COUNCIL FOR CATHOLIC MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

CCMS RESPONSE
TO
THE POST-PRIMARY
REVIEW BODY
PROPOSALS

20 JUNE 2002

1.0   Introduction

1.1 The publication of the Burns Report and the debate that both preceded and followed that event have presented Northern Ireland with perhaps the greatest opportunity in fifty years to reflect in depth on the nature and purposes of education. The Council commends the Minister on the nature of the review process itself and the Review Body for its energy, commitment and vision. The nature of the issues to be addressed and the implications of change are of such import that it was wholly appropriate that the process should be driven not as a political agenda, but as an educational one. In essence, the issue is too important to be caught up in ideological wrangling. At stake is the social and economic well-being of our community and the future of our young people. It must never be forgotten that our schools exist primarily to meet the needs of our young people and our primary concern must be for them rather than for institutions.

1.2 In seeking to ensure our economic future it is inevitable that we in Northern Ireland will ultimately be called on to address issues such as an over reliance on public sector employment, the demise of agriculture as a major employer and the impact of enhanced mobility of labour and goods within an expanded European Community. The task of our education system is to prepare our young people to take their place in a new and increasingly turbulent society as individuals secure in their beliefs and empowered to contribute to and benefit from the developing economy. Whilst such functional matters are important they by no means encompass the totality of education.

1.3 The Council is firmly of the belief that any meaningful consideration of proposals must be predicated upon a clear understanding as to the basic purposes and priorities of education. It is only with clarity in respect of **vision and purpose** that we can meaningfully reflect on the diverse mechanisms, including structures, and processes which would bring that vision to fruition. In keeping with this strategy, the Council believes that the process of review needs to be phased as follows :

- the establishment of an understanding as to **Vision** and **Purpose**

- the consideration of the principles to underpin **Structures**

- agreement as to the administrative **Processes**

1.4 The Council, in its initial submission to the Review Body, clearly expressed its concerns that any precipitive consideration of structures would be counter productive and had the potential to deflect the debate away from the core issues and towards the details of the structures proposed. Sadly that has been the nature of many of the responses to the Review Body's definitive proposals. It must, however, be recognised that because of the nature of the proposals the debate has moved on somewhat and thus the Council, in addressing this reality, has reflected on structures and has made an appropriate response. This issue will be addressed later in this paper.

2.0 Education: a Vision

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2.1   Goodman, in an insightful treatise on the dynamic of change, reminds us that in respect of schooling, if we are to expedite change then there must, of necessity, be :

> ".... a recognition that school restructuring efforts should be built upon an open discourse regarding the type of culture we wish to build and the relationship between schooling and this future society".
>
>   (*Goodman: Change without Difference)*

The concepts of culture and society and their relationship with education is complex and it is not the intention in this paper to reflect in depth on such issues. However, it is important that we articulate clearly our understanding in regard to Catholic education and its purposes for it is only with such an understanding can we engage fully in the open discourse called for by Goodman.

2.2   Interestingly, whilst education often features in political agendas and in many economic treatises, what is often lacking from both is specificity in regard to the purposes of education; rather one may find vague comments regarding economic or social well being, skills acquisition or even competitiveness. Such vagaries are starved of belief, imagination and vision. Catholic education, however, is predicated upon a clear vision as to the nature of man, his relationship with God and his place in the world. The recent publication from the Northern Bishops "*Proclaiming the Mission"* notes:

> "…… the Christian ideal of education - education in the true sense - is based on love, solidarity, the common good, truth and justice. It is not an economic or even a political activity. True education is a moral activity which has at its heart the twin notions of the fundamental worth of each person and the notion of a higher common good to which each belongs and through which each expresses his/her common God-given humanity".
>
>   (*Proclaiming the Mission*)

This is not to deny the role of education in preparing our young people for a place in the economic life of the community, rather the challenge for educators is to prepare our students for the complexities of modern living including the transmission of those skills required for living in today's modern economic world.

In publishing "Proclaiming the Mission" the Northern Bishops sought to benchmark for the broader Catholic School system the core values of Catholic Education and the challenges emerging in a world characterised by secularism. Equally important in a pluralist society was the need to outline

for others those guiding principles and values that inspire Catholic Education.

2.3   The challenges then are enormous and therein lies the essential dignity of the task so readily embraced by our teachers. The task is rendered at once more difficult and more necessary by the advance of secularism in society as a whole, and by the pre-eminence of a utilitarian and market-forces driven view of education. These views sit in direct contradiction to the notion espoused at Vatican II that :

> "True education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will as an adult have a share".
>
> *(Gravissimum Educationis)*

2.4   There are imperatives that flow from this vision of education, namely that we must celebrate the uniqueness and worth of all and must ensure that the talents of all those entrusted to our care are appropriately recognised and developed. In so doing it is imperative that we seek, in a world characterised by rapid change, to imbue within our students not just a sense of their own worth and potential, but also a recognition of the benefits of continued education. Research clearly indicates that success in this area depends, to a large extent, on the success or lack of it enjoyed by students in their formative years and to their sense of well-being in those years.

2.5   Equally there are clear imperatives in regard to the needs of society. In the context of Northern Ireland this assumes a particular significance in regard to the promotion of community understanding and reconciliation. The publication by the Northern Bishops of "*Building Peace Shaping the Future*" clearly articulates the commitment of Catholic education to address division and foster reconciliation and an openness to the world at large. This commitment is predicated upon two of the core values of Catholic Church teaching, namely : the theology of reconciliation and the promotion of the common good. This is not an issue solely for Catholic educators rather it is a task in which all must play an active role, a fact recognised in the Culture of Tolerance Report. In outlining the responsibilities of all there is a recognition that it is through the inculcation of values that we can build a sustainable culture of tolerance rather than through structural arrangements. Success in this venture depends on the promotion of values of respect and tolerance and the assumption of this responsibility by all who share in the mission of education.

