the P6 and P7 years', the Board would query if any research has been carried out in this area to substantiate this claim. The Board believes that compelling individual circumstances may have to include pupils with complex social and medical circumstances and schools will have to allow for totally unexpected circumstances in P6 and P7, from time to time. However, the compilation of the Pupil Profile, from Key Stage 1 eventually, should capture most cases of compelling individual circumstances. The criteria for establishing compelling individual circumstances will need to be tightly defined, otherwise there could be unwarranted growth in the number of claims of compelling individual circumstances in the P6 and P7 years.

- Q9 The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils admitted under compelling individual circumstances should be supernumerary to schools' admissions and enrolment numbers.**

The Board believes that pupils admitted under compelling individual circumstances should be admitted within the approved admissions number because of:

- class size policy including the size of practical classes; and

- the possible negative impact on neighbouring schools.

The procedure and timing of the consideration of pupils with compelling individual circumstances has not been addressed in the proposed timetable for the new post-primary admissions process.

Q10 The Department is seeking your views on whether individual Boards of Governors or a Central Panel should consider cases of compelling individual circumstances. If a Central Panel, your views are sought on size and composition.

The Board agrees that there should be a Central Panel to take the subjectivity out of cases of compelling individual circumstances. The timing of these cases is crucial as they have to be dealt with before other applications are considered - regardless of whether they are supernumerary or not.

Experience of the current officers in Transfer and Open Enrolment would suggest that the Central Panel should be no more than four persons, including the clerk. If Panels are too large experience shows that they become exceedingly difficult to constitute.

The composition of the Central Panel should include the interests of parents and teachers. It should also include medical/social and legal representation. There should be a 'pool' of panel members, from which to draw the panel together, that would serve the five Boards but be clerked on an individual Board basis.

Serious attention needs to be given to:

- the fees/rewards for those persons on the Central Panel. They should be on a par with those of the Special Educational Needs Central Panel (?250/?300 per day); and
- any right of appeal against the decision of this Central Panel.

Q11 The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils with statements of special educational need should continue to be admitted as supernumerary.

The Board agrees with the statement in Paragraph 4.10 that: 'An alternative approach could be to include those pupils who have statements in the school's admissions number before the transfer process begins; those who are statemented after the completion of the transfer process would be counted as supernumerary'. In the case of pupils who are statemented, supernumerary status may in fact have a negative effect by providing grounds for them to perceive themselves as different from other pupils.

This approach would prevent a school having to admit an undue number of pupils with behavioural statemented problems. Where statemented pupils are admitted without adequate support it affects the morale of teachers. Other pupils in the class may be neglected because of the disproportionate amount of time that the teacher has to allocate to statemented pupils. The presence of the classroom assistant(s) in the classroom could also be a distraction for other pupils in the class. All pupils are entitled to be treated equally and should not be

disadvantaged by the presence of an undue proportion of statemented pupils with behavioural problems in the class. However, the Board would expect schools to have a number of statemented pupils reflective of the number of pupils in their communities.

Whilst the Board is happy to advise on how these pupils are admitted to schools they, and other pupils, need a broad and balanced education. With regard to entitlement, the WELB Inclusion Policy states that: ‘All children are entitled to receive a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum. As far as possible, this should be in a local mainstream school, recognising that appropriate support, advice and resources may be necessary to achieve this’.

Chapter 5

Admissions Criteria for Oversubscribed Schools

Paragraphs 5.1 – 5.17

Q12 The Department is seeking your views on the family-focused criteria listed and their inclusion within a menu.

The Board agrees that the family-focused criteria of siblings currently at the school and eldest or only child should be included within the menu of admissions criteria in order to keep family units together and for practical and ecological reasons.

The Board would wish to draw the Department’s attention to the fact that if ‘eldest child’ is to remain as a criterion, a careful legal definition would be required to ensure that child is not disadvantaged because an older sibling has a statement and is attending a different school that meets his/her special needs. Consideration also needs to be given to cases where the eldest child in the family is already attending a co-educational school but where the next child wishes to attend a single sex school.

Q13 The Department is seeking your views on the community-based criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and how they should be defined.

The Board’s view is that the Community-Based Criteria, Feeder Primary Schools and Parish, should be available if Boards of Governors wish to include them. However, the Board believes that the term ‘Feeder Primary School’ should be legally defined by the Department. This definition would need to be robust enough to withstand scrutiny under equality legislation.

Experience at appeals shows that parish boundaries are difficult to define. In some cases there is more than one post-primary school in a parish. Current practice shows that the parish dimension is largely restricted to the maintained sector. The Board acknowledges the difficulties that common admissions criteria could pose for integrated, Irish medium, special and single sex schools, in terms of obtaining an appropriate intake.

Clarification should also be provided as to how a new primary school becomes a feeder school to one or more post-primary schools. The issue of determining feeder primary schools

should be overseen by a central body and not left entirely to individual schools to decide. Where an existing primary school takes on integrated status, this could change the traditional feeder primary schools to some controlled, maintained and/or integrated post-primary schools. The Board agrees with the statement in Paragraph 5.10 regarding the need for guidance from the Department in relation to the designation of feeder primary schools and parish areas to ensure that these criteria are effective, fair and transparent.

The Consultation Document is ambiguous in that it states in Paragraph 5.4 that: 'schools normally serve local communities' whilst in Paragraph 5.9 it states; 'many schools serve their local community', without any suggestion that it is abnormal to do otherwise. The term 'local community' needs to be defined by the Department as it seems to take on different meanings in rural and urban areas.

Whilst it is recognised there are benefits to be gained by pupils mixing with others from further afield, the Board believes that, generally, pupils from the local area should be facilitated at the local school. If a pupil in a rural area has to travel a considerable distance to a school and, whilst there, has to commute between the base school and another school, this could result in the pupil spending an inordinate amount of time travelling as opposed to time being profitably spent in the classroom. In view of this possible scenario, the Board is very apprehensive about how policy with regard to commuting will be addressed and administered.

Q14 The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the geographical criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and the most appropriate means of operating them; and**
- (b) what percentage limit, if any, should be set for places allocated by geographical criteria.**

The Board believes that it is not appropriate to generalise on geographical criteria because of the need to admit pupils into existing schools. There should be equality of opportunity for all pupils regardless of whether they live in the remote rural areas or the leafy suburbs. Geographical criteria could be disadvantageous to some schools at the expense of others. The Child-Centred Criterion is more acceptable than School-Centred because pupils would receive priority for a place at the most suitable school nearest their homes. However, being a priority case for a school does not in itself guarantee admission.

The Board believes clarification is necessary with regard to building in the necessary percentages into admissions criteria to take account of integrated status, cultural and other religious/social needs.

Whilst it is recognised that percentage limits are difficult to apply and likely to result in an increase in appeals due to their non-transparent nature, the Board feels there would be some merit in further exploration of this option as a means of ensuring a wider and more representative intake of pupils ie building in a balance into the admissions criteria to take account of the local area, feeder primary schools and rurality. The Western Board has particular concerns about Co Fermanagh, in particular, as at present most academic provision is provided in Enniskillen. The Board would suggest that the Department provides models

using percentage limits, as is the case in some areas of England, to further inform the new post-primary admissions arrangements.

Q15 The Department is seeking your views on:

- (a) the tiebreakers [random selection and proximity from home to school] as a means of admitting pupils down to the last available place;**
- (b) the most appropriate method of operating random selection and/or measuring proximity; and**
- (c) whether schools should be free to use different methods of operating random selection or proximity.**

If schools are over-subscribed with pupils from the traditional catchment area, random selection would be the Board's preferred option but random selection could rule out a pupil nearest the school or the pupil from further afield. Care should be taken with the Mc's and M's and the O'B's and O's.

A standard method of selection, like that outlined below, needs to be employed:

- siblings;
- community-based admissions criteria; and
- random selection as the final tie breaker.

With regard to the use of different methods of selection, the Board believes that post-code selection is crude and should be discouraged. Also, random selection is not transparent.

There should be a standard method for measuring proximity from home to school if Boards of Governors are to be permitted to use this criterion. Distance is contentious and expensive if Ordnance Survey (OS) is employed for measuring purposes and this can delay decisions for schools. However, it is anticipated that the Geographic Information System (GIS) measurements should be available for use when the Transport Management Information System becomes fully operational – currently scheduled for implementation in March 2007.

The policy to be adopted on the provision of transport assistance will be an important consideration, particularly in rural areas.

Q16 The Department is seeking your view on any other criteria that you believe should be included in the menu, bearing in mind the principles and objectives outlined in Chapter 2.

If Eldest Child is used as a criterion, it is essential that a child with an elder sibling who has a statement is not penalised in any way.

The Board recognises that there are some in its community who have difficulty in accepting random selection as a legitimate tiebreaking criterion, regarding any such process as tantamount to a lottery and akin to gambling with a child's future.

The Board recognises there could be equality implications for the youngest child with regard to the family-focused criterion 'Eldest Child/Only Child'.

The Board notes that the suggested Family-Focused Criteria (Pg 29/34) does not include any reference to children of staff. This criterion is currently applied in some schools in the Western Board and we believe that it deserves further discussion/consultation.

Criteria for children living outside Northern Ireland, eg Irish Republic and children living within Northern Ireland whose parents are not EU nationals, should be clearly defined by DE in consultation with the relevant government agencies.

A decision has to be made regarding whether or not children moving into an area should be given any special consideration as they will not readily meet the criteria listed.

Q17 The Department is seeking your views on the possible options for the menu.

The Board recommends that Boards of Governors should have the option of choosing their admissions criteria with as much choice as possible and at the same time should give parents as much clarity as possible.

The Board strongly recommends that there is clear guidance from the Department with regard to the order of criteria that Boards of Governors should consider, otherwise frustrated parents will be liable to resort to litigation.

With regard to Option 1 - Open Menu - the Board believes that Boards of Governors could choose whichever criteria they wish to apply from the menu but, in the interests of consistency, Governors might follow a recognised order.

With regard to Option 3 – Optional Categories and Compulsory Order – the Board recognises the importance of parents being able to identify and clearly understand the menu with regard to family-focused criteria. Compulsory order should be common to all schools across the province.

Chapter 6

Admissions Appeals

Q 18 The Department is seeking your views on whether the process for appealing the decisions of Boards of Governors not to admit a child to the school should be altered in any way.

The Board strongly recommends that the appeals system in the future should be rigorous, robust and fair. The new appeals process should have all the best features of the present system which has evolved but should be enabled to deal with appeals concerning compelling individual circumstances.

If implemented, the Central Panel's consideration of compelling individual circumstances will impact on the present appeal process. There is a lack of clarity on how appeals relating to compelling individual circumstances will be dealt with, where the Panel will be located and how they will be remunerated. If, as anticipated in the Consultation Document, the number of pupils with compelling individual circumstances is small, the Board believes those pupils should be included in the school's admissions number before the transfer process begins. However, the Board agrees that for those pupils for whom compelling individual circumstances arise after the transfer process has begun, they should be counted as supernumerary.

Although the Department anticipates there will be an extremely small number of pupils likely to be involved in compelling individual circumstances, the Board's experience would suggest that this may not be the case. Whilst a category named compelling individual circumstances exists, it will continue to grow disproportionately - especially in the early stages of the implementation of the arrangements where parents may seek to manipulate the admissions arrangements for their own advantage. It is for this reason that the Board recommends the new appeals procedure is strictly monitored and evaluated after revised procedures have been established/implemented. Any new timetable should reflect the pupils whom the post-primary schools are admitting and therefore the appeal process will need to be completed by early June in order for post-primary schools to arrange induction for new pupils towards the middle/end of June.

Other Issues

Are there any other issues you would like to comment on in relation to new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools?

The Pupil Profile concept is sound but not yet robust, rigorous or sufficiently resourced to carry out the task of placing pupils in the appropriate post-primary schools. The Pupil Profile would need to have been in existence from P1 for seven years, with teacher and parental involvement over that time, in order for it to have gained status and the respect of the post-primary sector. This would ensure that the P7 teacher/s would be confirming the professional opinions and judgements of the child's teachers from P1 to P6 and ensure a more realistic determination of the child's attainments/achievements. With regard to pupils who change primary schools, a good Pupil Profile would help receiving schools to place them appropriate to their needs. The Board, therefore, has serious concerns, on the grounds of sound educational practice, that teachers have not had a substantial 'lead-in time' with regard to the implementation of the Pupil Profile. This would have helped inform the resource implications for each academic year from P1 to P7 of the proposed new profiling system. The Board regrets that, at this stage, a model Pupil Profile has not been made available to it for consideration.

The Burns Household Response Survey indicated that 66% of responding parents were in favour of retaining academic selection, therefore, the parental perception that grammar schools are best will continue to exist into the foreseeable future, until all schools are seen to be of equal worth. In the early stages of the implementation of the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools it is reasonable to assume that many parents will still want to opt for grammar school education because they believe it is the best option for their children.

