

Response to

“Education for the Twenty-first Century”

The report of the Post-Primary Review Body

By

The North Eastern Education and Library Board

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The North Eastern Education and Library Board welcomes the publication of the Report by the Post Primary Review Body in October 2001 and the ongoing debate. This is the most significant review of the education system in Northern Ireland for some fifty years and the outcome of the Review will influence the lives of the future citizens of Northern Ireland.
- 1.2 The Board appreciates the complexity of the challenge faced by the Review Body and would wish to place on record its acknowledgement of a very challenging and thought provoking Report and one which reflects many of the comments submitted by the NEELB in its earlier response to the Review of Post Primary Education.
- 1.3 At the outset the Board is restating some key principles which underpinned its initial response to the Gallagher Report. These principles continue to influence and shape the Board's consideration of the Burns Report.

2. CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

- 2.1 The Board is deeply committed to providing a quality education service for all, with the aim of 'Developing People for Life'. In the debate on the future of post primary education, the Board would wish to ensure that whatever change takes place it enhances educational opportunity for all young people and helps them to fulfil their potential. The Board is committed to playing a full part in the ongoing debate and acknowledges the importance of the Report in informing the future shape of post primary education in Northern Ireland.
- 2.2 The Board acknowledges that the existing system of post primary provision has strengths and weaknesses and the time is opportune to begin to put in place new structures which will more adequately allow all young people to play their part in the society of the twenty first century. This approach recognises that:
- knowledge and skills will need to be constantly updated to keep pace with change and advances in technology will continue to be central to life and work
 - globalisation will become an increasingly dominant force in economics, finance and business

- the skills and abilities of our people will remain the major factor in international competitiveness and the quality of individual's lives
- greater environmental awareness and appreciation of the concept of sustainability will be required
- there will be a need to develop a society based upon the concepts of peace, justice and the rights of all regardless of age, gender, class or religion.

2.3 The Board believes that it is necessary to undertake a thorough review of the Northern Ireland education system thereby allowing children and young people to develop skills in problem-solving, team working and creativity necessary to participate in the knowledge based economy and play a full part as an active citizen.

2.4 The Board believes that given the dynamic global context in which we now find ourselves the education service has a lead role in preparing young people for work and life after school. The Board identified the following issues in its initial response to the Gallagher Report and the Board would reinforce the centrality of these issues in any debate on structures and future provision.

- i. The need for high levels of motivation amongst students and a capacity to achieve their full potential
- ii. the need for young people to have the skills, adaptability and enterprise to develop and maintain a prosperous economy
- iii. the need to develop a commitment and enthusiasm for life long learning
- iv. the need to promote concern for a more just and humane world amongst young people and an awareness of their uniqueness and dignity
- v. the need to develop competence in the following key areas
 - literacy and communication
 - numeracy and application of number
 - information and communications technology
 - working with others
 - problem solving and creativity
 - improving their own learning and performance.

3. RESPONSE TO BURNS PROPOSALS

3.1 Having given careful consideration to the Burns proposals, the Board would give its support to the vision of an education system as expressed in the Report which strives to

“ ...recognise the individual abilities and needs of all young people and provide them with high quality education, enabling them to realise their potential to lead fulfilling lives and to play productive and positive roles in society as persons whose learning and development have been holistic”

(paragraph 5.1)

3.2 The NEELB supports the Guiding Principles in the Burns Report and acknowledges their importance in underpinning any new structures for post primary provision.

- i. Each young person should be valued equally.
- ii. All young people should be enabled to develop their talents to the full and to realise their creative potential, including accepting responsibility for their own lives and making a positive contribution to society.
- iii. Young people should be encouraged to develop a love of learning.
- iv. The education system should provide for the development of all aspects of the individual, including the intellectual, spiritual, moral, cultural, social, physical, emotional and creative.
- v. The promotion and demonstration of a culture of tolerance, reconciliation and respect for diversity of cultures should be a seminal purpose of education.
- vi. Education should have regard to the changing needs of society and the economy.
- vii. There should be recognition of, and support for, the key roles of teachers in the delivery of a high quality education system.

