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Lear



New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools - Report on Responses to Consultation



December 2005



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Foreword by the Minister for Education

In January 2005, the Government launched an extended period of consultation to seek views on the new admissions arrangements that would be required when academic selection ends after 2008.

We received 14,094 responses to the consultation and I would like to thank all those who took the time to consider the issues and submit their views. This Report summarises the responses to the consultation covering the range of views expressed by our education partners, political parties, other interested bodies, parents and the general public.

The current admissions process is complex and difficult for parents to follow. I want to develop a better, more streamlined system, which is open and transparent, easily understood and ensures that parents and pupils have sufficient information, advice and the necessary support to enable them to make good choices.

The development of new admissions arrangements is one element of a co-ordinated package of reforms which will give all young people the opportunity to reach their full potential and to make a positive contribution to our society and economy in the 21st Century. We are making progress on all of these improvements including the new curriculum, the Entitlement Framework, the Pupil Profile, the pilot for Specialist Schools, collaborative working with the Further Education sector, the development of ICT and the creation of a schools estate which is fit for purpose. These changes and decisions on the detail of the new admissions arrangements will help move us closer to the new educational landscape that will benefit pupils, parents and teachers.



ANGELA SMITH MP
Minister for Education



Angela Smith MP
Minister for Education



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to Consultation

- 1.1 In April 2003, Jane Kennedy MP established a Working Group to provide advice on options for future arrangements for post-primary education, taking account of the responses to the consultation on the Burns Report, including the diversity of views on academic selection.
- 1.2 The Post-Primary Review Working Group presented its report, known as the Costello Report, to Jane Kennedy on 28th November 2003. The Group recommended that academic selection should end, with the last Transfer Tests to be held in 2008, and that new admissions arrangements should be based on parental and pupil choice, informed by a range of information, advice and support, including the Pupil Profile.
- 1.3 The Government accepted the Report's recommendations in full and Jane Kennedy MP agreed that new admissions arrangements were needed to give effect to parental choice, and that schools with more applications than places available should apply admissions criteria from a defined menu. Further work was needed to determine the new arrangements and the criteria that should be included in the menu and the Department of Education (DE) would consult on these as soon as possible.

Consultation

- 1.4 The Consultation Document on New Admissions Arrangements was published on 28th January 2005 for consultation until 30th June 2005. It sought views on the new admissions arrangements which should be put in place for post-primary schools after 2008 when academic selection will no longer exist.
- 1.5 The Consultation Document described the arrangements whereby parents can find out about their child's progress, interests and aspirations, the range of different schools and what they have to offer. It also set out ways in which they can participate in the transfer process so that they can make well-informed decisions when choosing a post-primary school for their child. This included the use of the Pupil Profile, the roles of primary and post-primary schools, DE, the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the timetable for this process. The Consultation Document also sought comments on the arrangements for pupils with special educational needs or compelling individual circumstances, the admissions criteria that schools could use if they receive more applications than they have places available and the appeals process.

- 1.6 The Department distributed copies of the Consultation Document and Response Booklet to education partners, schools, political parties, churches, community and voluntary groups and libraries. Each school received leaflets for pupils to take home to their parents advising them of the consultation and how they could access the document. Advertisements were also placed in the local press and the Consultation Document and Response Booklet were available on the Department's website.
- 1.7 Given the focus of placing children's needs at the centre of the decision-making process, the Department commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to undertake research with Year 8 pupils to discuss their recent experiences of the current transfer process and ways in which it could be improved. Details of the findings of the research are provided at Appendix 1 and a full copy of the report is available on the Department's website.
- 1.8 Over 14,000 responses were received to the consultation including responses from education partners, political parties, other interested bodies, parents and general public. The consultation was characterised by a number of pro-academic selection lobby groups who compiled a standard response to which individuals put their name. Some grammar and primary schools also provided standard responses to parents. These accounted for **90%** of the total number of responses. For the purposes of this Summary Report, we have grouped these responses along with the small number of other responses received from parents/general public.

Summary of Consultation Responses

- 1.9 The questions in the Consultation Document asked for views on the range of issues relating to new admissions arrangements and did not seek basic yes/no answers. This approach reflected the complexity of the issues under consideration and this Summary Report focuses on the arguments put forward in support of or in opposition to the issues within the Consultation Document. This is in line with Cabinet Office guidance which states that:

“Analysing responses is never simply a matter of counting votes. The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee has drawn attention to the risks of single-issue groups monopolising debate. Particular attention may however need to be given to the views of representative bodies, such as business associations, trade unions, voluntary and consumer groups and other organisations representing groups especially affected. Eventually it is for Ministers to assess the argument and evidence and reach decisions in the public interest.”
(Code of Practice on Written Consultation, Cabinet Office November 2000)

- 1.10 Every effort has been made to ensure that the views of respondents have been summarised accurately. Not everyone commented on every issue in the document. Any apparent gaps in coverage reflect the fact that some organisations or groups did not respond on that particular issue. The main areas covered are:

- ◆ Principles and Objectives
- ◆ Choosing a Post-Primary School
- ◆ Pupils with Compelling Individual Circumstances or a Statement of Special Educational Need
- ◆ Admissions Criteria for Oversubscribed Schools
- ◆ Admissions Appeals
- ◆ Equality Considerations

1.11 The Consultation also asked for any other comments in relation to the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools. Respondents raised a number of wider issues which did not specifically relate to the admissions arrangements and the main issues raised are outlined in Appendix 3.

1.12 Please contact the Department if you require this document in another format. Additional information, including full copies of the main submissions, are available on the Department's website www.deni.gov.uk

CHAPTER 2

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 **The Consultation Document set out a number of principles and objectives and sought views on whether they provided a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements.**
- 2.2 **The proposed principles for new admissions arrangements are that they should:**
- ◆ **put the interests of the child at the centre of the decision-making process;**
 - ◆ **be transparent, consistent and easily understood by parents;**
 - ◆ **be based upon informed choice by parents and pupils;**
 - ◆ **be fair and free from any bias or indirect discrimination against particular groups or individuals; and**
 - ◆ **acknowledge that schools normally serve local communities.**
- 2.3 **The proposed objectives for new admissions arrangements are to:**
- ◆ **ensure parents have a clear role in the process and are better informed to make key decisions for their children;**
 - ◆ **maximise opportunities for parents to exercise their preference;**
 - ◆ **ensure as far as possible that the admissions criteria of schools in a local area are complementary, so that each child is given some priority under at least one set of admissions criteria in that area;**
 - ◆ **take account of the particular circumstances of pupils with special educational needs;**
 - ◆ **give schools sufficient flexibility in setting their criteria to reflect their local circumstances; and**
 - ◆ **provide a clear-cut decision that reduces the need for appeal.**
- 2.4 **The five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) were broadly supportive of the proposed principles and objectives and agreed that they provided a sound basis for the new admissions arrangements, particularly the placing of the child at the centre of the decision-making process. However, the Boards raised some concerns about the practical outworking of the proposed principles and objectives.**

- 2.5 **The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB)** agreed that arrangements should be based on informed choice but were concerned that the document created an unrealistic expectation that parental choice will always result in parents securing a preferred place. They felt that preference may be curtailed by school provision available in the local area, particularly in rural areas. **The Western Education and Library Board (WELB)** was also concerned that ‘informed choice’ could raise parental expectations, and suggested that some thought would be needed on the transport assistance required to support parental preference. BELB and SEELB felt that the exercise of choice should be deferred to 14 when it is educationally more appropriate.
- 2.6 **The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB), SEELB and the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB)** suggested that the existing transport policy militates against maximising parental preference and may need to be reviewed in the context of the new arrangements.
- 2.7 **SEELB** suggested that the terms ‘normal’ and ‘local’ used in the principles should be clearly defined. **WELB** suggested that the term ‘local community’ should be legally defined and that the term ‘special educational needs’ should be legally defined to include high as well as low achievers.
- 2.8 **NEELB** felt that the reference to special educational needs requires greater definition.
- 2.9 **SEELB** felt there should be greater emphasis on the active participation of parents and pupils from Year 1 onwards. **WELB** suggested that the interests of the child may be better served if he/she is given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process.
- 2.10 **SEELB** and **SELB** felt that, if schools are given flexibility to set their criteria, it is unrealistic that each child will be given some priority under at least one set of admissions criteria.
- 2.11 **The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)** stated that the proposed principles and objectives provide a sound basis on which to develop new arrangements. The arrangements should ensure that parents have easy access to helpful admissions information and admissions criteria should be clear and objective for the benefit of all children including those with special educational needs, disabilities or who are in public care.
- 2.12 **The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)** accepted the principles and objectives and felt they were appropriately child-centred rather than institution focused. It stated that integrated schools tend to have larger than average catchment areas, so there is a need for DE to either define ‘local’ or acknowledge the unique nature of integrated schools. It welcomed the objective of ensuring parents are better informed to make decisions but stressed that future arrangements must be transparent and easily understood by parents.

NICIE supported the concept of complementary criteria amongst schools in a local area but questioned how this would be monitored and enforced. It acknowledged that schools need to be given sufficient flexibility in their admissions criteria to reflect local circumstances.

- 2.13 **Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) (Council for Irish-medium Education)** welcomed the basic principles and agreed that new admissions arrangements should focus on the welfare of the child. It was concerned that providing schools with some flexibility in setting admissions criteria should not be allowed to develop into academic selection. It accepted that a school must not be allowed to use the standard of Irish as an entrance criterion. It suggested that the provisions in the Special Educational Needs & Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SEND0) must be taken into account when admissions arrangements are being discussed.
- 2.14 **The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)** broadly supported the principles and objectives and welcomed that the new arrangements will be transparent, consistent and easily understood by parents and all concerned. It felt there should be acknowledgement of the work, expertise and professionalism of teachers that will ensure parents and pupils do make informed choices. It felt there is a need for funding to ensure the arrangements are equitable and uniform across Northern Ireland.
- 2.15 ATL and **the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)** stressed that schools should always serve local communities, not just 'normally'. They agreed that the third objective should be deleted as all schools should be applying standard criteria which will ensure equality and fairness for all children in Northern Ireland. ATL felt that every child should have equality of opportunity regardless of background. It had some concerns about schools having sufficient flexibility in setting criteria to reflect local circumstances but felt that this flexibility should be applied after standard admissions criteria have been acknowledged.
- 2.16 **INTO** supported the principles and objectives but stated that a new principle should be added: "*Ensure equality of opportunity for every child regardless of social background.*"
- 2.17 **The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)** suggested that the principles and objectives should recognise the central role that teachers must play in the development of admissions criteria and their interests must also be at the centre of the decision-making process. Teachers' rights must form a definite part of the principles and objectives. Admissions criteria should be developed within a Northern Ireland wide common framework.
- 2.18 **The Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU)** endorsed the principle of putting the child at the centre of the process. It felt that it is vital that pupils and parents, not schools, have the lead role in the decision-making process and the role of pupils in making pathway choices should be given increasing importance as they get older. An objective of the new arrangements should be to maximise the opportunity for young people to achieve their full potential and to maximise the flexibility of the system to allow them to change pathways easily at key points

if the decisions previously taken prove not to be fulfilling their needs. The transfer process should be transparent and consistent so that all involved have faith in the system.

- 2.19 UTU agreed that, while many schools already serve their local communities and this has many strengths, it may create schools without a true social mix. However, it would wish to uphold the right of a child not to be excluded from attending their local school if that is where they wish to go. All pupils with special educational needs should have equality of opportunity to fulfil their potential. It felt that it is essential that admissions criteria are complementary within an area. The degree of flexibility allowed to schools in setting admissions criteria should be controlled and monitored externally to ensure maximum uniformity, equality of opportunity and so that the process is not open to abuse.
- 2.20 **The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)** felt that the principles were laudable and provided a sound basis for the development of detailed policy. It felt the principle of putting the interests of the child at the centre of the decision-making process is in keeping with articles enshrined in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). All actions concerning the child should take full account of his or her best interests. It felt the child's right to express an opinion should be made explicit in the principles. It was also concerned that the objective of ensuring that admissions criteria of schools in a local area are complementary, so that each child is given some priority, would present schools with complex co-ordination arrangements and will require greater co-operation among schools and more co-ordinated planning. It felt the objectives will only be achieved if schools work in partnership.
- 2.21 **The Governing Bodies Association** of voluntary grammar schools (**GBA**) was opposed to the principle that schools normally serve local communities as it felt it makes unwarranted assumptions and suggests a prejudice against schools which draw their pupils from a wide area, especially those in urban areas where the concept of local community does not exist. It suggested that a new objective be added: *"To ensure parents are able to find places for their children in schools suited to their educational needs, interests and aspirations."*
- 2.22 **The Association of Head Teachers in Secondary Schools (AHTSS)** acknowledged that the principles are child-centred, but had serious reservations about the context in which the principles are to be applied and therefore did not consider them to be a sound basis on which to develop new admissions criteria. It felt that the principles address the interests of the individual child and do not give sufficient weight to meeting the interests of all children. It considered that the current inequalities in school provision are not addressed and the notion of 'types' of children and 'types' of school is reinforced which will lead to the growth of more 'sink' schools.
- 2.23 AHTSS felt that unfettered parental choice will lead to no choice for many and the proposals protect the current hierarchy of schools, further reinforce self-centred values and ignore the social and moral dimension. It felt that supporting the interests of the weakest in the system

should be a feature of the guiding principles and that the real issues that need to be addressed are the demographic downturn and open enrolment.

- 2.24 **The National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (NAEIAC)** broadly supported the principles and objectives, particularly the acknowledgement that schools normally serve their local community. It stated that children should be able to access a full range of educational opportunities within their local area.
- 2.25 The comments from **schools** on the principles and objectives were mixed. Those broadly in support of some or all of the principles and objectives felt they provided a sound basis for decision-making, they considered the needs of the child and they supported informed parental choice. Those who were not supportive of some or all of the principles and objectives expressed concern that schools do not only serve local communities, that the principles and objectives do not put the interests of all pupils at the centre, that they ignore the responses to the Household Response Forms and that some form of academic selection should be included. It was also suggested that the child must be able to find a place suitable to his or her educational needs, interests and aspirations.
- 2.26 The response from the **Northern Catholic Bishops** reiterated their commitment to the creation of a system that maximises parental election rather than just selection by the schools. It stated that this is a process about empowering all parents and involving them as much as possible in the education of their children.
- 2.27 **The Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC)** viewed the proposed principles as laudable but was concerned that the delivery of some may militate against others. It agreed that the interests of children should be at the centre of the decision-making process. It suggested that many people continue to support academic selection in the fear that parents will misuse choice, ignore the best interests of the child and choose a traditional grammar school for non-educational reasons. In order to build confidence in the approach of 'informed choice', parents must realise the importance of advice from both primary and post-primary school Principals.
- 2.28 TRC underlined its support for an academic pathway for those whose abilities and aptitudes are best suited to this direction and stressed that significant measures must be taken to raise the esteem of non-grammar schools. Whilst it acknowledged that schools normally serve local communities, it felt the proposals did not deal with the exceptions to this i.e. there is not uniform provision of all types of schools in every community and those in rural areas and small provincial towns have no significant choice of post-primary school. Historically, larger towns and cities attract pupils from far beyond the local area, especially where there is a good transport network. All children should have equality of opportunity in terms of access to academic and vocational courses. It felt that the proposals did not address how schools would be given sufficient flexibility or how admissions criteria in a local area will be complementary.

- 2.29 **The Institute of Directors (IoD)** was broadly content with the proposed principles. It suggested an addition to the second objective regarding maximising opportunities for parental preference to include “*and the likelihood that their preference will be met.*” IoD also suggested that the word “*some*” be deleted from the third objective and the following words should be added to the end of that objective: “*thereby ensuring that the child at least gains access to a place in a school of comparable quality to that preferred by the parent.*”
- 2.30 **The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)** suggested that the main principle underpinning new arrangements should be ensuring each child is placed in a school which meets their needs and abilities and which will enable them to develop to their full potential. It felt this cannot be met in the context of a school system resulting from the Costello proposals. The only way this can be achieved is by assessing those aptitudes and abilities and placing the child at the most suitable school. Where there is oversubscription, parental choice should not be the determining factor in deciding whether the child should be admitted.
- 2.31 DUP was concerned that admission will be based on interviews and geography, which will discriminate against young people from poorer communities and favour those children whose parents have the right connections, can afford to move into the preferred catchment area or who can present themselves best at interview. It felt it is wrong to assume that schools normally serve local communities as many schools attract pupils from a wide geographical area. It also stated that the locality principle will radically alter the intake and nature of many post-primary schools.
- 2.32 **Sinn Fein** recognised the attempts to make children and parents paramount in the proposed principles and objectives. However, it felt the word “*normally*” should be removed from the last principle as it believes that schools should serve local communities. It also felt that, in the third objective, giving a child only “*some priority*”, clashes with the primacy of the child. It stated that no principle or objective should result in a school population reflecting Pupil Profiles at either end of the academic spectrum only.
- 2.33 **The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)** suggested the addition of two principles: “*all pupils must be given the opportunity to reach their full potential*” and “*each child should be able to secure a place in a school that best suits his or her educational need.*” It felt that the concept of community was overplayed as not all schools serve particular local communities. It felt that the concept of parental choice was overstated and unattainable and should not be confused with parental preference, which is a much more realistic concept.
- 2.34 **The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)** was in broad agreement with what was proposed with some minor amendments to the objectives to reflect that parents should be ‘well informed’ rather than ‘better informed’, and that each pupil should be given ‘priority’ rather than ‘some priority’ under one set of admissions criteria.

- 2.35 In general, the responses from **parents/members of the general public** did not feel that the principles and objectives provided a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements. They highlighted a number of concerns, in particular, that the principles and objectives go against the wishes expressed in the Household Response Forms and that some form of academic selection should be included. Respondents were also concerned that the principles would not be achieved by the proposals outlined in the Consultation Document and that they do not put the interests of all pupils at the centre. Concern was also expressed that the principles and objectives discriminated against academically able children and against families who cannot afford to move into popular catchment areas and that schools do not only serve local communities.
- 2.36 It was suggested that the term ‘parental preference’ rather than ‘parental choice’ should be used to reflect the new arrangements and a new principle should be included: *“every child should be able to find a place suitable to his/her educational needs.”*
- 2.37 **The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)** supported the principles and objectives but wanted to see an additional principle about ensuring equality of opportunity for every child. It agreed that the education system should serve the individual child, parents and community but would advocate the addition of a Targeting Social Need (TSN) objective and would like to see the new government policy ‘*A Shared Future*’ take a central place in new educational arrangements.
- 2.38 **The Ulster Farmers’ Union (UFU)** supported the principles and objectives, in particular that the new admissions arrangements should be fair and free from any bias or indirect discrimination against particular groups or individuals. However, it felt that some of the proposals will disadvantage children living in rural areas and therefore do not fit with this principle, which is unacceptable. It asked that the needs of the rural community and farming families be fully addressed.
- 2.39 **Mencap** would welcome confirmation that the principles and objectives apply equally to children with statements and their parents. It felt that *“promotion of equality of opportunity for all children”* should be included in the list of principles.
- 2.40 **Barnardo’s** agreed with the proposed principles and objectives but would welcome the inclusion of children within the first objective. It stressed the importance of informing children about the options and choices available to them and providing them with assistance to understand the process.
- 2.41 **Save the Children** agreed with the principles but felt that children should be much more involved in the decision-making process and that the second objective should be amended to include pupils. It suggested that safety mechanisms were needed to ensure equality of opportunity and outcome for children from different socio-economic backgrounds. It recommended that the following sentences be added to the principles: *“facilitate the active*

involvement of the child as well as the parent in the decision-making process;” and “ensure equality of opportunity to every child regardless of background, including socio-economic background.”