The Board feels strongly that there should have been an official consultation process with it right from the start with regard to the proposed new arrangements under Costello for post-primary schools. This would have enabled the Board to have had input into the Consultation Document on the New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools. The Board is concerned that the Consultation Document does not address the major issue of the funding of the new arrangements. Resources will have to be made available to schools being forced to change as a result of these new arrangements. It is the Board's understanding that ?20m has been set aside by the Department but it has reservations about how realistic this amount of funding really is, in light of the expenditure which will be involved in issues such as:

- collaborative arrangements;
- transport;
- statementing;
- compelling individual circumstances; and
- other costs not yet identified.

The Consultation Document does not address the issue of a pupil ending up in a school not suited to his/her ability eg the weak pupil, academically, ending up in a school with an academic ethos or the able pupil, academically, ending up in a school which is non-academic. Pupils must gain access to schools best suited to their educational abilities and pastoral needs, otherwise situations could arise where the academic or vocational ethos of a school is threatened because quality teaching time is being sacrificed in order to deal with behavioural problems. Clarification is required as to what is meant by 'academic ethos' and how it can be maintained by schools in the absence of academic selection. Also, clarification is required as to what is meant by 'vocational ethos'.

The procedure for transfer between schools, years 9 to 14, has not been addressed in the Consultation Document. Criteria for entry within these years needs to be defined in light of the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools.

Do you think any of the issues contained in the Consultation Document would have any adverse implications for any of the Section 75 categories?

The relevant issues would need to be subjected to a formal equality impact assessment in order to ensure that any potential adverse implications are identified and properly addressed.

Names of Working Group

Board Members
Mr M P Martin (Chair)
Mrs E F Brunt
Dr J Cornyn
Mrs F G Durkan
Mr S Morrow

Board Officers
Mr A Rainey
Mr P Mackey
Mr R Thompson
Mrs R Watterson

Appendix 4

**Other Papers Considered
by the Sub-Group**

Research & Library Services

Background Briefing: Post-Primary School Admissions Policy in Northern Ireland

Current Post-Primary School Admissions Policy in Northern Ireland

1. The present arrangements for the transfer of pupils to post-primary schools are established under the provisions of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Education and Library Boards and School Boards of Governors in arrangement for the admission of pupils in accordance with the stated preference of parents.
2. The essential difference in the admissions criteria of grammar schools is that they are permitted to use academic ability or aptitude as a criterion for determining admissions in over-subscribed circumstances¹. Grammar schools start by admitting pupils with Grade A, followed by B1, B2, C1, C2 and D. When there are more pupils with the same grade than places available then additional criteria will be applied². Secondary schools in Northern Ireland do not refer to ability or aptitude in their admissions criteria and must admit all pupils who apply if there are places available. If the school is over-subscribed then secondary schools are permitted to use additional criteria³.

The Review of Academic Selection and the Abolition of the Transfer Test.

3. The abolition of the transfer test (11+ examination) was one of the key proposals of the Burns Report, published for consultation in 2001. The Burns Review concluded that grammar schools in Northern Ireland should no longer be allowed to use academic ability, as measured by a test, to decide who should be given a place in their schools. A report by the NI Assembly Education Committee in 2001 similarly recommended that the *“current tests should cease to be administered from such future date as is feasible to implement”*.
4. Following the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Jane Kennedy, MP then Minister responsible for education announced in a press release⁴, in October 2002, that she would work towards the abolition of the transfer test. In April 2003, the Minister further established

¹ Information extracted from Ch9 of the Burns Report, *“The Administrative Arrangements for Transfer”*, 2003, p122. www.deni.gov.uk/22-ppa-burns_chapter9.pdf

² Additional criteria could include – attendance at a certain primary school; if the child has a sibling at the grammar school; or if the child has a parent that teaches at the school.

³ See footnote above for examples of additional criteria.

⁴ *“Kennedy confirms transfer test will go”*. DENI Press Release, 31 October 2002. www.nics.gov.uk/press/edu/021031e-edu.htm

a Post-Primary Review Working Group to devise detailed recommendations for the development of alternative transfer procedures to replace the current system of academic selection. The report, known as the Costello Report, and its recommendations for an alternative system to the transfer test and academic selection, was circulated in January 2004.

Proposed New Admissions Policy for Post-Primary Education in Northern Ireland.

5. The Government is implementing the recommendations of the Post-Primary Review Working Group through the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, which was approved by both Houses of Parliament and became law on 19 July 2006. The Order includes the abolition of academic selection and the Government announced that the last transfer tests would be held in autumn 2008. However, the Government have acknowledged that the final decision on the matter should be decided locally. As part of the negotiations leading to the St Andrews Agreement, the Government have indicated that it would amend the *Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006* to reflect the March 2007 target date for the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly⁵.
6. If the Assembly is not restored academic selection will end and according to the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI), future transfer arrangements and school admissions policy will be based on informed parental and pupil choice, this will involve a wider range of schools to choose from including⁶:
 - Schools with an academic style of curriculum or a vocational style;
 - A mixture of both; or
 - A specialist approach (e.g. arts, business and enterprise, engineering, health and social care, humanities, ICT, leisure and tourism, science and technology)⁷.The aim is to enable parents and pupils to choose the type of school that best meets the child's educational needs.
7. New admissions arrangements are being developed to give effect to these changes. The Consultation Document on New Admissions Arrangements was published by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) for consultation in January 2005. It sought views on the new admissions arrangements that should be put into place for post-primary schools after the abolition of the transfer test in 2008. Over 14,000 responses to the consultation were received and a summary of responses was published in December 2005.

5 Information extracted from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland website - www.deni.gov.uk/index/22-postprimaryarrangements-new-arrangements_pg.htm

6 Information extracted from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland website - www.deni.gov.uk/index/22-postprimaryarrangements-new-arrangements_pg/22-ppa-key_areas_pg/22-ppa-ka-fta_pg.htm

7 A small-scale specialist schools project involving 12 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland began in September 2006. For further information see www.deni.gov.uk/index/22-postprimaryarrangements-new-arrangements_pg/22-ppa-key_areas_pg/22-ppa-ka-ss_pg.htm

Key Aspects of the Proposed New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools

Key aspects of the proposed new admissions arrangements include:

Pupil Profiles

8. Each child will be provided with a **Pupil Profile** that will provide detailed information on the pupil's achievements, progress, interests and aptitudes. These profiles can be sent to prospective post-primary schools at the request of parents. The purpose of the Pupil Profile is to provide parents with clear and up to date information about their child when they are considering which post-primary schools to list on the Transfer Form. The Pupil Profile is currently being development by CCEA. The consultation document states that, *"the Profile will be a tool to help parents chose which post-primary school is most appropriate for their child, not for post-primary schools to choose which children to admit in the event of their school being oversubscribed."*

Admissions Criteria for Over-Subscribed Schools

9. Many post-primary schools in Northern Ireland are faced with over-subscription, for example, two thirds of schools in the Greater Belfast area experience this difficulty. Under current arrangements over-subscribed schools set additional admission criteria (e.g. attendance at certain primary schools, having a sibling in the school, having a parent employed as a teacher in the school etc). The Department is seeking to streamline this process under the new admissions criteria given that the current criteria arrangements are complex and can vary according to school. The Department has accepted the recommendation that a menu of admissions criteria should be drawn up and schools should select from this menu the criteria they would use when over-subscribed. It is believed that this would give schools a degree of flexibility whilst ensuring a greater degree of fairness, consistency and transparency.
10. Suggested criteria for the menu include – (i) siblings currently at the school; eldest child or only child at the school; (ii) feeder primary schools; parish linkages; school-centred catchment areas; child-centred catchment; and (iii) random selection; and proximity from home to school to be used in a tie-breaker situation.
11. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 enables DENI to make regulations about the criteria that post-primary schools will use to admit pupils where they are over-subscribed. The regulations will set out the menu of criteria and the rules regarding the number of combinations of criteria or the sequence in which they are to be applied. The Department is required to consult schools and other interested groups before making the regulations, the Department have stated that this will take place early in 2007⁸.

For further information on the proposed new admissions arrangements for post-primary education the DENI website provides a series of Q & As in regards to the new procedures, refer to Annexe 1 attached or alternatively see www.deni.gov.uk/index/22-postprimaryarrangements-new-arrangements_pg/22-ppa-questions_and_answers_pg/22-ppa-faq-admissionscriteria_pg.htm

⁸ Information extracted from DENI Website – see http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/22-postprimaryarrangements-new-arrangements_pg/22-ppa-questions_and_answers_pg/22-ppa-faq-transfertestsacademicselection_pg.htm

**DENI Questions and Answers:
New Admission Arrangements for Post-Primary Education**

Please note that this information has been extracted verbatim from the DENI website⁹.

1. What happens if a school has more applications than places?

Schools will have to use admissions criteria to decide which pupils to admit, as happens at present. However, under the new arrangements, schools will have to choose which criteria they will use from a menu.

2. What admissions criteria will be included in the menu?

There will be a range of criteria included in the menu and individual schools will chose the criteria to be used. The elements of the menu will be:

- Siblings currently at the school and eldest child;
- Feeder primary schools/parish/child-centred catchment/school-centred catchment;
- Proximity from home to school or random selection as a tie-breaker

3. Why will the menu not include wider family relations/employee etc?

The criteria in the menu are based on the key principles and objectives which were set out in the consultation document. The principles and objectives received broad support and the criteria in the menu best meet those principles and objectives.

There is no compelling reason to include wider family relations or members of staff.

4. How will be feeder primary schools/parish criteria operate?

Regulations will set out the parameters for the application of these criteria to ensure that there is equality of opportunity and to avoid any form of social exclusion or postcode selection.

5. Will the geographical criteria not result in selection by post-code?

The new arrangements are not about introducing “postcode” selection. One of the underlying principles of the new arrangements is that schools normally service their local community. The criterion reflects this principle but provides flexibility for those schools that traditionally draw from a wider area.

⁹ See www.deni.gov.uk/index/22-postprimaryarrangements-new-arrangements_pg/22-ppa-questions_and_answers_pg/22-ppa-faq-admissionscriteria_pg.htm

Regulations will set out the parameters for the application of these criteria to ensure equality of opportunity and to avoid any form of social exclusion or postcode selection.

6. Why not let schools choose their own admissions criteria?

At present, schools set and apply their own admissions criteria. The result is that a wide range of criteria are used and there is limited consistency in how the criteria are defined or applied. This can make the process complex for parents to understand. We want to simplify the process.

The concept of a menu criteria recognises the fact that schools differ. Schools will still have the flexibility to select criteria from the menu that best meet their particular circumstances, but within a framework that will ensure a greater degree of consistency, fairness and transparency.

7. Will all schools be required to use the same criteria from the menu?

The aim of a menu approach is to provide some consistency in the criteria that schools use. However, it is important that there is some flexibility to enable schools to take account of local circumstances. The regulations will specify the criteria that are to be included, whether a specified number or combination of criteria should be included and if the criteria are to be applied in specific sequence.

8. When will the criteria be finalised?

The detail of the criteria will be set out in draft regulations. These will be published for consultation in 2007 to apply to admissions in the 2010/11 school year and future years.

9. How will the criteria be monitored?

The new Education and Skills Authority to be established under the Review of Public Administration will have a role in ensuring that schools comply with the new admissions arrangements; only use the admissions criteria which feature in the menu; and apply them within the parameters which will be set out in regulations.

10. What is the purpose of the category of exceptional circumstances?

New arrangements need to be flexible enough to respond to pupils with particular needs. Under the current arrangements, special circumstances are considered in the context of the Transfer Tests. This new provision will apply where a parent feels that there are exceptional circumstances which dictate that their child should go to a particular school.

11. What type of cases will be considered?

Regulations will define what is meant by exceptional circumstances, but it will apply to circumstances affecting a child that are so exceptional that they necessitate a child's attendance at a particular named school, rather than at any other school.

It is envisaged that these cases will be confined to the most exceptional of circumstances and that they will, therefore, be few in number. Regulations will set out the detail of the types of cases that will or will not be considered. Cases most likely to be considered are those which involve “looked after children” i.e. children in public care, and children who have a serious medical illness and require to be at a school which is either located near a hospital or medical centre, or which has a nurse employed on site.

12. Is this category not open to abuse?

The purpose of this provision is to cater for the most exceptional circumstances and regulations will ensure this is the case. The regulations will also require appropriate documentary evidence to be provided to support any application.

13. Who will consider exceptional circumstances cases?

Parents will apply to a new body which will be set up under regulations. If the body is satisfied that exceptional circumstances do exist, they will direct the Board of Governors of the school to admit the child.

The regulations will provide detail on the membership of the new body. It is envisaged that the new body will operate through a number of local panels to hear cases at a local level that will bring some local knowledge to the process.