2.6   Education then is viewed by Catholic educators as being simultaneously a sacred and a secular activity, whose ultimate goal is a synthesis of conscience and competence, the development of young people secure in their understanding of the needs of society and more importantly their essential dignity in Christ. It is this vision of reality and of the mission of education, sacred and secular, that has shaped the Council's response to the Review Body's proposals and which, more importantly, gives a sense of purpose to Catholic schools.

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2.7   Education, however, does not take place within a vacuum, it is also influenced by a variety of factors, social and otherwise, and it is to these issues that we now turn.

3.0   The Economic and Social Context

3.1   Education policy or philosophy does not exist or develop in a vacuum, rather it reflects the complex interaction of socio-political and economic imperatives which themselves are shaped by powerful historical, European and global influences. In short, whilst we must reject the purely utilitarian concept of education favoured by some, we must nonetheless remind ourselves that education *per se* must contribute to the common good and therefore must not only enrich the lives of our children but also meet the needs of society. Whilst it is impossible to completely compartmentalise the diverse roles of responsibility, for the purposes of clarity it has been decided to reflect on the broader structural dimensions that reflect traditional policy imperatives.

3.2   **Social Demands in an Era of New Politics**

Circumstances within Northern Ireland have happily conspired to produce, via the out-workings of the Northern Ireland Assembly, an emerging consensus around broad socio-political constructs embracing such themes as cohesion, justice and inclusion. These concepts are not valued solely within Northern Ireland, indeed the weight given to them in Westminster is clearly exemplified in the establishment of a Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Unit. What perhaps is unique, is the overt manner in which the political and governmental machinery of Northern Ireland has sought to place these concepts at the heart of government. This is perhaps best exemplified in the First Minister and Deputy First Minister's preface to the Draft Programme for Government in which they exhort the community to:

> "Help us to achieve the goal of making a difference to
> the lives of people enabling us to grow together as a
> peaceful, fair and inclusive community".

Section 4 of that Programme also echoes the commitment to the seminal themes of cohesion, justice and inclusion, but extends them to embrace the notion of quality and equal access for all. Paragraph 4.2 effectively encapsulates the Northern Ireland Assembly's objectives in respect of the Education system calling on us :

> ".....to ensure the best possible standard of education for all
> children and young people which will motivate them to
> achieve their potential, build their confidence and enrich
> their lives .... [and thus] .... provide the foundation for
> an inclusive society, a strong and vibrant economy and an
> incentive for lifelong learning".

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If education is to meet these needs then it follows that the processes of education i.e. the curriculum offered, the pedagogical styles embraced and *the core structures* of our education system itself, must be such as to ensure that education is an emancipatory activity encouraging social participation facilitating economic development and thus contributing to the common good. The implications of this will be considered below.

3.3 **Economic Demands in a New Northern Ireland**.

In an era of globalisation, the only real constant will be change and this is as true of economic needs as for others. The March 1999 Report of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy Review Group "Strategy 2010", successfully identifies its vision for Northern Ireland. Having noted the views of the World Bank (1998) the NIEC reminds us that the:

> ".......balance between knowledge and resources has shifted
> so far towards the former that knowledge has become
> perhaps the important factor determining the standard of
> living........ Today's most technologically advanced
> economies are truly knowledge-based".
>
> (2010 [3:13])

To respond appropriately to the needs of this brave new world economy, several conditions need to be fulfilled at the most strategic level. Firstly, there must be a re-alignment of our education and training programmes. "Strategy 2010" speaks of the need for a strategic focus driving education and training imperatives; a call echoed by Best in his work for the Northern Ireland Economic Council (December 2000) **"The Capabilities and Innovation Perspective: The Way Ahead in Northern Ireland".**

3.4 The nature of the challenge facing 'Northern Ireland PLC', if we are to prosper should not

be underestimated. The National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets [NACETT], reporting in respect of the United Kingdom as a whole (February 2000), noted that the changing profile of skills required within the new economic dispensation has major implications for education, economic and indeed social policy. NACETT research indicates a "sea change" in the labour market with an increase in the demand for higher-level skills and a considerable reduction in the demand for skills at NVQ1 level or below. In a time when the concept of a job for life is gone, in an environment characterised by a shrinking manufacturing and agricultural base, and in a location on the periphery of Europe and adjacent to a vibrant economy, this represents a major challenge to policy makers.

3.5 **Economic Empowerment and Social Cohesion**

Skills, however, are not merely a vehicle for delivering in terms of industry and commerce, they are also an important vehicle in ensuring greater **social cohesion**. It is important that we do not lose sight of these interrelated purposes. The difficulties facing those whose school-based education leaves them lacking in the appropriate skills are

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compounded by a differential response to the issue of on-going skills acquisition. This on-going difficulty reflects what the National Skills Task Force speaks of as "cognitive filters" which are asymmetric in impact. Simply put, the least privileged in terms of social background reap the least benefits not only from education in the first instance but indeed in any subsequent training regimes. For many of our young people, breaking this cycle of continuing "disengagement" will involve energising families, and in some instances communities, to recognise both the intrinsic and practical value of education. It is imperative that we do not fall into the trap of regarding the last comment regarding communities as little more than a fanciful aspiration. In a society tragically characterised by communal strife it is vital that education policy regards the promotion of social cohesion as an essential outcome to be assiduously planned for and more importantly resourced. Interestingly the recent Northern Ireland Civic Forum publication *"Educational Disadvantage: A Civic Discussion"* expresses particular concern about the long-term impact of early educational failure.

3.6   If we are to convince young people of the value of education, then there needs to be a concerted effort by government to ensure that our economy can deliver on job creation, particularly in areas characterised by endemic poverty and communal strife. Only if our young people can see some practical advantages arising from engagement in education will we see commitment and participation.

4.0   Core and Cultural Issues

4.1   What then are the seminal issues that emerge from a consideration of context and vision and purpose? What are the issues that must be addressed as we seek to reconcile the needs of the individual and of society? In essence, we are asking our education system to ensure that the developmental needs of the individual, in the broadest sense, are met and that that education contributes not only to economic well-being but also to social cohesion. These demands are not inconsequential and particularly so given the increasing pressures on funding and on teachers and yet our development as a vibrant community calls for no less. What then are the implications for our education system?