- 2.42 The **Equality Commission** agreed with the principles and objectives overall, in particular with the emphasis on putting the interests of the child at the centre of the process. It also agreed that the system should be fair and free from any bias or indirect discrimination. It was concerned that new arrangements based mainly on parental preference would reinforce existing economic and social inequalities. It welcomed the Department’s view that the choice of school at age 11 may not be the only or final determinant of a child’s educational pathway. It encouraged the Department to explore the option of transfer at age 14 as this may benefit children from poorer backgrounds, from ethnic minorities or with disabilities, by offering them real opportunities to enter a school most suited to their needs.
- 2.43 **The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)** welcomed the principles, particularly the fourth principle. It felt that any reform of the education system should make reference to the Human Rights Act 1998 and this should be made explicit in the principles. It noted the lack of an explicit reference to education rights and children’s rights and was concerned that parental choice was the primary consideration. The child’s right of access to an effective education, as defined by European jurisprudence, belongs to the child and the parent’s right to decide the nature of that education is subsidiary in nature. It stated that DE has an obligation to ensure that all policies are compliant with the UNCRC and its range of guiding principles. NIHRC suggested two additional principles: *“The new arrangements should be based on the child’s right to an education”* and *“the process should maximise the opportunity for children to express their views on their education.”*
- 2.44 NIHRC broadly welcomed the objectives but would liked to have seen an objective reflecting DE’s commitment to TSN. It felt that new arrangements should have the explicit objective of helping the education system to contribute to the equalisation of life chances and reduction of social disadvantage. It suggested there should be a review mechanism to ensure complementarity amongst the criteria of different schools and to ensure criteria are non-discriminatory.
- 2.45 The **Children’s Law Centre** stated that while many of the principles and objectives were positive in nature, there was an overall absence of a central rights based approach. There was a strong emphasis on parental preference and choice, with no reference to the views of the child being heard and taken into account. It felt the principles need to identify the rights of children and groups of children who currently do not enjoy equal access, such as children with disabilities, Traveller children and other minority groups. The principles and objectives should be amended to reflect the international treaties that seek to ensure that children’s rights in, and to, education are protected.

CHAPTER 3

CHOOSING A POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL

- 3.1 **The Consultation Document sought views on a number of issues relating to the process for choosing a post-primary school. This included:**
- ◆ **the Pupil Profile;**
 - ◆ **advice from the primary school;**
 - ◆ **advice from the post-primary school;**
 - ◆ **advice from the Department of Education and the Education and Library Boards;**
 - ◆ **continuing advice during post-primary school; and**
 - ◆ **the timetable for the admissions process.**

Pupil Profile

- 3.2 **The Consultation Document outlined how the Pupil Profile could be used at the transfer stage to help parents make informed choices for their children. Respondents were asked whether the Pupil Profile should be used in the way outlined in the document and whether there were any additional ways to use the Pupil Profile to help parents decide on the most appropriate post-primary school for their children.**
- 3.3 **BELB** felt there should be substantive changes made to the recommendations on the Pupil Profile. It felt the new curriculum and assessment proposals will require the pupil to engage in setting personal learning targets and the Pupil Profile should cater for this.
- 3.4 **BELB** and **SEELB** felt the introduction of the Pupil Profile raises significant professional development issues, particularly the need for teacher training which should be resourced through the Curriculum, Advisory and Support Services (CASS). They were also concerned that the proposals would put a significant burden on Principals and teachers. They felt that, where the Pupil Profile encompasses subjective matters and not just objective matters, there is significant room for disagreement. They felt that the Pupil Profile should be set within a process which develops capacity for the right choice to be made and which prevents it from being manipulated. They also felt the Pupil Profile would be enhanced by the inclusion of the opinion of the pupil.

- 3.5 BELB and SEELB recommended the development of a ‘model profile’ which could be used to illustrate different ‘educational pathways’ to parents. These could be ‘matched’ to Pupil Profiles thus providing parents with a range of examples of possible ways forward for pupils.
- 3.6 **BELB, SEELB** and **WELB** were concerned that honesty and educational objectivity in completing the Pupil Profile could be tempered by fear of litigation and the need to appease demanding parents.
- 3.7 **NEELB, SEELB, SELB** and **WELB** were concerned that, if the Pupil Profile is used as part of the transfer process, it could become a contentious document and potentially result in litigation.
- 3.8 **NEELB** supported the development and use of the Pupil Profile but stressed that rigorous quality assurance will be vital to its success. A comprehensive training programme is needed for teachers to support the Pupil Profile’s introduction, as well as an information campaign for parents and the wider community. The Board stressed the importance of the role of the P6 teacher at the annual parent-teacher meeting and that greater emphasis should be placed on input from pupils if the Pupil Profile is to become developmental. It welcomed the inclusion of information relating to aptitude and interests. **NEELB, SEELB** and **SELB** agreed that the inclusion of a section where parents could identify outside school activities would encourage parents to ‘buy in’ to the process.
- 3.9 **SEELB** agreed with the principle of ‘informed parental and pupil choice’, and would wish to ensure that information available to parents is relevant and wide ranging and that parents are actively engaged as contributing partners. **SEELB** and **WELB** felt it essential that the Pupil Profile is completed honestly, objectively and reflects the child’s educational needs, interests and aspirations. **SEELB** felt that the Pupil Profile should form the basis of informed discussions with potential post-primary schools but that post-primary schools should not receive the Pupil Profile in advance.
- 3.10 **SEELB** and **SELB** would like to see a partnership approach between parents and teachers in completing the Pupil Profile, with capacity to record the views of pupils. **SELB** asked how the information from a child’s P7 year is included in the Pupil Profile as many children (especially boys) develop significantly in this final year of primary education.
- 3.11 **WELB** was concerned that uninformed parental perception could result in litigation against the primary school Principal, where parents perceive they were not fully informed of their child’s attainments and/or achievements.
- 3.12 **WELB** felt that the Pupil Profile should contain high quality quantitative and qualitative information that is ‘parent friendly’ and which can be ‘backed up’ by hard evidence. Tools such as National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Tests and Cognitive Ability Tests (CATS) could be used to substantiate the quantitative information and bring more

objectivity to the qualitative information contained in the Pupil Profile. It felt that some form of standardisation and external moderation is essential across all schools.

- 3.13 WELB also had major concerns about the time implications of taking forward the new curriculum and assessment arrangements concurrently with the new admissions arrangements. It felt DE needs to issue clear guidance as to how arrangements can be fully implemented within the limited time available.
- 3.14 CCMS felt that, in time, the Pupil Profile could be a valuable formative tool used by pupils, parents and teachers to guide the child through their school career. Trust needs to be built between all parties to ensure honest and clear communication and this trust could be threatened if the Pupil Profile was used for any other purpose that could influence critical decisions about a child's life path. It felt the Pupil Profile may inform but not determine the appropriate school for a child as the Pupil Profile is not intended as a tool for selection and cannot be used for this purpose. CCMS felt that it would not be appropriate to place this responsibility on teachers.
- 3.15 NICIE broadly welcomed the concept of developing and using a Pupil Profile to help inform decisions. However, it was concerned that if post-primary schools have sight of it in advance of transfer, some form of selection may ensue. Parents may try to put pressure on primary school teachers and influence what is written in the Pupil Profile in order to gain a more favourable response from a preferred post-primary school. The proposed use of the Pupil Profile relies on the honesty and integrity of all parties, and to ensure fairness and consistency, DE needs to develop clear guidelines for primary and post-primary schools regarding the use of the Pupil Profile as well as Principal/parent interviews, their content and recommendations.
- 3.16 NICIE stressed that it is important that the Pupil Profile is fit for purpose. Sufficient time and support is necessary to make the document sufficiently robust. There must be a realistic and manageable time period for its development so that administrative tasks do not detract from core teaching time to the detriment of pupils. Teachers must be given adequate time to complete each child's Pupil Profile. It was concerned that the Pupil Profile will be introduced into schools on top of other changes, without the resources necessary for teachers to implement effective change. It felt that pilot schemes should be initiated as soon as possible and that schools should be informed about work to date on the development of the Pupil Profile.
- 3.17 CnaG indicated that the layout of the Pupil Profile must include the particular characteristics of immersion education, including translation, literacy and numeracy skills in both languages. It was concerned that awarding levels to pupils could be a problem and that the completion of Pupil Profiles could put extra pressure on primary schools. It felt that post-primary schools should not be allowed to request Pupil Profiles in order to choose pupils.

- 3.18 **ATL** had some concerns about the detail of the Pupil Profile and how it would be used. It stated that teachers will need sufficient time to gather and sift evidence to support the development of the Pupil Profile and that adequate time needs to be set aside for teachers to make judgements to prevent them being overburdened. Precise and accurate training and resources are needed for teachers so that both teachers and parents have confidence in the ‘assessment techniques’ used. It suggested that, if adequate resources and training are provided for all teachers, there would be no need for a system of quality assurance. **ATL** asked how the ‘soft skills’ will be ‘assessed’ and recorded in a Pupil Profile and suggested that the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) accelerates the development of the Pupil Profile.
- 3.19 **INTO** had concerns about the detail of the Pupil Profile and how it would be used. It stated that its content and format should make it accessible to parents and teachers with sufficient information to make informed judgements and without too much information that would render it meaningless. It was opposed to quality assurance of Pupil Profiles or assessment as it felt there was no need for another level of bureaucracy and additional workload for schools and it could undermine the professionalism of the teachers and management within the school.
- 3.20 **NASUWT** expressed major reservations regarding the format and development of the Pupil Profile. It stated that all references to the Pupil Profile indicate major increases in teacher workload in the completion of the Pupil Profile, in the related assessment and in the requirement for consultation with parents. Appropriate calculations should be carried out to estimate increased staffing levels needed for its development before 2007.
- 3.21 **NASUWT** insisted that consultations need to take place on adequate protection for teachers who may be involved in making recommendations on appropriate post-primary provision for pupils. It was concerned at the relationship between completion of the Pupil Profiles and parental consultations and the apparent lack of detailed consideration given to issues such as timing and workload.
- 3.22 **ATL** and **INTO** called for wider and fuller consultation on the Pupil Profile within the education sector and teachers in particular, so that the final document is meaningful, manageable and usable. They also argued against standardised tests for comparison purposes, as they felt this undermines the aims and philosophy of the revised curriculum, reduces pupils to a statistic and may also undermine the teacher’s work in building a pupil’s self-confidence and self-esteem.
- 3.23 **ATL**, **INTO** and **NASUWT** were of the view that the post-primary school should not have access to the Pupil Profile before the allocation of places. **INTO** felt this could lead to selection by the back door. **ATL** and **INTO** felt the Pupil Profile must be a robust document informing parents of their child’s strengths, weaknesses and interests and parents should be in

a position to ascertain from the post-primary school whether or not it is a suitable place for their child.

- 3.24 **UTU** fully supported the use of the Pupil Profile provided it is used to inform parental/pupil choice. It felt that, if used correctly, the Pupil Profile will be an excellent tool for assisting informed choice. It stressed that it should not be used in any way to prevent a child from entering a particular school. If this were to be the case, teachers would not continue to support its use. The system will only work if teachers have faith in it, and if teachers believe the information will be used by anyone other than the pupil/parent, this may distort or restrict the information supplied. UTU would vehemently oppose any attempt to link the information in the Pupil Profile to the admissions criteria for a school.
- 3.25 **GTCNI** stated that the Pupil Profile will be of pre-eminent importance in ensuring that parental confidence in the system is maintained and children's educational needs are met and therefore the Pupil Profile must be fit for purpose. It stressed that profiling must reflect the whole curriculum experience of children in primary school. The Pupil Profile has the potential to increase choice for parents and to establish a coherent process to enable teachers to identify pupils' aptitudes and developmental needs in a structured and coherent manner. It took the view that Pupil Profiles should not be made available to post-primary schools prior to admissions.
- 3.26 **GBA** felt that the Pupil Profile has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the decision-making process, although more work needs to be done on its shape and content before it could endorse it. It felt that, if the Pupil Profile is to have real value to parents or other users, it will need to contain objective information about pupils' progress and performance with benchmark data enabling parents to compare their children with others of the same age. GBA stressed that the Pupil Profile needs to be adequately trialled and tested, completed to a consistent standard across and within schools, taking account of best international practice.
- 3.27 The responses from primary and secondary **schools** showed broad support for the use of the Pupil Profile as described in the Consultation Document. Responses from grammar schools were not supportive of its use as described. Some of the concerns raised by schools included the additional workload and pressure which the Pupil Profile would mean for teachers and that parents will ignore the advice given and not make appropriate decisions. Some felt that the outline of the content of the Pupil Profile in the Consultation Document was too vague for them to consider its use. It was suggested that the Pupil Profile must include standardised test results. The grammar schools that responded expressed the view that the Pupil Profile should be used for selection. Other schools felt that post-primary schools should see the Pupil Profile as part of the information gathering/giving process.
- 3.28 **AHTSS** did not support the development of the Pupil Profile as set out in the Consultation Document. It believed that it will lead to the categorising of children into 'types' and that a

standardised primary report should be the only documentation at this stage of a child's development.

- 3.29 **NAEIAC** felt the Pupil Profile is fit for purpose, provided the admissions criteria specifically preclude the use of ability as a determining criterion. It felt that the Pupil Profile could be used by parents to seek independent advice and support on the best choice for their child.
- 3.30 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** stated that empirical data is important in enabling parents to understand what a child can and cannot achieve. Professional opinions from teachers are important but should not be the only element as there would be too much pressure on primary teachers to justify their opinions.
- 3.31 **TRC** viewed the Pupil Profile as a very useful and important document in describing any child's educational attainment and potential. It stressed that ongoing assessment must not distort the delivery of the curriculum. It felt the Pupil Profile should be available to post-primary schools as part of the 'choosing a school' process and that if the Pupil Profile is to be used to select pupils, rigorous standardisation and moderation will be essential.
- 3.32 **IoD** supported in principle the concept of the Pupil Profile and its intended content. However, it believed that teachers will be under pressure to give parents a positive picture of their child and therefore the Pupil Profile should contain purely objective elements, such as set tests. It suggested that computer aided formative assessments such as the Alta System could be used to increase objectivity.
- 3.33 **IoD** stressed the need for post-primary schools to have access to Pupil Profiles when deciding which children to admit when oversubscribed. It felt that the Pupil Profile should be reviewed by post-primary schools and parents during discussions about applications for places.
- 3.34 **DUP** suggested that the process of choosing a school will mean extra work for schools, teachers and parents and will disadvantage parents who are less comfortable with the education system. The process could act as a barrier to working class parents and their children. It was concerned that the priority being given to parental choice will result in oversubscription of popular schools.
- 3.35 **DUP** stated that the Pupil Profile will be a source of contention since parents will recognise how much rests on it and the assessment is entirely teacher based which will place great pressure on teachers. It stressed that post-primary schools must be able to see Pupil Profiles to ensure that the child is at the centre of the process and to enable grammar schools to maintain their academic ethos.
- 3.36 **DUP** called for more clarity about what the Pupil Profile will contain i.e. a set of marks, teacher evaluation or opinions etc. It stated that the Pupil Profile must contain some

objective assessment of a child's ability, otherwise there will be charges of teacher bias or schools could distort the content in order to avoid confrontation with parents. It asked what common benchmark data there will be to enable parents to make comparisons with other children.

- 3.37 **Sinn Fein** stressed that the Pupil Profile is key and that perceived intelligence is only one component in the decision-making process. It felt that the resources and procedures for the quality assurance of the Pupil Profile are crucial to sustain minimum workloads for teachers and instil confidence in parents, pupils and civic society.
- 3.38 Sinn Fein stated that the Pupil Profile must be an objective, transparent and accountable document, which must not be governed by a primary school senior manager's subjective views of second level institutions. It should not be used by the post-primary school to select pupils as this would lead to the re-introduction of the 11 plus by the back door.
- 3.39 **UUP** welcomed the introduction of the Pupil Profile that includes objective and carefully moderated information. However, it was not satisfied that the Pupil Profile has been fully developed and undergone the extensive consultation necessary. It was concerned that the choice of whether to consult with primary and post-primary schools rests with the parent, as this is contrary to the principle of informed parental preference.
- 3.40 UUP stressed the need for post-primary schools to see Pupil Profiles to use them if oversubscribed in order to ensure the best match between the school and pupil. It felt the Pupil Profile must provide a record of a pupil's work and test performance including results from standardised tests during the latter years of primary school.
- 3.41 **SDLP** was opposed to the Pupil Profile being sent to post-primary schools before a pupil has accepted a place in the school. The Pupil Profile should not be used as a tool for selection. Its function is to inform parents so that the choice of post-primary school remains theirs and is not handed back to the post-primary school.
- 3.42 Those **parents/members of the general public** who responded on this issue did not support the use of the Pupil Profile as described in the Consultation Document. Concerns expressed included the additional workload and pressure that the Pupil Profile would mean for teachers; teachers may not be fair or objective; the content would be largely subjective; and that parents would ignore the advice given. Respondents felt that the Pupil Profile could be used in a number of ways i.e. they could be used by post-primary schools to select pupils; they could be seen by post-primary schools in advance of parental discussions; and they could be seen by post-primary schools as part of the information gathering/giving process. Consistency across schools and between schools was raised as a concern. It was also suggested that parents need standard, objective information and that the Pupil Profile should include standardised tests and benchmarking data.