- viii. Each young person should be equipped with the values and skills needed for working and living in the 21st Century.
- ix. There should be parity of esteem for vocational and academic educational pathways.
- x. Lifelong opportunities and choices for learning should be available to all.
- xi. There should be equality of opportunity, access and excellence for all.
- xii. The curriculum and assessment arrangements should take account of research in individual learning styles.

3.3 In supporting these Guiding Principles, the Board would highlight the following observations.

- i. Potential changes to educational structures are futile without a major review of the content and balance of the curriculum. Research has shown that the present curriculum is neither appropriate nor challenging to a sizeable percentage of the school population. It is essential that the curriculum is stimulating, differentiated, relevant, flexible and acts as a liberating agent for learning. The relationship between curriculum and structures is a pivotal one. In the near future it will be possible to access much of the curriculum through powerful multi-media software. This facility will be available to schools and homes and has the potential to revolutionise approaches to classroom teaching within a relatively short period of time. Developing simultaneously will be changes to the curriculum within our schools. Many of these proposed curriculum changes are radical and if successful should build on existing strengths while addressing a number of acknowledged weaknesses. Such changes if implemented (beginning September 2004) will have a considerable impact on the whole educational process. At their heart will be a commitment to tailor the learning programmes to each young person's particular needs. These changes will also provide a considerable challenge to schools and their ability to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum to pupils. It is therefore essential that the pathways through secondary education are designed to meet the needs of young people and not the interests of institutions. The emphasis must be keeping

opportunities open rather than on closing them down. **It is essential that any new structures facilitate these developments rather than inhibit them.**

ii. Schooling is a once in a lifetime experience. Any changes to the existing system must not jeopardise the education of those presently in the system. It is essential that change is well planned and implementation effectively phased and resourced.

- While endorsing the Guiding Principles there is concern that inadequate consideration has been given to many operational issues. The Board has concern about what it regards as the over optimistic timescale set out in the Report (eg re abolition of 11+ tests). This has already caused deep unease and uncertainty amongst many parents. As presently envisaged there appears to be a lack of public endorsement of the proposals due partly to a lack of confidence in how the proposals would work in practice.

- The Board is conscious of the constraints upon Public Expenditure as a whole within Northern Ireland and the planned changes to the funding of the education service. There are already serious concerns in respect of the core funding of education. The scale of the proposed changes will need to be resourced adequately. Therefore the Board would argue for the publication of a carefully thought out **Action Plan which would set out a detailed and costed implementation strategy and an associated timescale which would take account of curriculum changes and demographic trends.** Such a process would create public confidence in the proposed changes. **Changes to the existing system will require a transitional period but it is in the interests of all that the pace of change is such that a revised system of education is established within a reasonable timescale.** There is also an acknowledgement that the present system has delivered 'excellence' in certain areas. It is important that any new system enhances these strengths while extending equality of opportunity to all.

iii The impact of tertiary education on the post primary sector is an issue of concern that must be addressed. At present this relationship has a very restrictive effect on post primary education and is a major inhibiting factor in the development of credible alternative routes of accreditation. The Report makes reference to the contribution of

Further and Higher Education to the proposed new education structures but it is essential that the Higher Education sector in particular is seen to open up alternative routes to accreditation rather than close down opportunities for many young people.

