

Department of Education
Response to New Admissions Arrangements for
Post-Primary Schools
July 2005

1. NASUWT is pleased to respond to Department of Education Consultation on New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools.
2. NASUWT is the largest union representing teachers and headteachers throughout the UK.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. NASUWT considers the establishment of a province wide framework to be essential in order to achieve consistency in the arrangements for school admissions.
4. NASUWT is strongly opposed to the policy on the establishment of specialist schools, where these are designed to promote competition between schools, where the admissions arrangements that apply to such schools provide for the operation of pupil selection, and where such schools operate outwith the nationally agreed policy frameworks.
5. NASUWT supports action to put an end to the damaging culture of competition between schools.
6. NASUWT considers it essential that a review of the implications of the 14-19 agenda be carried out to identify the effect on post primary admissions criteria.

7. NASUWT believes that the consultation document raises a number of highly important issues relating to meeting the needs of young people and their families and for teaching and learning. In particular, the Inquiry has a number of wider implications in terms of addressing issues of social inequality and social justice arising from equality of access to and distribution of school places.
8. The Union recognises that previous international research has demonstrated the importance of socially inclusive education systems for the standards achieved by young people.
9. The existing body of research indicates that low achievement can be tackled effectively by the ending of hierarchical arrangements between schools, which is linked to differential funding arrangements and differences in the mechanisms by which schools select their pupil intake.
10. The Government has made clear the need for Northern Ireland to compete on the global stage. New and higher order knowledge and skills are needed within the workforce. Schools have a vital role to play in terms of the nation's economic future.
11. NASUWT asserts that systems of school organisation and admission must provide equal access to the highest quality learning opportunities for all young people whilst contributing to high expectations for all.
12. It was in the 1960s that the then Labour Government recognised how selection in education, and the operation of the 11 plus system, was constraining the country's development. It was a deeply damaging system which affected adversely the lives of many young people branded as "failures" from an early age and only now is progress being made in Northern Ireland towards the abolition of this system.

13. The available evidence demonstrates that, rather than helping to raise educational standards, the system of selection undermines educational performance which is so central to economic performance.
14. The Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) provides a major comparative analysis of data on skills levels amongst young people at the end of their compulsory schooling. Based on an analysis of student achievement in 32 countries, the report suggested that high educational standards were threatened within those education systems where access to educational opportunity for young people is based on selection on grounds of ability or social, cultural or economic characteristics.
15. Indeed, a major conclusion of the OECD was that high educational achievement for all young people could be improved substantially by educating children from all social and economic backgrounds together.
16. One of the arguments made in favour of the Government's plans to introduce specialist schools to Northern Ireland is that such schools would remain in the state sector and provide greater parental choice. However, it should be borne in mind that specialist schools in England have received premium funding levels per pupil compared to their non-specialist counterparts. Rather than promoting social inclusion and excellence for all, the early evidence obtained in England regarding the establishment of specialist schools suggests that they could exacerbate the problems of social segregation within Northern Ireland's education system. NASUWT believes that it is essential that all schools are included in the advantages afforded by specialist status, which should be to the benefit of all pupils in Northern Ireland.
17. The converse of the practice of schools selecting pupils, it has been suggested, is the policy of parental preference, which in England was intended to provide the opportunity for parents to select schools which

they would want their children to attend. In fact, the policy has been a fallacy.

18. It remains the case that many parents find the admissions process confusing. Often, parents mistakenly believe that a place will be available for their child at their first preference school. Successive Governments have fostered a misguided belief amongst parents in the myth of parental choice.

19. NASUWT expects the issue of choice to be made absolutely clear to parents in Northern Ireland so that the education system here learns from the difficulties encountered in England.

20. ELBs must play a key role in the co-ordination of admissions. Regulations enabling certain schools to apply their own admission practices would cause considerable distress and confusion to many pupils and their parents. The Union does not believe that equality of educational opportunity and high expectations can be fostered within an environment for school admissions in which there are winners and losers. There must be a Northern Ireland wide framework for admissions.