Success in meeting these needs will require an education system that:

- Ensures excellence in and for all

- Ensures that no structural impediments to academic progress remain

- Optimises the opportunities of all and encourages a culture of life long learning

- Ensures that resource allocation to schools appropriately reflects the circumstances of the schools in terms of social deprivation and educational needs

- Enhances social cohesion and community development

- Offers a variety of pathways to Third Level Education

- Delivers a curriculum that meets the needs of the emerging economy

- Creates management entities which provide flexibility and meaningful choice to all

- Recognises the structural implications of the demographic downturn

- Sustains a pluralist perspective and facilitates parental choice in respect of ethos.

5.0   Does our Present System Meet These Needs?

5.1   In considering this question we need to reflect on issues such as performance, those factors inhibiting social cohesion and the impact of issues such as demography. For the purposes of clarity these issues have been treated as discrete factors but it must be recognised that the diverse factors interact to produce a cumulative impact.

5.2   **Selection and the Curriculum**

The detrimental impact of selection upon the primary school curriculum has been clearly documented; evidence clearly shows that the Key Stage 2 curriculum is badly skewed by the 11+ examination and indeed there is a concern that for some children there is an element of **"*de-schooling*"** with the telescoping of the Key Stage 2 programme to facilitate the 11+. Significantly, this was an issue raised in every consultation meeting held by the Council. It is interesting that we are presently engaged in what many see as a radical review of the primary curriculum, a process that will have major implications for schools in terms of training and resources. When one considers both the research findings in respect of the primary curriculum, and in particular that of Key Stage 2, and the diverse reports issued by the Education and Training Inspectorate, we cannot but be struck by the damaging effects of the testing regime associated with Transfer testing and selection. Should selection, in whatever guise, be retained, then undoubtedly we would see a recurrence of this phenomenon with the new proposals similarly been subverted as schools seek to reconcile the competing demands of the new curriculum and the pressure to produce 11+ results. However, it must be recognised that any change management processes should be cognisant of the implications of the curricular changes which will emanate from the current CCEA Review.

5.3   **Selection and Social Differentiation**

5.3.1   We presently allocate children to schools on the basis of a test that has been shown to be

flawed (Gardner 2000). In addition, there is clear evidence that the process favours middle-class children. Approximately 8% of the grammar school intake is from a working class background. The starkness of the divide is graphically illustrated in the 1996 statistical reports issued by DENI i.e. SB96/1 and SB96/2. This is a most significant factor in that it impacts significantly on the "socio-economic composition" of the post primary school sector. The impact of this has been noted within the Gallagher-Smyth research commissioned by DENI. It is significant that the recent OECD report "Programme for International Student Assessment" (a three year survey covering 32 countries and 265,000 students) supported these findings and reported that :

> "The socio-economic composition of a school's student population is an even stronger predictor of student performance than individual home background".
>
> (OECD/PISA Dec2001)

5.3.2   The evidence clearly suggests a potential link between the socio-economic segregation of students in different schools and the polarisation of students by performance. Indeed the PISA report goes on to note that :

> "The countries with the greatest differences between schools tend to be those that send students to different kinds of secondary schools on the basis of prior performance in school".
>
> (OECD/PISA Dec2000)

Simply put, a selective, differentiated system benefits some at the expense of others producing a much greater spread of performance. It is difficult to see how this sits with the notion of social inclusion and community empowerment enshrined in the Programme for Government or the New TSN Policy.

5.3.3   The impact of such social differentiation is most clearly evident in that cohort of schools known as 'Group One'. The interaction of selection and Open Enrolment created a vortex of difficulties for such schools and necessitated the introduction of a specific initiative to address the arising difficulties. Should selection be retained then, as the impact of demography manifests we will inevitably see other schools falling into this category.

5.4   **Selection and the Impact of Demography**

The advent of Open Enrolment has seen the intake of grammar schools rise from 27% to 40% of the pupil cohort, the ongoing demographic downturn will see this figure rise in the coming years. Some have suggested that the worse impact of Open Enrolment and selection might be obviated by a capping of enrolments. However, this would be at odds with current government policy and would be construed as a diminution of parental choice. The changing profile of entry to grammar schools, a feature the Inspectorate

warned of in 1990, has serious implications for non-selective schools and if not addressed, will create a **"dynamic of contraction"** that will ensure that many more of our schools develop the characteristics of Group One schools whilst others will become increasingly unsustainable. This has significant implications for all policy makers charged with legal responsibilities in respect of provision and indeed has implications for the teaching force within such schools and ultimately the pupils who will be served by such institutions. In short, the implications of demographic change are such that there is no alternative but to address the issue.

5.5   Selection and Pupil Performance

5.5.1   The issue of performance is both complex and emotive. We, in Northern Ireland, have often prided ourselves on our successes. Whilst our performance at GCSE is indeed commendable, particularly in respect of those who might be deemed academic "high flyers", Northern Ireland still has a long tail of low achievement. However, as CCMS noted in its 1993 paper on underachievement :

> "If as is oft stated, the process of selection leads to some pupils achieving at the highest level, it is equally true that it contributes to the underachievement of many other pupils, some of whom begin the process of failure in the primary school".
>
> (Raising Educational Standards, CCMS 1993)

In reflecting on performance we must consider the system as a whole and the needs of all children and this issue is dealt with below.

5.5.2   The process of comparison between differing systems each serving distinct populations is not straight forward. England, for example, has a population profile that is not replicated in Northern Ireland in that it has a large immigrant population with many inner city schools having a multiplicity of languages. It is fortuitous then, that the OECD should commission research, which transcended the United Kingdom and which **directly tested** pupils of fifteen years of age –265,000 in all in 32 countries. What is perhaps most significant is **the nature of the 'literacies' tested:**

'reading: the ability to understand, use, and reflect on written texts in order to participate effectively in life

mathematical: the ability to formulate and solve mathematical problems in situations encountered in life

scientific: the capacity to acquire and use scientific knowledge, and to draw evidence-based conclusions.