- 3.43 **NICVA** would be concerned if post-primary schools were to have access to Pupil Profiles before the allocation of places, as this would be tantamount to academic selection by the back door. It would also reinforce the impression that the introduction of some specialist schools focused on an ‘academic’ approach will perpetuate the grammar/secondary division.
- 3.44 **UFU** supported the principle of parents having as much information as possible about their child’s education but were concerned that the idea that parents will make informed choices is idealistic. It felt that the Pupil Profile should be made available to post-primary schools to allow them to cater for the needs of individual pupils and suggested that the Pupil Profile could be used to select pupils for certain schools.
- 3.45 **UFU** was concerned that Pupil Profiles could lead to disagreements between parents and teachers; that teachers will face excessive pressure from parents to give favourable results; and that teacher workloads will increase.
- 3.46 **Mencap** felt it was important to recognise the knowledge and experience of parents regarding their child’s skills, achievements and potential and that parents should be supported to become active contributors to the Pupil Profile. It felt that the content and use of Pupil Profiles should be monitored to ensure consistency and fairness in application. It also suggested that if Pupil Profiles are to be used for selection there should be an appeal process allowing unfair or inaccurate content to be challenged and corrected.
- 3.47 **Barnardo’s** was supportive of the decision to remove the Transfer Tests and welcomed a process of decision-making based on a child’s progress throughout their primary schooling. It would welcome more information about how the consistency of content and forms of assessment will be monitored and guaranteed both between and within schools.
- 3.48 **Barnardo’s** stated that the young people they talked to are concerned that the Pupil Profile may put pressure on children from an earlier age and for a longer duration. The young people also felt there was a risk that pupils viewed as disruptive might receive negative content in their Pupil Profile which could limit their choices later. The young people felt it was important that teachers tried to understand the family tensions or situations that may be creating their difficult behaviour, offer pupils support and take their circumstances into account when compiling Pupil Profiles.
- 3.49 **The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY)** felt that parents are likely to defer to the school’s views and judgement regarding their child’s progress. There is an assumption that parents will engage in the process and that they can participate on an equal basis. However, research shows that parents often feel they cannot engage in discussions with schools for a number of reasons e.g. tension between the parents and school, literacy and/or language issues etc. It felt that DE must make provision through proper assistance and using creative mechanisms to engage parents in a meaningful way. These mechanisms should be available and accessible to all parents otherwise the Pupil

Profile will have little impact for marginalized parents. NICCY also stressed that DE must consider the obstacles that could prevent the development of clear and consistent records about a child's development especially in the case of transient communities e.g. Traveller or refugee children.

- 3.50 **Save the Children** believed that, if used correctly, the Pupil Profile will provide a basis for decision-making. It stressed that the Pupil Profile should not be used to label and exclude children as they start their new school. Pupil Profiles should be developed as a record of achievement and involve pupils through a process of self-assessment. The development of the Pupil Profile should be a shared enterprise between parents, children and teachers. It was concerned about whether, due to the demands on teachers' time, Pupil Profiles will be completed in sufficient detail.
- 3.51 Save the Children felt that the purpose of the Pupil Profile should be to inform decisions of children and their parents rather than recommending one particular school over another. It stressed that primary schools should only distribute Pupil Profiles to pupils and parents and post-primary schools should not be allowed to see them prior to the allocation of places. Once a child has been admitted, Pupil Profiles should then be transferred to the new school.
- 3.52 The **Equality Commission** welcomed the proposal for the Pupil Profile, particularly its emphasis on continuous assessment covering all aspects of the new curriculum, rather than on examination results. It welcomed the development of dialogue with receiving schools guided by the Pupil Profile.
- 3.53 **NIHRC** welcomed the concept of comprehensive and objective Pupil Profiles and supported the emphasis on sharing of information between parents and schools and evidence-based discussions on the child's educational needs. It welcomed the fact that the Pupil Profile is not to be used in the admissions criteria.
- 3.54 The **Children's Law Centre** felt that the Pupil Profile is a useful tool in determining educational achievements as interpreted by individual teachers, but stressed that it should not be used as a form of academic selection. It should not be available to post-primary schools prior to decisions about choice of school being made, as there is a high likelihood that it will be used to determine admission. It felt that this form of selection would be more flawed than the current system as the Pupil Profiles are subjective in nature.
- 3.55 The Children's Law Centre suggested that parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds may be able to make better use of their child's Pupil Profile than those from disadvantaged backgrounds as these parents may have more confidence to approach schools and to make representations for admission. It believed that the Pupil Profile should be piloted thoroughly prior to its introduction so that specific concerns may be monitored and evaluated in practice. It stated that departmental guidance for schools and comprehensive training for teachers are fundamental to ensure consistency across schools and between pupils.

Advice from the Primary School

- 3.56 **The Consultation Document outlined the information and advice which should be available from primary schools to help parents make informed choices for their children and sought views on the information and advice to which parents should have access.**
- 3.57 **BELB** stressed that it is essential that primary schools provide the fullest range of information, in a standardised format, to help parents. It was concerned that some teachers may not have sufficient knowledge of the post-primary sector and there is a need for supplementary information from other sources on the range of post-primary opportunities available to pupils. The Board stressed that teachers and Principals would require additional training, time and resources to complete the necessary administration procedures.
- 3.58 **NEELB** felt that the information identified was sufficient, provided the post-primary sector makes available all relevant information to enable primary schools to inform parents. An effective information and training strategy will be required to ensure that information is easily understood by parents. It felt the new arrangements need to address concerns by primary schools about the pressure that might be exerted on them. **NEELB** was concerned that interviews in P6 will result in an increased burden on schools and will have significant resource implications in relation to substitute cover. Consideration should also be given to particular circumstances, for example, provision for people with sensory impairment or where English is not the first language or where parental responsibility is shared with social services.
- 3.59 **SEELB** felt that the roles and responsibilities of the parent, child and teacher and the whole-school responsibility need to be clarified. Clear guidance needs to be provided for primary schools. It was concerned about the possible drive to achieve higher levels by the end of Term 2 of Year 6. This could lead to a new culture of private tutoring which could distort results and the curriculum provision. It also highlighted the need for training P6 teachers on post-primary provision, including the range of post-primary opportunities and pathways. It felt there is a need to develop parents' knowledge about the curriculum and assessment process and their role.
- 3.60 **SEELB** recommended a consistent approach across schools with appropriate training for primary school Principals and teachers. It was concerned about the increased bureaucratic burden on schools and called for additional resources for interviews in Year 6 to ensure teaching time does not suffer.
- 3.61 **SELB** believed that the information identified is sufficient, providing the post-primary sector makes all relevant information available to primary schools to pass on to parents. At present, schools are allowed substitute teacher costs for the period of the transfer interviews. Additional resources should be made available for P6 interviews to ensure that teaching time does not suffer.

- 3.62 **WELB** believed that information for parents is paramount and that the Pupil Profile should carry sufficient information to help teachers teach the pupil and help parents make informed decisions. **WELB** was concerned that the Pupil Profile will make little impression on parents who take relatively little interest in their child's educational progress.
- 3.63 **BELB, NEELB, SEELB** and **SELB** felt that primary school Principals should offer advice and guidance but should not recommend specific schools as the final choice should remain with parents and pupils. **NEELB** suggested that guidance within a regulatory framework may be necessary in this area.
- 3.64 **CCMS** believed that the use of the Pupil Profile will improve communication between the parent and primary school throughout primary education. Primary schools are best placed to offer guidance on the child rather than possible receiving schools. Principals will have access to information on the child's needs/aptitudes/interests and aspirations for discussion with parents.
- 3.65 **CCMS** suggested that managing authorities should facilitate Principals by keeping them informed of developments in post-primary arrangements locally and any significant changes to educational provision or admissions criteria.
- 3.66 **CnaG** stated that teachers and Principals will have a specialist role in providing parents with appropriate information. This could be a problem for some parents who are struggling to find the appropriate school for their child and who are not familiar with the process.
- 3.67 **ATL** and **INTO** stated that the role of the primary school is to advise parents on the strengths, weaknesses and interests of their child, not to advise parents on the merits of individual post-primary schools. Advice must be clearly defined and understood by schools and parents to ensure openness/transparency and to reduce confusion/conflict. It is parents who make the choice of school for their child, not the primary or post-primary school. Advice must be the subject of consultation and agreement with the teachers' unions to ensure the process is clear and the rights of all pupils, parents and teachers are protected within it.
- 3.68 **NASUWT** accepted the value of regular consultation with parents but was concerned about the emphasis on P6 consultations. It felt there must be no implications that decisions regarding post-primary education will be made at that stage. It stated that parental consultations must be part of a programme of activity that takes place within the normal school day, with substitute cover available. **NASUWT** insisted that there should be no requirement on primary teachers to comment on the merits of individual post-primary schools.
- 3.69 **UTU** suggested that the advice from the primary school should include a reminder to parents that the real choices for children should be made at 14, not at 11 when the child is still developing and maturing. It felt that dialogue between the school and the child's family

- should start early. It stressed that advice given by the primary school teacher should remain general and it should be emphasised that the parent and pupil are completely in control of the choice.
- 3.70 **GTCNI** believed that teachers in primary schools will have a key role in providing appropriate information to parents but this will depend largely on the confidence that they have in the assessment and profiling arrangements.
- 3.71 **GBA** stressed that primary school Principals should use Pupil Profiles to give parents professional guidance and advice.
- 3.72 **AHTSS** had serious concerns about the pressure that will be exerted on primary school teachers in preparing Pupil Profiles, a document which it believes has the potential to be used to identify academic potential. It stressed that primary school Principals' knowledge of post-primary schools will be fundamental in giving advice to parents, and yet their knowledge is based largely on perception, as they have no involvement with a range of post-primary schools.
- 3.73 **NAEIAC** stressed that the Pupil Profile needs to be explained to parents to ensure they fully understand the information and advice. Boards of Governors and teachers need to be fully trained to advise parents. This professional development needs to be undertaken as a matter of urgency to ensure schools are prepared for implementation and to ensure consistency across schools.
- 3.74 The **schools** which responded on this issue were broadly content with the role of the primary school as described in the Consultation Document. However, some concerns expressed included: parents will ignore the advice given; parents will put pressure on teachers and Principals in primary schools; and P6 is too early for discussions concerning post-primary education as children develop considerably during the P7 year.
- 3.75 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** suggested that information should enable parents to see what the teachers' impression of their child is and the consultation should allow parents to make their own perspectives known.
- 3.76 **TRC** was concerned that in rural areas, where school choice is restricted, if a Principal recommends a school type, he/she is in reality recommending a specific school. It suggested that good links between post-primary schools and feeder primary schools could be encouraged by providing financial support and this would provide for a smoother transition for pupils from primary to post-primary schools.
- 3.77 **IoD** supported the proposals regarding advice from primary schools although it felt that what primary school Principals say should be heavily rooted in objectivity.

- 3.78 **UUP** regarded the primary school as one of the most important sources of advice and felt it was essential that all primary school Principals have a very clear understanding of what is on offer at the range of post-primary schools and should use the information in the Pupil Profile to offer realistic advice.
- 3.79 **SDLP** felt that the Pupil Profile should be the basis of discussion between parents and the primary schools as it will provide an objective source of information about how their child's needs can be best met in post-primary education. It stressed that primary school Principals or teachers should not recommend specific post-primary schools.
- 3.80 Responses from those **parents/members of the general public** who responded on this issue were mixed. Whilst some expressed the view that the meetings with primary school teachers would be useful, others were concerned that parents would ignore the advice given by primary school teachers. Other concerns included: parents will put pressure on teachers and Principals in primary schools; P6 is too early for discussions concerning post-primary education; parents need standardised, objective information; and the first cohort of pupils going through the new system will be disadvantaged. Some felt that primary school teachers should identify the most appropriate post-primary school for their pupils.
- 3.81 **NICVA** was opposed to primary schools offering advice to assist decisions about the actual choice of post-primary school. It felt that the role of the primary school should be to advise parents on the strengths, weaknesses and interests of the child. The decision regarding the post-primary school is for children and their parents.
- 3.82 **Barnardo's** agreed that P6 is an appropriate time to begin discussions about options and welcomed the advice and range of information proposed. However, it was concerned that there will be children who do not have an interested or supportive parent to assist and guide them through the process and who may be directed towards a school inappropriate for their needs. It was also concerned that many parents will want to get involved in the process but will find the new system complicated. Therefore, Barnardo's would like to see more consideration of how the new process will engage with and support parents not traditionally engaged with the school system. It suggested that children should receive information in a format which they can understand so that they can play a part in the process.
- 3.83 **Save the Children** recommended that the information and advice provided by primary schools should focus on the child's interests, strengths, competencies and areas in which they need additional support. Primary schools should not advise on the particular post-primary school the child should attend but should provide guidance on the benefits of each potential school. It felt that transfer should be seen as a process rather than a one-off event, with ongoing dialogue between the primary school, parent and pupil. Save the Children felt that discussions in P6/P7 should increasingly involve the child.

- 3.84 **NIHRC** felt that it is important for DE to oversee how schools share information with parents from all backgrounds, including those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and those with particular communication needs (including parents whose first language is not English). Research should be conducted into how schools can share information appropriately across the different social groups in Northern Ireland.

Advice from the Post-Primary School

- 3.85 **The Consultation Document set out a range of ways in which parents and pupils could access information about the post-primary schools available to them and the educational provision they offer. These included:**
- ◆ **open days/evenings;**
 - ◆ **post-primary school prospectuses;**
 - ◆ **web-based information; and**
 - ◆ **discussions with parents.**
- 3.86 **It sought views on the range of information outlined, the role of the post-primary school in advising parents and whether any other information/support should be provided to parents to assist the decision-making process.**
- 3.87 **BELB** and **SEELB** supported the use of open days and opportunities such as shadowing Year 8 pupils. They suggested that school prospectuses should include details of ‘pathways’ available to pupils via academic or vocational routes and they would welcome a greater emphasis on clear information about the ‘school ethos’. **SEELB** agreed with the information in the post-primary prospectuses with additions of details on the delivery of the Entitlement Framework, the focus of the school curriculum and progression routes.
- 3.88 **BELB** and **SEELB** were concerned that the post-primary school role in ‘providing advice’ could prove contentious and felt clear guidelines on the extent and range of information expected were required, otherwise the process could be inconsistent, contentious and possibly lead to litigation. They were concerned that the proposals will also place considerable pressure on resources and teachers’ workloads. **BELB** felt that information should be available on the web although it noted that not all parents will have access to on-line information.
- 3.89 **NEELB, SEELB, SELB** and **WELB** felt it was unrealistic for post-primary schools to undertake formal one to one meetings with parents prior to places being allocated. They felt this could raise unrealistic parental expectations and lead to an increase in appeals, particularly where Principals comment on the suitability of the school for individual pupils. **SEELB** and **SELB** agreed with the information as suggested apart from the one to one

meetings. They felt that parents could feel pressurised into attending these meetings and families unable to attend could be disadvantaged. They were also concerned that arranging interviews for all potential preferences would create a massive and costly burden on schools.

- 3.90 **WELB** was concerned that one to one discussions would involve a significant amount of time for parents and could increase the administrative burden for schools. It suggested that both sectors would require reasonable time and resources so that teaching time does not suffer. It stressed that post-primary schools should only be required to give information, not advice, as they cannot accept/refuse a pupil based on the information in the Pupil Profile.
- 3.91 **NEELB, SELB** and **WELB** suggested the information in school prospectuses should be strengthened to assist parents in making preferences. **WELB** felt prospectuses should be written in such a way so that they are not open to legal challenge and schools would need to ensure that they do not make commitments in relation to collaboration with other institutions which may not materialise for various reasons beyond their control.
- 3.92 **SEELB** stressed that Pupil Profiles should not be given to the post-primary school in advance of any meeting. It would encourage post-primary schools to make information relating to their school available on-line throughout the year, so that information is not concentrated in the last few weeks.
- 3.93 **CCMS** felt that post-primary schools are best able to explain the ethos and educational pathways available through their school through open days/evenings, school visits and prospectuses. Greater clarity is required as to what might be added to the requirements of school prospectuses e.g. how the curriculum is to be delivered.
- 3.94 **NICIE** accepted the suggested range of information as broad and accessible on different levels. It recommended that all prospectuses and websites should contain a core set of information and that schools should be obliged to keep their websites up to date. It accepted that meetings with post-primary school Principals could assist parents in making a more informed decision and acknowledged that parents would make the final decision. However, it noted the practical difficulties there may be for schools in conducting a huge number of discussions with parents in a relatively short period of time.
- 3.95 **CnaG** felt that any speciality the school has, or will have, should form part of the information. It felt meetings with parents could place a heavy burden on post-primary schools as they try to implement the new curriculum and that attendance at the meetings should not be necessary. Parents who are disadvantaged could feel uncomfortable and their children should not be disadvantaged because of this.
- 3.96 **ATL** accepted the current requirements for inclusion in school prospectuses but felt there is a need to evaluate the structure of open days/evenings to truly reflect the workings of the post-primary schools rather than them just being an exhibition of what might take place. It

felt that attempts should be made to encourage post-primary schools to move away from ‘marketing’.

- 3.97 ATL accepted that interviews are extremely important to establish what is best for the child. ATL and INTO were concerned about workload implications and the practicality of all parents having access to individual meetings with post-primary schools. They felt that meetings will have to be monitored to assess their manageability, effectiveness and usefulness and that guidance must be provided, following consultation with the teachers’ unions, to post-primary schools about advising parents of their choices.
- 3.98 INTO suggested one addition for post-primary school prospectuses: how the school will provide access to the Entitlement Framework, including the involvement of other providers e.g. Further Education (FE) Colleges.
- 3.99 NASUWT stated that the emphasis being given to open days/evenings is inappropriate in the new culture of co-operation. It felt that open days should be discontinued. It sought clarification on who would conduct parent meetings and when in the school year they would take place. NASUWT stated it will resist any attempts to impose additional workload burdens on members. It was concerned that there was no indication of how collaboration between schools would be addressed in parent interviews and that reference is still being made to opportunities within a ‘particular school’. It felt that, in an environment of co-operation between schools, there will need to be an entirely new approach to the information required in a school prospectus. It felt it would be completely inappropriate for an individual school prospectus to contain information specific to other schools.
- 3.100 UTU agreed that open days/evenings are an excellent tool in assisting parental choice and suggested that such visits should take place in the first term of the P7 year when time will be available with the removal of the Transfer Tests. It regarded school prospectuses as another excellent means of providing advice and suggested that each post-primary school should be given a common ring-fenced sum for the production of their prospectus. Alternatively, it suggested that information could be centrally collated and distributed in order to create a level playing field for all post-primary schools. It felt that, whilst web-based information is important, it should not be assumed that all parents/pupils have access to it and reliance on it as a means of disseminating information could be potentially discriminating.
- 3.101 UTU was concerned that providing the level of one to one guidance as envisaged will have funding implications. The decline in pupil numbers should be used as an opportunity to allow time to be made available to teachers at both primary and post-primary level to provide the kind of advisory services that are suggested. However, if the new arrangements are to work, co-operation not competition must prevail and there should be no external pressure that might influence the advice offered to a parent or pupil.