21. The Union asserts that the formula for determining the number of school places should have a high level of transparency. It should take account of health and safety requirements not only on overall capacity but also for specialist curriculum provision. Governing bodies and heads should not be allowed to admit more and more pupils into unsuitable accommodation. NASUWT casework demonstrates that accidents are occurring in schools when vast numbers of pupils are moving round the school, particularly at change of lessons in corridors that were never built to accommodate them. Overcrowding also contributes to pupil indiscipline.

NASUWT

recommends that:

- ***a province-wide framework for school admissions be established;***
- ***action be taken to***

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

22. NASUWT believes that the introduction of the new curriculum cannot take place effectively in a selective education system. It is therefore imperative that progress towards the abolition of selection in 2008 continues rapidly. The Union considers this must be a priority for DE.

23. NASUWT believes that adjustments in school provision are not the appropriate way forward. To deliver the range of educational opportunities envisaged by the Costello Report the Union considers that a new mechanism of funding schools must be developed. The use of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit in a period of decline in numbers will result in schools haemorrhaging staff. This will then produce a situation where, when increased numbers of staff are needed to deliver the new post primary arrangements they will not be available.

24. NASUWT would wish to be involved in consultations on alternative funding mechanisms.

NASUWT recommends that:

- ***progress towards the abolition of selection is a priority for DE;***
- ***serious and immediate consideration is given to an alternative method of funding schools from the current AWPU;***
- ***the Union is directly involved in consultation on alternative funding mechanisms;***

Pupil Profile

25. NASUWT insists that it is involved in negotiations on the format of the Pupil Profile. The development of such a profile and its intended use will have major implications for teacher workload.

26. NASUWT is seriously concerned by aspects of the pupil profile content as outlined in Appendix 1. The Union is most concerned by the ambiguous references to “some commentary on the pupil’s performance” and “qualitative comments”; given the potential to increase significantly the workloads of teachers.

27. The Union must be consulted on the format of this Pupil Profile in the development stage.

28. NASUWT accepts and agrees with the concept of parental involvement and appropriate information being available to parents. However, the Union is aware that parents do not necessarily agree with or accept information provided for them. NASUWT is concerned as to the outcome if parents are unwilling to accept the professional information and advice to which they have access.

NASUWT recommends that:

- *the Union is directly involved in consultation on the development of the Pupil Profile;*

New Curriculum

29. NASUWT supports the flexibility which will accompany the introduction of the new curriculum. However, the Union is as yet unclear as to how this process will work in practice. The Union wishes to be involved in ongoing consultations on the development and outworking of the new curriculum.

NASUWT recommends that:

- *the Union is directly involved in the development of the new curriculum;*

Entitlement Framework

30. NASUWT supports the concept of the Entitlement Framework. However there are many details which are not yet clear. In this context NASUWT is seriously concerned by the apparent lack of urgency on the part of DE to encourage the development of local partnerships. For the entitlement framework to be available to all pupils from 2008 work needs to be progressing now.
31. NASUWT is strongly of the opinion that local collaborative arrangements must be within a province wide framework. To ensure this the DE must move to provide advice and guidance now.
32. To return to the Entitlement Framework itself the document states that there must be available 1/3 vocational and 1/3 academic courses. However the Union remains unclear as to whether pupils will be required to select from both these options.
33. The Union is seriously concerned by the apparent confusion indicated when DE is contacted as to which courses will be designated as vocational and academic.
34. On the assumption that very few schools will be able to provide all 24 and 27 courses within one campus, there are major areas of detail which need to be addressed e.g. transport, timetabling, teacher movement.
35. NASUWT is concerned by the reference to 'ethos'. Moving from a selective to a non selective system will present many problems not least amongst them parental perception. Much work will need to be done to

ensure that schools are on equal terms and that the concepts of “better” schools and “competition” will have to be addressed.

36. NASUWT would like to believe that the “wide disparity in provision” will end. However, for this to happen the Union considers that much groundwork will need to be carried out by the DE to make this statement a reality.

NASUWT

recommends that:

- ***the DE consult NASUWT immediately on the implications***

Co-operation and Collaboration

37. NASUWT is disappointed by the specific reference here to co-operation and collaboration. There must be a recognition that such collaboration will have to involve all schools i.e. CCMS, Controlled, Voluntary Grammar, Integrated and Irish Medium as well as the FE sector.