Given the move within Northern Ireland to a more skills based curriculum and the constant call from the world of industry and commerce for students to be '**skilled for**

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life', the PISA findings are significant all the more so in that they offer an objective and direct comparison between England and Northern Ireland. Significantly, in each of the three skills, pupils in England out-performed their counterparts in Northern Ireland.

5.5.4   As has been noted, the PISA definition of literacy transcends the theoretical and embraces

the practical, but if we consider performance in these areas as measured by public examinations what do we find? Figures published by the UK Government Statistics Agency, whose figures are compiled from official statistics for each region, reveal the following (with regard to students scoring GCSE grades A*-C in the PISA research areas, the figures were as follows for the year 1999/00. The table also shows data for all core subjects) :

Region	English A*-C	Mathematics A*-C	Any Science A*-C
England	53.9	46.5	46.7
Wales	53.9	43.3	47.8
Scotland	71.0	53.1	61.7
N. Ireland	58.7	48.4	46.3

5.5.5   It can readily be seen from the above statistics why Scotland has a much higher proportion of students entering Higher Education than Northern Ireland. As has already been said, much has been made of our successes and indeed those successes have been attributed to our selective system. The data from both PISA and the above would indicate that our confidence in that success is perhaps is not fully warranted. Much of the debate around the notion of 'reorganisation' has been characterised by emotive rejections of non-selective systems and citing Northern Ireland's superior performance. The reality is that there is clear evidence that calls such assertions into question. Jesson's research (2001) on performance in England, reveals another level of complexity; namely differential levels of performance between those LEAs that have retained selection and those who have not. Jesson's studies indicate that the *'overall performance'* of pupils in non-selective schools is superior to that of selective LEAs. Given Jesson's role with DfES in respect of 'value-added analysis', his work carries significant weight. Interestingly, Croxford *et al's* work on comparative performance within the UK throws into relief another significant issue, namely the impact of social segregation as a factor in inequality in attainment - and thus supports the findings of PISA in respect of social segregation.

5.6   **Selection and Economic Needs**

5.6.1   Our present system, even when it is producing what might be seen as a profile of high performance, is not necessarily reflecting the needs of our economy. Indeed, the Northern Ireland Economic Council has reported that at least 30% of our long term unemployed possess two A levels or more. This raises serious questions in regard to how our present system will meet our future economic needs**.**

5.6.2   In addition we need to reflect on the linkages between our economic needs, the ambitions of our young people and the profile and availability of courses in our local universities. Approximately 40% of those who enter Higher Education attend university in Britain and the majority do not return home. Compton (1992) reports that migrants, far from being an underclass, usually possess a qualifications profile superior to the Northern Ireland population as a whole. This haemorrhage of "talent" has potentially serious ramifications as Northern Ireland seeks to address the needs of the new knowledge based economy in an environment where financial subventions from the UK exchequer may be less forthcoming and European Initiatives begin to favour other countries. There is, therefore, a need to reflect on the totality of provision including Third Level to ensure not only logical progression but also 'fitness for purpose' in terms of social and economic needs. This is not to suggest that we should seek to gratuitously restrict choice, rather it is to suggest that in the area of Further and Third Level education we must be equally mindful of practical and economic realities in an increasingly volatile economic environment.

5.7   **Selection and Pupils' Well-Being**

5.7.1   Our selective system currently deems the majority of our pupils as failures at age 11 with all that this means in terms of their self-esteem and psychological well-being. A constant refrain from principals in the period after the publication of the latest 11+ results - a period that coincided with the Council's consultation with principals on the Burn's proposals - was of the debilitating impact of "failure" on a significant cohort of children. Repeatedly, principals from primary schools spoke of the stresses engendered pre the tests and more significantly the stresses manifest in the period following publication of results. It is evident that not all children experience the same levels of stress but it is equally apparent from discussions with principals that numerous children find the transfer-testing regime a source of considerable distress. Interestingly, there are some who would posit that the sense of failure or pain engendered by the 11+ is restricted to those who having applied do not gain access to grammar school.   This is most certainly not the experience reported by both principals and staff in primary schools.

5.7.2   Even a cursory consideration of the issues above leads inexorably to the conclusion that the status quo, in terms of curriculum and post primary structures, is simply not an option. The pressures arising from demography, the new skills agenda and the changing economic realities quite simply demand a strategic review of structures, management arrangements, curriculum and assessment regimes. Failure to respond to these changing circumstances will have significant implications for Northern Ireland, not just in terms of economic performance but also in terms of social cohesion. Indeed, these two areas are inextricably linked in that economic failure will impact most readily on those sections of our community least capable of addressing the difficulties that will result. Social cohesion, of necessity, requires that we empower all our young people to participate in society **-** failure to do so is to run the risk of the emergence of an underclass of alienated

young people or the perpetuation of a culture of dependence or indeed communal strife. Above all, our concern must be for our young people any system that fails to afford all of our young people the opportunity to grow in understanding of their essential worth and to grow in understanding as to their responsibilities both to themselves and to society at large.

5.7.3   In seeking to address the issues emanating from the above, there needs to be a "multi track" approach. Steps must be taken to ensure that the curriculum on offer reflects the changing needs of our economy whilst retaining its core capacity to meet the needs of the individual in terms of social and moral development and also the needs of society at large. The realisation of this goal depends not only on the nature of the curriculum but also on the currency of the qualifications that underpin it not only in terms of the job market but also in terms of pathways to third level education. To reiterate, if our strategic objective is an economically viable and socially cohesive society then our education structures at all levels must support that strategic aim. In short structures must support strategy and our strategy must deliver on those myriad needs identified above. How then do the Review Body's proposals measure up to the needs of the new Northern Ireland?

5.8   **Curriculum: A central Role**

Many of the issues raised above have also featured in the ongoing deliberations in respect of the curriculum. CCEA, in its response to the Review Body's proposals, calls for a new "contract" that sets out society's expectations of schools and teachers and envisages the curriculum as the basis of that contract. One might assume that this call echoes Goodman's plea for discourse as to purposes.