- 3.102 **GTCNI** felt that the proposals are in line with current best practice. However, it felt it was important that no additional burdens are placed on teachers. It was concerned that parental meetings could place an intolerable burden on Principals and senior staff of post-primary schools. It queried what would happen if parents did not attend these meetings and what impact this would have on decision-making.
- 3.103 **GBA** stated that if schools are oversubscribed, the Principal should be able to use the Pupil Profile to admit those who are clearly well-matched to the school and refuse admittance to those who would be misplaced in the school. It felt there should be clear, precise and accurate information about the curriculum provided by post-primary schools, their expectations of pupils, their distinctive characteristics etc.
- 3.104 **GBA** felt that the proposals are incapable of ensuring that parents' decisions will be informed by professional opinion and advice as the Consultation Document suggests that parents will make decisions and will consult with others only if they choose to do so. It felt the role of post-primary schools should be stronger if ill-informed and unwise decisions are to be avoided. Parents should be encouraged to make decisions informed by professional guidance and advice and should be rewarded for doing so. **GBA** was concerned that the admissions criteria would give no advantage to parents who make professionally informed decisions and make it just as likely that places will be offered to parents who take no advice of any sort.
- 3.105 **AHTSS** questioned the value of one to one discussions with post-primary schools as the time required could be significant and probably unrealistic and was concerned that providing a copy of the Pupil Profile prior to an interview in a post-primary school could result in its misuse.
- 3.106 **NAEIAC** felt that the information supplied by post-primary schools should be objective, factual, accurate and without embellishment that may give a misleading impression of the school. It also suggested that a standard format for reporting pupil attainment in external exams should be agreed.
- 3.107 The responses from **schools** showed broad support for the role of the post-primary school as described in the Consultation Document. The range of information described, including open nights, prospectuses and on-line information, was seen as useful for parents. Schools also suggested that information on a school's curriculum focus should be made available to parents. Concerns were expressed that one to one meetings would be time consuming for both schools and parents and would also have significant cost implications. Grammar schools felt that post-primary schools should have access to Pupil Profiles and that one to one discussions with parents should be mandatory.
- 3.108 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** felt that, if parents are to be empowered, they will need access to as much information as possible to enable them to make appropriate choices. That

information should be available in as many ways as possible, given adult literacy problems and the increasing number of non-nationals with English as their second language.

- 3.109 **TRC** felt that the range of information outlined was appropriate and acceptable. It suggested that the Inspectorate or ELB transfer personnel should monitor and evaluate school prospectuses and web-based information as schools' 'marketing strategies' can distort reality. It was concerned that parental discussions could be misused and should not become protracted negotiations. It felt it was important to emphasise to parents and post-primary schools that the aim of sharing information in a child's Pupil Profile is to increase the information available to help parents make a decision. TRC stressed that this process will have significant time and staffing implications for senior management which will require additional resources.
- 3.110 **IoD** felt that what is proposed is sufficient, although the importance of the role of the post-primary school in providing advice should be emphasised. It stressed that post-primary schools should be entitled to see the Pupil Profiles for prospective pupils and it should not be left solely to the discretion of parents. It felt that post-primary schools should set out their educational objectives and provide a clear articulation of the type of pupil they believe will thrive in their particular educational environment.
- 3.111 **DUP** expressed concern that parents who seek professional advice on the best school for their child, based on the Pupil Profile, will not be treated any more advantageously than parents who disregard the Pupil Profile, seek no advice and choose a school because it is popular. It sought clarity about the role of the post-primary school in the selection process, in particular, whether the Principal would merely listen to parents, or whether he/she would have any input into whether the pupil is accepted and on what basis a school could refuse to admit a child, if any.
- 3.112 **Sinn Fein** was concerned that the debate surrounding admissions will fuel the established practice of parents 'shopping around' and attending open nights from the beginning of Key Stage 2. It felt that the creation of Local Partnerships of Schools which provide 'broadband menus' rather than 'narrowband menus' of single post-primary institutions, must be the parents' means of establishing which pathway meets their child's needs. It agreed that prospectuses are a vital form of communication with parents and children. However, experience is that parents and pupils will read in detail the 'Marketing Prospectus' of a school rather than the detail of the legal statutory prospectus. It stated that web-based information requires resources of time, finance and trained personnel to keep the website updated and engaging. Schools cannot compete with employers for the necessary Information & Communications Technology (ICT) personnel and the present funding difficulties exacerbates this further. Proper discussions with parents will also require resources and Sinn Fein questioned why there was no reference in the Consultation Document to the extra budgetary resources which will be required to establish the new procedures.

- 3.113 **UUP** felt that the post-primary school will have a critical role in advising whether the pupil is matched to what the school can offer and, where oversubscribed, the school is in the best position to assess the best match between school and pupil.
- 3.114 **SDLP** agreed with the range of information proposed and stressed that it is important that schools' admissions criteria are clearly highlighted and explained to parents to reduce confusion and appeals. It was opposed to the Pupil Profile being available in advance of parental meetings with post-primary schools. It suggested that parents may take the Pupil Profile with them to such meetings, but only if they so wish, in order to ensure that the Pupil Profile does not become an alternative instrument of selection. It felt the post-primary school should provide any other information that parents might reasonably request.
- 3.115 Responses from **parents/members of the general public** were broadly supportive of the role of the post-primary school as outlined and the range of information described. School open nights, school prospectuses and on-line material were seen as useful sources of information for parents and pupils. There was broad support for one to one discussions although there were concerns that they would be too time-consuming for parents and schools. Some respondents felt that these discussions should be mandatory, should be based on the Pupil Profile containing standardised test scores and that post-primary schools should have access to Pupil Profiles in order to give good advice to parents.
- 3.116 **NICVA** supported the proposals to inform pupils and parents about the range of available schools but stressed its opposition to post-primary schools having access to Pupil Profiles during discussions with prospective pupils. It also questioned how much staff time will be available in post-primary schools to meet the family of every prospective applicant.
- 3.117 **Mencap** welcomed the commitment to informing parents about the choices available to their children but felt that schools should be required to ensure that the information is accessible and that parents who do not have access to web-based information are not disadvantaged. DE should ensure that the advice service is accessible to all, including parents with a learning disability.
- 3.118 **NICCY** felt that it will be difficult for post-primary schools to provide objective advice. The advisory role could be open to abuse, with some schools exerting pressure on parents to make particular selections which could result in some children being discriminated against. Parents may feel bullied into accepting particular recommendations and therefore it is important that parents and children have access to independent advice and support in making decisions.
- 3.119 The **Equality Commission** felt that all advice and information should be fully accessible, including information in the school prospectus which should be available on request in alternative formats. External factors should be considered such as the availability of school transport and other factors such as sports facilities, catering arrangements, curriculum

strengths and weaknesses. It cautioned that not everyone is computer literate or has access to a computer.

- 3.120 **NIHRC** stressed the important role for the Department in overseeing how schools share information with parents from all backgrounds, including those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and those with particular communication needs, including parents whose first language is not English. It recommended that research is conducted into how schools can share information across the different social groups in Northern Ireland.
- 3.121 The **Children's Law Centre** stressed that DE needs to take immediate action and invest considerable resources to ensure that those already disadvantaged socio-economically and by the current education system have access to information in a suitable format and are fully aware of the new system and its consequences. It was concerned that some children will be disadvantaged by virtue of their parent/guardian's inability or failure to properly engage in the process and that reliance on web-based information clearly favours those from advantaged backgrounds. It felt the Department must make adequate provision for those parents who may have difficulty attending open evenings. In particular, the Children's Law Centre was concerned at the impact of the new admissions arrangements on looked after children, children in the youth justice system and children who are carers.

Advice From DE/ELBs

- 3.122 **The Consultation Document sought views on the information/advice which should be available from DE/ELBs to help parents choose the most suitable post-primary school.**
- 3.123 **BELB** stated that ELB staff are well positioned to provide objective guidance and information to assist 'informed parental choice', and that the ELB role should be to provide an overview of the process. **NEELB** generally welcomed these proposals. **SEELB** stated that the ELBs should continue to provide information and guidance on different stages of the transfer process and the roles of stakeholders. It should also provide the Transfer Booklet with information on the process, descriptions of each school and their admissions criteria.
- 3.124 All of the **ELBs** expressed concern about the staffing and training needed to support a help-line and web-based information service and were in agreement that this should not be an 'add-on' to existing commitments. There was also general ELB support for a review of Transfer Booklets in light of strengthened school prospectuses and web-based information and the sourcing of school-based information directly from schools, with DE and the ELBs providing an overview of the procedure. They agreed that ELBs should continue publishing admissions criteria and suggested that DE allow ELBs to cut down on hard copy publications in favour of electronic publication, as this could realise significant cost savings for ELBs, although **SEELB** acknowledged that this could give rise to equality of access issues.

- 3.125 **BELB** stated that the role of the school link officer will be an important one in providing information about schools' provision for particular educational 'pathways', or the addressing of specific aspects of learning difficulties. It was suggested that DE might make 'case study' models available to parents to show how information can be drawn from all the recommended sources. **NEELB** commented on the need for a communication strategy for the new post-primary arrangements to help parents understand the process and inform themselves about the schools they may wish to consider for their children.
- 3.126 **SEELB** explained that Transfer Officers are also responsible for admission to primary and pre-school and the appeal procedure and account needs to be taken of the diverse procedures operating. It was suggested that these admissions processes be reviewed to ensure greater consistency and accessibility for parents.
- 3.127 **WELB** suggested that parents should receive information about the transfer process much earlier than September of the P7 year and commented that admissions criteria could be provided early in the P7 year.
- 3.128 **CCMS** suggested that a single authority responsible for admissions and exclusions could offer consistent coherent advice to parents and adjudicate on contentious issues. The support body would have a single set of documentation and produce appropriate guidance materials. **CCMS** also suggested that a step by step guide should be made available to parents, including details of how and when admissions criteria would be applied by schools and how they can access appeals procedures. It felt the criteria published by the central support body should be legally binding. The body should scrutinise and approve the criteria and, in consultation with DE and governors, only publish criteria which it deems to be consistent with regulations.
- 3.129 **NICIE** welcomed any supporting information that will help parents make the right decision for their child and commented that advice from officers in all education bodies should be impartial, honest and in keeping with the principles and objectives. It expressed concern about a lack of knowledge/understanding of the integrated sector by ELB officers which can lead to confusion for parents. It appealed to DE for assistance with the appointment/ allocation of an individual, based at **NICIE** offices, to advise parents on post-primary transfer within the integrated sector.
- 3.130 **CnaG** commented that most of this advice will be factual and non-controversial.
- 3.131 **ATL**, **INTO** and **AHTSS** expressed support for the continuation of current procedures, with **AHTSS** also commenting that the information currently provided is adequate. **NAEIAC** stated that ELBs should continue to provide Transfer Booklets with information on each post-primary school and further help and advice on the process. Much of this could be made available on-line.

- 3.132 **ATL** suggested that research be conducted into how valuable the information contained in present ELB Transfer Booklets really is and what use parents make of this information. **NASUWT** commented that the booklets would need to be considerably extended and it would expect to be consulted on the detail.
- 3.133 **ATL** suggested that the role of DE should be that of honest broker, providing factual and procedural advice, and this advice should be equitable across Northern Ireland. Public meetings hosted by DE personnel would assist parents and help emphasise that the ‘perceived best school’ may not be the best school for their child.
- 3.134 **UTU** suggested that there may be a role for an external advisory agency in assisting parents to choose the correct pathway, though this type of advice might well be more relevant at age 14, when pupils have a clearer idea of their wishes/strengths and interests. ELBs have a definite role as information providers and the ELBs or other central body could administer the transfer process, in the same way that the admissions process to primary schools is administered.
- 3.135 **GTCNI** stated that the proposed advice from DE should help parents understand the transfer process and that DE needs to ensure that its advice does not place intolerable demands on schools. It felt it would be helpful if DE and ELBs could provide each school with a summary breakdown about how admissions criteria are operating locally in terms of applications and actual admissions.
- 3.136 The **schools** that responded to this question broadly agreed with the information and advice as described in the Consultation Document.
- 3.137 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** suggested that information should be available in diagrammatic form where possible so that the maximum number of parents are able to understand the process and participate in it.
- 3.138 **TRC** stated that the proposals seem adequate, appropriate and similar to current arrangements.
- 3.139 **DUP** expressed the view that parents will not take advice from an ELB officer who has no knowledge of their child and who will be perceived as trying to fill the less popular schools.
- 3.140 **UUP** commented that DE/ELBs need to set out clear procedures as to how new arrangements will work and ensure that as much information as possible is available to all concerned.
- 3.141 **SDLP** considered that the proposed structures for advice and support are adequate. It suggested that ELB officers may need to visit primary schools during P6 to explain the Pupil Profile to parents and the roles and responsibilities involved. Parents should be made aware of the role of admissions criteria and the appeals process.

- 3.142 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, there was broad agreement with the information and advice as described in the Consultation Document. Issues identified concerned the need for information to be clear, succinct, factual, unbiased, well presented and accessible. Support was expressed for the standardisation of information produced by ELBs. A number of respondents identified a need for additional support for parents with literacy problems.
- 3.143 Feedback from **young people** involved in **focus group** discussions facilitated by PwC highlighted the value of web-based information for young people with a need for post-primary schools to maintain sufficient content and for primary schools to assist with access to relevant websites.
- 3.144 **NICVA** supported the proposed supply of information packs and provision of a help-line in each ELB, supported by extensive web-based information.
- 3.145 **NICVA, Mencap, NICCY, the Equality Commission** and **NIHRC** commented on the importance of making information accessible to different groups – parents, children and young people, those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and those with particular communication needs, including parents whose first language is not English. **NICCY** and the **Equality Commission** highlighted the fact that not everyone is computer literate or has access to a computer, so information should continue to be available in hard copy format. **NIHRC** suggested that research should be conducted into how schools can share information appropriately across different social groups.
- 3.146 The **Equality Commission** suggested that the information provided should include: availability of school transport; sports facilities; catering arrangements; curricular strengths and weaknesses; school discipline; pupil services; and medical facilities.
- 3.147 The **Children’s Law Centre** suggested that information should be provided in a variety of formats to ensure that all parents can understand the information and are informed about the effect that their choice will have on the life of their child. It felt that the more pro-active the parent, the more informed and prepared they will be for choosing a school and the transition. The **Children’s Law Centre** felt this will have a negative impact on parents who are from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly with regard to the provision of and reliance on web-based information, which clearly favours those from advantaged backgrounds.

Continuing Advice During Post-Primary Education

- 3.148 **The Consultation Document sought views on what information/advice should be available to assist with choices of educational pathway during post-primary education.**

- 3.149 **BELB** and **SEELB** commented on the need for a range of information and advice to form a continuous dialogue between parent, pupil and school about a child's learning pathway. **SEELB** agreed that the Pupil Profile would provide a structured basis to inform this.
- 3.150 **BELB** considered that DE should establish complementary educational school networks which would facilitate a pupil's entitlement to courses/accreditation provided by a group of schools. This concept of an 'educational passport' would require additional funding for all schools.
- 3.151 **NEELB** and **SELB** questioned whether ELBs would be in a position to provide advice about a young person's suitability for placement in an 'alternative setting'.
- 3.152 **BELB** and **NEELB** identified a need for improved careers advice in schools and a more proactive Careers Service respectively. **BELB** suggested that ELBs could maintain a register of course provision and assist schools in devising pathways incorporating contributions from other establishments. **WELB** suggested that careers advice about the availability of academic and vocational pathways should be included in prospectuses, to assist parents in their choice of school, and that career guidance should start in Year 8 if pupils are to make informed judgements about appropriate choices at Key Stage 4 and beyond. Pupils should be provided with guidance as to the range of subjects they may combine post-14 and post-16.
- 3.153 **BELB** and **SELB** drew attention to the wording of the final sentence of paragraph 3.17, and commented that this implied a guarantee of acceptance at the chosen school, irrespective of numbers etc.
- 3.154 **CCMS** expressed the view that age 14 is the earliest point at which major decisions about learning pathways should be taken. It felt that, at this critical juncture, parents and students need impartial advice and guidance on the 14-19 provision available in the locality, including FE and training. It also stated that schools need support in providing more differentiated provision from 14-19 to cater for the aspirations of young people.
- 3.155 **NICIE** agreed that choice of school at age 11 should not be the final determinant of educational pathway. It questioned whether ELBs could offer impartial and up to date advice on the integrated sector, especially Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools. It also expressed concern about the time necessary for teachers to complete the Pupil Profile if it is to evolve with the pupil and commented on the need for thorough training.
- 3.156 **CnaG** commented on the importance of appropriate careers advice in facilitating choices of educational pathway.
- 3.157 The **Teacher Unions** that responded on this issue recognised a need for ongoing dialogue between schools, parents and pupils and the desirability of flexible pathways, with **UTU** highlighting the resource implications of preparing for, and conducting, such interviews. It

stated that there must be real opportunities to transfer between schools/campuses when pupils decide that a particular pathway is unsuitable, though there should be controls to ensure that this is not abused. **NASUWT** questioned how the movement of pupils between schools would sit alongside specific admissions criteria applied rigorously to specific post-primary schools.

- 3.158 **ATL** recognised that the final decision about a pupil's future educational provision should rest with the parent and pupil and the school has a very important role to play, but it queried who will monitor what is happening. It suggested the establishment of a panel of independent personnel to observe and evaluate all procedures i.e. a Central Body with responsibility for the whole of Northern Ireland. **INTO** and **NASUWT** considered it unnecessary to add ELB advice into the process. **NASUWT** expressed concern at the potential devaluing of careers advice delivered by teachers in situations where it conflicts with advice provided by the Careers Service.
- 3.159 **GTCNI** felt that these issues should be dealt with within an educational framework which focuses on the promotion of lifelong learning. Such a framework would enable pupils to map out their learning routes, whether academic, vocational or both.
- 3.160 **AHTSS** stated that the school to which a pupil is admitted at age 11 should be the school at which the pupil completes his/her secondary education, with an opportunity at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 to review progress and consider choices and options.
- 3.161 Of the **schools** that responded to this issue, there was broad support for the range of information and advice as described in the Consultation Document and there was a general welcome for the focus on increased flexibility.
- 3.162 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** highlighted the importance of good careers education and advice and commented on the need for the Pupil Profile to be used to discuss new and emerging options during the post-primary phase.
- 3.163 **TRC** highlighted the need for guidance to help parents and pupils make appropriate choices, especially at the end of the Key Stages and suggested that independent advice should be available if a parent/pupil is dissatisfied with the advice provided by a school. It felt that pupils should have access to independent counselling/support to provide direction and alleviate anxiety.
- 3.164 **IoD** suggested that pathways for every potential career objective should be mapped out showing qualifications needed, where and how they can be obtained, alternative routes and the qualities required to succeed. Such maps should be available to primary and post-primary schools and careers staff and should give adequate attention to careers in wealth-creating business. Post-primary schools should advise parents how progress can be made through various pathways.

