

**Meeting With The Governing Bodies Association Re: BURNS – Parliament Buildings –
29 APRIL 2002**

PRESENT:

Minister	Declan O’Kelly
Mr Peover	Sister Ursula Canavan
Dr Browne	Finbar McCallion
D Whyte	David Gray
L Ashe	Dr W Mulryne
C McParland	Dr Bob Rogers
	John Miskelly
	Alan Burnside

1. The Minister welcomed the group to the meeting and gave them a brief overview of his understanding of the debate so far.
2. Mr McCallion thanked the Minister and said that they welcomed the opportunity to discuss the report and other issues facing education. He said that the GBA’s mission statement expresses the desire to reach excellence. He added that they, as an organisation, were consulting on the issues at the moment but said that the groups members must be confident about what is going on and must be brought along as one. He said that their executive were convinced that they can find a better way of delivering education even though the membership feel that the whole exercise is a stitch-up. He said that they accept that there is a need for change and that the demographic changes will impact on them also. Mr McCallion went on to say that our education system could and should do better and should envelope more children from deprived areas, “we accept this”, but said that they have problems with 3 main issues of the Burns report.
3. Mr O’Kelly, in referring to the proposed collegiate arrangement, indicated that the Birmingham arrangements had been used as a model, but in Birmingham there had been no attempt to change the status of existing schools. Birmingham had not worked because proper consideration had not been given to Post 16 provision. He said that the Burns report has also omitted this consideration and this gives the GBA cause for concern. He was also concerned that collegiates would be unwieldy and dilute Trustees responsibilities.
4. Mr McCallion queried who wants, supports or is in favour of the collegiates. He said that only the teachers’ unions and ELBs were likely to support. The ELBs would support because they would take difficult decisions on closure and rationalisation out of their hands.

5. Sister Canavan said that the rural communities would be disadvantaged by the Burns Collegiate proposals. She said that there would be major travel problems for small schools and that there would also be problems with equality of provision between boys and girls, especially provision for Catholic boys in Belfast (Report from Sister Canavan pending).
6. Mr McCallion said that they believed that the collegiate system is a move away from direct management of schools by Boards of Governors. There could be difficulty in attracting high calibre governors.
7. Sister Canavan asked what the Minister meant by Academic Selection.
8. The Minister explained that in the context of the current arrangements it is a test which is used to determine the suitability of pupils for grammar schools and which rejects a percentage of the population. By definition the majority of pupils fail this test.
9. Sister Canavan enquired whether the Minister could foresee any place for an academic route.
10. Mr Peover explained that there was a need to focus the debate on academic selection. The question was whether we can have academic selection without the negative outcomes and perceptions.
11. Dr Mulryne indicated that there will always be a need for selection of some type.
12. Mr O'Kelly said that there were many excellent secondary schools where children do not feel deprived. We need a system which places children in schools which suit their needs and abilities. There will always be selection – either by schools or by the system.
13. Dr Rogers said that the GBA endorsed the Minister's approval of the Catholic Bishops' statement and that the principles were also part of the GBA's philosophy. He emphasised that priorities for the education system needed to be determined. The key issue was the curriculum and this should be sorted before post-primary structures. The GBA was not suggesting that all schools should become grammar, rather there was a need for diversity of provision.

14. Mr McCallion suggested that the proposed common system under Burns was flawed. We already have a diverse system of secondary and grammar schools which is largely successful. It is inappropriate to have a “one size fits all”. The introduction of all ability comprehensives in Scotland had led to a significant increase in the number of pupils attending private schools.

15. Dr Mulryne referred to the need to address the difficulties in the primary sector. He recognised that there were problems with the 11+ and that intakes to grammar schools had been skewed. The GBA would welcome a broader social mix and wanted to look at other ways of selection. The first priority, however, should be the curriculum.

16. Mr O’Kelly/Sister Canavan said that the report leaves major gaps in how we will provide education after 11. For example do schools provide A levels or not, or do we have mixed ability schools at which kids are unable to cope with the pace of learning.

17. In conclusion Mr McCallion asked if it was possible for the GBA to see the Household Response Form before it issues. The Minister said that this would not be appropriate.