Given the exceptional nature of the cases under consideration, membership is likely to comprise a medical practitioner, social worker and educationalist.

The new body will not be required until the first year of the new arrangements, i.e. for those pupils transferring in September 2010. It is envisaged that the Education and Skills Authority to be set up under the Review of Public Administration will take on this role.

14. Why can't schools consider exceptional circumstances cases?

At present, Boards of Governors are often asked to make decisions on medical and other sensitive issues for which they are not qualified. Given the exceptional nature of these cases, it is important that they are considered by people with the necessary expertise. It is envisaged that the new body will comprise a medical practitioner, a social worker and an educationalist.

The new body will provide more consistency and transparency to the process and should reduce the workload for schools.

15. At what stage of the process will exceptional circumstances cases be considered?

Given the exceptional nature of these cases, it makes sense for them to be considered first, outside of the normal admissions process. It is important that pupils with exceptional circumstances are considered first and placed in the school that meets their very specific needs.

If exceptional circumstances arise after the normal process has begun, the normal process will continue until the application has been considered.

16. **Will pupils admitted under exceptional circumstances be part of the school's admissions and enrolment number?**

Children admitted under exceptional circumstances will be supernumerary and will not count towards a school's admissions or enrolment number for that year. This means that schools can admit those pupils for whom exceptional circumstances arise throughout the year. Given the extremely small number of pupils likely to be involved, schools should not have difficulty absorbing them.

17. **Will the arrangements for statemented pupils differ?**

No. The same arrangements for pupils with a statement of special educational needs will apply under the new arrangements. These pupils will be supernumerary and will not count towards a school's admissions or enrolment number for that year.

It is important that these pupils are admitted to the school most appropriate to meet their needs.

18. **Will the appeals process differ from the current arrangements?**

The responses to the consultation on the new admissions arrangements showed broad support for the retention of the current system. The only change will be to the timing of the process. Under the new arrangements, the appeals will be held earlier, in May and June, rather than during the summer months.

This will provide certainty for pupils earlier than at present. It will also allow more time for post-primary schools to have a appropriate induction for Year 8 pupils. This will help create a smooth transition from pupils from primary to post-primary education.

19. **When will the new arrangements be introduced?**

The last Transfer Tests will be held in November 2008. The new arrangements will operate first for those pupils who enter P4 in September 2006 who will be transferring to post-primary school from September 2010.

20. **Will the timetable for the admissions process change?**

Yes, the timetable will be shortened and this will reduce the stress on pupils and parents at this time. With the removal of the Transfer Tests, there will be more time for parents to consider the full range of information available to them, to visit schools and to seek advice. The Transfer Forms on which parents indicate their school preferences can be completed earlier (before Christmas) and decisions will be made sooner (March). This will allow more

time for post-primary schools to have an appropriate induction for Year 8 pupils, and allow a smooth transition for pupils from primary to post-primary education.

21. **What are the key steps for parents?**

- Parents will attend a meeting with the primary school at the end of the P6 year and will receive the child's Pupil Profile.
- Parents will gather/receive information on a range of schools during the first term of the P7 year.
- Parents will complete the Transfer Form in late November/early December.
- Parents will receive a letter confirming school place in March.
- The appeals process will be completed by the end of June.

Research & Library Services

Background Briefing: Post-Primary Education System in the Republic of Ireland¹

At the request of the Sub-Group on Schools Admission Policy, this paper provides a overview of the post-primary education system in the Republic of Ireland. Issues covered include primary education, the structure of post-primary education, the various types of post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, and post-primary school admissions and enrolment policy.

Primary Education in the Republic of Ireland

1. Attendance in full-time education in the Republic of Ireland is compulsory for all children between the ages of 6 and 16 years of age. Whilst there is no national provision for pre-schooling in Ireland, almost all children begin school in the September following their fourth birthday. Thus, a large percentage of 4 year olds and almost all 5 year olds are enrolled in the infant classes in primary schools.
2. The vast majority of primary schools in the Republic of Ireland are State-aided parish schools, having been established under diocesan patronage with the State giving explicit recognition to their denominational character. However, parental choice in primary education has been extended in recent years with increasing number of Irish language schools (Gaelscoileanna) and Multi-denominational schools emerging.
3. Until relatively recently there was no standardised assessment of pupil's performance in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, nor was there any formal systematic arrangements for the transfer of pupil information between primary and post-primary schools. Many post-primary schools tended to develop their own arrangements for testing/assessing pupil's abilities in the first year of post-primary education for the purposes of banding by ability (e.g. in the form of an examination on entrance to the secondary school of their choice).
4. Over the last number of years, however, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the body responsible for primary and post curriculum and assessment in the Republic, have been involved in the development of standardised tests in numeracy and literacy in primary schools. The NCCA have also been involved in the development of a draft Report Card Template. The purpose of the Report Card template is to support schools

¹ *The majority of information contained within this briefing has been extracted from - Department of Education and Science (2004). "A Brief Description of the Irish Education System" http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/dept_education_system.pdf?language=EN*

in recording and reporting children's progress at primary level and to enable parents to make informed choices regarding their children's future education.

Post-Primary Education in the Republic of Ireland

5. Pupils transfer to second level education around the age of 12. Secondary education is predominately a six-year cycle, taken between the ages of 12 to 18. This six-year cycle comprises of a three-year Junior Cycle (lower secondary) culminating in the Junior Certificate. The main objective of the Junior Cycle is for students to complete a broad, balanced and coherent courses of study in a variety of curricular areas, and to allow them to achieve levels of competence that will enable them to proceed to the Senior Cycle.
6. The Senior Cycle caters for students in the 15 to 18 age group. This cycle has undergone significant changes in restructuring in recent years. The Transition Year is a new concept that immediately follows the completion of the Junior Certificate. The Transition Year provides students with the opportunity to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of the year, free from formal examinations.
7. During the final two years of Senior Cycle students take one of three programmes, each leading to the State Examination – the Leaving Certificate (Established), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Further details of each certificate can be found in Table 1.
8. The Leaving Certificate is taken around the ages of 17 or 18 years of age. Syllabi are available in 34 subjects. All subjects are offered at two levels, Ordinary and Higher, although two subjects Irish and Mathematics are available at foundation level.

Table 1: The Irish Leaving Certificate²**Leaving Certificate (Established)**

The Leaving Certificate (Established) is a two-year programme that aims to provide learners with a broad, balanced education whilst offering some specialisation towards a particular career option. The programme is taken in almost all secondary schools and by an annual cohort of around 55,000 students. Students following the Leaving Certificate (Established) programme are required to study at least five subjects, one of which must be Irish. In general, students take five or more subjects (usually seven) for examination. Performance of participants in the examination can be used for purposes of selection into employment for further and higher education. In recent years increasing attention has been paid to making subjects more vocationally relevant.

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

The Leaving Certificate Vocation Programme was introduced in 1994. It is designed to enhance the vocational dimension of the Leaving Certificate (Established). This two-year programme combines the academic strengths of the Leaving Certificate (Established) with a new focus on self-directed learning, enterprise, work and the community. To be eligible for the LCVP students must take at least five Leaving Certificate subjects (one of which must be Irish) two of these subjects must be selected from a list of designated vocational subject groupings (e.g. construction studies, engineering, agricultural science, physics and chemistry, home economics, business, accounting etc). Students must also complete a number of mandatory “link modules” (e.g. “preparation for the world of work” and “enterprise education”).

Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

The Leaving Certificate Applied, introduced in 1995, is a self-contained Leaving Certificate programme. The programme is pro-vocational by nature and designed for students who do not wish to proceed directly to higher education or for those whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not formally catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes. Participants in the Leaving Certificate Applied are mainly engaged in work and study of an active, practical and student-centred nature. The Leaving Certificate Applied is a two-year programme made up of a range of courses structured around three elements – vocational preparation, vocational education, and general education. A certificate is awarded at three levels – distinction, merit and pass.

Types of Secondary Schools

9. The second level education sector in the Republic of Ireland is comprised of four types of post-primary schools – **secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive** schools.

² Information extracted from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) www.ncca.ie/index.asp?locID=283&docID=-1

The majority of post-primary school students are educated in secondary schools³. Secondary schools are privately owned and managed; the trustees of the majority of these schools are religious communities or Boards of Governors. Vocational schools are State-established schools and are administered by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) whilst community and comprehensive schools are managed by Boards of Management of differing composition.

10. Whilst each category of secondary school has evolved from a distinctive historical context, and have different ownership and management structures, they are largely State funded and follow the same State prescribed curriculum and take the same State public examinations (e.g. the Junior Certificate examination and the Leaving Certificate examination). However, facilities for practical or vocational subjects are more commonly available in vocational, comprehensive and community schools, as well as in boys' single sex schools⁴.

Admission and Enrolment Policy in Post-Primary Schools⁵

11. Unlike Northern Ireland, there is no formal transfer procedure at the end of primary education in the Republic of Ireland. Until 1994, some voluntary secondary schools had entrance examinations for the purpose of screening intake. Consultations regarding this practice took place between the Department of Education and Science and the secondary school authorities at the request of the Minister for Education and Science. In light of these discussions and taking into account the provisions of the Education Act 1998 (which guaranteed equality of access to all schools) this practice was discontinued.
12. Parents and guardians are entitled to send their children to the school of their choice, with due regards to the rights of denominational schools to promote their own ethos as noted in both the Education Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000. The Boards of Management of schools are obliged under the Education Act 1998 to formulate, publish and make available to parents and guardians an admissions policy.
13. The vast majority of schools in the Republic of Ireland are in a position to enrol most children who apply, however, if there are more applications for enrolment than available places, the school may operate a method of selection in line with its enrolment policy. Admissions policies for the more popular, over-subscribed schools tend to include religious denomination, sibling connections to the school, feeder primary schools, parental connections, catchment area etc.
14. Should a child be refused admission to a school then there is a right of appeal to an Appeals Committee, established under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

³ *In 2004/05 there were 185,026 full-time students in State-aided secondary schools, in comparison to 52,443 students in community and comprehensive schools and 97,693 students in vocational schools. In 2004/04 there were 403 State-aided secondary schools, 92 community and comprehensive schools and 247 vocational schools.*

⁴ *Information extracted from the Eurybase Education System Database - http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home*

⁵ *The information in this section has been extracted from the Eurybase Education Database – Chapter 5, Secondary Education in the Republic of Ireland. http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home*

Background Briefing:

Post-Primary Education System in the Republic of Ireland: Additional Information on Report Card Templates and Transition Year

Report Card Templates

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the body responsible for primary and post-primary curriculum and assessment in the Republic, has begun to develop draft Report Card Templates in consultation with primary school principals, teachers, parents and children. The Report Card Templates are designed to support teachers in recording information on a child's progress, sharing this information with parents and using it to inform future learning. Templates have been developed for use mid-year and at the end of the school year.

The NCCA provides an overview of Report Card Templates, which contains some useful questions and answers as follows¹:

What are the draft Report Card Templates for?

The templates have been developed for use by teachers in reporting children's progress at school. Templates 1, 2, and 3 are designed for mid-year reporting. Templates 4, 5 and 6 are designed for end-of-year reporting.

Why did the NCCA develop the templates?

The NCCA developed the templates to support teachers in recording information and communicating it to parents to enhance the dialogue between home and school and to help parents to support their children's education. They were developed to respond to teachers' and parents' requests for much greater information and advice on assessment in primary schools (Primary Curriculum Review: Phase 1, 2005).

Why are there 11 different templates?

Just as no two children are the same, no two schools are the same. To meet the needs of as many schools as possible, the NCCA has developed 11 templates. There are six different types of templates. These include report cards designed for mid-year/end-of year reporting and report cards for use with infant classes. The different templates provide a range of options for teachers in choosing how to report information (e.g., using narrative text and/or rating

¹ See <http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/primary/card%20temp%20oview.pdf>

scales), how much information to report and what additional information to provide for parents.

Do the templates have a common structure?

Yes. Each template has 3 components which provide information on:

- the child as a learner with reference to curriculum subjects and/or areas
- the child’s social and personal development
- the next steps in learning and/or advice for parents on supporting learning

Transition Year

The Transition Year Programme (TYP) has been officially described as “one of the major innovations in Irish education” and it has attracted positive attention internationally. It is generally well-regarded in schools and the increasing number offering TYP as an option suggests that public opinion, including pupil and parent opinion, is less resistant now than in the past.

The TYP is officially described in the following terms:

“A Transition Year offers pupils a broad educational experience with a view to the attainment of increased maturity, before proceeding to further study and/or vocational preparation. It provides a bridge to help pupils make the transition from a highly-structured environment to one where they will take greater responsibility for their own learning and decision-making. Pupils will participate in learning strategies which are active and experiential and which help them to develop a range of transferable critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills. The Transition Year should also provide an opportunity for pupils to reflect on and develop an awareness of the value of education and training in preparing them for the ever-changing demands of the adult world of work and relationships.