- 3.165 **Sinn Fein** felt that a Localised Partnership Solution model would provide greater fluidity and expand the parameters of choice for parents and pupils.
- 3.166 **UUP** expressed the view that further consideration of education pathways is required i.e. definition of course types, how co-operative arrangements will work, timetabling, transport arrangements, problems in rural communities, how and if shared sectoral responsibilities will work, financial arrangements and responsibilities between schools. It expressed doubt that any such arrangements will be simple and easily understood, which is a requirement of the principles.
- 3.167 **SDLP** agreed with what is proposed but considered that careers provision should be strengthened and there should be more support from the ELBs and the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL's) Careers Service. Pupils should be able to assess realistically their own progress and aspirations in relation to various forms of work.
- 3.168 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, there was broad support for the information and advice as described in the Consultation Document and there was a general welcoming of the focus on increased flexibility. The most common issues raised were as follows:
- ◆ a recognition that changes of educational pathway can be difficult to manage;
 - ◆ a recognition of the potential value to be gained by switching pathway or setting where a child is struggling in educational terms;
 - ◆ a recognition of the value of meetings between schools and parents and the issue of regular progress reports; and
 - ◆ the need for the Pupil Profile to be a record of progress not just up to the point of transfer, but throughout a child's post-primary education.
- 3.169 **NICVA** strongly endorsed the proposal that there should be an opportunity to change educational pathways within a school, or move to a more appropriate setting, especially at the end of Key Stage 3. **NICVA** commented that 14 year old pupils are in a better position to make choices than 10 or 11 year olds and urged that systems be put in place to ensure this is a genuinely pupil-centred system.
- 3.170 **NICCY** expressed the view that mechanisms to involve parents and children should continue throughout post-primary education to ensure that ongoing consultation happens in a meaningful way. It supported a flexible approach to education that acknowledges that every child is different and develops at different rates and agreed that the final decision regarding a child's future educational provision should rest with the parent and young person.

Timetable for the Admissions Process

- 3.171 **The Consultation Document sought views on a broad timetable for the new admissions process. A copy of the proposed timetable is provided at Appendix 2.**
- 3.172 **BELB** stated that the proposed timetable seems appropriate from a logistical viewpoint. **WELB** considered that the timetable is too closely aligned with the present timetable and needs to take more account of the demands on schools and Boards.
- 3.173 **NEELB, SEELB, SELB** and **WELB** expressed concern about the tight deadline for gathering information, publishing and distributing Transfer Booklets, but felt this could be alleviated if the publication and distribution of Transfer Booklets was made less onerous. Strengthened prospectuses and better web-based information would also make the proposed four week discussion period in November more realisable.
- 3.174 They also stated that admission and enrolment numbers need to be agreed by April of the P6 year. They considered that the proposed timetable for receipt and processing of Transfer Forms would be difficult to meet and that the timetable needs to include consideration of compelling individual circumstances. They suggested that schools might issue acceptance letters in order to avoid duplication of effort and reduce costs.
- 3.175 **NEELB** expressed the view that the overlap in proposed dates for the processing of appeals and the gathering of information about admissions criteria for inclusion in the Transfer Booklet, would place a considerable additional burden on the Transfer Section within each Board. **SEELB** and **SELB** also commented on this overlap.
- 3.176 All 5 **ELBs** considered that a deadline of June for appeals would facilitate attendance by schools and parents and would help limit uncertainty for parents.
- 3.177 **BELB** suggested that DE provide guidance to schools on a range of induction processes that could inform parental/pupil choice, such as visits from post-primary teachers and Year 8 pupils to the primary school, co-operative planning of work between Year 7 and Year 8 teachers and buddying of Year 7/Year 8 pupils.
- 3.178 **NEELB** and **SEELB** considered that the organisation of induction activities in May and June may be impractical for post-primary schools due to other pressures with examinations and annual parent meetings. **WELB** considered that the term ‘induction arrangements’ needs to be defined more clearly. It also felt that the timetable for one to one annual parent teacher meetings during May/June is not practical and could put teachers under pressure.
- 3.179 **SEELB, SELB** and **WELB** expressed the view that four weeks in November is not long enough for discussions between schools, parents and pupils. They also noted that in the first year, Transfer Officers will have to manage an overlap of existing and new procedures. All

- admissions timetables will therefore need to be clearly established and integrated. **BELB**, **SEELB**, **SELB** and **WELB** also considered that resources must be made available and appropriate structures must be in place to permit delivery of services.
- 3.180 **CCMS** welcomed the fact that transferring pupils would be informed of their new school earlier which would facilitate any challenges to a decision and allow for an induction process.
- 3.181 **NICIE** broadly welcomed the proposed timetable. However, as December is a busy month for primary schools, it would prefer Principal/parent interviews to be completed by the end of November. It felt that appeal tribunals should finish by the end of May so that all pupils know their allocated school and can benefit from induction programmes.
- 3.182 **CnaG** and **GTCNI** considered the timetable to be fit for purpose, with the exception of the time allowed for discussion between schools, parents and pupils during November.
- 3.183 **ATL**, **INTO**, **UTU** and **AHTSS** offered broad support for the proposed timetable although they raised some concerns.
- 3.184 **ATL** commented on the need for the Year 7 curriculum to be robust and challenging given that this year is a ‘bridging’ year, bringing primary schooling to a close and putting in place an induction programme and state of readiness for post-primary schooling. It would support a centralisation of Pupil Profile data with DE and/or ELBs on an annual basis in order that it would not be amended without due explanation after the decision to transfer has taken place. **INTO** and **NASUWT** expressed the view that post-primary schools should not need to review their admissions criteria in May/June each year. The admissions criteria should be standardised for all schools and administered by a central body.
- 3.185 **NASUWT** expressed concern about DE setting admissions criteria for post-primary schools a full year in advance, with no indication of any opportunity to review these figures. Also, it was concerned that there was no indication as to the criteria DE will use to set these numbers. It expressed surprise that the procedure is dependent on pupils’ attainment at the end of P6, bearing in mind the variability in maturity of young children. Transfer will be in effect based on a pupil’s attainment at the end of P6. It also expressed concern at the assumptions made that schools will continue to run open days/evenings, will move these to the Christmas term and will give up periods of time in the summer term for induction of next year’s pupils. **NASUWT** considered that induction will disrupt both the education of P7 pupils and post-primary pupils and suggested that DE review the proposed timetable in light of these concerns.
- 3.186 **AHTSS** expressed concern at the risk of information overload.
- 3.187 **NAEIIAC** considered that overlap between the old and new procedures may cause undue strain on the system.

- 3.188 Of those **schools** that responded to this question, there was broad support for the proposed timetable, with a number of schools commenting on the benefits of being able to make decisions sooner. Where there was opposition to the proposed timetable, the most common objection was that decisions would be made too soon, ruling out progress made during the P7 year.
- 3.189 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** commented that if the process could be completed in March, it would enable receiving schools to better prepare for new arrivals.
- 3.190 **TRC** acknowledged the need for a timetable of the duration envisaged, because of the large amount of consultation and information retrieval necessary. However, it was concerned that the long time span could unsettle P6/P7 pupils much too soon. TRC was also concerned that if parental discussions were held too early, this may unsettle and put stress on children, and would limit information gleaned from the P7 year, during which many children can develop significantly.
- 3.191 **UUP** considered the proposed admissions timetable too tight and overly ambitious in the context of the broader timetable for introducing new post-primary arrangements, which is considered unrealistic and a source of confusion throughout the system, not least to parents. It expressed concern that the decision about post-primary placement will be made a lot sooner, at the end of the P6 year.
- 3.192 **SDLP** felt that the proposed timetable seemed sensible and logical.
- 3.193 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this question, there was general opposition to the proposed timetable, with the most common issues being that the timetable was unrealistic and that decisions would be made too soon, ruling out progress made during the P7 year. Some concern was also raised that there would be insufficient time to develop the Pupil Profile before 2008 and that the proposed induction period was too long.
- 3.194 **Barnardo's** welcomed the proposed timetable and commented that the earlier confirmation of a place will play a positive role in creating a smooth transition to post-primary education.
- 3.195 Feedback from **young people** involved in **focus group** discussions facilitated by PwC highlighted a desire to shorten the length of time involved in the entire transfer process and offer more time for induction towards the end of P7. In particular, the young people felt the three month period between completing the Transfer Form and receiving the letter notifying pupils of their post-primary destination should be shortened. Induction activities were generally considered to be useful.

CHAPTER 4

PUPILS WITH COMPELLING INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR A STATEMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED

- 4.1 **The Consultation Document proposed that special consideration should be given to cases of compelling individual circumstances i.e. circumstances affecting a child that are so compelling that they necessitate the child’s attendance at a particular named school, rather than any other school. Cases most likely to be considered are those involving ‘looked after children’ and children who have a serious medical illness. The Consultation Document sought views on the types of cases which should be considered as compelling individual circumstances.**
- 4.2 All 5 **ELBs** felt that the proposed system should retain sufficient flexibility to allow for all potential cases. **BELB** and **WELB** felt that in most instances, the education system should be aware of such cases at an early stage through the Pupil Profile and that tightly defining the criteria would prevent an unwarranted growth in claims in P6 and P7. For this reason, **BELB** questioned the need for the involvement of other statutory agencies.
- 4.3 **NEELB** felt that this category should include children who are undergoing statutory assessment for their special educational needs (SEN) but do not have a statement at the time the transfer procedure begins.
- 4.4 **CCMS**, **NICIE** and **GTCNI** emphasised the need for clear criteria/guidelines in such cases, but agreed that drawing up a definitive list would be difficult.
- 4.5 **CnaG** agreed with the listed likely cases, but in cases where a child attends an Irish-medium primary school, he/she should be able to transfer to the post-primary school with the best available Irish-medium provision.
- 4.6 **NAEIAC** agreed that new arrangements need to be flexible enough to cater for individual circumstances but not so loose as to provide opportunities to abuse the new admissions procedure. This concern about possible abuse of the system was also raised by **ATL**, responses from **schools**, **DUP**, **UUP** and the **Children’s Law Centre**. It was felt that specific guidelines and safeguards would be needed to clearly define and strictly limit relevant cases to prevent this abuse. **ATL** supported the proposed arrangements, provided that pupils’ compelling individual circumstances are identified by the pupil’s teacher.
- 4.7 **AHTSS** felt that children with compelling individual circumstances can be adequately catered for within the current SEN provision and **NASUWT** felt that any attempt to depart from the standardised admissions criteria should be resisted.

- 4.8 **GBA** emphasised that the criteria for assessing cases should be stringent and applied consistently.
- 4.9 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** felt that provision for children with compelling individual circumstances should be very limited and depend clearly on the needs of the child rather than the needs of the parents.
- 4.10 **TRC** expressed concern that provision for children with compelling individual circumstances was not adequately funded and would have a detrimental effect on other pupils.
- 4.11 **DUP** and **SDLP** agreed that in such cases strong, supporting evidence of a medical and/or educational nature would be required.
- 4.12 **Barnardo's** felt that the system's ability to respond flexibly to individual cases would depend on the child having an advocate who was familiar with the system.
- 4.13 **NIHRC** supported the types of cases listed, but recommended that additional categories be considered, including children who have been the victims of bullying or intimidation, children of migrant workers or asylum seekers and children from the Traveller community. **NICCY** also suggested that cases of bullying should be considered as compelling individual circumstances, but supported the view that the list should not be restrictive.

Compelling individual circumstances - supernumerary

- 4.14 **The Consultation Document proposed that in cases where children are assessed as having compelling individual circumstances, they should be supernumerary i.e. over and above the normal admissions and enrolment numbers of the particular school. Alternatively, such cases could be included in admissions numbers before the process begins; those for whom compelling individual circumstances arise after the process has begun would be counted as supernumerary.**
- 4.15 **The Consultation Document sought views on whether pupils admitted under this category should be counted as supernumerary.**
- 4.16 **BELB, CnaG, UTU, GBA** and the **Northern Catholic Bishops** agreed that this category of pupils should be supernumerary. There was also broad support for this from **schools, parents/members of the general public, DUP, the Equality Commission** and **NIHRC**. Reasons given to support this view included the belief that while the needs of the individual children would be addressed, the number of such cases would be small and the impact on schools and other pupils would be limited.

- 4.17 **NEELB** felt that such pupils should be supernumerary only in the year of enrolment and **SELB** felt that the issue should be considered in the context of the SENDO legislation and the policy of inclusion generally.
- 4.18 **SEELB, WELB, NAEIAC** and **UUP** felt that such pupils should not be supernumerary. Reasons given included the possible negative impact on class sizes and on neighbouring schools that might result from the inclusion of supernumerary pupils.
- 4.19 **CCMS, ATL, INTO, AHTSS, TRC** and **SDLP** felt that such cases should not be supernumerary but should be considered first, outside the admissions process. **CCMS, NICIE** and **SDLP** felt that those cases which arise after the transfer process had begun should be supernumerary.
- 4.20 All 5 **ELBs** recommended that DE should examine the timing of the consideration of these cases and how this fits into the proposed timetable for the admissions arrangements. All of the **ELBs** and **CCMS** raised concerns on the possible impact on class sizes that such cases would have if they are considered as supernumerary.
- 4.21 **CnaG, ATL, GTCNI** and **NIHRC** stated that appropriate levels of additional resources must be provided to schools admitting children with compelling individual circumstances.

Board of Governors/Central Panel to consider cases of compelling individual circumstances

- 4.22 **The Department sought views on whether individual Boards of Governors or a Central Panel should consider cases of compelling individual circumstances. It was proposed that a Central Panel could bring consistency, objectivity and expertise to the process and could comprise a medical practitioner, an educationalist and a social worker. Criteria would be drawn up to assist the Central Panel in the decision-making process.**
- 4.23 The 5 **ELBs, CCMS,** and **schools** supported the proposal for a Central Panel and recommended that a regional pool of Panel members from the relevant professional backgrounds be set up. **BELB** recommended that Panel members should undergo common, quality assured, training and that the Panel should take account of the opinion of the individual school Principal/Board of Governors in question.
- 4.24 **SEELB** and **WELB** felt that clarification should be given as to whether there would be a right of appeal against the Central Panel's decision. **NICIE** and **NIHRC** felt that there should be such a right of appeal.
- 4.25 **CnaG** and **GTCNI** felt that Boards of Governors should make judgements in such cases in the first instance, with appropriate support/information from the relevant **ELB**. Where this was not feasible, a Central Panel should review the cases.

- 4.26 **CnaG** suggested that the size and membership of this Panel should be decided by the relevant ELB. **NICIE** stated that it would be important to the integrated sector that any Panel would include members of other school governing bodies.
- 4.27 **ATL, INTO, UUP** and the **Children’s Law Centre** agreed that common criteria should be drawn up to assist the Panel to make fair and consistent decisions. **ATL, INTO** and **NASUWT** stressed the need for meaningful consultation with the education partners in drawing up these criteria. The Children’s Law Centre felt that any criteria drawn up should be the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) prior to any such consultation.
- 4.28 **TRC** agreed that a Central Panel would be appropriate in such cases provided budgetary concerns are not the predominant factor in making decisions.
- 4.29 Opinion among the **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this question was mixed, with support for both the Boards of Governors and the Central Panel. Reasons given by those who supported the idea of a Central Panel included the objectivity and consistency that they believed such a Panel would bring to the process. Arguments in favour of the Boards of Governors option included the opinion that Boards of Governors were best placed to consider cases in the light of the resources available to the school. Suggestions for the membership of the Central Panel included a medical representative, social worker and a teacher or Principal.
- 4.30 **Barnardo’s, the Equality Commission, NIHRC** and **NICCY** stated that the decision process in these cases should allow for the child’s right to be heard. **NIHRC** and **NICCY** suggested that DE should look at ways in which children and parents could be independently represented at Panel hearings.
- 4.31 **Mencap** suggested that parents should also be members of any established Central Panel.

Statemented Children

- 4.32 **The Consultation Document sought views on whether pupils with a statement of SEN should continue to be admitted as supernumerary to schools’ admissions and enrolment numbers. A suggested alternative to the current arrangements would be to include statemented pupils in admissions numbers before the transfer process begins; those statemented during the process would be counted as supernumerary.**
- 4.33 **BELB, NEELB, SEELB, SELB, NAEIAC, INTO, GBA, schools, the Northern Catholic Bishops** and **parents/members of the general public** all felt that the present arrangements should continue with statemented pupils counted as supernumerary. **TRC** felt that such pupils should be supernumerary for one year only.

- 4.34 **BELB** stated that the inclusion of statemented pupils should not diminish the allocation of resources available to other pupils and recognised the potential of the statementing process to be regarded as an alternative means of securing a desired place.
- 4.35 **NEELB** suggested that, as an alternative to such pupils being counted as supernumerary, schools be allowed an additional percentage of statemented places to ensure equitable distribution.
- 4.36 **SEELB** and **SELB** stated that, while such pupils should remain supernumerary, schools should be able to take into account statemented pupils when considering admissions requests to a year group.
- 4.37 **SEELB** stated that DE should regularly review schools' admission and enrolment numbers, physical capacity and the actual numbers of statemented pupils present.
- 4.38 **WELB, NICIE, CnaG, GTCNI, AHTSS** and the **Equality Commission** supported the proposal that statemented pupils should be included in a schools' admissions number before the transfer process begins. Pupils statemented after the process begins should then be counted as supernumerary.
- 4.39 **CCMS** felt that statemented pupils meeting a school's general admissions criteria should apply through normal procedures, though where this is not the case, they should be counted as supernumerary. The school's enrolment number should include them in the year after they have entered.
- 4.40 **ATL** felt that statemented pupils should not count as supernumerary and that there should be a fair distribution of statemented pupils across all post-primary schools. Schools should be provided with ring-fenced funding in support of such pupils.
- 4.41 **UUP** stated that pupils with statements should not be supernumerary. **SDLP** stated that statemented pupils should be treated as supernumerary before and after the transfer process to ensure that they gain a place at the school of their choice.
- 4.42 **WELB** stated that the number of statemented pupils in a school should reflect the number of such pupils in a school's community.
- 4.43 **NICIE** supported setting a limit on the number of statemented pupils that could be admitted to a school, e.g. 2-3%. Schools would be permitted to exceed this limit, but they would not be compelled to.
- 4.44 The possible impact of the SENDO legislation on this question was highlighted by **BELB, NASUWT, ATL** and **NIHRC**. **UTU** and the **Children's Law Centre** also expressed concern at how schools would cope with increased numbers of statemented pupils. **UTU** felt

that if statemented children are classified as supernumerary, a formula should be agreed to increase schools' staffing levels to support the pupils.