38. NASUWT considers that immediate and meaningful consultation must take place on such co-operation.

NASUWT recommends that:

- ***the DE actively promotes the development of local partnerships;***
- ***a province wide framework is developed to support local collaborative arrangements;***
- ***immediate steps are taken by DE to address the change from a competitive system to a collaborative system;***
- ***the DE develop systems which will promote collaboration between all sectors and NASUWT must be involved in the development of such systems.***

Specialist Schools

39. NASUWT believes strongly that the development of specialist schools must proceed with caution. It is essential that the lessons learned from the development of a specialist schools system in England are considered carefully. NASUWT recognises that early evidence on the operation of specialist schools in England demonstrated that they were potentially divisive and served to undermine other non-specialist school provisions, to the detriment of delivering the highest standards of teaching and learning for all pupils.

40. In the context of moving to a non-selective post primary system the development of a different form of selection seems to be completely inappropriate.

41. Should the Government insist on moving forward in this area, NASUWT insists that it should be consulted at all stages.

**NASUWT
recommends that:**

- ***the DE consult further with NASUWT prior to any decision to***

Oversubscribed Schools and Demographic Trends

42. NASUWT is seriously concerned that the figures presented in para. 1.14 appear to be based on one year's intake figures. The Union is equally concerned at the mechanism

used to determine the figure of -16% in Appendix 2. The Union is aware of the increase in the number of immigrants to Northern Ireland since the expansion of the EU. There is no indication that such numbers have been taken into account.

43. NASUWT is further concerned that there is an assumption that a drop in pupil numbers will result in over subscribed schools not being so in the future. NASUWT considers this to be an unrealistic view. The Union is seriously concerned that the existence of many schools, particularly in rural areas may be put at risk by this assumption. Direct and positive

action will be needed now to ensure that educational choice exists throughout Northern Ireland and is not just a feature of urban areas.

NASUWT recommends that:

- ***no financial decisions are made on the future of school intakes which are based on school and demographic data that are not representative of school trends.***

Principles and objectives

44. NASUWT believes that there should be a recognition within these principles of the central role teachers must play in the development of any admissions criteria. The interests of teachers in both primary and post primary schools must also be at the centre of the decision making process. Direct consultation with the Union is essential in developing these criteria.

45. NASUWT is very concerned that, yet again, no mention is made of teachers' rights within the objectives. The interests of teachers must form a major part of these objectives.

46. Furthermore the Union again asserts its view that admissions criteria should be within a Northern Ireland wide common framework.

47. The Union is also concerned by the reference in the final bullet point to an appeal mechanism which is not outlined. NASUWT cannot comment on a procedure which ends in an appeal mechanism which is not detailed.

48. The Union must be consulted in the development of such an appeal mechanism.

NASUWT recommends that:

- *the interests of teachers must be taken into account in the principles and objectives for admissions criteria;*
- *the Union is directly involved in consultations on these principles and objectives;*
- *teachers' rights must form a definite part of these principles and objectives; and*
- *the Union is directly involved in consultations on any appeal mechanism.*

Choosing a Post-Primary School

49. NASUWT has major concerns that nowhere in this paragraph, which refers to informed parental and pupil choice, is any mention made of professional input. Professional comment must play a significant role in the development of informed choice.

50. NASUWT is seriously concerned by the reference here to the development of specialist schools. The Union has not yet been involved in any discussions on this new development despite having sought a meeting on the topic with the DE.

51. NASUWT must be involved at all stages in this proposed major change in the educational system in Northern Ireland.

52. The Union is not aware of specialist schools being part of the Costello recommendations. Consequently NASUWT cannot fathom how this development has appeared as part of this consultation which arose from those recommendations.