The Mission of the TYP is “to promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society”²

2 Source: *Irish Education Manual, Section 1: 2.7.3*

Background Briefing:

An Overview of Post-Primary Transfer Arrangements in Other Countries

This paper provides an overview of post-primary transfer arrangements in a range of countries – Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Singapore and Canada. A summary of the education system and admission criteria for post-primary (secondary) education in each country is outlined. Further information on any issues of interest contained within this briefing can be provided upon request.

Summary

1. Transition to the post-primary phase is generally automatic in the countries outlined in this paper, with the exception of Singapore, where children must first have obtained a primary school leaving certificate. In Germany, the Netherlands and Singapore, a child's performance in primary school affects the type of secondary school or course to which s/he is admitted.
2. In **Austria**, transition to secondary education occurs around the age of 10 (although students can remain in a senior primary school until the age of 14). Transfer at 10 years to a lower academic secondary school is dependent upon an assessment at primary school level or an entrance examination. Transfer to upper secondary school is at 14 and pupils may progress to academic type school based on assessment rather than examination.
3. In **Denmark, Finland and Iceland** the school system is undifferentiated, a system of "all through" compulsory education is in operation and there is no demarcation between primary and compulsory secondary education.
4. In **France**, transition from primary to lower secondary education takes place around the age of 11. There are no formal national exams at the end of primary education to determine choice of lower secondary school. The admission of students in all state schools is based upon the geographical area in which they live.
5. In **Germany**, primary schools (*Grundschule*) make recommendations on the basis of a child's abilities, performance and inclination, and after detailed consultation with parents. In the event of disagreement, *Land* (federal state) law determines whether parents, school or the school supervisory authority has the final say. Recent education policy has tended to favour

parental choice and it is usually possible for children to spend a ‘probationary’ period in a specific type of lower secondary school, with the possibility of transfer after a review¹.

6. In the **Netherlands**, the receiving school board (analogous to the school governing body) decides on admissions, on the basis of the primary school report and recommendation and parental preference. The recommendation is based on the child’s general performance and, increasingly, on his/her results in the *CITO* Final Test of Primary Education².
7. In **Singapore**, students take the national Primary School Leaving Examination (*PSLE*) at the end of Primary 6 (age 12+). Their results determine their placement on differentiated courses of lower secondary education (special express, normal academic or normal technical), according to their learning pace, ability and inclinations³.
8. In **Canada**, transition from primary/elementary education to secondary education occurs around the age of 12. Students are admitted to public schools within their catchment areas, although some provinces permit a more open enrolment policy. Students seeking admission private schools are normally required to sit a standardised secondary school admission test.

Austria

Compulsory full-time education

9. Compulsory education in Austria begins on the first September following a child’s sixth birthday and lasts for nine years. Parents are free to choose between state-funded schools or private schools. In 2002/03, 89% of students attended state-funded institutions with private institutions accounting for the remaining 11%.
10. The compulsory school cycle begins with a four-year attendance at a primary school (Years 1 to 4 of a primary or special needs school) which are attended between the ages of 6-10. Years 5 to 8 (attended between the ages of 10-14) may be completed at a senior primary school, a general secondary school, the lower level of a secondary academic school or a senior special needs school. Year 9 (age 14) may be completed by attending a pre-vocational year, a secondary academic school, or a technical and vocational school or college.

Admissions criteria from primary school to lower secondary education

11. Transfer to lower secondary schooling (between the ages of 10-14) requires successful completion of Year 4 of primary school. However, admission to the lower level of a secondary academic school is conditional upon the successful completion of Year 4 and the pupil’s performance in the subjects of German and mathematics, which need to have been assessed as “excellent” or “good”, or upon recommendation by the teaching staff of the primary school. If a pupil fails to meet these requirements, he or she can sit an entrance exam to gain admission to the school of their choice.

¹ Le Metais, J. (2003) *Transition from Primary to Secondary Education in Selected Countries of the INCA*

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*

12. If the secondary academic school is over-subscribed, the order of admission will be dependent upon certain criteria such as the performance of the student, distance of the student's home to the school, or if the student has siblings already attending the school.

Admissions criteria from lower secondary to upper secondary education

13. The following types of schools exist in the upper cycle of secondary education in Austria – upper general secondary school, upper academic secondary schools (ages 14-18), pre-vocational schools (ages 14-15), technical and vocational schools and colleges (ages 14-19), schools for the training of kindergarten and non-teaching education staff (ages 14-19).
14. Upon completion of the fourth year of a lower secondary school students may transfer to an upper-secondary academic school without having to do an entrance examination if they have obtained the mark “good” or better in compulsory subjects or have completed the lower secondary school level with distinction.
15. In the ninth year of compulsory schooling all students are given the option to attend a one-year pre-vocational school (at age 14). Around 20% of Austrian students chose this option. The purpose of the pre-vocational year is to provide students with the necessary skills to prepare them for the transition from traditional education to vocational apprenticeship training or continuing education. The pre-vocational year provides opportunities for visits to companies and practical training sessions in workshops.

Denmark⁴

Compulsory full-time education

16. Compulsory education in Denmark takes place between the ages of 7 and 16 and comprises of *Folkeskole* (comprehensive primary and lower secondary education). Parents are free to choose between state-funded schools or private schools within their municipality. In 2005/06, 86% of students in compulsory education attended public-sector primary and lower secondary schools, the remaining 13.1% attended private grant-aided schools.

Folkeskole - comprehensive primary and lower secondary education

17. The Folkeskole is a comprehensive school system and there is no distinction between primary and lower secondary education. The Danish Folkeskole is not an examination-orientated system and there are no formal tests or examinations between these two stages. The Folkeskole comprises compulsory education in years 1 – 9 and an optional 10th year (attended by approx. 61% in 2003). Students are taught in classes, and they remain together throughout the entire period of compulsory school. The teaching is differentiated within the framework of the class.
18. The students are continuously evaluated, and teachers write progress reports twice a year. Progression to the next form is usually automatic. For pupils in Years 8 to 10, the evaluation of the level of attainment in individual subjects are expressed in marks on a 13-

⁴ Information on the Danish education system extracted from the Eurydice database on education systems in Europe - www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home

point marking scale (13 being exceptionally independent” and excellent performance, 1 being completely unacceptable performance).

19. Examinations at the primary/lower secondary level are held at two levels – (i) the leaving examination (after the ninth and tenth year), and (ii) the tenth year examination. The written examination questions are set and marked at central level. Examinations are *not compulsory*, but most pupils choose to sit the exams (between 85%-95%).

Post-Compulsory Education – Upper Secondary Level Education

20. There are two forms of general (i.e. non-vocational) upper secondary education in Denmark: the ‘*Gymnasium*’ and the higher preparatory examination courses, the ‘*HF*’. Institutions may offer both courses either in a package or as single subjects. The Gymnasium offer a three year academically orientated course leading to the Upper Secondary School Leaving Examination (‘*studentereksamen*’), which qualifies for admission to university and other higher education studies. There are approximately 150 Gymnasiums in Denmark. The Higher Preparatory Examination (Danish abbreviation: HF) was introduced at the end of the 1960s and is directed at young people and adults who have left the education system and wish to return. It is also possible for pupils to attend an HF-course directly after the 10th year of the Folkeskole⁵.

Admissions Criteria for Upper Secondary Level Education

21. The requirement for admission to the Gymnasium is the successful completion of the ninth year of folkeskole. The pupil’s folkeskole, however, may recommend to the Gymnasium that the pupil sit an admission test if there is a risk that the student is unable to meet the requirements of the general upper secondary programmes.

Finland⁶

Compulsory full-time education

22. Compulsory education in Finland takes place between the ages of 7 and 16. The Finnish compulsory education system is a comprehensive school system and there is no distinction between primary and lower secondary education. Generally, compulsory education is provided in primary schools. Primary school comprises years 1-9 and is intended for the whole age group (7-16 years old). During the first six years education are provided by the class teacher who teaches all or most subjects. During the last three years separate subjects are usually taught by different subject teachers.
23. Teachers carry out assessment in their respective subjects on the basis of objectives and assessment criteria written into the curriculum. Assessment is an ongoing part of daily school life and each pupil receives a report at least once every school year. Achievement is assessed both continuously and through tests set by teachers. A certificate is awarded when a pupil

⁵ Information extracted from the Danish Ministry of Education website - <http://eng.uvm.dk/publications/factsheets/fact2.htm?menuid=2510>

⁶ Information on the Finnish education system extracted from the Eurydice database on education systems in Europe - www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home

successfully complete the full nine years of comprehensive schooling, an additional certificate is awarded for those completing an optional tenth year.

Post-Compulsory Education – Upper Secondary Level Education

24. Upper secondary education in Finland (usually taken between the ages of 16-19) consists of Lukio/Gymnasium (general upper secondary schools) and vocational upper secondary schools. Approximately 90% of those who complete compulsory education continue on to general or vocational secondary schools. Around 54% opt for general upper secondary studies and 36% for vocational upper secondary studies. Completion of upper secondary education, both general and vocational, gives students eligibility to move into higher education.

Admissions Criteria for Upper Secondary Level Education

25. Students who have successfully completed compulsory education are eligible for general and vocational upper secondary education and training. The application procedure takes place mainly through the national joint application system. Students are entitled to apply to any institution offering upper secondary education.
26. Student selection to general upper secondary schools is mainly based on previous study record and attainment of the school-leaving certificate from the compulsory education stage. Selection criteria for vocational education and training usually include the general study record, grades emphasised in the field of study, work experience and entrance and aptitude tests. Priority is given to young people without prior vocational education.
27. Towards the upper secondary education, students usually take the national matriculation examination and receive a matriculation certificate in addition to the school-leaving certificate. Students in vocational education and training study for vocational qualifications.

France⁷

Compulsory full-time education

28. Education in France is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16 and is divided into three stages –
- école élémentaire (primary school) between the ages of 6 and 11;
 - college (lower secondary education) between the ages of 11 to 15; and,
 - upper secondary education: pupils gain admission, normally at the age of 15, either to a lycée d'enseignement général et technologique (general and technological lycée) or to a lycée professionnel (vocational lycée) in order to begin the classe de seconde (fifth year of secondary schooling), on completion of which they reach the age corresponding to the end of compulsory education.

⁷ Information on the French education system extracted from the Eurydice database on education systems in Europe - www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home

29. Students are continuously assessed by teachers throughout their primary and secondary schooling. Since 1989, “diagnostic assessment” of students at the beginning of the third and sixth years of compulsory education enables teachers to identify the progress and weaknesses of their students in French and mathematics.
30. There is no exam at the end of primary school to determine progression into the next class and choice of lower secondary school. All students have the right to go straight into lower secondary education (collège), except in the event of the relevant teacher objecting. At the age of 12, all pupils must leave primary school education and must then be registered in a collège, whatever their level may be. There is no document certifying the end of their primary schooling.
31. On completion collège education (usually around the age of 15), students are awarded a brevet (national certificate) on the basis of their marks in the final two years and a national examination. The brevet is not a compulsory qualification and continuation of schooling in a lycée is not dependent upon their passing the examination.

Post-Compulsory Education – Upper Secondary Level Education

32. On completion collège, students are offered three educational options – (i) general studies which after three years leads to the general baccalaureate; (ii) technological studies which after three years leads to the technological baccalaureate; and, (iii) vocational training which, after two years, leads to the certificat d’aptitude professionnelle (CAP) or the brevet d’études professionnelles (BEP) and then, after a further two years, to the baccalaureat professionnel.

Admissions Criteria for Upper Secondary Level Education

33. The enrolment of students in all state schools is based on a ‘sectoral’ principle, i.e. students are normally registered in the primary school, collège or lycée of the geographical area in which they live. Pupils coming from collège are generally directed to the lycées in their school district, unless the chosen option or specialisation requires attending a school in another district. There are, however, some exceptions to the rule of assignment to a district lycée. Lycée sections leading to special training or rare programmes concern several districts. In some cases, they involve a national selection process, which may require the student to be assigned to a different district. The same is true when students living in communes on the border of two different districts run into transport problems.

Germany⁸

Compulsory full-time education

34. Full-time education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 15/16 in Germany, and part-time education is compulsory until the age of 18 for those who do not attend a full-time

⁸ Information on the German education system extracted from the Eurydice database on education systems in Europe - www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home

school. The vast majority of students (94%) attend public sector schools whilst the remaining 6% attend privately maintained schools⁹.

35. Compulsory education in Germany is comprised of three stages:
- Primary education (Grundschule) – attended between the ages of 6-10 (or 6-12 in Berlin and Brandenburg).
 - Lower secondary level
 - Upper secondary level
36. Lower secondary level covers the age group of between 10 and 16 years old and upper secondary level between 16 and 19 years old. Both age groups are required to attend school: the former full-time, the latter, 16-19-year-olds, generally part-time for three years or until they have reached the age of 18, unless they are attending a full-time school.