Interestingly, much of the work undertaken in the CCEA review processes and development sits at ease with the demands identified above in respect of a skills-based curriculum, the need for programmes addressing the social well-being and health of education and the work in respect of citizenship and values.

Neither curricular nor structural change can be introduced in a vacuum; each will invariably impact on the other and this must be recognised. Equally the changes envisaged would see schools enjoying a considerable degree of flexibility in regard to the curriculum. Undoubtedly this will create opportunities for innovative thinking in respect of the programmes offered, timetable scheduling and indeed pupil groupings. It will also require significant resourcing and staff devlopment.

Some might envisage curricular change as the main "driver" of structural change. This, however, is to deny the reality of the last decade. What is correct is that the two processes are linked and the management of change must embrace both.

6.0   The Post Primary Review Body's Proposals - A Critique

6.1.1   As has already been noted, the Council, in its initial submission to the Review Body, argued for a phased approach to the review commencing with an identification of the purposes or vision of education. Had that advice been followed, the nature of the debate that ensued would surely have been different, less emotive in nature and less characterised by 'constituency driven' responses.

6.1.2   The Council does, however, recognise the need to respond appropriately to the proposals. A perusal of the report reveals in excess of twenty proposals, many embedded within the body of the report as opposed to being set out within a discrete section. Any attempt to respond at such a level of specificity would effectively obscure the core issues and would hinder real discussion. In any event, the core of the proposals revolves around :

- the articulation of a set of guiding principles deemed to underpin education

- the move to election i.e. 'informed choice' as opposed to academic selection

- the development of a Pupil Profile to provide a broad picture of a child's attributes, aptitudes progress and developmental needs which ultimately will facilitate informed and meaningful choices in respect of courses and curricular pathways

- the establishment of a management infrastructure to facilitate the move to a non-selective system and develop a culture of co-operation, i.e. Collegiates complete with broad managerial and fiscal responsibilities; and

It is to these **core proposals** that the Council will confine its comments.

6.1.3   In adopting this strategy, the Council remains constant in its approach, having counselled the Review Body in its initial response against specificity in regard to structures and processes. As has already been noted it has been a source of disappointment to the Council that much of the comment and debate around the proposals has centred, not on educational issues but on the question of structures and possible administrative processes.

6.1.4   The Council remains of the opinion that structures and processes follow from policy, which itself must be predicated upon Vision, Philosophy and Principles. Whilst policy reflects an agreed philosophy and principles, the structures to deliver such policy will, of necessity, be impacted upon by the current pattern of provision and plant, available resources and local circumstances. In addition, the processes will have to reflect present legal restrictions or any new such arrangements as are put in place. The implementation of any structural change and the development of any subsequent protocols in respect of administration, transport and admissions criteria, would require a strategic management process which would operate on a variety of levels. Any such planning processes must

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be established on the basis of inclusivity, in respect of all vested interests, and transparency of processes. The out-workings of such planning would be an agreed time-frame for action and a commitment that 'local interests' play a central role in the realisation of local arrangements.

6.1.5   Whilst having concerns about the specificity of the proposals within the report, the Council was pleased to note that in many areas the Burns' Proposals resonate readily with the Council's views in regard to:

- the end of selection

- the development, within a common Key Stage 3 of a, programme of "sampler courses" and a significantly enhanced Careers Guidance Service

- the suggested move to a culture of election i.e. 'informed choice' rather selection with the former being facilitated by a pupil profile

- a commitment to the development of 'parity of esteem' for qualifications and pathways.

There are, of course, many other areas of agreement between the CCMS position and that of the Review Group, most notably the broad thrust of the principles espoused by each and it is to this that we now turn.

6.2   **Guiding Principles**

6.2.1   Principles, by their nature, reflect values and philosophy and even a cursory perusal of the

Burns' proposals reveals the significant agreement between the principles articulated by the Council in its original response to the Review Body (*see appendix A)* and those set out in the report proper. In essence, these principles are rooted in the notions of : the child as being at the centre of the educative process, the pursuit of excellence and the dual concepts of social justice and social cohesion. In espousing such core values, the report inevitably rejects the concept of market forces within education as flawed and corrosive and this too echoes the Council's standpoint.

6.2.2   The Council notes the emphasis throughout the report on the promotion of a culture of tolerance and readily accepts that one of the seminal aims of education is to promote respect for diversity. Unlike the authors of the report, CCMS believes that it is in the inculcation of values that one builds a true culture of tolerance rather through structural arrangements.

6.2.3   In summation, however, the Council considers that the adoption of the broad concepts

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enshrined in the principles set out in Burns', effectively underpins the aspirations of the Northern Ireland Executive as set out in the Programme for Government and effectively requires an end to academic selection.

6.3 Election not Selection

6.3.1 The Council's policy in respect of selection is that it should end as soon as is practicable and should be replaced by a process of informed choice or election. This policy reflects the reality that selection serves neither the interests of children nor ultimately that of society at large.

6.3.2 Education is at the service of society and the Council recognises this truth, but we must not neglect the needs of those who collectively constitute society, namely individuals. It is imperative that we are particularly mindful of the needs of our children for we must address their needs as well. We must engender in our children and young people, a sense of their worth, and ensure that their formal education not only realises their full potential thus securing for them a stake in our society and economy, but also that we imbue in them a desire for further development and life long learning. It is now clearly recognised that the nature and pace of change within the workplace is such that on-going training is a pre-requisite to economic well being. Yet, the 1996 Adult Learning Survey revealed that 52% of adults in Northern Ireland reported having undertaken no organised learning since leaving school as opposed to 36% in the UK as a whole. When we consider this fact, in tandem with the statistics regarding the qualification levels of our long-term unemployed, we can clearly see that our present system, which marks many of our young people as failures, is not imbuing those young people with a culture of life long learning.