- iv The Report makes inadequate reference to the needs of young people in Special schools and fails to identify or address issues which would arise if the Burns proposals were to be implemented. Any new arrangements must include these schools to ensure all have equality of opportunity.
- v The quality of the Northern Ireland teaching force is one of the province's greatest strengths. This must be publicly recognised and if it is decided to make changes then such change must be communicated effectively to the teaching force with opportunities for retraining or staff development where appropriate. The proposed curriculum changes will require significant training and support for teachers as education moves increasingly towards a competence led curriculum with new approaches to teaching and learning. It will be essential that this is done in a way which encourages and empowers teachers and reinforces their role as key stakeholders in structural changes to the system.
- vi The Review provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to undertake a strategic and radical examination of educational provision. The opportunity exists to develop a system based upon generally agreed principles which meets the needs of a pluralist society through the establishment of a genuinely inclusive education system (paragraph 7 page 13).
- vii The Board as a responsible public body administering the education service is uniquely placed to ensure the promotion of a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity at all levels within the education system and in the wider community. The Board's proposed model aims to deliver an education service based on these principles.
- viii For co-operation amongst schools to be effective it is important that the present funding arrangements are changed. The Funding System must move away from funding pupils to funding teachers or measures such as pupil teacher ratios.

4. NEELB RESPONSE TO KEY PROPOSALS OF THE POST PRIMARY REVIEW BODY

- 4.1 The Board endorses the abolition of the Eleven Plus Transfer Test. The end of academic selection at 11 is welcomed because of the published evidence of the detrimental effect on individual children, the distorting impact on the primary curriculum and the inequality of opportunity it sustains in relation to access to secondary level education in Northern Ireland. The Board is of the view that the introduction of proximity as a final admissions criterion is unacceptable and may lead to selection by post-code and furthermore have an adverse effect on rural and disadvantaged communities.
- 4.2 The Board welcomes the development of a Pupil Profile as a means of providing information on the attributes and achievements of children. Development work will be required to ensure that the Profile gives a holistic picture of an individual child and is used regularly throughout the educational process to inform decisions about how best to meet the needs of that child. Additional resources will be required for staff development in relation to the Pupil Profile. Furthermore, the Board believes that in the model proposed in this response, post primary schools should have access to the profile after deciding on admissions.

The Board accepts the need for a degree of consistency and objectivity in the development of Pupil Profiles. The Board further recognises that:-

- the professional expertise of teachers should be utilised to assist in the development of pupil profiles
 - consideration should be given to developing the profile in such a way as to provide a wide range of qualitative and quantitative measures on each child's competencies
 - parents should receive guidance and advice on how to interpret the information in a pupil profile in the best interests of their child.
- 4.3 The Board would welcome new arrangements which encourage and facilitate local collaborative networks of schools. This is a positive aspect of the specific Collegiate proposals contained in the Post Primary Report. The creation of such a culture will have major implications for employing authorities, principals, trustees and Boards of Governors of individual schools. The Board does not consider it necessary to establish large and

unwieldy structures in order to establish closer co-operation between schools and does not believe the collegiate structure as proposed in the Report is workable.

5. WORKING TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONFEDERATION STRUCTURE

NEELB Model – Phase I – Clustering Of Schools

- 5.1 After a careful scrutiny of the Report and an analysis of the implications of the proposals the Board is supportive of a model which would be phased into operation during a 10 year transitional period.
- 5.2 The NEELB acknowledges the need expressed by many in education for greater co-operation between schools to enhance quality and choice. Research has shown that there is a lack of choice and diversity in educational options open to children with differing talents and abilities at Secondary level. The NEELB strongly supports the view that any new structure of secondary education needs to promote equality of access and opportunity for young people. Article 13(2)(6) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that: “Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational education, shall be made available and accessible to all by every appropriate means.” The NEELB believes that a structure which initially encourages and facilitates co-operation between schools in all areas to meet the educational needs of young people is an achievable objective in the short term. The establishment of multi campus schools providing quality, choice and flexibility of provision to the communities they serve represents a longer term vision. This needs to be developed in a phased manner, with careful planning over a longer period of time.
- 5.3 The NEELB initially proposes the establishment of clustering networks to encourage schools to work together and to share resources and expertise with the ultimate objective of ensuring access to high quality education provision for all young people. Such a development would afford opportunities for greater choice, flexibility and diversity of provision and would provide opportunities for cross community working at a range of levels within the proposed structure.

