

# INTO Response to the Department of Education Consultation on New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools

## Q1. PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES (Chapter 2)

*The Department is seeking your views on whether the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements.*

INTO supports the principles and objectives for new admissions arrangements as detailed in the Consultation Document, subject to the following amendments and addenda:

### Principles (para. 2.2)

Last bullet point - 'acknowledge that schools **normally** serve local communities'; Delete 'normally'. Schools already serve the local community and do so in all situations not just '*normally*';

Add an additional principle by including an additional bullet point - 'Ensure equality of opportunity to every child regardless of social background.'

### Objectives (para. 2.3)

Delete the third bullet point - '*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;*'

INTO is of the view that all schools should be applying standard criteria, which will ensure equality and fairness for all children in Northern Ireland and not giving priority to a few. (see also the response to Qs 12 to 17)

## CHOOSING A POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL (Chapter 3)

### Q.2 Pupil Profile (para. 3.7-3.9)

*The Department is seeking your views on: (a) whether the Pupil Profile should be used in the way described in the Consultation Document; and (b) whether there are alternative or additional ways in which the Pupil Profile should be used to help parents decide on future post-primary provision for their child.*

INTO has concerns about the detail of the pupil profile and how it will be used. The content and format of the pupil profile should be such as to make it accessible to parents and teachers, with sufficient information to make informed judgements without including too much information that may render

the Profile meaningless. The Profile is currently being piloted by CCEA in a small number of schools. The pilot profile should be the subject of a wider consultation with the education sector and teachers in particular to ensure a manageable, meaningful, usable document.

INTO is opposed to Quality Assurance of Pupil Profiles or assessment in schools generally. Moderation of assessment takes place currently and will continue within the revised curriculum and assessment. There is not a necessity for another layer of bureaucracy and workload for schools in addition to this. Seeking to quality assure one aspect of a school's work undermines the professionalism of the teachers and management within that school to monitor their own performance and standards.

INTO is of the view that inclusion of Northern Ireland averages of standardised tests for comparison purposes will not benefit the pupil, parents or the school.

This proposal undermines the aims and philosophy of the revised curriculum, which is to develop the attitudes, aptitudes and interests of the individual pupil. It reduces them to a statistic. It may also undermine the teacher's work in building up the pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. It is destructive rather than constructive.

INTO is of the view that the Pupil Profiles should not be given or shown to prospective post-primary schools before the child has been accepted by the school, as this could lead to selection by the back door. The Profile will already have been discussed with the child's primary school and the parent should have a clear idea of their child's strengths, weaknesses and interests there from. They should then be in a position to ascertain from the post primary school whether or not it is a suitable place for their child. The post-primary schools should not have access to the Profile before the allocation of places.

### **Q.3 Advice from the Primary School (para 3.10)**

*The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from the primary school to help parents make informed decisions.*

The role of the primary school is to advise parents on the strengths, weaknesses and interests of their child. It is not the role of the primary school to advise parents on the merits or otherwise of individual post-primary schools. The advice from primary schools to parents needs to be clearly defined and understood by schools and parents to ensure there is no confusion or conflict. It is the parents who make the choice of school for their child, not the primary or post-primary school. This 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.

**Q.4 Advice from the Post-Primary School (para. 3.11)**

*The Department is seeking your views on: (a) the range of information outlined in the Consultation Document to help parents make informed decisions; (b) the role of the post primary school in advising parents; and (c) whether any other information/support should be provided to parents to assist the decision-making process.*

INTO is of the view that there should only be one addition to the current requirements for inclusion in the post-primary school prospectuses - 'how the school will provide access to the Entitlement Framework, including the involvement of other providers e.g FE Colleges' and that this should be expanded to include, other schools, cross-community involvement and access to the underlying principles in the Government's proposals for 'A Shared Future.'

Bullet point 2 is unnecessary given the current requirement to detail the curriculum in the school and bullet point 3 is too broad making it unwieldy and infinitesimal.