Lower Secondary Level Education

37. There are four main types of lower secondary level schools in Germany attended by students aged between 10 and 16 - Hauptschulen, Realschulen, Gymnasien and Gesamtschule. All instruction at these schools is geared toward the attainment on a specific leaving certificate:
- The Hauptschule provides its students with a basic general education. Students work towards obtaining the Hauptschulabschluss qualification which is generally used to enter a course of vocational training.
 - The Realschule provides students with a more extensive general education. A Realschule leaving certificate qualifies a pupil to transfer to a school that provides vocational or higher education entrance qualification.
 - The Gymnasium provides intensified general education. Apart from standard Gymnasien, there are special types of Gymnasium into which Hauptschule pupils can transfer following grade 7, as well as special courses for particularly able Realschule and vocational school leavers.
 - Gesamtschule – is a co-operative comprehensive school that combine the Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium in one organisational unit. Classes in some of the subjects are divided up into two or more levels of proficiency, which are defined in terms of the curriculum covered. Setting of pupils according to ability begins in grade 7 in mathematics and the first foreign language, usually in grade 8 (or, at the latest, 9) in German, and in or before grade 9 in at least one science (physics or chemistry). All the pupils usually take classes together in social sciences, art, music, sport and religious education. All lower secondary level school-leaving certificates can be gained at cooperative and integrated comprehensive schools after grades 9 and 10.

⁹ 2003 figures.

Admissions Criteria for Lower Secondary Education

38. The Lander¹⁰ have different regulations governing the transition from primary into lower secondary education. In some instances, a binding decision on the choice of school attended and/or course of education pursued in lower secondary education is made in grade 4. However, no such decision has to be made if the pupil is entering a *Gesamtschule* (integrated comprehensive school).
39. During grade 4 in the primary school, an assessment is made by the primary school which the pupil is leaving that includes general information about the pupil's progress in primary school and concludes with an overall appraisal of her or his aptitude for certain types of secondary schools. This is accompanied by detailed consultations with parents. The vote of the primary school is either the basis for the decision or an aid in the decision regarding the pupil's future school career. Depending on Land legislation, various methods can be used to assess the pupil's suitability for a future school career at the *Realschule* or *Gymnasium* (trial half-year, trial lessons, entrance examination). The final decision is taken either by the parents or by the school or school supervisory authority. So far, Education Acts and education policy have tended to give increasing consideration to parental rights in the choice of the pupil's future school career.
40. The rights of parents to choose a school for their children does not mean that a pupil has the right to be accepted by a specific school. As long as attendance of another school of the same type is possible and can reasonably be expected, some Länder rule out a legal right to acceptance into a specific school in their Education Acts.
41. Pupils wishing to complete their compulsory schooling at the *Hauptschule* must always attend the local school. This rule also applies to pupils at other types of secondary school if school catchment areas have been fixed for the type of school they have chosen. However, parents may choose a school other than that which is responsible for the local area and apply to the school authority to admit their child to that school. The school authority then decides on the merits of each particular case, following consultations with the parents and the authority maintaining the school. If no catchment areas have been fixed for a type of secondary school, parents are always able to choose which school their child attends. In this case, the capacity of the chosen school is the only limiting factor affecting the pupil's right to admission.

Upper Secondary Education & Admissions Criteria

42. Educational and training institutions in upper secondary level comprise full- and part-time schools providing general or vocational education as well as companies that provide training in the *duales system* (dual system). The different types of upper secondary schools include:
 - ***Gymnasiale Oberstufe*** - the upper level of the *Gymnasium* which covers grades 11 to 13 (ages 16-18/19). The *Gymnasiale Oberstufe* is usually divided up into a one-year introductory phase and a two-year qualification phase. Entrance is conditional on the appropriate qualifications, which are mostly obtained at the end of grade 9 or 10 at *Gymnasium* or, with comparable standards, at other types of schools providing lower

¹⁰ Germany is a Federal Republic made up of 16 States known as German Lander. Educational legislation and administration are primarily the responsibility of the Lander.

secondary education. The *gymnasiale Oberstufe* has also been established in other types of school in addition to the *Gymnasien*. In some Länder, these include the *Gesamtschulen*.

- **Berufsfachschule** - full-time schools that introduce their pupils to one or several occupations, offer them part of the vocational training in one or several recognised occupations requiring formal training or lead to a vocational training qualification in a specific occupation. Depending on the training objective, *Berufsfachschulen* require their pupils to have a *Hauptschulabschluss*.
- **Vocational training in the dual system** - about 60 per cent of young people in Germany undergo vocational training in the *duales system* lasting for three years, depending on their chosen occupation. It is described as a dual system because training is carried out in two places of learning: at the workplace and in a *Berufsschule* (vocational school). Compulsory full-time schooling must be completed before commencing vocational training. There are no other formal prerequisites for admission to the dual system; training in the dual system is generally open to everyone. However, the majority of trainees have the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss* or a higher education entrance qualification.

Iceland¹¹

Compulsory full-time education

43. Compulsory schooling in Iceland takes place between the ages of 6 and 16. Education in Iceland has traditionally been organised within the public sector, and there are few private institutions in the school system.
44. Compulsory education is organised in a single structural system, i.e. primary and lower secondary level education form part of the same school level and generally take place in the same school. There are no entrance requirements at this school level and as a rule children enrol in the school closest to their residence. In municipalities where there is more than one compulsory school, parents may request that their children be allowed to attend a school that is not in the catchment area where they live.
45. Compulsory school is divided into ten grades. Three types of schools are the most common: schools that have all ten grades, schools that have grades one to seven and schools that have grades eight to ten. Schools that have grades eight to ten are often merger schools, i.e. they take in pupils from more than one school in the catchment area that has grades one to seven. All compulsory schools are co-educational, i.e., pupils of both sexes attend.
46. Examinations and other forms of assessment, usually written, are carried out by individual teachers and schools. Assessment is therefore not necessarily standardised between different schools and teachers. The way in which the reports on pupils' progress are written varies greatly: the assessment can be in the form of a number, a letter or a description either oral or written. Reports are given at regular intervals throughout the school year and at the end of each year.

11 Information on the Icelandic education system extracted from the Eurydice database on education systems in Europe - www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home

47. Nationally co-ordinated examinations *samræmd próf* are given every year in the core subjects, Icelandic and mathematics, in grades 4 and 7. These examinations are composed, marked and organised by The Educational Testing Institute. Marks ranging from one to ten are given based on referenced criteria. The purpose of the examinations in grade 10 is primarily to indicate the pupil's standing at the completion of his compulsory education and to assist him in choosing a course of upper secondary study. At the end of compulsory schooling all pupils get a certificate stating their marks on both the nationally co-ordinated examinations and all other courses completed in their final year at school.

Post-Compulsory Education – Upper Secondary Level Education

48. The main types of schools offering upper secondary education are:
- *Grammar schools* - which offer four-year general academic branches of study which conclude with a matriculation examination. Pupils who complete the course satisfactorily are entitled to enter higher education institutions in Iceland.
 - *Comprehensive schools* - which offer an academic course comparable to that of the grammar schools, concluding with a matriculation examination. These schools also offer theoretical and practical courses, as in the industrial vocational schools, and, in addition, some other courses providing vocational education. A few of the comprehensive schools also offer programmes to educate master craftsmen.
 - *Industrial vocational schools* - which offer theoretical and practical branches of study in the certified and some non-certified trades. These schools also offer programmes to educate master craftsmen.
 - *Specialised vocational schools* – which offer specialised branches of study as preparation for specialised employment.

Admissions Criteria for Upper Secondary Level Education

49. All students who have completed compulsory education have the legal right to upper secondary education, regardless of their results in the 10th and last grade of compulsory school. The law concerning upper secondary education allows for varied admission requirements to different programmes of study at the upper secondary level according to what demands are made by the programme of study in question. The admission requirements relate mostly to the results in different subjects of the nationally co-ordinated examinations in the 10th grade of compulsory education, as well as to the results in school examinations.
50. Students can apply to any school they wish, regardless of their legal residence. Thus the student's and/or parents' choice of an upper secondary school is unrestricted. The admission of students to individual schools is the responsibility of the headmaster who must state the reasons for exclusion if asked.

Netherlands¹²

Compulsory full-time education

51. Compulsory schooling in the Netherlands takes place between the ages of 5 and 16. Young people are then required to attend an institution providing educational courses for at least one or two days per week for a further year.
52. At the end of their eight years of primary schooling, pupils do not receive a certificate or diploma, but a school report describing their level of attainment and potential and based, in part, on the results of an attainment test. This report is drawn up by the school head in consultation with the teaching staff, and is for the use of the chosen secondary school. A copy of the report is given to the child's parents.
53. The “*end of primary school test*”, also known as the “*CITO test*” is used by 90% of all Dutch primary schools¹³ and is regulated by an external body, CITO. The test is usually administered around the age of 12. Participating primary schools tend to use CITO test as a ‘second independent factor’ for teachers, parents and pupils in the choice of secondary education. The test consists of over 200 multiple choice questions on language, mathematics, study skills and world orientation. In addition to the ‘end-of-primary-education’ test, CITO also develops tests to measure student performance throughout primary education. The Student Monitoring System tests, which are optional for teachers and schools, provide a means of evaluating the progress of students in all the years of primary education, and give a teacher an overall picture of the standard reached by his/her class and by individual children.

Post-Compulsory Education – Upper Secondary Level Education

54. There are around 700 secondary schools in the Netherlands, both publicly and privately run. Secondary education encompasses schools providing *pre-university education* (VWO; 6 years, age 12-18), *senior general secondary education* (HAVO; 5 years; age 12-17), *pre-vocational secondary education* (VMBO; 4 years, age 12-16) and *Practical Training* (PRO; age 12-18). All four types of secondary education are for children aged twelve and over and all begin with a period of basic secondary education¹⁴.
55. Most secondary teaching takes place within combined schools offering a number of different types of secondary education (VWO, HAVO, VMBO). There are also schools that provide only one type of secondary education, for instance VMBO or VWO, and VBO schools that provide only the basic and middle-management vocational programmes. There are no schools providing only HAVO. VMBO schools and schools providing practical training are required to form part of a consortium.

Admissions Criteria for Upper Secondary Level Education

56. Students are admitted to secondary education at an average age of 12+ years, after completing primary education. Parents must select and enrol their child in a (public- or private-sector)

¹² Information on the Dutch education system extracted from the Eurydice database on education systems in Europe - www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home

¹³ 2004 figures.

¹⁴ Information extracted from the Dutch Ministry of Education website www.minocw.nl/english/education/293/index.html

secondary school before the start of the summer holidays preceding admission. They are guided in their choice by the primary headteacher and class teachers' recommendation of the student's suitability for the secondary education type concerned. Around 90% of primary schools make use of the CITO test to complement teacher assessments when evaluating children's performance at the end of primary education.

57. All primary schools provide advice in writing for parents advising them regarding the form of secondary education/type of secondary course they feel best suits a given child. Students are not generally allowed to enrol on courses against the advice of their primary school. Secondary schools usually accept a primary school's advice. However, some schools may also conduct their own tests before deciding whether to admit a given student. School boards can refuse to admit a child. In such cases, parents have a right of appeal.

Singapore¹⁵

Compulsory full-time education

58. There is an average of ten years of formal general education in Singapore, comprising six years of compulsory primary school (6/7 to 12/13-year-olds) and four years or more in the secondary sector. The latter is not compulsory, although attendance is generally universal.
59. Primary education consists of a four year foundation stage from Primary 1 to 4 and a two year orientation stage from Primary 5 to 6. At the orientation stage, pupils are placed in one of three language streams, namely EM1, EM2, and EM3, according to their abilities. Pupils in the EM1 and EM2 streams do English, Mother Tongue, Mathematics and Science. EM1 pupils may do Higher Malay/Chinese/Tamil as their Mother Tongue. Pupils in the EM3 stream do Foundation English, basic Mother Tongue and Foundation Mathematics.
60. At the end of Primary 6, students take the national *Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE)*. Their results in this examination determine their placement on differentiated courses of lower secondary education (special, express, normal technical, or normal academic), according to their learning pace, ability and inclinations. Differentiated courses are generally provided within the same school.
61. Since the 2003 academic year, all primary students taking the *PSLE* have selected their secondary school after the results of the *PSLE* have been announced. Once results are announced, parents and students are given four days to make their school choices. Previously students chose their secondary school in the August immediately prior to taking the examination.

Secondary Level Education

62. Secondary education in Singapore is comprised of Special, Express, Normal (Academic) or Normal (Technical) courses:
- The *Special Course* is a four-year secondary course for pupils in the top 10% of the PSLE cohort. Pupils will sit for the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary (GCE 'O') Level Examination at the end of the fourth year. They

15 The information in this section has been extracted from the Singapore Ministry of Education website www.moe.gov.sg

will study English Language, Higher Chinese/Higher Malay/Higher Tamil and a range of other subjects.