- 5.4 It is recognised that some schools may wish to function separately from this network. Therefore each network of schools should receive **additional earmarked resources** initially to undertake development work. While recognising that voluntary co-operation within a clustering arrangement is preferable, the Board is proposing that in the longer term it should be a **statutory condition of grant aid that all post primary schools be included in the cluster.**
- 5.5 The Clusters would serve a defined catchment area and be established by the Department of Education in consultation with schools, Employing Authorities and local communities. It is envisaged that such groupings would be smaller in size than proposed in the Collegiate Model and local needs would be a key factor in determining composition.
- 5.6 The Clusters would have contributory primary schools co-operating with post primary schools particularly in developing the pupil profile and Key Stage 2/3 transition arrangements. Such developments would allow for greater continuity of educational provision and address one of the acknowledged weaknesses in the present system.
- 5.7 **As stated in the introduction to this paper the Board is seeking to move from a system of competition to one of co-operation. One possible means by which this might be achieved is through the use of an interim testing arrangement which would allow for the continuation of a revised system of testing during a transitional period.**
- 5.8 In the interim period a reducing number of pupils using a revised testing mechanism would gain admission to schools which had in the past been designated ‘grammar’. Statutory arrangements would be put in place to require grammar schools to also accept pupils using non-academic criteria. This proportion would be gradually increased over a five year period across Northern Ireland when it would be envisaged that all oversubscribed schools would apply standard and predetermined criteria.
- 5.9 It is suggested that the revised Test which would be an interim arrangement for the 5 year transitional period would be devised and marked by CCEA. Each year the percentage of pupils gaining access to any school as a result of a test would be reduced. Parents of pupils achieving a grammar school place would be guaranteed the offer of such a place within the cluster and particular attention would be given to any denominational

preferences expressed by parents. In the initial period the Board would administer the final allocation of such places to grammar schools.

5.10 Parents would have the option of exercising choice within the defined catchment areas. All schools would offer a common curriculum 11-14 but at 14+ the opportunity would exist to create a range of exciting educational opportunities in line with the proposals emanating from the review of the N.I. Curriculum. The Board is of the view that at the age of 14, pupils are much more mature and capable of making informed choices about their future career route. At this stage it is proposed that the emphasis will be on informed election as opposed to selection.

5.11 The focus of much of the development work of the cluster networks would be the development of a range of pathways (eg academic, academic and vocational mix, vocational and technical where appropriate for pupils at 14 and 16).

5.12 Each cluster network would be responsible for

- the development of course provision to provide proper access and choice in its own area
- curriculum and staff development across all institutions to help teachers cope with a wider ability range
- joint 14/16+ curriculum planning and progression arrangements
- transition arrangements between Key Stage 2/3
- development of partnerships between schools and community/business
- consultative channels to include the views of children and young people as the new system develops
- joint arrangements for children with special educational needs whether learning, physical or emotional
- links with local Further and Higher Education Institutions.

5.13 Pupil Profiles should not be developed and used as a means of assisting transfer and placement of pupils. Each cluster network would develop the Profile in a way which ensured it supported the development of the young person throughout their school career. The Board would like to see schools working together to ensure the profile is comprehensive and facilitated by technological developments.

5.14 Additional funding would be made available to each cluster but it would be linked to course provision and its ability to meet targets relating to the quality, choice and diversity of curricular provision for its area. The Department of Education may need to re-examine the inspection process to determine if its model of inspection is adequate in this context as it would be essential that standards of education within the clusters were closely monitored during the development phase.

5.15 School transport assistance should be provided to any suitable school within the Cluster which is designated as a 'cluster school' but pupils wishing to attend a school further afield would be responsible for meeting the transport costs associated with this option. The Board accepts that this is dependent on the range of schools available to parents within a local cluster.

