

975

Consultation on New Admissions Arrangements
for Post-Primary Schools

RESPONSE BOOKLET

January 2005

Name: John Chowcat

Address:

E-Mail Address (if any):

Organisation you are replying on behalf of (if any): National Association of
Educational Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants (NAEIAC)

Your position within that organisation (if appropriate): General Secretary

CONSULTATION ON NEW ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The Department of Education (DE) has published a Consultation Document entitled **New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools**. The document deals with a new admissions process in which the transfer of pupils will take place without a Transfer Test. Instead, parents will decide which post primary school best meets their child's educational needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations.

The purpose of this Response Booklet is to provide you with an opportunity to comment on the range of issues covered in the Consultation Document. The questions therefore should be read in conjunction with the full document. Additional copies of both the Consultation Document and the Response Booklet can be obtained by contacting the Department of Education:

by phone: 028 9127 9638

by fax: 028 9127 9710

by e-mail: ppst@deni.gov.uk or

by writing to: Post-Primary Support Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Bangor
Co Down BT19 7PR

The documents can also be viewed on and downloaded from the Department's website (www.deni.gov.uk). Please contact the Department if you require the documents in other formats.

Please complete the Response Booklet and return it in the pre-paid envelope to the Department by **30 June 2005**. Responses can also be e-mailed to the Department at the e-mail address above. In view of the size and nature of the consultation, it will not be possible for the Department to reply individually to comments. Responses to this consultation will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which gives the right of access to information held by all public authorities.

Please tick if you wish to receive confirmation of receipt of your response. The Department will consider all of the responses received before decisions are taken on new admissions arrangements.

CHAPTER 2

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

The Department has proposed a number of principles and objectives that could underpin new admissions arrangements, to create a process which is child-focused, fair, transparent and easily managed. Further details are provided at **paragraphs 2.1-2.3** of the Consultation Document.

Q1 The Department is seeking your views on whether the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop new admissions arrangements.

Broadly support principles and objectives underpinning the procedure for new admission procedures for post primary schools. In particular we support the acknowledgement that schools normally serve their local community. Children should be able to access a full range of educational opportunities within their local area.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

CHAPTER 3

CHOOSING A POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL

The fundamental principle underlying the new admissions arrangements will be informed parental and pupil choice. This will involve parents deciding which schools best meet their child's educational needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations and listing those schools in order of preference on the Transfer Form. Questions 2-6 seek views on the different sources of information which could assist parents in the decision-making process.

Pupil Profile

A Pupil Profile for each child will be drawn up each year and will replace the current Annual Pupil Report. The Pupil Profile will be a fuller document, providing parents with clear and objective information about their child's progress and achievements and an assessment of their attitudes, aptitudes and interests. Further details are provided at **paragraphs 3.7-3.9** of the Consultation Document.

Q2 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.

(a) The pupil profile is fit for purpose provided the admissions criteria for post primary schools specifically preclude. The use of ability as a determining criterion.

(b) The post primary could be used by parents to seek independent advice and support on the best choice for their child

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Advice from the Primary School

Towards the end of P6, as part of the current annual parent-teacher meetings, parents will have the opportunity to discuss with the primary school Principal and/or P6 teacher, their child's progress, achievements and future educational needs. The Pupil Profile will play an important role in this discussion. Further details are provided at **paragraph 3.10** of the Consultation Document.

Q3 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 pupil profile needs to be explained to parents to ensure that they fully understand the information and advice.

Board 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 the implementation of the proposals. This is also necessary to ensure consistency across schools.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Advice from the Post-Primary School

Parents and pupils will need clear information about the range of post-primary schools available to them and the educational provision they offer. This information could be available in the following ways:

- Attending open days/evenings
- Post-primary school prospectuses
- Web-based information
- Discussions with parents

Further details are provided at **paragraph 3.11** of the Consultation Document.

Q4 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.

The information supplied by post primary schools should be objective, factual, accurate and without embellishment that may give a misleading impression of the school.

A standard format for reporting pupil attainment in external exams should be agreed. This format should indicate the number of pupils in the year group and the number of pupils entered in each subject

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Advice from DE/Education and Library Boards

The Department of Education and the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) will also have a key role in providing parents with access to information about the key stages of the admissions process. In September of the P7 year, parents could receive an information pack which would include a guidance leaflet explaining the key stages of the process and a copy of the relevant ELB Transfer Booklet(s). Parents would also have access to factual, procedural advice via the ELB Transfer Officers, a help-line and web-based information. Further details are provided at **paragraphs 3.12-3.13** of the Consultation Document.

Q5 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.

NAE/AC believes that Boards should continue to provide transfer booklets with information on each post primary school and to provide further help and advice on the process. Much of this information can and should be made available online

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Continuing Advice during Post-Primary Education

There should be ongoing dialogue between the post-primary school, the parent and pupil to ensure that the child's educational needs are continuing to be met. This will be particularly important at the end of Key Stage 3 (age 14).

If a pupil's needs are not being met, consideration could and should be given to a change of educational pathway and, where appropriate, a change of educational setting. Further details are provided at **paragraphs 3.14-3.17** of the Consultation Document.

Q6 The Department is seeking your views on what information/ advice should be available to assist with choices of educational pathway, during post-primary education.

NAEIAC agrees that full and open dialogue between post primary schools and parents should be maintained and that the pupil profile will form the basis of the dialogue. It is essential also that parents and pupils have access to appropriate advice and support throughout the pupils' post primary stage and that the educational pathway can be amended in the light of experience or change to the pupils' needs.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Timetable for Admissions Process

It is important that time is built into the admissions process to enable parents to consider the full range of information available to them, to visit schools and to seek advice. The removal of the Transfer Tests may also provide an opportunity for decisions to be made sooner and this could allow more time for post-primary schools to have an appropriate induction for Year 8 pupils. Further details of a possible broad timetable for new admissions arrangements are provided at paragraphs 3.18-3.20 of the Consultation Document.