- The *Express Course* is a four-year secondary course. Pupils will sit for the same national examination as Special Course pupils at the end of the fourth year. They will study English Language, Chinese/ Malay/ Tamil and a range of subjects similar to that of the Special Course.
- The *Normal (Academic) Course* is a four to five-year secondary course. Pupils will study English Language, Chinese/ Malay/ Tamil and a range of other subjects. They will sit for the Singapore - Cambridge General Certificate of Education Normal (GCE 'N') Level Examination at the end of the fourth year. Those who do well in this examination will proceed to a fifth year of secondary education and sit for the GCE 'O' Level Examination. Those who do not qualify to enter the fifth year may take up technical-vocational education and training at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE).
- The *Normal (Technical) Course* is a four to five-year secondary course. Pupils will study English Language and Basic Chinese/ Basic Malay/ Basic Tamil Language and a range of subjects. They will sit for the GCE 'N' Level Examination at the end of the fourth year. Like pupils in the Normal (Academic) Course, the more able students may continue for an additional year and sit for the GCE 'O' Level Examination. Those who do not qualify to enter the fifth year may take up technical-vocational education and training at ITE.

Admissions Criteria for Secondary Level Education

63. Students are placed on courses according to their performance in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). The posting of pupils to secondary schools is computerised. All pupils are ranked by merit according to their PSLE results. In general, a pupil would be considered for admission to his choice of schools before another pupil who has not performed as well in the PSLE. However, admission is subject to the availability of vacancies in the school. If the child fails to get a place in any of his schools of choice, he will be posted to a school near his home that still has vacancies. However, the child must meet the school's lowest PSLE aggregate.
64. In recent years, the Singapore Ministry for Education has been providing schools with greater flexibility in their admission of pupils to allow a more diverse range of pupil achievements and talents to be recognised. Under the Direct School Admission – Secondary Exercise (DSA-Sec), 47 secondary schools will select some of their 2007 students using criteria other than the PSLE results. These criteria are schools-based and seek to allow a greater range of student achievements and talents to be recognised.
65. For the DSA-Sec Exercise, students' talents and achievements in both academic and non-academic areas will determine if they will be selected for direct admission into a secondary school. Each school has its own merit-based academic and non-academic criteria for selection. These are based on the qualities, such as talent in science, music or sports, which the school would like to emphasise. To assess these qualities in applicants, schools may conduct tests, interviews or trials as necessary.

Canada

Compulsory full-time education

66. Education in Canada comprises 10 provincial and three territorial systems. As education is a provincial responsibility under the Canadian constitution, there are significant differences between the education systems of the different provinces.
67. In general, compulsory education begins at age 6 or 7 and lasts for about ten years, with most provinces also offering one or two years of pre Grade/Year 1 or Kindergarten education (beginning at either age 5 or 6, dependent on the province) as an option. Primary education, which covers the first six to eight years of compulsory education in most provinces, is generally known as ‘elementary education’. Elementary education is often divided into two levels, primary and intermediate, as follows:
- Level one- primary (which can include Kindergarten education, children aged 5) and Grades/Years 1 to 3 (students generally aged 6-9);
 - Level two - intermediate, Grades/Years 4 to 6 (students aged 9 to 12).

Secondary Level Education

68. Secondary education comprises two separate levels: compulsory lower secondary education in junior high school and post-compulsory upper secondary education in senior high school. Junior high school includes Grades/Years 7 to 9 (age 12/13 to 14/15) in most jurisdictions except British Columbia, where it covers Grades 8 to 10. Senior high school includes Grades 10 to 12 in most jurisdictions. Exceptions are Quebec, where it ends at Grade 11.
69. Curriculum programs at the secondary level include both academic and vocational programs. The academic program provides students with the credits necessary to meet the entrance requirements of universities and colleges. The vocational program prepares students with the credits necessary to continue their studies at a postsecondary college, or to enter the job market. Secondary school diplomas are granted to students who pass the compulsory and optional courses of their programs — academic or vocational.
70. In most provinces or territories schools set, conduct and mark their own assessment tests and examinations. Many also have some form of provincial assessment system for certain year groups, where students are usually assessed in English or French and mathematics. In addition, periodic national assessments are carried out. One of the main examples is the School Achievement Indicators Programme (SAIP) which was developed by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). SAIP aimed to provide data to assist provinces in policy making and curriculum improvement and tests 13- and 16-year-old students in mathematics, reading and writing, and science. The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) has since then replaced SAIP, with its first assessment scheduled for the spring of 2007. PCAP will continue to assess performance in the same three core subjects as SAIP but incorporate other subjects as the need arises.

Secondary Level Education - Admissions Policy

71. Admission policy for enrolment in public schools in Canada is determined by various school boards who govern school districts. Students normally attend public schools within their

catchment areas although they may be permitted to attend schools in other districts if the schools within the catchment areas are oversubscribed. British Columbia, however, operates an open enrolment policy whereby students are permitted to attend schools in districts outside their local catchment area, provided space is available. This enables the parents and students the right to choose among schools, with the proviso that local students still have first priority at their neighbourhood school and cannot be displaced¹⁶. Manitoba and Alberta have the most generous school choice legislation in Canada, where parents may select any publicly funded school in the province, provided there is enrolment space and the parent assumes transportation responsibilities¹⁷.

72. Students seeking admission to academically orientated *private* or *independent* junior high and high schools in Canada are usually required to sit a Secondary Schools Admission Test (SSAT). The SSAT are standardised tests primarily administered in the USA and Canada at various test centres¹⁸.
73. For parents seeking alternatives to the public system, there are “separate” as well as private schools. Provincial legislation permits the establishment of *separate schools* by religious groups (mostly Roman Catholic). Admission to separate schools is based on religious denomination.

¹⁶ Brown, D. (2004) *School Choice Under Open Enrolment*. Canada: Society for the Advancement of

¹⁷ Phillips, S., Raham, H., & Wagner, K. (2004) *School Choice: Policies and Effects – International Comparisons*. Canada: Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education www.sae.ca/pdfs/022.pdf

¹⁸ For further information on the SSATs see the official SSAT website - www.ssat.org/

Memo form Economic Sub-group

From Shane McAteer
Clerk
Sub-group on Economic Issues

Date 21 December 2006

To Stella McArdle
Clerk
Sub-group on Schools Admission Policy

Sub-group on Economic Issues – recommendation re. education

At its meeting on Thursday 21 December 2006, the sub-group on economic issues agreed its report to PfG on the Chancellor's Economic Package and on Alternative Proposals. Included in the report is a recommendation to PfG that the package of alternative proposals to the Chancellor should include a call for an additional £20m per annum to be allocated to education, with particular reference to special needs education, early years development, educational underperformance and teacher training.

The report will be forwarded to PfG on Friday 22 December 2006. Members agreed that the sub-group on schools admission policy should be informed of this recommendation.

Shane McAteer

Ext. 21843

Appendix 5

**Papers Submitted by
Parties of the Sub-Group**

DUP response to Schools Admission Policy issues paper

The key issue for the DUP is how do we find an agreed procedure for transfer from primary school to secondary school in light of the decision by the government to permit academic selection to remain as an option in any admissions criterion unless the Assembly decides to remove it.

There is no prospect of such a decision but at the same time those who are opposed to academic selection as an option have indicated that they will not agree to any form of academic selection which may be suggested.

The result is likely to be a stalemate with no criterion agreed and in this event each individual school will then set their own criterion which may be an adequate short term solution but will create its own problems in the long term. The lack of certainty is not going to be helpful to schools, parents or children. There is an urgency since the Department of Education has indicated that the new arrangements need to be in place by October of 2007.

1. The Admissions Policy

Principles of the schools admissions arrangements.

The primary principle should be that children are matched to schools which best enable them to develop to their full potential.

We do not believe that at post primary level schools normally serve local communities. For a variety of reasons children are far more mobile at this level and while some schools do primarily serve a local community many draw from a huge catchment area.

Not only should the transfer be based upon informed choice by parents and pupils but there should also be an input from the receiving school. This would require the school to have some knowledge of the abilities of the child applying.

The admission criteria proposed by the Department of Education

The emphasis on geography is unacceptable. All but two are geographically based. The criteria does not reflect the new political reality namely that academic selection is back on the agenda. We insist that we will not accept any criteria which does not include this.

We have suggested some forms which academic selection might take. If no agreement can be found on a statutory test to be used across the primary sector then the use of academic selection set by individual or groups of post primary schools which wish to use it might be worth considering.

The open menu approach

We would favour this approach since it permits individual schools to tailor their entrance to their own local and educational circumstances.

Definitions of the proposed criterion

The fact that the committee had different views as to what were feeder schools or how a local school could be defined in the event of three different schools serving a similar area, or how children living in rural areas might be protected against marginalisation, indicated that the criterion is wide open to interpretation. We believe this is deliberate to divert attention that in practise little choice will be permitted and that children will be corralled into all ability local comprehensives.

Provision for sectoral schools

Given that earlier principles emphasised consistency, putting the child first free from bias it seems contradictory to have special arrangements for particular schools. We oppose the introduction of special arrangements for favoured sectors.

2. The Pupil Profile

The pupil profile as a means of academic selection

We believe that this option should be looked at immediately. Obviously to protect teachers any academic assessment must be externally based. The CATs test have been suggested as an option and they would seem to answer many of the objections made against the 11+ in that they would not be high stakes, would not be open to tutoring and would tie in with the normal curriculum.

Manageability for schools and teachers

Evidence from the teachers unions was that they were not. They took an inordinate amount of time and teachers were not capable of dealing with the IT component even if they had the hardware which many don't.

Relevance to parents

Given that the evidence revealed that these will be totally subjective documents with little consistency possible between teachers let alone school, they will be of little use to parents. Added to this that some of the headings at present will not even be understood by parents and CCEA have admitted that they will have to train parents in using them there must be serious concerns about the usefulness of these reports and their accessibility to parents who themselves have educational difficulties.

Even though CCEA indicated that there would be levels of progression to guide teachers as to their comments these would only be set for 3 out of the 17 categories on the report and even then the levels of progression will be open to interpretation.

Sharing the pupil profile with schools

This is essential but requires the profile to be more robust and objective than at present.

Cost and delivery of ICT solution

Even CCEA could not guarantee delivery. It is particularly worrying that they are contemplating carting busloads of computers around schools with no indication as to the programme for teacher training. We believe that the timetable for the profile which is meant to start in September 2007 is totally unrealistic.

Sinn Féin – Report to Schools Admission Policy Sub Group Friday 5 January 2007

Introduction

Equality of opportunity, of access and of provision are basic entitlements. It should be a fundamental right for children to be enabled to achieve their full potential by having free access to the levels of curriculum, institutions and type of teaching best suited to their needs. People should be able to avail of education at any age and stage of their lives. Such provision calls for adequate and sustained investment in our richest resource - our people.

Sinn Féin believes that every citizen has an equal right to education. Sinn Féin believes in a child-centred and rights based education system. The education system should be free, accessible, quality-assured and based on equality, regardless of class, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion or community background.

Sinn Féin believes that we should adopt effective programmes to attract underrepresented groups, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds into university education, including targeted financial supports and incentives.

Sinn Féin believes that we should develop concerted literacy and numeracy strategies including targeted timeframes to achieve eradication of illiteracy and innumeracy by 2012.

Sinn Féin believes that both education systems in Ireland (North and South) have a lot to learn from each other and need to work closely together to develop best practice

Schools Admission Arrangements and Pupil Profile

In respect of Schools Admission arrangements and the issue of the Pupil Profile, we wish to explore the concept of the Report Card Template which could be helpful in making Pupil Profiling more flexible and child centred. Consideration should also be given to children living in border communities so that they can be enabled to attend their nearest appropriate school (whether it is North or South).

Additionally, the ‘Transition year’ has been one of the major innovations in post primary education in the twenty-six counties and has attracted positive attention internationally. This is worth looking at as well. We also wish to note the development of the All Ireland Centre of Excellence for Autism provision in County Armagh which is a very necessary and positive initiative aimed at supporting children with special needs and their families and teachers.

The structure of the Sinn Féin submission will be aligned to the format and structure represented in the Issues Paper which has been presented to the Sub Group.

1. **Principles of the schools admission arrangements**

Sinn Féin advocates that schools admission arrangements should be child-centred and that all educational decisions must be taken in the best interests of the child. These arrangements need to be based on clearly understood criteria which are uniformly applied.

Parental choice, fully informed by teachers is a fundamental principle in all of this.

Any advice from teachers will, of course, be non-directive. It will be about providing the parent with the necessary information to make an informed choice.

2. **The admission criteria as proposed by the Department of Education**

Named feeders schools and catchment area should be the main criteria applied. The geographical definition of a catchment area needs to be clearly defined. The attendance of a sibling could be another criterion, as could be the fact of a parent or a guardian working at the school.