5.16 Each cluster network will require considerable administrative and curricular support particularly during the development period of five years. The Curriculum Advisory and Support Service with its experience of providing schools with quality independent support should be the main vehicle for assisting clusters manage curriculum change. This service should continue to be available to special, primary as well as post-primary schools.

6. TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

6.1 A proposal as radical as this must be introduced on a phased basis. The following is suggested as a possible timescale for its introduction.

6.2 Years 0-5

- Phased reduction of the number of 'academic places' in Grammar Schools
- Establishment of a monitoring body representative of all employer authorities to oversee implementation
- Audit of existing resources (capital, skills etc) within the cluster network
- Publication of Development Strategy for each cluster

- Work completed on the structure and content of profile
- Investment in primary/post primary schools to improve Key Stage 2/3 transition arrangements
- Rationalisation to be progressed where appropriate
- Transport policy to be finalised
- Capital investment and refurbishment priorities identified for 10 year period
- Major review of cluster network arrangements.

Towards the end of a 5 year period it is proposed that the Department of Education commission a detailed review of the process before moving to the second phase of implementation.

7. NEELB MODEL – PHASE 2 – CONFEDERATION MODEL

- 7.1 The Board has a long term vision of a model which is radical in concept but one which addresses the aspirations of the Burns Report and encompasses all of its underpinning concepts. The Board recognises that such a vision is idealistic. It is one which visualises an inclusive education service which recognises the historical rights of stakeholders and sees all children having the opportunity of being educated together. Such a vision may be an issue for future generations to address but in the interim the Board would offer the following model as a realistic means of building upon the arrangements established as part of Phase I.
- 7.2 The NEELB believes that in the longer term a Confederation structure building on the widest possible community support and the strengths of the cluster network would offer the best possible model to deliver the principles outlined earlier in the paper. The Board would readily acknowledge that the Confederation Model would embrace some of the roles and responsibilities proposed for Collegiates in the Burns Report.

- 7.3 A School Confederation would consist of an affiliation of post primary schools, special schools and feeder primary schools who had worked together in a cluster network. The number of schools in a Confederation could vary but it would be essential that there was a sufficient number of schools in each Confederation to allow for choice and diversity and yet not so large as to make it unwieldy and impractical.
- 7.4 The Confederation would operate within a defined catchment area.
- 7.5 The Confederation would operate on differing campuses depending on the number of schools within each Confederation.
- 7.6 The Confederation would be underpinned by a common ethos and would have at its core the promotion of tolerance and a respect for cultural diversity and a commitment to meet the Guiding Principles as set out in the Report. Opportunities would be provided within each Confederation to allow pupils to pursue their religious beliefs, cultural/sporting traditions.
- 7.7 The Confederation when fully operational would afford all pupils the opportunity of following a common curriculum in the first two/three years of post primary education but increasing flexibility would be introduced from this stage onwards. Schools within a Confederation would have the flexibility to develop learning programmes that provide opportunities for pupils to develop as
- individuals
 - active citizens in a harmonious society
 - contributors to the economy and the environment.

The NEELB has given careful examination to present and future enrolment trends in all post primary schools in its area. The present range of intakes to some schools in terms of transfer grades and the worryingly low intakes to a large number of post primary schools highlight the need for radical and far-reaching solutions to present provision.

7.8 MAIN STRENGTHS

- i. The local Confederations would be able to facilitate much greater curricular choice and flexibility because they would be able to offer a much greater range of choice and

diversity than existing individual schools. The opportunities at 14 + and 16+ for students are exciting and would provide greater choice and diversity within the system.

- ii. Competition would be reduced and co-operation increased because schools would be part of larger groupings.
- iii. The majority of pupils would be able to complete their education 11-18 within a Confederation regardless of their ability.
- iv. A Confederation would attract a wide range of ability and social class thus making it easier to address disadvantage and underachievement.
- v. All Confederations would be accorded similar status and would be offering broadly similar courses and qualifications but they would also take account of local needs and circumstances. It is accepted that the size and range of opportunity may vary depending on the size of the Confederation.
- vi. The Confederation Model would offer choice to pupils within Special schools which were excluded from the Collegiate proposal.