Q7 The Department is seeking your views on the broad timetable for the new admissions process.

NAEIAC believes that the overlap between the two procedures may cause undue strain on the system. To accommodate the discussions on transfer timetables will need to be generous to ensure all the stages of the new procedures can run smoothly and efficiently.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

CHAPTER 4

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

Some children will have specific needs that can only be provided for at a particular named school i.e. pupils with compelling individual circumstances and children with statements of special educational needs. These pupils are considered outside of the normal admissions process. Questions 8-11 cover this in more detail.

Compelling Individual Circumstances

For some children, their individual circumstances will be so compelling that they necessitate the child's attendance at a particular named school, rather than any other school. Further details are provided at **paragraphs 4.2-4.7** of the Consultation Document.

Q8 The Department is seeking your views on the types of cases which should be considered as compelling individual circumstances (see paragraphs 4.3-4.5).

NAEIAC agrees that the new arrangements need to be flexible enough to cater for individual circumstances but not so loose as to provide opportunities to using the new admissions procedure without good cause which is verifiable.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Q9 The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils admitted under compelling individual circumstances should be supernumerary to schools' admissions and enrolment numbers (see paragraph 4.6).

NAEIAC believes that once a pupil is admitted to a post primary school then they should not be supernumerary.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Q10 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 (see paragraph 4.7).

NAEIAC believes that a Central Panel to consider cases of compelling individual circumstances provides the best independent decision making process and removes the school from undue pressure.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need

Some pupils with special educational needs will have a statement which sets out what those needs are and specifies the type of school, and any particular school, which the Education and Library Board considers appropriate to meet those needs. Pupils with a statement of special educational need are currently admitted to the school as supernumerary i.e. over and above the school's approved admissions and enrolment number. Further details are provided at **paragraphs 4.8-4.10** of the Consultation Document.

Q11 The Department is seeking your views on whether pupils with statements of special educational need should continue to be admitted as supernumerary.

NAE/AC supports the continuation of pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs being admitted as supernumerary.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

CHAPTER 5

ADMISSIONS CRITERIA FOR OVERSUBSCRIBED SCHOOLS

Under new admissions arrangements, some schools will continue to be oversubscribed i.e. have more applications than places available. If this happens, post-primary schools have to apply admissions criteria to decide which pupils to admit. The Department has accepted the recommendation that a menu of admissions criteria should be drawn up and schools should select from this menu the criteria they would use when oversubscribed. Questions 12-17 seek views on a range of admissions criteria that could be included in a menu and the different options for the format of the menu.

Family-Focused Criteria

The two criteria listed for consideration under this category are siblings currently at the school and eldest/only child. Further details are provided at **paragraph 5.8** of the Consultation Document.

Q12 The Department is seeking your views on the family-focused criteria listed and their inclusion within a menu.

NAEIAC broadly agrees with the three categories of criteria and that the family focused criteria should predominate with appropriate safeguards to prevent specific cases of disadvantage eg single sex schools and older siblings or eldest child having a statement of Special Educational Needs.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Community-Based Criteria

The two criteria listed for consideration under this category are feeder primary schools and parish. Further details are provided at **paragraphs 5.9-5.10** of the Consultation Document.

Q13 The Department is seeking your views on the community-based criteria listed, their inclusion within a menu and how they should be defined.

NAEIAC agrees with the concept of community based schools and criteria for admission need to reflect the community structure in relation to feeder primary schools.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Geographical Criteria

The two criteria listed for consideration under this category are School-Centred Catchment and Child-Centred Catchment. Further details are provided at paragraphs 5.11-5.13 of the Consultation Document.

Q14 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.

NAEIAC supports the child centred catchment criterion which places the individual child at the heart of the process. The difficulty with school catchment is the propensity to have postcode preferences. This may be alleviated by having neighbouring schools with common catchment areas and ensuring criteria applicable to the child and parental preferences take precedence.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Tiebreakers

Admissions criteria must be capable of admitting pupils down to the last available place. The two tiebreakers listed for consideration are random selection and proximity from home to school. Further details are provided at **paragraph 5.14** of the Consultation Document.

Q15 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.

In order to ensure completeness in terms of the admissions procedure some form of tie breaker is inevitable. NAEIAC supports the mechanism provided it is fully open to scrutiny.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Other Criteria

Q16 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.

None

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Format of Menu

The aim of a menu approach is to provide some consistency in the criteria which schools use whilst allowing some flexibility to enable schools to take account of local circumstances. Several options for the menu are considered. Further details are provided at **paragraphs 5.15-5.17** of the Consultation Document.

Q17 The Department is seeking your views on the possible options for the menu.

Agree

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

CHAPTER 6

ADMISSIONS APPEALS

Parents will continue to have a statutory right of appeal if they are not content with the decision of the Board of Governors not to admit their child. Further details of the appeal arrangements are provided at paragraphs 6.1-6.8 of the Consultation Document.

Q18 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.

NAEIAC agrees with the appeals process and the criterion that appeals are allowed only on the complaint that procedures were not adhered to and the criteria were incorrectly applied.

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

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.

None

continue on a separate sheet if necessary

NEW POST-PRIMARY ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS – EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between certain individuals and groups, namely:

- between persons of different religious belief;
- between persons of different political opinion;
- between persons of different racial group;
- between persons of different age;
- between persons of different marital status;
- between persons of different sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependents and persons without.

Do you think any of the issues contained in the Consultation Document would have any adverse implications for any of the section 75 categories?

Yes No

If yes, what are they?