INTO is concerned about the workload implications and practicalities of all parents having access to individual meetings with prospective post-primary schools. The manageability, effectiveness and usefulness of these meetings should be monitored.

INTO reiterates the view expressed in Q.2 that the Pupil Profile should not be given or shown to prospective post-primary schools before the child has been accepted by the school, as this could lead to selection by the back door. The role of the post-primary school in advising parents is very important. Again clear guidance must be provided, following consultation with the teachers' unions, to ensure that schools cannot be placed in a position where they can discourage or deter parents from choosing a school, based on the child's ability.

**Q.5 Advice from the DE/ELBs (para. 3.12-3.13)**

*The Department is seeking your views on the information/advice which should be available from DE/Education and Library Boards to help parents choose the most suitable post primary school.*

INTO supports the continuation of the current procedures in the DE/ELBs on providing advice to parents.

**Q.6 Continuing Advice during Post-Primary Education (para. 3.14-3.17)**

*The Department is seeking your views on what information/advice should be available to assist with choices of educational pathway, during post primary education.*

It is important that pupils and parents continue to receive advice throughout their post-primary education. This is provided through careers advice in schools, annual parent-teacher meetings and the introduction of the Pupil Profile. This

advice is also important in recognising that the choice of school at 11 may not be the best choice of school for the pupil at 14 and that it is possible for the pupil and parents to change at this point.

INTO does not believe that there is any need for additional advice from the ELBs as independent advice is already available from the DEL Careers' Service.

**Q.7 Timetable for Admissions Process (para. 3.18-3.20)**

*The Department is seeking your views on the broad timetable for the new admissions arrangements.*

INTO supports the amended timetable for transfer of pupils from primary to post-primary schools. INTO does not believe that post-primary schools need to be reviewing their admissions criteria in May/June each year. The admissions' criteria should be standard for all schools and administered by a central body.

**PUPILS WITH COMPELLING INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR A STATEMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED (Chapter 4)**

**Q.8 Compelling Individual Circumstances (para. 4.2-4.7)**

*The Department is seeking your views on the types of cases which should be considered as compelling individual circumstances.*

INTO supports the proposed arrangements for pupils with compelling individual circumstances. This is on the understanding that they will apply in few and only exceptional circumstances.

**Q.9 Supernumerary (para. 4.6)**

*The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils admitted under compelling individual circumstances should be supernumerary to schools' admissions and enrolment numbers.*

INTO is of the view that these pupils should not be supernumerary, but considered first outside of the normal admissions' process. This provision should be monitored and kept under review to ensure it is not abused.

**Q.10 Board of Governors or Central Panel? (para. 4.7)**

*The Department is seeking your views on whether individual Boards of Governors or a Central Panel should consider cases of compelling individual circumstances. If a Central panel, your views are sought on its size and composition.*

INTO advocates the introduction of a central panel of independent experts in determining the application of compelling individual circumstances. The criteria to be used in reaching these determinations should be the subject of meaningful consultation with the education partners.

**Q.11 Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need (para. 4.8-4.10)**

*The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils with statements of special educational need should continue to be admitted as supernumerary.*

INTO supports the retention of the current system for placing pupils with Special Educational Need in schools. They should continue to be supernumerary. This position must be kept under review annually in the context of the introduction of SENDO from September 2005.

**ADMISSIONS CRITERIA FOR OVERSUBSCRIBED SCHOOLS (Chapter 5)**

**Q.12 Family-Focused Criteria (para. 5.8)**

*The Department is seeking your views on the family-focused criteria listed and their inclusion within a menu.*

INTO is of the view that the criteria to be used should be centrally administered and monitored, kept simple and uniformly applied across all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. In applying this process many of the criteria proposed in the consultation document, including family-focused, are not necessary. (see also Q.13 - 17)

**Q.13 Community-Based Criteria (para. 5.9-5.10)**

*The Department is seeking your views on the community-based criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and how they should be defined.*

INTO supports the use of Feeder Schools as the first criterion for determining admissions to an oversubscribed school. The guidance on determining the Feeder Schools for the post-primary schools should be the subject of meaningful consultation with the education partners. The guidance should ensure that in determining feeder primary schools to individual post-primary schools a socially balanced intake of pupils is achieved. INTO does not support the use of parish as a criterion.