6.3.3 Our differentiated system, in creating cohorts of pupils who are disadvantaged, is effectively working against the aspirations of government. In short, our early educational experiences are replicated in later life. It is in light of this issue, amongst others, that the Council formed the view that selection must end. The Council is firmly of the view that an end to selection, allied to changes within the curriculum, is an essential pre-requisite to addressing the issues of de-motivation and over-specialisation within the post primary sector.

6.3.4 In addition to the above, an end to selection immediately liberates our primary system from the pressures of "high stakes" testing and returns to Key Stage 2 the freedoms enjoyed in the early years of primary schooling. Education by its nature should be an "emancipatory activity", with an end to the pressures of selection we should see the extension into years 6 & 7 of the spirit of enquiry so obviously missing in many classrooms.

6.4 Pupil Profile

6.4.1 The notion of pupil profiles gels with the Council's call for informed election, indeed the

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concept of election is impractical without such an instrument. The success of such profiles depends on several things. They must :

- be both comprehensive and yet accessible
- not be used in any manner as an instrument of selection
- be structured and prescribed in a manner that facilitates moderation
- above all they must to provide a broad picture of a child's attributes, aptitudes progress and developmental needs, which ultimately will facilitate informed and meaningful choices in respect of courses and curricular pathways.

6.4.2   The Council is conscious that there have been calls for the profile to be made available to schools in advance of decisions to admit a child to a school rather than, as is suggested in the report, after a child has been admitted. The logic for this proposal is that this will facilitate decision-making. Such a notion is clearly predicated upon the retention of selection and a differentiated system of post-primary education.   Any proposals which envisaged the use of profiles as an instrument of selection would be strenuously resisted by primary teachers and would result in difficulties of the same magnitude as those that emerged in the 1970's.

6.4.3   Appropriately used, the profile will indeed be essential to post primary schools, BUT, only as a mechanism to facilitate decisions by school management in respect of the learning and developmental needs of children. Given such a purpose, it should be made available only after decisions regarding admission have been reached. Used in this way the profile becomes a positive document empowering parents and providing a sound basis for the promotion of achievement and excellence

7.0   Collegiate Structures

7.1   For many this has been the most radical of the many proposals within the report. Unfortunately, much of the debate has been characterised by a lack of objectivity and indeed at times has become unnecessarily emotive. Certainly, if one reflects on the objectives underpinning the concept of Collegiates, we find much that is both laudable and desirable. There is now an almost universal rejection of the market forces approach to education predicated upon competition as the primary means of driving up standards. The Council has long warned of the debilitating effects of untrammelled competition. The culture enshrined within the Education Reform Order (NI) 1989 has effectively created an 'underclass' of schools. Thus, the notion espoused by the Review Body of collaborative working 'institutionalised' by the creation of a structure of management and the delegation of resources outwith LMS funding, has an obvious attraction.

However, the proposals, as currently framed, are effectively unmanageable. The difficulties arise in several areas but most notably in relation to issues such as :

7.2 **Governance and Management:** the proposals regarding what we might call the 'corporate management' of Collegiates, with four additional but inter-related structures addressing a variety of issues, would create confusion as to roles, create another layer of bureaucracy and most significantly would sit ill at ease with the role of Governors and the concept of Trusteeship.

7.3 **Trusteeship and Ethos**: the arrangements as set out take no cognisance of the role of Trustees and their responsibilities in respect of ethos other than a vague reference that the arrangements pose no threat. Given the central role of Trustees in school provision, it is unacceptable that any arrangements, proposed or actual, should neglect to reflect their role. Indeed, any attempt to abate the role of Trustees in the respect of Catholic education would be both unfortunate and unacceptable.

Ethos, explicit or implicit, lies at the heart of any school and Trustees exercise a central role within the Catholic school - a role that lies at the core of the mission of such schools. It should be noted that much of what has been said in relation to Catholic Trustees will also apply to providers of other schools and most notably Transferor schools.

7.4 **Network Management** : reference has already been made to the demographic downturn that will impact on Northern Ireland in the coming years and the need to manage the contraction of the post-primary system in such a manner as to ensure that the needs of individuals and society can be accommodated. The proposals as they stand, would create a series of 'informal cantons 'and thus create a potential tension between those charged with strategic management and what would be a 'loosely coupled' vested interest group. Given the extent of the demographic pressures, which will necessitate strategic management, it is imperative that any new arrangements do not, of themselves, create obstacles to necessary restructuring

7.5 **Funding as a Catalyst for Competition** : whilst the proposals seek to enshrine a culture of collaboration, and to support that notion with structures and decision making processes, they do not address the issue of funding. Whilst schools are funded on the basis of pupil numbers there will inevitably be an element of competition and this of itself will preclude the development of the collaborative culture envisaged. CCMS is well aware of many previous 'informal compacts' between schools that have struggled over this thorny issue and ultimately have foundered.

7.6 **Employment Issues** : the proposal that staff should work in a variety of institutions has significant implications for terms and conditions, promotion issues and indeed performance issues such as Threshold or indeed issues of basic confidence and staff development. Undoubtedly, matters would be further complicated by issues such as the complexities surrounding Child Protection.

7.7 In short, whilst the aspirations underpinning the Review Body's proposals are laudable,

the out workings would, however, create considerable difficulties. This is not to dismiss the concept of collegiality; partnership is clearly the way forward. 'Collegiate working,' would require a more tightly structured model than that suggested in the Review Body's thinking. Any new structures must effectively diminish the worst effects of the market forces culture, secure a career pathway for teachers, protect, as far as is possible our smaller schools and, above all, optimise the educational opportunities for all of our children.

7.8   The Council is conscious that some continue to promote the notion of voluntary collaboration as a means of enhancing flexibility and choice. However, experience has shown that such "loose couplings" lack stability and readily fall prey to internal financial or staffing pressures. In essence, they cannot offer continuity of provision, appropriate levels of accountability and most importantly, they do not address the core issues of market forces and competition noted above.

8.0   Structures: a Perspective

8.1   The Council, in its original submission to the Review Body, advised against addressing, at that time, the issue of structures and remains of the view that this was the correct path to take. That said, it would be remiss of the Council not to recognise that the Collegiate proposals have triggered considerable debate. It is, therefore, as a contribution to that debate, that the Council has chosen to explore and elaborate on its thinking in respect of structures.