- 4.45 **Mencap** stated that whichever option is eventually chosen, DE should demonstrate that it promotes equality of opportunity for statemented children and their parents to take part in the transfer process.

CHAPTER 5

ADMISSIONS CRITERIA FOR OVERSUBSCRIBED SCHOOLS

5.1 **The Consultation Document identified a range of criteria which could be included in the menu of admissions criteria. They fell under the following broad categories:**

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

Family-Focused Criteria

5.2 **The Consultation Document sought views on the family-focused criteria listed i.e. siblings currently at the school and eldest or only child, and their inclusion within a menu.**

5.3 **BELB** agreed that there is a need to establish criteria that focuses on ‘family education’ but felt that this area requires further clarification. It felt that the criterion ‘siblings currently at the school’ only works for the first generation of families. It noted that other family connections i.e. mother/uncle were not considered despite their previous importance in decision-making.

5.4 **NEELB** and **SELB** agreed that there are practical reasons for giving preference to families with pupils at the school. **SEELB** agreed that schools should be family-focused and with the two criteria listed. **WELB** agreed that the criteria listed should be included to keep family units together and for practical and ecological reasons.

5.5 **NEELB**, **SEELB** and **SELB** questioned the rationale behind giving the eldest child priority over a child whose siblings previously attended the school.

5.6 All 5 **ELBs** agreed that the term ‘eldest child’ requires careful definition to ensure a child is not disadvantaged because the older sibling has a statement of special educational need.

5.7 **CCMS** agreed that admissions criteria should not break up families and it would give highest priority to siblings of children attending the school. In increasingly complicated domestic arrangements, schools and parents need the term ‘sibling’ clearly identified and enshrined in regulations. It would have sympathy with siblings of children who previously attended the school but would see no merit in any other family relationship as a principal criterion. It felt

that children of all employees could also be included as a family-friendly policy and this would have relatively little impact on admissions numbers. Guidance would be required regarding what is meant by an employee.

- 5.8 **NICIE** generally welcomed this category but felt that it was unfair to exclude siblings who formerly attended the school, especially in the context of ‘second families’. It also supported the inclusion of ‘parent is an employee or governor of the school’ to acknowledge the contribution that individuals make to the school community.
- 5.9 **CnaG** stated that significant use is already made of family-focused criteria and they should be included in the menu.
- 5.10 **ATL** supported this category but felt that a school is there to serve all siblings, even if older children in the family have left the school. **INTO** felt that this category was not necessary. **UTU** agreed with the criteria listed and felt they should have a high priority in any list of criteria.
- 5.11 **GTCNI** considered the criteria to be appropriate but suggested that the exclusion of siblings who formerly attended the school could weaken family ties which are significant for many schools.
- 5.12 **GBA** welcomed this category but considered the criteria listed to be insufficient. It felt this category should also include: siblings who formerly attended the school; children of current permanent employees; pupils enrolled in recognised feeder schools; pupils who have particular skills or aptitudes in areas in which the school specialises; pupils whose parents either wish to have or need boarding education; and pupils whose parents have expressed a preference for the particular type, ethos or religious affiliation of the school.
- 5.13 **AHTSS** had serious concerns that the interests of an individual child could take precedence over the best interests of all children.
- 5.14 **NAEIAC** felt that family-focused criteria should predominate with appropriate safeguards to prevent specific cases of disadvantage regarding single-sex schools and where the older/eldest sibling has a statement of special educational need.
- 5.15 Of the **schools** that responded to this issue, there was broad support for this category to be included in a menu of admissions criteria. The main issue raised by primary and grammar schools was that the category should include siblings previously at the school.
- 5.16 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** felt that it was desirable for siblings to study together and felt that giving preference to siblings of former pupils could disadvantage/discriminate against others.
- 5.17 **TRC** considered the two criteria listed to be essential if schools are to be family-focused.

- 5.18 **IoD** was not attracted to family-focused criteria as such criteria imply that what is best for the eldest child is also best for younger brothers and sisters.
- 5.19 **Sinn Fein** was broadly happy with the proposed criteria.
- 5.20 **UUP** agreed that the criteria listed should be included in a menu but felt that schools should be able to decide the exact nature of such criteria and whether it should be extended to include siblings of past pupils. It felt that this criterion should not override the matching of pupil to school on the basis of ability and aptitude.
- 5.21 **SDLP** supported this category as the family is the basic building block of society and it is important to keep families together. It suggested that some recognition could be given to applicants whose siblings formerly attended the school although at a lower level of priority. It also supported eldest/only child as a criterion to ensure that pupils without older siblings are not disadvantaged.
- 5.22 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, there was broad agreement that this category should be included in a menu of admissions criteria in order to support the family and to take account of practical considerations. However, a number of other issues were raised including the following: that the first criterion should be based on the child's suitability for the school; and that this category should include wider family relations, siblings previously at the school, parents who were former pupils and children of a member of staff or Board of Governors.
- 5.23 **UFU** considered the use of this criteria to be relevant.
- 5.24 **Barnardo's** felt strongly that the decision about which post-primary school a child attends should be based on what is best suited to the child's needs. Using the siblings criterion may skew decision-making in favour of what suits the sibling group, rather than what is best for the individual child. Families should be free to choose schools for each individual child without concern about how this decision will impact on younger family members.
- 5.25 **NICCY** agreed that these criteria reflect a family and child-friendly approach but felt they do not necessarily put the child's educational needs at the centre of the process.
- 5.26 **NIHRC** agreed that family-focused criteria have practical advantages for the family and that the school community also benefits from an increased sense of identification and loyalty. However, in the first 5-10 years of the new arrangements, pupils who do not have a family member at the school will not have an equal opportunity to attend the school of choice and children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds who are minimally represented in the present grammar school system will continue to be disadvantaged. Family connections should therefore be a consideration in the admissions procedure but not the determinant and a

review should take place of the equality impact of whatever weighting is given to family connections.

- 5.27 The **Children’s Law Centre** recognised the practical advantages in keeping siblings together, but had some concerns regarding equality of access to school of choice. It was concerned that some children may be discriminated against in situations where their elder sibling(s) did not attend the school of their preference or had very different individual educational needs or where the child is from a socially and economically deprived background and is the first in the family to require different educational provision. It felt that DE’s failure to provide equality of access to an effective education could result in legal challenges.

Community-Based Criteria

- 5.28 **The Consultation Document sought views on the community-based criteria listed i.e. feeder primary schools and parish, their inclusion within a menu and how they should be defined.**
- 5.29 **BELB** was concerned that the use of a feeder primary school criterion could be used to perpetuate exclusivity unless feeder primary schools are based on locality. It explained that, within Belfast, schools can attract pupils from many feeder primaries and the notion of ‘educational community’ requires further scrutiny to take into account factors such as new housing areas, the migrating population from Belfast, accessibility of transportation and the parental work journey. The parish criterion may be acceptable as all communities can subscribe to ‘parish’ boundaries and there are no significant gaps or anomalies. The current school ‘community’ label needs to be challenged and clearly defined.
- 5.30 **NEELB, SELB and WELB** broadly supported the concept of feeder primary schools but felt that the parish criterion presents practical difficulties as boundaries can be difficult to define, in some cases there is more than one post-primary school in a parish and the criterion is currently restricted to one sector only.
- 5.31 **SEELB** acknowledged that many schools serve their local community and broadly supported the criteria. It agreed that schools should not name so many feeder primary schools or parishes that the criteria become meaningless or some primary schools are inadvertently excluded.
- 5.32 **WELB** suggested that schools should be able to use the criteria listed if they so wish, and that the determining of feeder primary schools should be overseen by a central body. It also suggested that the term ‘local community’ needs to be defined as it can take on different meanings in rural and urban areas. It stated that, whilst there are benefits in pupils mixing with other pupils from further afield, generally pupils should be facilitated at their local school to reduce travelling time.

- 5.33 All 5 **ELBs** suggested that DE provide guidance regarding the designation of feeder primary schools and parish areas to ensure compliance with equality legislation.
- 5.34 **CCMS** stated its strong identification with the concept of parish as Catholic Maintained schools have a history and tradition of identification with their parish community. This use of parish defines a locality and applicants from outside the parish or defined local community should not displace a child from within the local community. It would prefer the use of the home as a community identifier rather than the use of feeder primary schools.
- 5.35 **NICIE** suggested there was an overlap between the community-based and geographical criteria. It was concerned that the use of feeder primary schools and parish in the controlled and maintained sectors would reduce the potential for young people to attend schools which are outside of their immediate community, which will further consolidate sectoral-based schooling. It would argue strongly that pupils who have attended an integrated primary school should be able to attend an integrated post-primary school.
- 5.36 **CnaG** felt that the definition of a community should be broad enough to include the Irish-speaking community, even when this community is throughout the region. It is important that certain schools are not exempt from the list of feeder primary schools e.g. Irish-medium schools and schools on the periphery.
- 5.37 **ATL, INTO** and **NASUWT** supported the use of feeder primary schools but not the use of parish. They suggested there should be meaningful consultation with the education partners on the guidance for determining feeder schools to ensure that a socially balanced intake of pupils is achieved, that the catchment area of a post-primary school is not re-drawn each year and that openness and transparency are evident in all cases.
- 5.38 **UTU** stated that these criteria were less acceptable than the family-focused criteria in that there is the potential for them to perpetuate existing social bias. If post-primary schools name a large number of feeder schools, the criterion could be rendered meaningless in dealing with oversubscription.
- 5.39 **GTCNI** agreed that it was appropriate to include community-based criteria in keeping with the principle that schools normally serve local communities. However, it stated that defining ‘community’ in terms of parishes or feeder primary schools will be a significant challenge for schools and the wider service.
- 5.40 **GBA** stated that feeder primary schools should not be defined simply or solely in terms of those schools in the immediate locality or geographical vicinity of the post-primary school.
- 5.41 **AHTSS** had reservations about using feeder primary schools as a criterion as there is potential for social selection in some cases. However, it regarded the use of parishes or some equivalent acceptable in defining the local community.

- 5.42 **NAEIAC** agreed with the concept of community-based schools and felt this community structure should be reflected in relation to feeder primary schools.
- 5.43 Of the **schools** that responded to this issue, there was broad support for the inclusion of this category in a menu, although some grammar schools felt that feeder primary schools should not have to be local.
- 5.44 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** stated that parish identity remains an important element, particularly in rural areas and needs to be recognised.
- 5.45 **TRC** felt that it was extremely important that all sections of the community have a school within a reasonable travelling distance with an ethos they can support and identify with. Criteria in relation to feeder primary schools need to be effective, fair and transparent. It also felt that schools should be able to give a preference to pupils transferring from primary schools in their particular sector.
- 5.46 **DUP** and **UUP** both suggested that the community-based category was geographical and the DUP questioned how this could take into account the educational needs of the child.
- 5.47 **Sinn Fein** expressed concern about the use of feeder schools and stressed the importance of ensuring that the system is not open to abuse and that schools do not ‘cherry pick’ pupils to maintain their current academic profile.
- 5.48 **SDLP** supported feeder primary schools and would hope that, as parents gain confidence in the new system, they would opt to send their children to the local school. It agreed that DE needs to provide guidance regarding the designation of feeder schools and parish areas to ensure the criteria are effective, fair and transparent. It stressed that, during the first few years, the list of feeder schools would need to remain geographically expansive for all schools otherwise it may be perceived that those living further away from an existing grammar school are being disadvantaged.
- 5.49 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, different views were expressed about whether this category should be included in a menu. Those who agreed with its inclusion, suggested that community-based criteria acknowledges that many schools serve their local community. Those who did not support this category, raised the following issues:
- ◆ ‘community’ is broader than local community and schools should be allowed to define the community and to continue drawing pupils from a wide geographical area;
 - ◆ it is too difficult to limit the number of feeder primary schools as schools draw from a wide area;

- ◆ there is a need for pupils from different geographical, religious, political and economic backgrounds to be educated together; and
 - ◆ this category will lead to selection by post-code which will disadvantage the less well-off.
- 5.50 **NICVA** supported the use of feeder schools only if a socially-balanced intake can be achieved by prioritising pupils from a mix of prosperous and disadvantaged areas.
- 5.51 **UFU** welcomed the acknowledgement that schools generally serve a local community but felt further clarification is required on how feeder primary schools would work in practice. It was concerned that rural schools will feature further down the list of feeder schools or may not be classified as feeder schools due to small pupil numbers. It was also concerned that parents may move children to primary schools to ensure places at certain post-primary schools which could result in oversubscription at those schools as well as declining numbers in smaller rural schools and school closures.
- 5.52 **Mencap** felt that all schools, including relevant special schools, should be identified as feeder schools.
- 5.53 **Barnardo's**, **Save the Children** and the **Children's Law Centre** were concerned that primary schools listed as feeders may become oversubscribed and primary schools attended by disadvantaged children may be excluded from feeder lists of popular/oversubscribed schools. The Children's Law Centre and Save the Children suggested that DE should choose feeder schools to ensure a balance in terms of socio-economic background.
- 5.54 Save the Children and the Children's Law Centre expressed concern that the parish criterion could result in possible religious/race discrimination as parish is not a uniform concept for all denominations across Northern Ireland and may be irrelevant to those with no religious affiliation. They suggested there could also be problems regarding the demarcation of parish boundaries. Barnardo's sought further information as to how sectors, other than the Catholic Maintained sector, would use the parish criterion.
- 5.55 **NICCY** was concerned that, where post-primary schools select their traditional or new feeders, the interests of the child would take a back seat to the interests of the post-primary school.
- 5.56 The **Equality Commission** stated that the community-based criteria would reinforce existing social and economic divisions through post-code selection which will limit options. It suggested that DE should review the possibility of a system whereby schools allocate a proportion of places to children of lower socio-economic groups.
- 5.57 **NIHRC** recommended that feeder schools should not be used if a geographical catchment criterion is applied. It suggested that if the feeder school option is retained, there should be

an equitable representation of schools with a high proportion of children from socially deprived backgrounds. It stated that catchment areas defined by parish boundaries will not give consistent outcomes in terms of area and population and are currently used only by the maintained sector.

Geographical Criteria

- 5.58 **The Consultation Document sought views on the geographical criteria listed i.e. school-centred catchment and child-centred catchment, their inclusion within a menu and the most appropriate means of operating them. The Document also sought views on what percentage limit, if any, should be set for places allocated by geographical criteria.**
- 5.59 All 5 ELBs preferred the child-centred catchment over school-centred catchment as each child would be given priority at one nearest suitable school and they felt it better reflects the principle of putting the child's interests at the centre of the decision-making. **BELB**, **NEELB** and **SEELB** agreed that a child should be supported in attending their local school. BELB felt this would be particularly desirable in remote and/or rural localities and SEELB agreed that there would be benefits for pupils' health and also benefits in terms of practicality and cost.
- 5.60 The 5 ELBs did not support the school-centred catchment criterion. BELB, SEELB and SELB were concerned that this would result in selection by post-code, some areas could be omitted and there could be overlapping boundaries. NEELB was concerned that it would reinforce social divisions within education.
- 5.61 All of the ELBs stated that percentage limits would be difficult to apply and likely to result in an increase in appeals due to their non-transparent nature, although **WELB** suggested there is some merit in this approach as a means of ensuring a more representative intake of pupils.
- 5.62 **CCMS** supported the use of child-centred catchment as opposed to school-centred catchment and added health benefits to the practicality and cost benefits already identified by DE. It stated that DE needs to define what is meant by 'nearest suitable school'.
- 5.63 **NICIE** supported the concept that a school serves the local community and can promote local community cohesion but had concerns about the use of geographical criteria. It was concerned about the term 'local' in relation to catchment areas as the local community for an integrated school may differ significantly from other sectors. It stated there would be problems operating a school-centred catchment for integrated schools as children regularly travel long distances to attend integrated schools so it would be difficult to identify a realistic catchment area. In relation to child-centred catchments, it would have concerns about how catchment boundaries would be measured and drawn up and how integrated schools would be able to provide clear maps for parents. It stated it would be impossible for integrated

schools to guarantee priority to any child even within an agreed catchment, since entry to all schools must be predicated upon the school's ability to maintain a religious balance.

- 5.64 **CnaG** supported the child-centred catchment criterion but felt there would be practical difficulties in operating a percentage limit.
- 5.65 **ATL** and **INTO** supported the use of school-centred catchment and then child-centred catchment to be applied respectively. **ATL** raised questions of what maps would be used, how distances would be measured and whether a panel made up of governors, parents and teachers should determine the school's catchment area to ensure transparency. Both **ATL** and **INTO** felt that percentage limits should not be necessary using this approach.
- 5.66 **NASUWT** stated that geographical criteria was acceptable, provided the post-primary school had a socially balanced mix of pupils.
- 5.67 **UTU** agreed that some element of geographical determinant should be included to ensure that the majority of children who choose to do so may attend their local school and so that the rural community can feel confident that they will receive parity of treatment. It therefore suggested that the child-centred catchment criterion should be compulsory for all schools and should be applied after family-focused criteria to ensure that every child has a fair chance of getting their closest suitable school.
- 5.68 **GTCNI** contended that school-centred catchments would be complex, possibly bureaucratic and could lead to political and legal disputes. They could also undermine the principle of putting the interests of the child at the centre. It suggested that the child-centred catchment criterion is more in keeping with the overall philosophy of the Consultation Document and might be viewed favourably by the Integrated and Irish-medium sectors. It felt it would be difficult to draw up geographical catchment areas given the numbers of pupils travelling long distances to school and that schools would require assistance in drawing clear maps.
- 5.69 **GBA** stated that it was difficult to distinguish between community-based and geographical criteria and that the proposed criteria will drive parents to limit their preference to the nearest post-primary school, whether they deem it 'suitable' or not.
- 5.70 **AHTSS** supported a child being given priority in his/her closest school and suggested that, where parents do not choose the local school, they should bear any additional transport costs.
- 5.71 **NAEIAC** supported the child-centred catchment criterion which places the individual child at the heart of the process. It suggested that post-code selection may be alleviated by having neighbouring schools with common catchment areas and ensuring criteria applicable to the child and parental preference take precedence.