**Q.14 Geographical Criteria (para. 5.11-5.13)**

*The Department is seeking your views on: (a) the geographical criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and the most appropriate means of operating them; and (b) what percentage limit, if any, should be set for places allocated by geographical criteria.*

INTO supports the use of school-centred and then pupil-centred criteria as the second and third criteria to be applied, respectively. Percentage limits should not be necessary using this approach.

### **Q.15 Tiebreakers (para 5.14)**

*The Department is seeking your views on: (a) the tiebreakers, random selection and proximity from home to school, as a means of admitting pupils down to the last available place; (b) the most appropriate method of operating random selection and/or measuring proximity; and (c) whether schools should be free to use different methods of operating random selection or proximity.*

INTO is of the view that Random Selection is the best method to apply in a tie-break situation. The criteria should be applied by a central body, thereby removing the potential for different methods to be applied in different schools.

### **Q.16 Other Criteria**

*The Department is seeking your views on any other criteria that you believe should be included in the menu, bearing in mind the principles and objectives outlined in Chapter 2.*

INTO is of the view that the criteria should be kept simple and applied uniformly across all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland by a central body. This central body should draw the criteria and the guidance on how it applies. The criteria and the guidance should be the subject of meaningful consultation with the education partners. The central body should be representative of the social partners.

### **Q.17 Format of Menu (para. 5.15-5.17)**

*The Department is seeking your views on the possible options for the menu.*

INTO supports Option 4 - Compulsory Categories and Compulsory Order. INTO is of the view that the criteria should be prioritised in the following order;

1. Feeder Primary schools
2. School-centred
3. Pupil-centred
4. Random Selection

### **Q.18 ADMISSIONS APPEALS (Chapter 6)**

*The Department is seeking your views on whether the process for appealing the decisions of Boards of Governors not to admit a child to the school should be altered in any way.*

INTO supports the retention of the current system of appeals. There is no need for the establishment of a panel in each ELB area. The Central Panel, as proposed by INTO, could establish panels where and when necessary from a list of nominees agreed by the social partners.

INTO is opposed to the introduction of legal representation in the appeals' process.

## **Other Issues**

*Are there any other issues you would like to comment on in relation to new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools? If so, please use the box below.*

This consultation document, *New Admissions Arrangements for Post Primary Schools* was issued to deal with a new admissions process in which the transfer of pupils will take place without a Transfer Test. It examines the arrangements in a post 11+ era.

INTO welcomes the ending of the 11+ in 2008, a determination that is long overdue. This summary outlines the Organisation's policy on selection and arrangements for post primary education. This policy and the principles underlying it are reflected in the INTO response to the Consultation Document.

INTO is opposed to academic selection at 11. INTO continues to call for the establishment of a non-selective, all ability, comprehensive post primary school system on the basis of equality for all children. At present there is a strong social differential in educational achievement in Northern Ireland. Pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds do significantly less well than other pupils.

INTO agrees with the conclusions of the Post Primary Review Group that too many of our young people leave school with low, few or no qualifications and that this has direct implications for their future employment prospects and for their life-chances generally. INTO is of the view that the extensive gap between the highest and lowest achievers in our schools (one of the greatest in Europe) is a consequence of academic selection.

The proposals from the Post Primary Review Working Group fall short of the INTO objective for a comprehensive system at post primary level. INTO still supports most of the proposals made by the group. INTO is committed to making these work within the proposed timetable for implementation.

