

# Chapter 5

## OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION

### Vision

5.1 Throughout all stages of our consultations with schools, education partners, public representatives and the wider community, there was an acknowledgement of the need for a shared vision for the type of education service that we would all wish to see in place. We endorse this view and propose that the Vision for the education service should be that -

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

### Underlying Objectives

5.2 In support of this Vision the underlying objectives of the post-primary education system should be -

- to develop every young person’s competence in a range of disciplines, including, of course, literacy, oracy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT);
- to develop their personal qualities, knowledge and understanding as the platform for the development of their individual aptitudes, abilities and creativity;
- to assist their progression to employment through work-based training or further and higher education; and

- to enable them to take advantage of changing employment opportunities in the new knowledge-based economy.

5.3 Young people need to be enabled to understand and accept the responsibilities of citizenship, to fully respect different religions and cultural values in a pluralist society, and to recognise the importance of equality, tolerance and human rights.

5.4 The education system should also foster in all young people a desire for lifelong learning, and should equip them with the confidence, values and motivation to develop their potential to the full, and a desire to make a positive contribution to society.

5.5 The delivery of these objectives will be characterised by a strong focus on the relevance of the curriculum to living and learning, on well-trained, motivated and valued teachers, and on partnerships between schools, parents, pupils and employers, and other providers of education and training. Co-operation and a sharing of resources and expertise between schools will better serve the needs of pupils and schools. New curricular pathways must be developed and promoted for pupils which are better suited to their individual talents and aspirations and today's learning needs. Vocational, academic and occupational courses must be available to all sixteen to nineteen year-olds and need to be equally valued by parents, schools and employers. The post-primary school system should meet the common purpose of providing all young people with a high quality educational experience, while at the same time allowing schools to develop distinctive missions to provide opportunity and choice for young people as they develop towards adulthood.

5.6 Teachers have a central role in the realisation of this Vision. The quality of education provided is directly related to the quality of the teachers and the standard of management and leadership in schools. Northern Ireland has good teachers and it is essential that they are provided with the time, professional support, training and resources to enable them to adapt to the changing needs of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The growth of ICT will have a significant bearing on learning and teaching, giving greater independence to the learner and enhancing the teacher's role in guiding and evaluating learning.

## Guiding Principles

5.7 Our Vision and objectives for an education system which has as its focus the needs of young people are reinforced by a number of Principles which should influence and be at the heart of policy and practice at all levels of the system. These Principles are discussed below.

- **Each young person should be valued equally.** All children should be accorded the same respect, regardless of their background, abilities or aptitudes. They should be valued as individuals, for who they are, and for what they do and achieve in their own right.
- **All young people should be enabled to develop their talents to the full and to realise their creative potential, including accepting responsibility for their own lives and making a positive contribution to society.** The education system has a responsibility to provide each pupil with a broad and balanced curriculum and the opportunities, particularly in the latter stages of their post-primary education, to pursue courses which will develop and enhance their individual abilities and creative skills, in line with their chosen career pathways.
- **Young people should be encouraged to develop a love of learning.** Education at school is not an end in itself; the education system has a key role in encouraging all young people to recognise the intrinsic value of learning and in enabling them to become autonomous learners with a commitment to lifelong learning.
- **The education system should provide for the development of all aspects of the individual, including the intellectual, spiritual, moral, cultural, social, physical, emotional and creative.** Although central to the development of each young person's intellectual, physical and creative abilities, education is not limited to the formal curriculum; it also involves extra curricular provision to complement the development of those attitudes, values and qualities that young people need in order to live in and contribute to society.

- **The promotion and demonstration of a culture of tolerance, reconciliation and respect for diversity of cultures should be a seminal purpose of education.** An inclusive education system, which is founded on equality of opportunity and the development of all young persons to their full potential, can enrich schools, local communities and society at large, and will make a significant contribution to the development of mutual understanding and respect for different cultures and for the responsibilities of citizenship.
  
- **Education should have regard to the changing needs of society and the economy.** The education system must take account of and respond to the needs of employers, the views of parents and the community, and should develop the aptitudes and abilities of individual pupils so that they are equipped to take their place in a society emerging from conflict, and to pursue a career pathway which is rewarding and equips them to contribute to the strengthening of society and the economy.
  
- **There should be recognition of and support for the key role of teachers in the delivery of a high quality education system.** Changes in the post-primary arrangements will affect the roles of teachers in all schools to some extent. It will be crucial to the effective implementation of change that teachers should be respected and supported by parents, education partners and society at large. It is important that teachers should be adequately resourced for continuing professional development to meet the challenges associated with change throughout their careers. The diversity of needs and interests among pupils needs to be matched by a diversity of skills and talents among teachers, and all their contributions should be acknowledged and valued.
  
- **Each young person should be equipped with the values and skills needed for working and living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.** In an ever-changing world, with globalisation, technological change, cultural diversity and pluralism combining to produce new challenges and opportunities, it is increasingly important that all young people should be given full opportunity to develop a broad range of work-related competences and life skills.

- **There should be parity of esteem for vocational and academic educational opportunities.** It is important to be clear what is meant here by “academic” and “vocational” education: academic education can best be described as the transfer of knowledge and the acquisition of understanding about a broad range of subjects. Vocational education can often be aligned with “technical education”, and concerns the teaching of skills, knowledge and understanding relevant to specific or broad areas of employment (ie job related). Academic and vocational education are not mutually exclusive - both require pupils to experience a broad and balanced curriculum in primary and the early years of post-primary education, containing opportunities for vocational and academic learning, before making decisions about a particular educational or career pathway. While academic courses and qualifications, generally, have been more highly valued in the past, it is entirely wrong that this should continue to be the case: academic and vocational courses both serve essential purposes in ensuring that all young people have equal opportunities to develop their individual abilities, skills and aptitudes to their maximum potential. Parents, schools, teachers, further and higher education institutions, employers and all education partners need to promote and reinforce parity of esteem for vocational and academic courses and qualifications. The structure and operation of the school system should also underpin this parity of esteem.
- **Lifelong opportunities and choices for learning should be available to all.** It is important that schools should promote lifelong learning and should provide for flexibility in the delivery of the curriculum so that choices of course and career pathways are kept open.
- **There should be equality of opportunity, access and excellence for all.** Any new arrangements must ensure that all young people have access to education provision that meets their individual needs and provides equality of opportunity and high quality learning and teaching.
- **The curriculum and assessment arrangements should take account of research on learning abilities.** The process of learning is paramount - the nature and content of the curriculum and teaching

methods should take account of the fact that each person has various aptitudes and ways of learning. Assessment systems should cover progress and achievement over a broad range of subjects, abilities and skills.

5.8 We believe that these Principles are fundamental to the planning and provision of post-primary education and we have used them in that way in our work. In particular we have applied them as criteria for our analysis of evidence to the Review Body and in developing our recommendations for change.