In the event of a tie-breaker we favour random selection .

In relation to Irish Medium Education, any community-based criteria should take account of the Irish language community. Similarly, flexible arrangements need to be put in place for the Integrated Sector, Irish Travellers and Ethnic Minority groupings.

Admissions criteria should be applied as consistently as possible across the North.

There may be value in additional modelling analysis in this area. Again, with a strong emphasis on schools working together in new collaborative arrangements, there needs to be proper provision, including transport for children in border communities who may attend their nearest school in the other State.

3. **Academic Selection as an admission criteria**

Sinn Féin is opposed to Academic selection in any form. There is a direct link between academic selection and the long tail of under-achievement. We believe that academic selection fails the majority of our young people and contributes to low self-esteem on the part of many children who are not selected.

Academic selection is socially divisive and it should not be introduced under any guise. For example, entrance exams, and Computer Adaptive Testing are not acceptable.

4. **The open menu approach**

Admission criteria should be set centrally and applied as consistently as possible across the North.

5. The definition of the proposed criteria (to be legislated for in regulation)

Definitions need to be clear, easily understood and easily applied. There needs to be maximum transparency. Tie-breaker definitions need to be clear and applied in such a way as to remove any notion of potential discrimination. (For example: Against rural areas.)

6. The intervention powers to prevent misuse of admission criteria

Currently, ELBs administer an Independent Appeal Tribunal System. This type of arrangement should be retained following the establishment of the ESA and the dissolution of the ELBs. There is an absolute requirement for an independent system which would have the involvement of skilled professionals, including educational psychologists.

7. The provision for sectoral schools (e.g. Integrated Schools, Irish Medium schools)

The definition of Community Based Criteria needs to be sufficiently flexible as to incorporate or identify the Irish speaking community in a given area. This may go beyond defined catchment area boundaries which apply in other circumstances. It is important to support a child who has attended Irish Medium Primary provision and who is transferring to a Post Primary School. They should be accommodated in the nearest Post Primary School with suitable Irish language provision.

Integrated Post Primary Schools may wish to use attendance at an Integrated Primary School. Flexibility needs to be built in to accommodate the needs and requirements as identified by the Integrated sector.

For both the Irish Medium and Integrated Sectors, feeder school criteria should be used.

The special requirements of Irish Travellers also need to be accommodated.

8. Admission Arrangements for Special Needs

There is a need for much greater investment in support arrangements for children with special needs.

Special education requires major development. Special schools have an important contribution to make to raising standards of achievement of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. There is an urgent need for a clear vision for SEN, not least because of the growing number of statemented pupils. Again, parents must be given the fullest possible information and high levels of support to inform their decision. This decision may involve sending their child to a Special School or it may involve sending their child to a Mainstream School.

It should be noted that DE has observed that there is considerable support for the view that the word 'special' should not be included in the title of a Special School.

Of crucial importance, there is a need to provide the necessary resources and to employ more educational psychologists so that the earliest possible intervention and diagnosis can take

place. It is a proven fact that delaying the process of SEN Statementing can do severe damage to the child's educational development.

9. **Miscellaneous**

There needs to be investment in the development of the capacity of parents to articulate their views and to play a full partnership role in the education of their children. There needs to be coherence between schools admission policy and other key education policies including transport provision and collaborative working arrangements between schools.

It is not desirable nor in the best educational interest of the child to be travelling long distances to school.

There is a strong belief among educationalists that delayed entry to formal education at Primary level would serve the best educational interests of the child.

The 11+ and current transfer procedure distorts the entire Primary School system / curriculum etc and there needs to be fresh thinking about the appropriate age for children entering formal education.

10. **Pupil Profile as a means of academic selection**

Sinn Féin agrees with the concept of the Pupil Profile but it must not be used for the purpose of academic selection.

11. **Manageability for schools and teachers**

Teachers have expressed concern because the profiles are not yet fit for purpose and that there are problems with presentation. We need to factor in teachers' concerns about the concept of awarding 'scores' and about the length of time which it takes to make this report

12. **Relevance for parents and pupils**

The purpose of the Pupil Profile is to serve as an aid to parents and children in the process of choosing the most appropriate pathway. Pupils and parents need to be centrally involved in the whole process.

13. **The content**

We need to look at the success of the Report Card Template which is structured in to three components and which is used in the rest of Ireland. These provide information on:

- the child as a learner with reference to curriculum subjects and/or areas.
- the child's social and personal development
- the next steps in learning and/or advice for parents on supporting learning.

In relation to Irish Medium Education, the Pupil Profile needs to reflect the characteristics of immersion education. It also needs to take into account that assessment of literacy and numeracy in IME is problematic.

14. **Sharing the pupil profile with schools**

There should be a free and open approach with respect to sharing the Pupil Profile with schools where this is used to inform individual education plans for the child. These must not be used for the purpose of selection.

Conclusion

Sinn Féin looks forward to the introduction of a new Post-Primary School Admissions Policy which will end social division and put the pupil at the centre of the education system. Education in the North is undergoing much change at present. We must make absolutely sure that education is about fulfilling the educational needs of the child and not those of an institution.

SDLP Submission to Sub-Group on the Schools' Admissions' Policy, January 2007

Introduction

This paper has been compiled in response to the Key Issues Paper of the Sub Group on the Schools' Admissions' Policy meeting on Friday 22nd December 2006. The format thus follows as closely as possible the key issues and suggested questions in that paper.

The SDLP believes that access to high-quality education is a human right. The party places great importance on education, as a fundamental human right as well as a key driver of the economy and a central requirement for personal development. We believe an effective and well-resourced education system must be an essential component of any strategy to create genuine equality of opportunity. While we acknowledge the excellence achieved by many schools and many pupils, the party believes the system requires reform to raise standards, and widen opportunities, for all. Specifically, we have opposed academic selection on the grounds that it is educationally unsound, socially divisive and operates to the detriment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Having campaigned since the SDLP's inception for an end to academic selection, the SDLP has expressed broad support for the proposed reforms, as set out in our submissions over recent years to the Burns Review, the Costello Report and the Post-Primary Admissions Criteria Consultation which reflect more fully, the party's views on education. The party therefore welcomed the publication of the legislation and urged the government to proceed with its early implementation.

The party fully supports the Sub-Group's aim to examine the key issues that will be of crucial importance for an incoming Northern Ireland Assembly and an Education Ministry. It is on this basis that we are submitting our response to the key issues for consideration in relation to Admission Policy and Criteria.

Key Issues:

Principles of the Schools' Admission Arrangements:

- The SDLP broadly agrees with the principles of the Schools' Admission Arrangements proffered for discussion in the Sub-Group Issue paper (15th Dec 2006)
- As discussed during the sub-group meeting on Friday 22nd Dec the SDLP agrees that all 7 priorities should be considered equally and that there is no need for 'and additionally' to precede points 6 and 7.

Admission criteria as proposed by the Department of Education:

- The **Sibling Currently at School** and **Eldest Child** are important criteria as they help keep families together and support the child-centred aim of the Principles of the Schools' Admission Arrangements .
- The criteria **Feeder Primary Schools, Parish** and **Catchment Area** are interrelated. Feeder Primary Schools usually define both catchment areas of, and contributory parishes to Post-Primary schools. The SDLP believes that in practice there is little need for distinction between these three admission pools and that **Feeder Primary School** could adequately cover all three. It is important that feeder primary schools are not narrowly defined – so a grammar, for example, only names its prep schools as feeders – and that they are not based on cherry-picking – ie nominating some schools as feeders, but disallowing others that operate in the same area.
- The SDLP believes that **Random selection within a Catchment area** should be the only tie-breaker criteria. The party opposes a system of creating (or exacerbating) a 'post-code lottery' or any differential opportunities for urban and rural populations. We submit, therefore, that catchment areas around all post-primary schools will need to be widely defined, much as they currently are for existing grammar schools. Within these widely defined areas, a lottery system could ensure fair access for all.
- We are opposed to the use of **proximity from home to school** as a tie-breaker as this could result in a postcode lottery. We note that the issues paper specifically identifies postcode selection as something that will be avoided. The current system illustrates de facto postcode selection, but on the basis of wealth of areas rather than distance per se – in the cities most of the grammar school pupils come from the same, more affluent areas, even if this means money is spent bussing them considerable distances to go to the school. If this is a criterion for the sub-group, then the consequences of any decisions should be tested against this criterion.
- We consider the criteria of **nearest suitable school** applicable in relation to Irish Medium and Integrated Post-Primary Schools the availability of schools in these sectors is limited by comparison to the availability of schools in other sectors.

Open Menu Approach

- The SDLP believes that the list of criteria should be centrally agreed and uniform for all schools with built in flexibility as outlined above for Irish Medium and Integrated Post-Primary Schools. In other words, individual schools should not be allowed to choose from a menu. This uniformity would increase public confidence by presenting both parents and schools with a transparent and readily comprehensible process. We believe that the more uniform the procedure, the more transparent and obvious it is.
- A uniform and centrally agreed list of criteria would also help prevent instances of unfair exclusion and promote equality of opportunity for all pupils and schools within the new admissions' policy.

Definition of Proposed Criteria

- The SDLP believes that certain criteria require expansion and more detail so as to ensure that they are applied uniformly and with equality in all schools.

- The Family Criteria should make an extra provision for single-sex school, i.e. to prevent exclusion of a son or daughter who is not the eldest member of their immediate family. The criterion of ‘eldest child’ should automatically include the oldest boy or girl if the application is to a single-sex school.
- There must also be more clarification of how children are related within a family. Foster children and half-brothers or sisters must be included in this criteria without discrimination. Special consideration should be given under extraordinary circumstances to children in care as their educational experience tends to be very poor.

Intervention powers to prevent misuse of admissions criteria

- The SDLP believes that such powers must be defined within the Education Reform Act. We believe that the current appeals procedure is effective but we see a need for the Department to have the power to ensure that schools are operating admissions criteria in such an inclusive way which does not disadvantage applicants on social, geographical, racial, or cultural grounds. The advantage of a fully uniform system is that it is possible to have a central appeals body which could consider complaints about the way the procedures are operated, or to consider pleas for entry to a school due to special circumstances. The appeal body could be organised by the Department or the ESA. Given the clarity of a uniform system there would not be the likelihood of extensive litigation.

Provision for Sectoral Schools

- We have mentioned above that we consider the criteria of **nearest suitable school** applicable in relation to Irish Medium and Integrated Post-Primary Schools as the available of schools in these sectors is limited by comparison to the availability of schools in other sectors
- Sectoral schools will be further protected by the ability to define their own feeder primary schools within their catchment areas.

Admission Arrangements for Special Needs

- The SDLP believes that arrangements for Special Needs pupils is sufficiently protected by the statementing process.
- Current SENDO legislation will continue to protect special needs pupils. The absence of any criteria that might contravene the legislation means that no Special Needs pupil can be excluded by the new process.

Miscellaneous

- Impact of Admission policy on Dickson schools?

The SDLP believes that Dickson schools will be helped by the proposed admissions policy. As with sectoral schools, the establishment of catchment areas as defined by feeder primary schools and a set list of admission criteria will protect the intake of Dickson schools

- Coherence with other key education policies?

The SDLP wants the admission policy to have full coherence with policies such as funding, transport and collaboration. We believe that to achieve collaboration between schools, sufficient departmental level funding is required. This will entail up-front costs for the government but the long-term gain from such investment is immeasurable. It is also vital that provision be made in policy formulation for adequate home to school transportation across the board. This promise is crucial for preventing the exclusion of pupils from rural areas. The transport issue is particularly important – it will be an issue if wide catchments are allowed as this presumably will lead to an increase in pupil mobility. More important, current transport rules actually work against school collaboration and make it harder to achieve.

Pupil Profile

Pupil Profile as a means of academic selection

- The SDLP is against the use of the pupil profile as a means of academic selection. The current form and logic of the profile makes no sense if it was to be used as a selective instrument.

Manageability for schools and teachers

- As it stands, the pupil profile is not a manageable tool for either schools or individual teachers.
- Responses from teaching trade unions have reflected that at present teachers are increasingly unsatisfied with the level of resources available to them in formulating the pupil profile.

Relevance for Parents and pupils

- The current model for the Pupil Profile is equally inadequate for parents and pupils in terms of providing them with the information sufficient to make decisions on their child's future.
- The Summative Pupil Profile provides information on the pupil's development between years 4 and 7 in terms of Reading and Mathematics. While these charts are visually helpful, it would be beneficial to include a brief explanation of the overall findings. This would help make the charts more instantly comprehensible to parents.
- The provision of comment banks would be a helpful addition so long as they do not in practice act as hindrance to the process. Comment banks would help to make the Pupil Profiles more comparable across the board and would assist teachers and primary schools involved compiling the profiles. Furthermore, the provision of comprehensible and detailed comments will guarantee that the pupil profile will act as a useful tool for parents and pupils.