8.1.1   The Council, in its initial response to the Review Body, speculated on a range of possible structural options, amongst them being the notion of what it referred to as **"multi-site campus**" arrangements operating either in a **formal consortia structure** or **under one management umbrella,** a concept that has much in common with the broad thrust of the collegiate proposals. There is merit in reflecting in more detail on this issue as a continuing contribution to the debate initiated by the Review Body's proposals. This debate can only be brought to fruition, however, subsequent to a policy decision in regard to the ending of academic selection.

8.2   **Campus Structures: A Rationale**

8.2.1   It is self-evident that any proposed structures should seek to ensure excellence, in and for all, and thus ultimately contribute to the raising of standards. It is equally self evident that any management arrangements supporting such structures should be sufficiently robust to facilitate the management of issues such as Quality Assurance, competence and accountability. Underpinning all of this is the need to ensure not only the articulation of ethos, but as significantly, the management of same. A system that does not deliver on these issues would be fatally flawed.

The list of issues above is not exhaustive there are other factors that must be addressed by any proposed structures and these are outlined below. It is the Council's view that *any* new structures should :

- ensure excellence in and for all

- ensure cohesion in terms of ethos and values reflecting the pluralist nature of Northern Ireland and the right to an expression of parental preferences

- ensure a degree of continuity that protects the interests of pupils presently within the school system

- facilitate sufficient flexibility to allow pupils the widest choice of subjects and curricular pathways

- allow for a seamless transfer at age 11 from Primary School to post-Primary School and facilitate, as far as practicable, the retention of pupil friendship communities in transfer from Primary to Secondary

- facilitate a continuum of schooling from 11 to 19

- offer teachers opportunities in terms of career progression

- reflect demographic realities whilst ensuring to the greatest extent feasible access for all and in particular rural communities

- facilitate structural cohesion through management arrangements that ensure flexibility of resourcing and staffing with enhanced local autonomy

- expedite the removal of temporary accommodation

- allow greater flexibility in addressing issues such as sub-standard specialist provision.

8.2.2   It is the Council's belief that in bringing the above to fruition, local circumstances and dialogue between various interests will substantially shape the outcomes. In other words, what is envisaged is a series of local arrangements reflecting the guiding principles.

The realisation of the above will, we believe, require certain conditions :

- The institutions multi site or otherwise, if they are to offer the degree of flexibility envisaged, will need to be of sufficient size to ensure that there is adequate flexibility of plant and more importantly staffing to ensure meaningful choice.

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- In seeking to optimise flexibility, it follows that there should be a commitment, where practicable, to co-educational education. Experience in recent years in seeking to manage demographic blips has shown single sex provision to be the greatest stumbling block in the strategic management of this issue creating a structural inflexibility that reduces available options.

- Management units must reflect a coherent ethos and culture reflecting parental desires and the pluralist nature of Northern Ireland.

9.0   The Council's Proposals Regarding Structures

9.1   Following from the analysis above, and mindful of the pressures engendered by curriculum change, parental expectations and demographic fluctuations, the Council would suggest that any structurally collaborative arrangements across Northern Ireland *should reflect local circumstances* and could take the following forms :

- One institution where the school is of sufficient size to offer curriculum flexibility and a constancy of resourcing

- A campus comprising several schools within a discrete geographical area. Local conditions may result in a variety of configurations for example smaller units may exist as Key Stage 3 schools feeding into a Key Stage 4 sixth form provision.

9.1.1   The Council is secure in the belief that the proposed Campus arrangements meets all of the criteria listed above at paragraph 4.1 in a way that the loose coupling of the collegiate proposals do not.

9.1.2   The above are offered as no more than possible examples, many other possibilities exist.   Indeed, specific units may operate as 11-16 schools with a separate post-16 centre. Effectively, we would see 'local "configurations' emerging from a consideration of local circumstances. Such potential flexibility would allow for the retention of an extended network of rural schools and effectively retaining a community linkage whilst securing quality education 11 to 19.

9.1.3   The final shape of such arrangements would be the subject of local consultation between providers, local managers, Trustees and other vested interests where appropriate. The Council's experiences in developing proposals in respect of Strabane provided ample evidence of the importance of local consultation. The galvanising of local interests to participate in discussions ensured not only that the nuances of local circumstances were

fully recognised but also that the local community felt a sense of ownership not only of the processes but also of the outcomes.

9.2   **Logistics and Campus Arrangements**

9.2.1   The proposed move to a campus type arrangement raises significant issues in respect of matters such as: governance and management, resourcing, staffing and finally the nature of delegation most in keeping with the concept of subsidiarity. In recognition of the significance of these issues and the difficulties associated with them, the Council would propose the following:

9.3   **Governance and Management**

9.3.1   Each campus would operate under a single management and governance structure. Where a campus is multi-site in nature, the Board of Governors could be enlarged from the now traditional 9 member structure which would allow not only for traditional interests to be represented, but would also allow for greater flexibility in respect of committee work. In addition, Boards of Governors of this size could more readily embrace interests such as business and Further Education.

9.4   **Resourcing & LMS**

9.4.1   Under the Council's proposals, the campus, multi-site or otherwise, will operate with a single budget. This will effectively diminish the worst effects of competition for pupils but more importantly will create greater flexibility of funding. Coupled with the internal rationalisation of structures, this should create savings, which ultimately will benefit pupils. It is further proposed that a move to the funding mechanisms currently enjoyed by the Voluntary Grammar Sector and much cherished by them, would create additional flexibility and would ensure an 'immediacy' in respect of services provision and purchasing.