8. ORGANISATION, PLANNING AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

- 8.1 The Board's proposal would be to establish Confederations consisting of a minimum of 2 large schools but in most cases a grouping of 3 or more schools up to a maximum of 7/8 schools in any one Confederation. It is important that schools within a Confederation are close enough together geographically to facilitate meaningful developments and account is taken of rural/urban location.
- 8.2 Schools within a Confederation would continue to operate with their own Board of Governors and discharge a range of statutory responsibilities but activities proposed and developed by the Confederation would be resourced by separate earmarked funding set aside for this purpose.

- 8.3 The development of the Confederation would be overseen by a professional group representative of the constituent institutions within a Confederation (ie Confederation Planning Team). This group would assume some of the responsibilities similar to those proposed for the Collegiates in the Burns Report and would consist of a Co-ordinator and Principal from the respective institutions within the Confederation. It is proposed that the Co-ordinator within each Confederation should be an external appointment with the appropriate managerial skills and experience to give direction to the corporate activities of the Confederation.
- 8.4 The Confederation framework will require additional financial and human resources to support its establishment. There is considerable evidence available to show the value of existing support services in helping to raise educational standards. It is recognised that existing services may need to be realigned with any emerging structures but there is little rationale and no research to support a fragmentation of services into localised groups of personnel. Such a model would be less cost effective, lead to increasing fragmentation in terms of quality and would be contrary to the stated views of leading educationalists such as Michael Fullan (Ontario Institute).
- 8.5 It is argued that this model of co-operation between schools would lead to a more inclusive system of education which in the long term could play a major part in contributing to a more cohesive and integrated society.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Board acknowledges the importance of the Review Body's findings and the research which preceded it in influencing debate about future educational arrangements. The Department has embarked on an extensive consultation exercise which has been lively and informative.
- 9.2 The NEELB believes the Review of Post Primary education is a historic opportunity to establish new educational arrangements for young people for future decades.
- 9.3 The proposals as outlined in this paper will only work if they are adequately resourced. It is essential that such a commitment is forthcoming otherwise such radical proposals will struggle to become a reality.
- 9.4 The Board strongly endorses the view that the needs of young people must influence decision making. Research has demonstrated that the current selective system has significant strengths and weaknesses. Education must embrace the development of all children and provide for everyone to be a contributor to society and the economy.
- 9.5 The needs of the 21st century dictate that decisions about the future cannot be focused entirely on structural and administrative arrangements. CCEA is currently involved in a major review of the school curriculum and this new curriculum will be delivered from 2004 onwards. This should result in a new approach to learning and teaching, more appropriate assessment arrangements and a greater range of vocational and academic options available.
- 9.6 The Board's response has outlined what it considers to be a dynamic visionary model for the future and the interim steps which are necessary to achieve this. It is conscious that significant change will be challenging and complex.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Board warmly endorses the Guiding Principles as set out in the Report.
2. The Board endorses the abolition of the present Transfer Test.
3. The Board endorses the concept of the Pupil Profile but would agree that considerably more developmental work needs to be invested in the concept before informed comment can be offered.
4. The Board is setting out a long term vision of an inclusive education system which in the shorter term would be partially realised through:
 - the creation of a clustering arrangement between schools in a local area on a voluntary basis which would in the longer term be underpinned by statute
 - the phasing out ‘during a transitional period’ of a revised form of academic selection
 - the creation in the longer term of local Confederation of schools.

In making these recommendations the Board would also recommend that the Department of Education

- publishes a costed Action Plan which sets out in detail how future changes are to be implemented
- undertakes a proper Economic Appraisal to determine the full costs involved in such an exercise.