- 5.72 Of the **schools** that responded to this issue, there was broad opposition to the inclusion of a geographical criterion in the menu, the main concern being that it could result in selection by post-code.
- 5.73 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** considered local identity to be important but was concerned that, in order to increase real choice, geographical criteria should not have undue prominence. It suggested that, if all schools become local schools, there is no real choice in relation to matching pupils to schools.
- 5.74 **TRC** preferred the child-centred catchment criterion.
- 5.75 **IoD** was opposed to geographical criteria being a dominant part of the process because it believes they deny children access to schools which offer an education most suited to their needs and they could force parents to move house to access a school of their choice.
- 5.76 **DUP** stated that 3 of the 4 categories in the community and geographic sections are based on locality. It stated these do not take into account the educational needs of the child, will result in all-ability neighbourhood comprehensive schools, increased oversubscription and academically able children from working class backgrounds will be disadvantaged.
- 5.77 **Sinn Fein** stressed that geographical criteria should not create artificial areas of exclusivity and that robust measures need to be put in place to ensure that this is not the case.
- 5.78 **UUP** stated that there was no distinction between geographical and community-based criteria as both relate to distance from the school. It was concerned that, with the removal of the Transfer Tests, many schools, particularly grammar schools, will be heavily oversubscribed and the proposals mean that distance would be used to select a significant number of pupils. UUP contended that selection by post-code would replace academic selection which would be unsatisfactory and not in the best interests of pupils.
- 5.79 **SDLP** supported the child-centred catchment criterion as it felt it seeks to give every child priority at their closest school and is particularly suitable for the Integrated and Irish-medium sectors where provision is not at the same level as in other sectors.
- 5.80 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, there was some support for the child-centred catchment criterion. However, it was generally felt that geographical criteria should not be included in the menu and the following main reasons were given:
- ◆ there is too much emphasis in the admissions criteria on distance and proximity;
 - ◆ it will result in selection by post-code;
 - ◆ there will be discrimination based on where people live, particularly against pupils in rural areas;

- ◆ imposing geographical constraints is counterproductive to cultural and social diversity; and
 - ◆ use of this criterion will result in a failed comprehensive system.
- 5.81 The definition of the term ‘suitable school’ was also raised, with suggestions that this should include grammar and single-sex schools.
- 5.82 **NICVA** stated that studies have shown that geographical criteria lead to higher house prices and reduce the opportunity for poorer families to access more effective schools. It argued that more intervention is necessary to counter selection by post-code. Consideration should be given to providing additional resources to assist schools in deprived areas.
- 5.83 **UFU** agreed that there are some benefits in children attending their nearest school, in terms of practicality and cost. However, the top priority should be the suitability of the school. It stressed that the use of geographical criteria is totally unacceptable, will disadvantage rural children and also goes against the principle that the arrangements should *“be fair and free from any bias or indirect discrimination against particular groups or individuals.”*
- 5.84 **Barnardo’s** expressed concern that the school-centred catchment criterion could perpetuate the inequality already experienced by disadvantaged communities and that there should be further discussion about how catchment boundaries would be drawn up and who would be responsible for this.
- 5.85 In relation to the child-centred catchment criterion, **Barnardo’s** suggested that further clarification is needed about how the closest suitable school would be decided upon and by whom and suggested there may be disagreement between a parent and the post-primary school about which is the closest suitable school. **Barnardo’s** and the **Children’s Law Centre** had concerns regarding access to a school of preference for children in rural areas. The Children’s Law Centre suggested that distance should not be a deciding factor in respect of the suitability of a school and that one form of social segregation should not be replaced with another.
- 5.86 **NICCY** was concerned that geographical criteria may reduce choice for parents and children who at present are prepared to travel to access the school of their choice. It suggested the child-centred catchment criterion would provide the most solid base in human rights terms for decision-making and would put the child at the centre of the process. However, it cautioned that this may be diluted if some children are directed to schools that are not equipped to meet their needs because the school is poorly resourced. In order to ensure real choice, schools need to be properly resourced and supported to provide for the diverse needs of pupils.
- 5.87 **Save the Children** stated that if geographical criteria are used, **DE**, not individual schools, should draw up the catchment areas to ensure genuine choice for children and parents.

Schools should be able to exceed their quota in order to accommodate children arriving in the area, to ensure that refugee and asylum seeking children, migrant children, children of armed forces and Traveller children are not disadvantaged by geographical criteria.

- 5.88 The **Equality Commission** contended that geographical criteria will reinforce existing social and economic divisions through post-code selection, which will limit options.
- 5.89 **NIHRC** recommended that, from a cost perspective, schools should serve geographical catchment areas where possible. Geographical catchments should be defined by an independent body, should be reasonably consistent in extent, and should include a fair representation of areas which are defined as socially disadvantaged. Schools should not be allowed to apply so restrictive a catchment boundary that it perpetuates existing socio-economic disparities.

Tiebreakers

- 5.90 **The Consultation Document sought views on the tiebreakers listed i.e. random selection and proximity from home to school, as a means of admitting pupils down to the last available place; the most appropriate means of operating random selection and/or measuring proximity; and whether schools should be free to use different methods of operating random selection or proximity.**

Random Selection

- 5.91 All 5 **ELBs** indicated that random selection was the preferred option and that all schools should use the same method. **NEELB, SEELB, SELB** and **WELB** suggested using the surname and **BELB** suggested that the process should be computer-based.
- 5.92 **CCMS** would support random selection based on surname, although it recognised that it is arbitrary and there can be difficulties with common surnames.
- 5.93 **NICIE** supported random selection based on alphabetical order of surname. It suggested that a small working party comprising all the education partners could agree guidelines on how this might operate to ensure consistency and fairness across all schools.
- 5.94 **CnaG** did not support random selection as it felt it would not be fair or usable.
- 5.95 **ATL, INTO, NASUWT, GTCNI** and **UFU** supported random selection. **ATL** and **INTO** suggested that it should be carried out by a central body to ensure consistency, fairness and transparency and that schools should not be free to use different methods of operating random selection.

- 5.96 **AHTSS** considered random selection to be the most appropriate tiebreaker to ensure fairness, equality and transparency. It stressed that the method of operating random selection should be standard for all schools and random letter generation would be the most appropriate method.
- 5.97 Of the **schools** that responded to this issue, there was some support expressed for random selection.
- 5.98 **TRC** supported random selection based on the initial of the surname on the birth certificate. It suggested that if this was published in advance and changed annually it would be the most appropriate, fair and transparent method, enabling parents to plan in advance.
- 5.99 **SDLP** stated that computerised random selection is the fairest and most objective tiebreaker. All schools should use the same method according to guidelines outlined by DE and it should be administered by a central panel.
- 5.100 **UUP** was opposed to any form of random selection.
- 5.101 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, different views were expressed about random selection. The main views expressed were that education should not be decided on a lottery and that if random selection was used, it should be computer-based to ensure consistency.
- 5.102 **NIHRC** recommended the use of random selection from within geographical catchment areas, drawn so as to include a mixed social base. It stated that all children within a defined geographical area should have an equal opportunity to attend the school of their choice.
- 5.103 The **Children’s Law Centre** did not support the use of tiebreakers and felt that random selection would have implications in the interests of fairness.

Proximity from home to school

- 5.104 All 5 **ELBs** were concerned that distance could be contentious, expensive if independently measured and likely to delay decisions. **SEELB** suggested it could disadvantage those children in rural areas or those not living within close proximity to post-primary schools. **WELB** stated that post-code selection should be discouraged.
- 5.105 **CCMS** would support proximity to school as it believed it has the advantage of minimising travel distance. It suggested that DE should indicate which methods of measurement are acceptable as one way may be suitable for some schools but not others and schools need to be satisfied they can apply the criterion uniformly and verifiably.

- 5.106 **CnaG** supported the use of proximity from home to school. It suggested DE should advise schools how this should be measured and the method should be agreed by all partners involved.
- 5.107 **ATL** supported proximity from home to school but suggested that schools should not be free to use different methods of operating proximity.
- 5.108 **UTU** had mixed views. Whilst it could see that random selection was attractive to ensure a wider social mix, it would opt for proximity from home to school to ensure that no child must travel too far from home to school at age 11.
- 5.109 **GTCNI** was concerned that proximity from home to school could have unintended consequences which would impact on local communities.
- 5.110 Of the **schools** that responded to this issue, primary schools were more supportive of its use than post-primary schools.
- 5.111 **DUP** stated this was a geographic criterion which did not take into account the educational needs of the child.
- 5.112 **Sinn Fein** suggested the need for a standardised formula for measuring proximity.
- 5.113 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, there was broad opposition to proximity as it was suggested it would result in selection by post-code.
- 5.114 **UFU** was totally opposed to the use of proximity from home to school as it believed this would discriminate against children in rural areas as the majority of post-primary schools are located in towns.
- 5.115 **NIHRC** was opposed to proximity from home to school as it believed it has the potential to lead to selection by post-code and children from less advantaged districts would have less chance of admission.
- 5.116 The **Children's Law Centre** suggested that distance from school will have implications for rural children and will be subject to legal challenge.

Other Issues

- 5.117 **BELB, NEELB, SEELB** and **WELB** stated that a standard tiebreaker should be used to ensure consistency across all schools. **BELB** suggested that the method should be clearly published and circulated to all parents/pupils in advance of the application stage.
- 5.118 **CCMS** would support using date of birth as a tiebreaker but would acknowledge that there is no compelling reason for its use other than ease of convenience as it can be easily obtained

from the application form. It believed the choice of tiebreaker should be left to schools to meet their individual circumstances.

- 5.119 **NAEIAC** supported the tiebreaker mechanism provided it is fully open to scrutiny.
- 5.120 The main issue raised by those **parents/members of the general public** who responded was that the use of an academic criterion through the Pupil Profile, or some other means, would reduce the need to use a tiebreaker. Views were mixed on whether schools should be free to use their own method of tiebreaker or whether they should all use the same method.
- 5.121 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** and **TRC** suggested that standard criteria should be used across Northern Ireland and that tiebreakers should be transparent in their specification and use.

Format of Menu

- 5.122 The Consultation Document sought views on the possible options for the menu:

Option 1 – Open Menu

Option 2 – Compulsory Categories

Option 3 – Optional Categories and Compulsory Order

Option 4 – Compulsory Categories and Compulsory Order

Option 1 – Open Menu

- 5.123 **WELB** stated that schools should choose whichever criteria they wished to apply from the menu but, in the interests of consistency, they might follow a recognised order.
- 5.124 **NICCY** disagreed with an Open Menu. It suggested the same menu should apply to all schools to reduce the complexity of the system and ensure that it is understood by parents and children. It stated that the child-centred catchment criterion should be compulsory for all schools and that it should be top of the menu.
- 5.125 Of the **schools** that responded to this issue, there was support expressed for an Open Menu.
- 5.126 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, there was support for an Open Menu as it was considered that this approach would give schools the flexibility to reflect local circumstances and retain their own ethos.

Option 2 – Compulsory Categories

5.127 **NEELB** supported Option 2 although it stated that all of the options outlined had some advantages and disadvantages.

Option 3 – Optional Categories and Compulsory Order

5.128 **WELB** recognised the importance of parents being able to identify and clearly understand the menu. It suggested that a compulsory order should be common to all schools.

5.129 **NICIE** would support Option 3 due to its concerns regarding catchment area.

Option 4 – Compulsory Categories and Compulsory Order

5.130 **ATL** and **INTO** supported Option 4 and specified the following order in which the criteria should be applied: feeder primary schools; school-centred catchment; child-centred catchment; and random selection. **ATL** reiterated the need for a central panel to draw up the criteria, to issue guidance regarding the application process and to have a quality assurance role to ensure the guidance is followed.

5.131 **TRC** supported Option 4 as it was concerned that, otherwise, litigation and judicial reviews could become a feature of the new process.

5.132 Of the **schools** that responded to this issue, some primary schools supported Option 4.

5.133 **Save the Children** supported Option 4 as the only fair and straightforward method of dealing with oversubscription.

General Comments on Menu Approach

5.134 **BELB** stressed that any admissions framework should have a greater degree of consistency, fairness and transparency and there is a need to balance present/new criteria against the changing educational landscape.

5.135 **NEELB** was supportive of a menu approach but was also sympathetic to giving schools flexibility to reflect local circumstances.

5.136 **SEELB** agreed with the four main categories outlined for the menu.

5.137 **SELB** questioned how a menu approach could be balanced against the principle of giving schools flexibility to set their own admissions criteria and how flexibility will be managed if admissions criteria in an area are to be complementary.

- 5.138 **WELB** suggested that schools should have as much choice as possible in choosing their admissions criteria and that parents should have as much clarity as possible. It recommended that DE provides clear guidance in relation to the order in which the criteria should be applied otherwise it could result in litigation.
- 5.139 **CCMS** stated that all schools should have to apply family-focused criteria first, followed by criteria which reflect the local community within the catchment. Thereafter, schools can apply criteria which have been approved by a central panel and apply them in any order.
- 5.140 **NICIE** accepted the benefits of a simplified and streamlined transfer process with agreed criteria for all schools being selected from a menu which is consistent with the principles and objectives.
- 5.141 **CnaG** considered that priority should be given to the criterion which recognises the need to serve local communities and that a central panel should be used to avoid and overcome problems.
- 5.142 **ATL, INTO and NASUWT** stated that criteria should be straightforward, centrally administered and uniformly applied across Northern Ireland by a central body.
- 5.143 **UTU** stressed that schools should not be allowed an unfettered choice of criteria. It suggested that all schools should follow a compulsory order, but could omit a category or categories if desired. Only the tiebreaker should be compulsory, and if this is random selection, then a geographical or community-based criterion must be included to ensure that children have a fair chance of getting admitted to a local school, if that is their choice. It suggested the following compulsory order: family-focused; geographical; community-based; and tiebreakers.
- 5.144 **GTCNI** suggested that DE should provide models to show how each menu might operate at a regional and sub-regional level before a decision can be made on the most appropriate format.
- 5.145 **GBA** contended that, rather than being required to choose admissions criteria from a centrally determined ‘menu’, post-primary schools should be able to determine their own criteria subject to DE approval and apply them in the order in which they choose. It suggested that, if there is to be a menu, the criteria need to be sufficiently differentiated from each other and if community and geographical criteria are applied, oversubscription will increase.
- 5.146 **AHTSS** suggested the menu should have a compulsory core, to include order of preference, with an Open Menu otherwise.
- 5.147 **NAEIAC** agreed with the possible options for the menu.

- 5.148 **IoD** accepted the range of criteria listed and supported schools choosing which criteria to apply on the assumption that a range of high quality choices will be available to parents.
- 5.149 **DUP** did not support a menu approach as it is concerned that it will drive parents to choose their nearest school. It also contended that schools should be allowed to set their own criteria to enable them to maintain their ethos.
- 5.150 **UUP** considered the menu options as unacceptable, as they will result in significant numbers of pupils being selected by post-code or random selection.
- 5.151 **SDLP** specified the following order in which the criteria should be applied: feeder primary schools; siblings currently at the school/eldest/only child; child-centred catchment; and computerised random selection.
- 5.152 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, there was broad opposition to a menu approach as it was felt that schools should be able to apply whichever criteria they wish in keeping with their ethos and tradition. If a menu approach was adopted, an Open Menu would be the preferred option to allow schools to retain their ethos.
- 5.153 **NICVA** proposed that the finalised criteria should be applied by a central body to encourage a consistent and fair approach across all schools.
- 5.154 **Mencap** felt that the Department should monitor the admissions criteria set by schools to ensure that they are consistent and fairly applied, that they promote equality of opportunity for all children and that children with special educational needs are not disadvantaged.
- 5.155 **Barnardo's** felt that DE should encourage all schools to use the same criteria, as a menu approach may be confusing for parents.
- 5.156 **Save the Children** recommended that one set of criteria should be applied uniformly across all post-primary schools, rather than a menu approach and should be monitored closely by DE to ensure the best interests of all children are kept central and no child is disadvantaged due to his/her location. It stated that criteria should be kept simple and straightforward.
- 5.157 The **Children's Law Centre** stated it could not make an informed decision about the order of the criteria without DE providing a full and thorough EQIA on each of the proposed criteria.

Other Criteria

- 5.158 **The Consultation Document sought views on any other criteria that should be included in the menu, bearing in mind the principles and objectives outlined.**

- 5.159 Respondents identified a number of other criteria which could be included in the menu. These are set out below.
- 5.160 **GBA** suggested some method of matching the child's aspirations, abilities and aptitudes to the school. It suggested that preference should be given to those pupils whose parents have expressed a preference for the particular type, ethos or religious affiliation of the school. It also stated that oversubscribed schools should be able to use the Pupil Profile to admit pupils well matched to the school's provision.
- 5.161 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, it was suggested that the academic ability, skills and interests of the child should be a factor in the admissions decision and that standardised tests, entrance tests or the Pupil Profile should be used to match the child to the school.
- 5.162 **IoD** would prefer a system based on matching placement with aptitude and ability as identified through the Pupil Profile supported by objective assessment.
- 5.163 **UUP** regarded matching aptitude/ability of pupils to schools as the fairest criterion. It suggested preference should be given to those pupils whose aspirations, aptitude and ability best match what any school has to offer. It suggested that Pupil Profiles, containing standardised test results should be used to match pupils with the most suitable school.
- 5.164 **NICIE** and **AHTSS** considered that the reintroduction of the 'order of preference' criterion would be in the interests of parental/pupil choice. They believed that no child with a first preference for a particular school should be denied admission in order to accommodate another child with a second, third or other preference for that school.
- 5.165 The 5 **ELBs** suggested that DE should provide guidance and define criteria for the admission of pupils living outside Northern Ireland and non-EU nationals.
- 5.166 **GBA** and some **parents/members of the general public** suggested preference should be given to those children where there is a wish or need to board at a school.
- 5.167 **BELB**, **GBA** and **TRC** considered that children with sporting, musical and artistic talents need to be acknowledged and provided for in the education system and therefore skills or aptitudes in particular areas in which the school specialises should be included within the admissions criteria.
- 5.168 **GBA** and **CCMS** suggested that children of current, permanent employees should also be included in the menu. **WELB** agreed that there should be further discussion/consultation about this criterion.

- 5.169 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, other criteria suggested included giving preference to those parents who attend an interview with the post-primary school and those parents who sign a parent/school contract.
- 5.170 The **Equality Commission** would welcome the introduction of a positive social and economic integration measure to ensure that a proportionate percentage of pupils from lower income families is reflected in the student population of each school. **NIHRC** recommended a criterion to reflect the TSN principle. The **Children’s Law Centre** stressed that there is a need to proactively advantage those children who are currently being discriminated against in the education system and would argue for the consideration of a form of social criteria in the interests of equality of opportunity.