9.5   **Staffing**

9.5.1   All staff will be employed on a "campus basis" providing:

- greater flexibility and enhanced opportunities for co-operative working
- enhanced staff development opportunities
- improved opportunities for training of student teachers
- greater opportunities for "subject specialisation "
- opportunities to re-configure management responsibilities
- a greater sense of corporate identity

Initially, this proposal may afford an opportunity for a re-alignment of staff expertise. Such a "fresh start" offers real opportunities in terms of enhancing morale amongst staff, creating promotion opportunities and facilitating retirement. The implementation of such a proposal would, of necessity, require close co-operation with the Teaching Unions and this also affords what might be a unique opportunity to forge a new compact between all aspects of the profession.

9.6   **Delegated Responsibilities**

9.6.1   Reference has already been made to this issue (see Resourcing /LMS). The Council has long been conscious of the freedoms afforded to the Voluntary Grammar and other Grant-Maintained schools in respect of services provision. Council considers that there would be merit in extending this regime to all post-primary schools. Such a move would bring immediacy to the processes of purchasing and indeed plant maintenance.

9.6.2   In addition, the Council is conscious of the demand from some schools to have the freedom to commission services such as Welfare and Learning Support Services on a school basis. Given that any proposed changes will have far-reaching effects and given that we are now embarked on a structured review of education administration as a whole, there is merit in considering as part of that review the notion of the autonomous and "fully serviced" campus. Experience in the United States indicates that such arrangements can bring considerable benefits for pupils. Such a concept would be in keeping with the notion of subsidiarity and empowerment that lies at the heart of LMS itself. Such proposals would be particularly appropriate in a structured "campus arrangement" which would generate not only a quantum of funding but also an operational flexibility that could optimise the opportunities available from such arrangements.

10.0 Next Steps :

10.1   Change, by it very nature, can create a sense of uncertainty and indeed fear. Such feelings are particularly prevalent where the purposes and indeed the nature of the changes proposed have not been articulated clearly. It follows then that in seeking to manage the process those charged with that responsibility undertake this task as a first priority. Simply put, there needs to be a clear declaration of policy. In undertaking such a task, they will effectively have begun that 'open discourse' that Goodman identifies as a precursor to meaningful change.

10.2   The nature of the changes emanating from an end to selection would be driven not just by logistical or legal requirements, but also by factors such as local circumstances and indeed wider policy issues in areas such as Rural and Economic Development, Tertiary Education and Training. In addition, there will be changes in the specification of the curriculum and a major review of administration within education and indeed beyond.

This adds up to a complex backdrop, but it might be said that this presents as many opportunities as it does potential difficulties.

10.3   In responding to the demands of change management, the Council would suggest that the process must be seen as multi-faceted in nature and underpinned by mechanisms that offer both strategic pathways for decision making and action as well as a capacity for local reactivity. The latter is essential if the process is to embrace local realities in terms of plant and resources and is to engage local interests in articulating needs and shaping outcomes. The duration of transition will, in part, be decided by what might be seen as the "facilitatory processes" in respect of legislation and regulation covering issues such as school designation, admissions criteria, transport arrangements and LMS Funding. The Council remains of the opinion that final decisions regarding such issues are best taken in the wake of policy decisions regarding the seminal issue of selection and by those with whom the diverse responsibilities lie at present, namely the Department of Education and school providers and administrators.

10.4   It is equally important that transition arrangements protect the interests of young people presently engaged in courses of study at whatever institution. It is also important that transition should not be a protracted process, rather should be a phased process with adequate funding to facilitate a duality of approach, maintaining aspects of one system while simultaneously moving to introduce change. The concept is neither novel nor untested, the introduction of the diverse changes introduced in the wake of the Education Reform order (NI) 1989 is an example of the process.

10.5   The Council is of the opinion that any detailed planning in respect of transition at this stage would effectively be nugatory work. Planning in advance of both regional decisions regarding issues such as funding, admissions criteria or in advance of local consultations in respect of how provision might be configured to address local conditions and aspirations, would be both ill informed and ineffectual.

10.6   It is not envisaged that the processes noted below would be sequential in nature, indeed many would be undertaken in a series of parallel processes which would ultimately dovetail to allow for an orderly and managed transition. The process might be as follows:

- Policy decision to end selection

- Establishment of a Strategic Group chaired by the Department to :

    - Co-ordinate and facilitate change management

    - Identify necessary legislative and regulatory changes

    - Facilitate cross-sectoral data exchange

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- Initiate logistical review regional and local by relevant authorities

- Establish local consultation processes by relevant bodies

- Analyse and distil of responses and data generated by local consultation processes

- Schedule structural changes agreed with school providers - resulting in local configurations reflecting agreed principles.

11.0 Conclusion

11.1   In responding to the Review Body's proposals, the Council has sought to place the issues raised in a broader strategic context and to reflect on the personal social and economic purposes of education. The Council's views are straight forward : education above all must be an emancipatory activity.   If it does not liberate the individual, awaken in them a sense of his/her own dignity, an understanding as to their potential and provide the means to achieve this then it is not education in the truest sense. The responsibilities transcend the personal for in empowering individuals we are also working for the common good

11.2   It is the responsibility of policy makers at all levels to ensure that this noble mission is fulfilled for all. Thus decisions in respect of curriculum, resources and above all structures must meet the litmus test of fitness for purpose and respond positively to the question. "will this policy ensure that education is truly an emancipatory exercise for all our young people"?

11.3   It is the Council's view that if we are to answer in the affirmative to the questions above, then it is imperative that :

- **There is an end to Academic Selection**

- **That parents and young people are empowered to make an informed choice as to courses or curricular pathways**
  - **Via access to a common curriculum at Key Stage 3**
  - **Provision of 'sampler courses'**
  - **Development of a pupil profile**

- **A strategic body be established to coordinate the over arching management processes**

- **That decisions re structures reflect both local circumstances albeit within the constraints of broader policy**

11.4   It is the Council's firm belief that any reluctance to address the many issues thrown into relief by both the Review Body's proposals and by the earlier research will have serious implications for the well being of Northern Ireland. Such is the nature and pace of change, such is the nature of the demographic downturn, that any failure to respond will seriously weaken our school system and as importantly our social and economic well-being. The Council looks forward to participating fully in the ongoing discussion and decision making processes.