The Content

- The SDLP would welcome the opportunity for pupils to include their own comments on their profiles. These could come in the form of sections where a pupil might list their extra-curricular activities or personal interests, their own assessments of their strengths

and weaknesses, their future learning intentions as well their aims they have for their post-primary education.

Sharing the Pupil Profile with Schools

- Parents should not be prevented from voluntarily providing prospective schools with their child's pupil profile. The profile is intended as a tool to allow parents to make an informed decision about their child's educational future. It is therefore the parents' prerogative to use the profile in any way which assists their decision making process.
- We must, however, emphasise that schools should not automatically receive a copy of the pupil profile as this could result in the profile being used by post-primary schools as a tool for selection.

Computer Adaptive Testing

- While CAT can be useful for tracking pupil progress on specific areas of knowledge or specific areas of the curriculum. CCEA proposals for the pupil profile have always involved using CAT as a formative device for providing information for parents, pupils and teachers on children's progress over time in specific areas of the curriculum – this would be one element of the overall body of information available to pupils and parents to help inform choice, in a situation where there are different routes and opportunities available at a number of levels throughout schooling. However, I'm not aware that any country uses a system like this for high-stakes purposes, that is, as the basis for deciding what type of school a child will go to, for children as young as 9/10/11.
- CAT may be useful in tracking progress in areas of the curriculum, such as a child's understanding of specific aspects of mathematics, or their level of literacy on some dimension or other (scientific, numerical, technical, etc). However, we are unconvinced that the basis for assuming, in a high-stakes context, that performance on any one of these dimensions would allow us to predict a pupil's performance at 16, 18 or any other stage of their life. The assumption in a system of selection at 11 is that the test does accurately predict 'ability' and hence future performance. This also assumes, of course, that children can be neatly categorised into two groups.
- If CAT is used for formative purposes, then there is no specific pressure on pupils to 'do well' as the entire purpose of the system is to better inform teaching and learning. However, if CAT was to be used for high-stakes purposes, it is inevitable that some parents would buy computers and software to try to fast-track their pupils along the designated routes. Anyone who thinks there would not be massive pressure and preparation is being naïve. The official recommendation from the Department of Education in the old 11+ days was that preparation of 3 hours was all that was needed and that any additional preparation was a waste of time. In fact, as we know, not only did schools devote massive amounts of time in P5/6/7 to test preparation, but a very large proportion of parents paid for additional coaching. If we continue with a high-stakes test, deciding a child's route at 11 between two school options, and with little or no flexibility after this point, then it is absolutely inevitable that the last few years of primary school will be narrowly focused on test preparation, the external coaching business will continue to thrive, the status difference between grammar and secondary schools will continue, and post-primary schools generally will have to make up for all

the problems created by test preparation. This has happened with every other test system designed to separate pupils at 11 – there is no good reason to suggest it will not happen also with CAT, and since there is no-where else in the world using this system it is difficult to claim otherwise.

- CAT is being proposed by some as an alternative means of academic selection. In the past the 11+ did not actually measure what pupils knew, it simply put them in rank order and allocated grades on the basis of fixed proportions. The proportion who ended up in grammar schools was related to the number of places in grammar schools, not the number who were ‘objectively’ measured as being capable of dealing with the academic curriculum of grammar schools.
 - Presumably those who advocate CAT also think they know what proportion of the cohort should be selected?
 - Presumably they know what factors need to be measured by CAT in order to identify pupils who are ‘fit for an academic curriculum’?
 - If they plan to measure more than one dimension, then what do they do with a pupil who scores high on one, but low on another?
- Although research on the use of CAT for formative purposes has been underway in NI for the last 6 or 7 years, it has not appeared as a suggested selective instrument until very recently.
- We are not aware of any research done on the use of CAT as a selective instrument in NI has been published in peer-reviewed journals over the last 5 years.
- We are not aware of that any research done on the use of any type of test for high-stakes selection at 11 has been published in peer-reviewed journals by any of the advocates of selection at 11 in NI over the past 5 years.
- There have been a couple of papers published on lobby group websites on these issues – but we are not aware that any of these papers have been submitted to peer-reviewed journals for normal academic scrutiny.

Schools Admission Policy Sub-Group – Ulster Unionist Party

School Admissions Policy – Key Issues

■ **Principles of the schools admission arrangements**

- Put the interests of the child at the centre of the decision-making process, by ensuring that the child is placed in a post-primary school best suited for her/his aptitudes, talents and abilities
- Be transparent, consistent and easily understood by parents and by schools
- Be based upon informed choice by parents, facilitated by Pupil Profiles being provided to post-primary schools and post-primary schools providing parents with a statement of advice
- Be fair and free from any bias or indirect discrimination, ensuring that the criteria do not result in postcode selection, social exclusion or disadvantaging of ethnic minorities
- Acknowledge that many schools serve local communities, and that some grammar, Special Needs, integrated and Irish Medium Schools serve wider communities
- Retain as much flexibility as possible, so that schools can reflect their local circumstances and educational ethos

■ **The admission criteria**

- Sibling currently at the school
- Eldest child
- Feeder primary school
- Catchment area
- Nearest school appropriate to the child aptitudes, talents and abilities
- In the event of over-subscription, schools should also have the option of using fair and consistent academic criteria (approved by the Minister) in order to enable the child to be placed in the post-primary school best suited for his/her aptitudes, talents and abilities
- Schools should have the freedom to employ additional criteria e.g. parent is a past pupil, parent or guardian teaches at the school

■ **Open menu approach**

- Schools should be allowed to choose from a menu of admission criteria, and to determine the order in which the criteria are applied
- This will enable schools to best respond to local circumstances and to reflect the educational ethos of the school

- **The criteria presently proposed in legislation**
 - Inevitably the existing proposals will lead to postcode selection
 - Pupils in rural areas or on the periphery of urban centres will be disadvantaged
 - Both proposed tie breakers of random selection or proximity of home to school are inherently unjust
- **The intervention powers to prevent misuse of admission criteria**
 - Intervention powers must recognise and respect the freedom and autonomy of schools to reflect their local circumstances and educational ethos
 - The appeals procedure must be robust, accessible and transparent
- **Miscellaneous**
 - A Parental Voice Forum should have a statutory role in assisting to review the workings of transfer procedures
 - Communities presently served by the Dickson schools should be given the option of retaining their existing framework – and consideration should be given to allowing groups of schools in other areas to opt into a Dickson arrangement
 - The Department should urgently provide stakeholders and elected representatives with an assessment of the impact of The Independent Strategic Review of Education upon transfer procedures

Pupil Profiles – Key Issues

- **Pupil Profiles and academic criteria**
 - The Pupil Profile should be revised in order to record the academic ability of the child on the basis of fair and consistent standards
 - This record will help inform post-primary schools in developing the child's aptitudes, talents and abilities and may be used by post-primary schools in the event of over-subscription
- **Manageability for schools and teachers**
 - Resources, training and a timetable to facilitate the introduction of Pupil Profiles must be provided
 - The results of the pilots must be made available to stakeholders and elected representatives
- **Relevance for parents and pupils**
 - In order to adequately determine the relevance of the Pupil Profiles for parents, the results of the pilots must be made available to stakeholders and elected representatives

- **The content**
 - The professional judgement and experience of teachers are an important part of the Pupil Profile
 - This should be supported by a record of the academic ability of the child on the basis of fair and consistent standards

- **Sharing the Pupil Profile with post-primary schools**
 - Post-primary schools should automatically receive a copy of the Pupil Profile of a child seeking to transfer to that school
 - In the event of over-subscription, schools should also have the option of using the (revised) Pupil Profile's record of academic ability in order to enable the child to be placed in the post-primary school best suited for her/his aptitudes, talents and abilities

Appendix 6

**Direction from the
Secretary of State**



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Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Mrs Eileen Bell, MLA
Speaker of the Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

27 November 2006

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

One of the elements of the St Andrews Agreement is a Programme for Government Committee to agree priorities for a restored Executive and to make preparations for restoration. It is intended that the Committee should meet regularly over the coming months, at least once a week.

I, therefore, hereby direct under paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 1 of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 that the Business Committee shall establish a Programme for Government Committee to meet at 12:00 noon on Monday 27 November and subsequently at dates and times to be agreed by the Committee.

I also direct that:

- The Committee should be made up of 10 MLAs with the number of members from each party being on the following basis – 3 DUP, 3 Sinn Fein, 2 UUP, 2 SDLP
- The meeting on 27 November should be chaired by one of the Deputy Speakers (Mr Francie Molloy and Mr Jim Wells) (who shall not count for the purposes of the composition set out above) with future chairing arrangements to be agreed by the Committee



Northern
Ireland
Office

- The Committee's procedures, membership arrangements and arrangements, including charring arrangements, for any subgroups of the Committee shall be such as shall be determined by the Committee.

I am content for officials in OFMDFM and other NI Departments to do all they can to facilitate the Programme for Government Committee and its sub-groups, including attending meetings and providing information, if this would be helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Hain'.

RT HON PETER HAIN MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Appendix 7

**Letter to the
Secretary of State**

Room 242
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

22 January 2007

The Rt Hon Peter Hain MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast
BT4 3TT

Dear Secretary of State

Report On Schools Admission Policy

At its meeting on 22 January 2007, the Committee on the Programme for Government approved the report from the sub-group on Schools Admission Policy and agreed to write to you to ask you to take action urgently on a number of the recommendations in the report. The Committee's report on Schools Admission Policy will be published shortly and a copy will be sent to you as soon as it is available.

The Committee noted that, as a result of section 21 of the Northern Ireland (St. Andrews Agreement) 2006, academic selection was not prohibited. While there was not consensus on its continued use as part of the admission criteria, the Committee had a number of concerns about the proposals for the schools admission policy. It agreed that there should be-

- Further research on transfer systems at the age of 14;
- An additional principle that 'there is a need to ensure equality of opportunity for every child and in particular the need to take account of difficulties faced by newly arrived families and ethnic minorities;
- Additional research and modelling to show how the proposed schools admission criteria would interact and operate in practice; and
- That the use of the term 'parental choice' was misleading and should be replaced with the more accurate term of 'parental preference'.

On the proposed pupil profile, while there was no consensus on revising the pupil profile to include academic ability and use it for academic selection, the Committee noted that -

- There were a number of concerns about many aspects of the profile including weaknesses in its content; its manageability for teachers and schools and relevance to parents and pupils;
- The proposed system was not properly supported with the full range of resources it required (including ICT, additional reporting time and advanced training for teachers, and educating parents) for it to be of meaningful use to teachers, parents and pupils;

- There were considerable doubts that the pupil profile could be delivered in an effective and efficient format in the manner and timetable proposed by the Department of Education and CCEA.

The Committee noted that, without prejudice to the issue of whether academic selection should or should not continue to be available, very little research had been carried out on alternatives to the 11+, and agreed that such research should be undertaken so that it is available to inform an incoming Executive's consideration of this issue.

The Committee recommends that -

- Further research should be commissioned on the experience of transfer at age 14 including the Dickson Plan in Craigavon and elsewhere in Europe. This should include an assessment of the resource implications of restructuring schools to accommodate such a system, including as an area based solution.
- The Department should conduct independent research and carry out exploratory modelling on the interaction between the proposed criteria. It should then consult widely on the criteria as soon as possible.
- In the new single Education and Skills Authority there should be provision for a representative parental voice forum, including capacity building for parents, and that the Department should update members of the sub-group on progress in this area as soon as possible.
- The Department should lay out clearly how the admission criteria and pupil profile will be impacted on by the proposed changes in education policies such as: transport arrangements; collaborative arrangements; the entitlement framework; specialist schools and the Independent Strategic Review of Education and recent legislation, including that arising from the Northern Ireland (St Andrews) Agreement Act 2006.
- The Department should examine what impact the admission criteria and pupil profile will have on Dickson area schools and see what flexibility there would be for this and other local arrangements.
- The term 'parental choice' should be changed to 'parental preference' to reflect the reality which will pertain after the proposed changes.
- The final report from BDO Stoy Hayward on the independent evaluation of the pupil profile should be made available to MLAs and interested groups without delay.
- Adequate resources are made available for schools and for the professional development of teachers to enable them to carry out the completion of the pupil profile.
- Further work needs to be done on the usefulness of the pupil profile as a guide given the potential for variation and interpretation in the meanings of the headings particularly on the levels of progression in literacy and numeracy; its manageability for teachers; and the opportunity for a child to comment on his/her own progression, achievements and aims for post primary education.
- The Department of Education should make available information about the cost and delivery of the ICT solution proposed for the pupil profile.

- The Department and CCEA should consider whether the timetable for the introduction of the pupil profile is achievable.

I should be grateful if you would consider the comments and recommendations made by the Committee and let the Committee know what action you will take on these matters.

Yours sincerely

signed

Jim Wells
Chairperson
Committee on the Programme for Government

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