INTO supports the concept of An Entitlement Framework and agrees that at Key Stage 3 this will comprise a sound general education as proposed by CCEA. INTO also supports Key Stage 4 pupils having access to a broad menu of courses of which at least one third must be academic and at least one third vocational. These proposals should ensure a smooth transfer of pupils at 11 from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 with important choices being made by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 before moving on to Key Stage 4. It is the view of INTO that pupils at the age of 14 are in a better position to make such choices and will have begun to think about possible choices of career.

INTO supports the development of pupil profiles to be used to provide a holistic picture of the individual child. Teachers will be responsible for preparing pupil profiles. They will be used at the end of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 to inform parents and pupils and to assist them in making choices. The pupil profile will be particularly relevant at the end of Key Stage 3 when pupils are deciding which learning pathways best suit their individual needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations. The pupil profiles should be used to inform decision-making. They must not be used as an instrument of rejection, or selection by schools.

INTO opposes attempts to introduce the pupil profile as a part of a new process of academic selection. The purpose of the Pupil Profile, as expressed by the Review Body, is to provide a formative record of a pupil's attainments and inform parental choice. It should not be able to be used in a mechanistic way to provide a rank order or a grade to enable pupils to be selected for admission. Using the pupil profile for this purpose, at the end of Key Stage 2, will completely distort and change it. INTO members will not participate in the preparation of pupil profiles if they were to be used as an instrument of selection.

CCEA is developing the Pupil Profile to ensure that it is fit for purpose and manageable for teachers. INTO supports CCEA's emphasis within the revised curriculum on the centrality of the child as the learner, basing reports on summarising day-to-day information from the classroom and the development and of transferable skills. Concerns remain in relation to the assessment proposals. Assessment must be integral to the curriculum, manageable and relevant to pupils, teachers and parents. INTO remains opposed to the use of levels in assessment and Pupil Profiles.

Proto-type reports and Pupil Profiles have been developed in school based pilots. One area being developed is a bank of comments which is held electronically and can be used, modified or developed by schools to meet their reporting needs. INTO calls for more transparency regarding these pilots and for more dialogue between CCEA and the teacher organisations to ensure that the pupil profile is meaningful, manageable and relevant.

INTO opposes any attempt to introduce NI school averages into the reports for purposes of comparison as it runs counter to the underlying principles of assessment for learning. There are issues of workload for teachers, which need to be addressed. Some of these workload issues will be resolved when the Curran II recommendations are implemented. The importance of joined up policy development and thinking across education is highlighted.

The introduction of Pupil Profiles has major implications for teacher training. Inservice training is required in the new approach to assessment, assessment for learning and assessment in new areas such as personal development and ICT. Schools will also require additional training and time to undertake moderation of

assessment across schools and key stages. The introduction of Pupil Profile coincides with the phased introduction of the New Curriculum. It is important there is a strategic overview of the implementation of these initiatives to ensure that they are manageable, successful and do not cause undue stress among teachers.

The teacher unions must be involved with the other educational partners in this process. The Pupil Profile will play an important role for parents and pupils in 2008/09 if, as proposed, the principal and teacher should, at the end of Primary 6, advise parents about their child's progress, achievements and future educational needs. It is not enough to ask as the Consultation Response does - what type of information should be provided? Before responding teachers must be absolutely certain that qualitative advice with a largely subjective content will not be used to select pupils for a particular type of school. Very practical questions remain to be addressed about how the information will be gathered; what formats will be used to report it; and how to ensure consistency across all schools.

Time and resources to implement the changes are important issues. Teachers require time to complete the pupil profile. Currently, in the pilot phase, it is taking 1 hour per pupil in a primary school. Multiply this by 30 for a primary class and it is clear that teachers will need to be released to prepare the profile, which parents will regard as a crucial guide to their child's future. The present timetable must be maintained but there needs to be a greater involvement of teachers in the process to ensure progress, and the necessary resources are provided to ensure success.