CHAPTER 6

ADMISSIONS APPEALS

- 6.1 **The Consultation Document sought views on whether the process for appealing the decision of Boards of Governors not to admit a child to the school should be altered in any way.**
- 6.2 **ATL, INTO, NASUWT, UTU, GTCNI, AHTSS, NAEIAC, TRC, SDLP and NICVA** supported the retention of the current system. Of the **schools** that responded to this issue, there was broad agreement that the current appeals system should not be changed. **ATL** considered that appeals should be completed by May so that children can avail of induction programmes, and **UTU** welcomed the proposed timetable as this would allow schools to receive the outcome of appeals prior to the summer term and would help them prepare for their September intakes.
- 6.3 **GBA** suggested there should be a right of appeal to an independent body for those parents who do not accept the post-primary school's decision.
- 6.4 All 5 **ELBs** expressed support for the proposed earlier deadline for appeals on the grounds that this would facilitate attendance by schools and parents and help limit uncertainty for parents, although **BELB** was concerned that it could place additional pressures on Principals at an already busy time in the school year.
- 6.5 **BELB, SEELB, SELB and WELB** suggested there could be implications for the appeals process if cases of compelling individual circumstances are considered by a Central Panel and that greater clarity is needed on how appeals regarding compelling individual circumstances will be dealt with.
- 6.6 **NEELB, SEELB, SELB and WELB** recommended that a review of the appeals procedure should take place after the new arrangements have been established and implemented. **SEELB** also suggested that consideration should be given to establishing a single set of regulations governing membership of admission and expulsion appeal tribunals and aligning the Central Panel and admissions appeal tribunals.
- 6.7 **SELB** suggested that some consideration should be given to zero-rating pupils admitted on appeal, at least in those schools which lose a significant number of appeals or where there is a pattern of lost appeals. **WELB** recommended that the appeals system in the future should be rigorous, robust and fair and that the process should also deal with appeals regarding compelling individual circumstances.

- 6.8 **CCMS** and **CnaG** suggested that each tribunal should have at least one member with knowledge of the locality and the prevailing circumstances and that tribunals should be held as local to parents as practical and in a neutral environment. **CCMS** felt there should be a single set of regulations governing the membership and payment of admission appeals and expulsion appeal tribunals.
- 6.9 **NICIE** expressed a preference for appeals to be determined even earlier i.e. by the end of May, to enable children to avail of induction programmes.
- 6.10 **ATL**, **INTO** and **NASUWT** expressed opposition to the introduction of legal representation in the appeals process. They agreed, along with **UTU**, that with a common set of admissions criteria, there should also be a central appeals mechanism rather than individual appeals panels within ELBs. A Central Panel could establish panels where and when necessary from a list of nominees.
- 6.11 **GTCNI** suggested that teachers with any professional or personal interest in a child or his/her parents should be precluded from sitting on an appeal tribunal.
- 6.12 **AHTSS** recommended that an annual review of panel decisions should be undertaken to ensure consistency and develop good practice.
- 6.13 The **Northern Catholic Bishops** suggested that any process should protect volunteers who act as governors from exposure to excessive pressure.
- 6.14 **TRC** felt that it is important for admissions criteria to be robust enough to withstand an extraordinary numbers of appeals.
- 6.15 **IoD** expressed the view that where parents wish to challenge an oversubscribed school's decision they should be able to demonstrate to an independent arbitration service that their child's Pupil Profile more closely matches the school's requirements than those of other children offered places.
- 6.16 **UUP** suggested that there are some inconsistencies in the present system and expressed a preference for a more professional and less ad hoc approach.
- 6.17 Of those **parents/members of the general public** who responded to this issue, there was general agreement that the current system should not be changed although there were some concerns expressed that the number of appeals could increase as a result of the new arrangements and this could lead to increased bureaucracy for schools.
- 6.18 **Barnardo's** strongly agreed with the need for a robust appeals procedure and suggested that appeal tribunals should consist of more than three people to allow more diversity of opinion.

- 6.19 **NICCY** contended that a clear and consistent menu of admissions criteria used across schools with child-centred catchment as the first criterion should reduce the grounds for appeals. It stated that the independence of appeal tribunals must be assured and ELBs must be clear about the list of tribunal members they are drawing from. The process should also provide an opportunity for the young person to be heard or to be independently represented and every effort should be made to ensure parents and children are put at ease in the functioning of the process, taking account of factors such as the venue, timing and language used.
- 6.20 **NIHRC** stated that there is no need to change the appeals process, other than accommodating a role for the Central Panel, if it is created, for decisions relating to compelling individual circumstances.

CHAPTER 7

EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 **The consultation sought views on whether any of the issues contained in the Consultation Document would have any adverse implications for any of the Section 75 categories of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.**
- 7.2 **NEELB, SEELB and SELB** were concerned that the use of feeder primary schools as a criterion could impact on persons of different religious belief.
- 7.3 **WELB, Save the Children and NIHRC** stated that a formal EQIA is needed to ensure that any potential adverse implications are identified and properly addressed. Save the Children contended there may be complex equality issues relating to all the criteria being proposed e.g. the use of parish as a criterion could result in religious discrimination and may not promote equality of opportunity for those of no religion.
- 7.4 **NICIE** raised the issue that a significant number of parents, when choosing an integrated school, choose to designate their children as ‘Other’ i.e. neither being brought up in the Catholic/Protestant faith. It stated that, DE, while accepting people from other faiths, does not accept these more local ‘Others’ and as such disadvantages these pupils regarding their right to integrated education as they are not accepted as making a contribution towards religious diversity within the school.
- 7.5 Of those **schools and parents/members of the general public** that responded, there were mixed views about whether any of the issues would have adverse implications for any of the Section 75 categories. The categories mentioned by parents/members of the general public that would be adversely affected by the new arrangements were as follows:
- ◆ persons of different racial group;
 - ◆ persons of different religious belief; and
 - ◆ persons of different religious groupings/racial groups/political beliefs will be discriminated against by the geographical criteria.

EQIA AND RURAL PROOFING

In developing new admissions arrangements, the Department is committed to taking into account equality and rural considerations at each stage of the process. The Consultation Document set out options for the new admission arrangements rather than firm policy proposals and sought views on a range of issues. The consultation has been a key part of the process of gathering information from both the education sector and the general public on the way forward. In determining the way forward, the Department will consider the full range of information available and will undertake an initial screening exercise to ascertain whether a full EQIA and/or rural proofing exercise is required.

VIEWS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) facilitated 20 focus groups involving Year 8 pupils in a sample of schools across Northern Ireland. The research focused on the following elements:

- ◆ the information pupils used to make the decision on their choice of post-primary school;
- ◆ the extent of their role in the decision-making process;
- ◆ information they would have liked to have known about the post-primary schools available to them; and
- ◆ the usefulness of open nights/induction.

Information used to make the transfer decision

Pupils reported having availed of a wide range of information sources and assistance when making their transfer decision. They considered the most useful of these to be:

- ◆ **Open Nights** – The most important or biggest selling aspects of open nights and visits were considered to be:
 - seeing the facilities and activities available at post-primary schools;
 - being able to watch and participate in practical demonstrations;
 - hearing about the range of subjects available at the schools;
 - getting a feel for the general atmosphere at the schools;
 - having a tour of the schools; and
 - hearing the truth or ‘real story’ about life at the schools.
- ◆ **Advice from parents and family**
- ◆ **Visits from post-primary staff to the primary school**
- ◆ **General information on the post-primary schools e.g. school’s reputation and academic achievements**

Involvement of pupils in the transfer decision

Most of the pupils were content with their level of involvement in the transfer decision. However, a few were unhappy, commenting that their views were not listened to and their parents made the

decision for them. They would have liked to have attended the meeting between their parents and the primary school and had more input into the range of choices included on the Transfer Form.

Involvement of Primary School

Findings regarding the usefulness and involvement of primary schools varied. Pupils felt there was a need for primary schools to play a more active role by discussing with pupils the most suitable type of post-primary school for them and providing more information on the subjects taught at post-primary level.

Involvement of Post-Primary Schools

There were high levels of satisfaction regarding the level of involvement of post-primary schools and the efforts made by the schools to encourage pupils to attend their school. Open nights and visits from post-primary staff to primary schools were considered very useful exercises as it gave the pupils the opportunity to find out more information and to ask questions about the post-primary school.

Suggestions for improving the transfer process

It was felt that greater exposure to post-primary school life whilst still at primary school would make the transition easier for pupils and provide them with more understanding of what to expect. This could be achieved through:

Induction

All pupils reported having started their first year one or more days before the other year groups returned to school. There was general consensus that this was of benefit as it gave them the opportunity to find their way about the school; they did not have to worry about having to deal with big crowds of people; and it gave them time to get to know the people in their own year group. Most pupils reported having attended an induction day at their post-primary school which took part at the end of their primary school year. This was considered to be useful as they:

- ◆ got to know their teachers and Year Heads;
- ◆ found out what classes they were going to be in;
- ◆ learned a bit about the subjects they would be studying;
- ◆ familiarised themselves with the school layout; and
- ◆ made friends with future fellow pupils.

Gaps in information

Pupils were dissatisfied with the information they received on the range of schools in their area and felt it may be helpful for pupils to receive a short booklet which lists the range of schools open to them.

There was a general consensus that more information on the subjects taught at post-primary schools and the various facilities and activities available, would have helped pupils in making their decision. Also, hearing about the experiences of current Year 8 pupils at the post-primary school would have helped the decision-making.

Some suggestions were made regarding how pupils could have been better prepared for transfer. These focused mainly on:

- ◆ knowing more about the subjects taught;
- ◆ receiving timetables in advance of the beginning of the school year;
- ◆ having a map of the school; and
- ◆ having more information on, and better, travelling arrangements.

Information on Internet

A relatively straightforward way of providing pupils with more information is via the Internet. Some pupils had visited a number of websites to find out information and considered these useful in helping them with their decision. In order to become a valuable source of assistance, post-primary schools need to ensure that their websites contain adequate levels of information and primary schools must set aside time to allow pupils to access the various websites and assist them in doing so, if required.

Timetable

Another suggestion for improving the process focused on shortening the length of time involved in the entire transfer process. The current 7-month process attracted criticism, particularly the 3-month period between completing the Transfer Form and receiving the letter notifying pupils of their post-primary destination – pupils felt this should be shortened. The time period was more problematic for those pupils who were less sure of getting into a school of their choice. The new admissions process should be shorter to offer more time for induction towards the end of P7.

TIMETABLE FOR NEW POST-PRIMARY ADMISSIONS PROCESS

MONTH	PARENT	SCHOOL
March-July of P6 year		DE reviews and sets admissions and enrolment numbers for the following year
May/June		Post-Primary school reviews admissions criteria for the following year and sends to ELBs for inclusion in Transfer Booklet
May/June		Primary and Post-Primary schools receive DE Circular containing advice on transfer process
May/June	Attend one to one annual parent teacher meeting and receive Pupil Profile	Primary school holds annual parent-teacher meetings to include discussion of Pupil Profile
September of P7 year	Receive information pack including Transfer Booklet and guidance leaflet explaining transfer arrangements	Primary and Post-Primary schools receive copy of Transfer Booklets published by ELBs
October	Attend open days/evenings and receive copy of school prospectus	Post-Primary schools hold open days/evenings for P7 pupils and their parents and issue prospectuses
November	Arrange and attend informal discussions with prospective Post-Primary schools, if desired	Post-Primary schools provide time for discussions with prospective pupils and their parents
Late November/early December	Attend meeting with Primary school Principal to complete Transfer Form	Primary school Principals hold meetings with parents, complete Transfer Forms and send them to ELBs
January/March		Post-Primary schools receive and process Transfer Forms Post-Primary schools inform ELBs of allocation of places to enable placement letters to issue
March	Receive letter from ELB advising of the Post-Primary school into which child has been accepted	
April	Final date to give notice of intention to appeal against decision of Post-Primary school Board of Governors	
May/June	Attend Admissions Appeal Tribunal, if applicable Support child's participation in induction process	Post-Primary schools participate in appeals process, as appropriate Post-Primary schools arrange induction for new pupils

OTHER ISSUES

The Consultation Document provided the opportunity for other general comments in relation to the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools to be made. Respondents raised a number of wider issues which did not specifically relate to the admissions arrangements but are connected with the wider post-primary reforms. The main issues raised are outlined below.

Case for Change

NICIE supported fundamental change within the transfer process and regarded the proposals as an opportunity to contribute towards both social change and reconciliation within the community.

GBA recognised that change in education and the ways in which post-primary schools operate is necessary and desirable and welcomed the ending of the Transfer Tests.

UTU stated that it has campaigned for the end of selection at age 11, that it welcomes the recommendations of the Costello Report and wishes to see their full implementation.

Academic Selection

INTO stated its opposition to academic selection at 11. It favoured the establishment of a non-selective, all-ability, comprehensive post-primary school system on the basis of equality for all children. It agreed that too many young people leave school with low, few or no qualifications and this has direct implications for their future employment prospects and life chances generally. It considered that the extensive gap between the highest and lowest achievers is a consequence of academic selection.

IoD felt that selection in one form or another will always be necessary so long as there are insufficient places in schools to which parents want to send their children. It felt the only satisfactory answer is to develop a situation in which there are sufficient places in schools of acceptable quality to meet children's needs and aspirations.

DUP was opposed to what it termed the destruction of the current system and felt that the proposals would result in a one size fits all comprehensive school system. It felt that the strong performance of Northern Ireland schools will not be maintained by 'destroying' academically oriented schools and that academic selection gives pupils from working class backgrounds the best opportunity of succeeding. It felt that the ending of academic selection is unacceptable. It stated that the proposals have no community support, are not thought through, the method of implementation has not been tested, there is no indication of implications for primary teachers and no costs identified. It suggested that the

present arrangements, with some minor changes, should continue until agreement can be reached on a way forward.

UUP contended that the proposals do not take into account the results of the Household Response Form. It felt that it is unlikely that the proposals would find the necessary support in a devolved Northern Ireland administration and therefore pushing them through is unacceptable and undemocratic.

Some **parents/members of the general public** suggested that academic selection was supported in the Household Response Forms and must therefore be included in the new arrangements; academically able children should be able to attend grammar schools; and the proposals will result in a failed comprehensive system, will destroy grammar schools and will destroy the strengths of the current system.

Vocational Pathways

GBA recognised the need for more emphasis and status to be given to vocational education.

WELB considered that the Consultation Document does not address the issue of a pupil ending up in a school not suited to his/her ability. Pupils must gain access to schools best suited to their educational abilities and pastoral needs, otherwise the academic or vocational ethos of a school could be threatened because quality teaching time is being sacrificed in order to deal with behavioural problems. Clarification is required of what is meant by ‘academic ethos’ and ‘vocational ethos’.

DUP supported the development of properly accredited vocational courses. It suggested that choice of pathway must be equally valued – pupils with academic interests/abilities pursuing them in grammar schools; those with different talents/interests attending a school that will cater for those needs.

SDLP stressed that the system should enable every student to maximise their potential in academic, vocational and creative terms.

Resources

SEELB stressed that the most pressing challenge over the next 5-10 years is to ensure that all schools which are in need are adequately funded and supported to enable them to provide the highest quality education and have the confidence of pupils and parents.

SELB considered adequate resourcing and training of school personnel, governors and board services to be important to ensure proposals can be effectively implemented.

WELB stated that the new arrangements should promote parity of esteem for all schools, including unpopular schools. Significant resources, financial and human, should be provided to ensure high quality provision for all pupils. It was concerned that the document does not address the major issue of funding and suggested DE’s planned expenditure may be unrealistic in light of such issues as

collaborative arrangements, transport, statementing, compelling individual circumstances and other costs not yet identified.

IoD stressed that it was essential that schools are given the resources to make a success of their selected strategy.

UUP stated it was important that all post-primary schools are well funded with the resources necessary to deliver a first class education for every child. It considered investing in primary schools is also important, to ensure pupils reach their full potential and that no child is left behind.

Sinn Fein stated that there was no mention of the extra budgetary resources which will be required to establish the new procedures.

SDLP contended that schools should be the hub of the community and should be resourced to prepare young people to play an active role in society.

NICCY agreed that, if all schools are properly supported and resourced, this would offer parents and children real choice.

The **Equality Commission** welcomed the resources being committed to schools. However, it felt improvements are needed to pre-school and primary schools, and significant extra resources are needed in post-primary schools in areas where there is under-performance to promote greater choice.

The **Children's Law Centre** stated that the proposed funding cuts in education will lead to school closures and will further exacerbate the problems which currently exist in disparities in post-primary education provision.

Timescale

SEELB was concerned that the new admissions arrangements are being put in place for a post-primary structure involving a revised curriculum, specialist schools, Entitlement Framework etc which is not yet in place.

GBA suggested that, while a great deal is promised in the document, very little of the new educational landscape has yet occurred or even shown signs of imminent arrival. It contended that it would therefore be irresponsible for Government to go ahead with these important and complex arrangements in the timescale envisaged, unless the elements expected to make up the different educational landscape are in place. It was concerned that the educational system is in danger of being overloaded if admissions changes are added to a revised curriculum, demographic change, funding crisis, common funding formula and reform of local administration which all bring their pressures and demands.

DUP argued that the new educational landscape envisaged will not be in place by 2009. It suggested Government should at least delay changing the admissions arrangements until the other developments are in place.

GLOSSARY

AHTSS	Association of Head Teachers in Secondary Schools
ATL	Association of Teachers & Lecturers
BELB	Belfast Education & Library Board
CATS	Cognitive Ability Tests
CnaG	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (Council for Irish-medium Education)
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (NI)
CASS	Curriculum, Advisory & Support Services
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
DE	Department of Education
DEL	Department of Employment & Learning
ELB	Education & Library Board
EQIA	Equality Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
GTCNI	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
GBA	Governing Bodies Association
GMI	Grant Maintained Integrated
ICT	Information & Communications Technology
IoD	Institute of Directors
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
NAEIAC	National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers & Consultants
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers

NFER	National Foundation for Education Research
NEELB	North Eastern Education & Library Board
NICCY	Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People
NICIE	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
NICVA	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
NIHRC	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
SDLP	Social Democratic & Labour Party
SEELB	South Eastern Education & Library Board
SELB	Southern Education & Library Board
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENDO	Special Educational Needs & Disability (NI) Order 2005
TSN	Targeting Social Need
TRC	Transferor Representatives' Council
UFU	Ulster Farmers' Union
UTU	Ulster Teachers' Union
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UNCRC	United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child
WELB	Western Education & Library Board



Copies of this Report will be made available in different formats. These can be obtained by contacting the Department at the contact point below:

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