53. NASUWT would wish to see consultation on the proposed introduction of specialist schools to be separated from this consultation on admissions criteria.
54. NASUWT must again indicate its serious concern that when local collaboration is mentioned there is no reference to cross sector co-operation. No realistic progress will be made towards the Entitlement Framework without such collaboration.
55. NASUWT would like to see much more detailed information about the consequences of parental choice. There is no indication as to what might happen if a pupil found him/herself unsuited to the chosen post-primary school. Recognition must be given to the fact that at age eleven there is no guarantee that educational aptitude or inclination is as it will be in years to come.
56. NASUWT would express major reservations with regard to the format and development of the Pupil Profile. The Union is deeply concerned at the possible workload implications of this Pupil Profile and reiterates its insistence (para.22) that it is involved at all stages of development.
57. NASUWT wishes to have explained in detail what “quality assured” means in the context of the Pupil Profile.
58. The Union wishes to know who will determine whether the explanatory information from DE, CCEA and/or ELBs is good or not.
59. NASUWT must be consulted at every stage as such information could impact on teachers conditions of service. NASUWT needs to be informed as to how the time will be provided for discussions between primary schools and parents. There must be no expectation that such parental consultations will take place in a teacher’s own time.

60. NASUWT is also concerned at the status of the advice received particularly with regard to the situation for a teacher where parents refuse to accept the advice.

61. NASUWT is concerned by the reference to the 'type of curriculum'. The right to the Entitlement Framework indicates the need for collaboration between schools in order to deliver this Framework. NASUWT is unclear as to the status of an individual school's curriculum in light of this framework.

62. NASUWT is further concerned by the reference to 'open days' and 'information evenings'. Open days / open evenings have developed in a culture of competition between schools. As the Costello recommendations rely on co-operation and collaboration between schools the Union fails to see any need for such functions which would merely perpetuate competition.

63. The Union finds the careless reference to discussions with post primary schools to be extremely disheartening. In order to respond in a detailed manner to this consultation we must be given detail of these discussions; with whom, when, for how long, on what aspects of movement to Post-Primary education.

64. The Union wishes to draw attention again to its comments on collaboration and the Entitlement Framework and seeks consultation on the development of such processes.

NASUWT

recommends that:

- ***the proposals be the subject of further detailed consultation with***

Pupil Profile

65. NASUWT must indicate yet again its grave concerns over the Pupil Profile. All references to this profile indicate major

increases in teacher workload; in the completion of the Profile, in the related assessment and in the requirement for consultation with parents.

66. The Union must insist on appropriate calculations being carried out to estimate the increased staffing levels which will be necessary for such a profile to be developed. This must take place in time for an appropriate profile to be developed before 2007.

67. The Union must also insist that consultations take place on adequate protection for teachers who may be involved in making recommendations on appropriate post primary provision for pupils.

68. NASUWT is also concerned as to the relationship between the completion of the Pupil Profile and the parental consultations. Parental consultations of necessity take place in the months of January and February. NASUWT believes the consequence of this would be to require the completion of the Pupil Profile before the end of the first term. This would in effect reduce the profile of a pupils' last year in primary school to a one term document. The Union is extremely concerned by the apparent lack of detailed consideration in this document to such issues as timing and workload.

69. NASUWT does not consider it appropriate for the Pupil Profile to be available to post primary schools before a pupil has been provided a place.

NASUWT recommends that:

- ***the Union should be consulted as a matter of urgency on all aspects of the development of the pupil profile.***

Advice from the Primary School

70. NASUWT accepts the value of regular consultations with parents. However, the Union is concerned by the emphasis being placed here on P6 consultation. There must be no implication that decisions regarding post primary education will be made at this stage.

71. Any parental consultation must be part of a normal programme; take place within the school day with substitute cover available.

72. NASUWT must insist that there is no requirement on teachers in primary schools to pass any comment whatsoever on the merits of individual post-primary schools.

NASUWT

recommends that:

- ***parental consultation must be part of a programme of***

Advice from Post Primary School

73. NASUWT is particularly concerned by the emphasis being given here to open days / evenings. These have been developed in a culture of competition between schools. As

there is an expectation that all pupils in KS3 will follow the Core Curriculum regardless of the school they attend NASUWT considers this emphasis on open days to be inappropriate. NASUWT must also insist that there must be no increase in the number of open days from 1 to 2.

74. The current provision of open days does not provide for parents to gain information in a way which would be appropriate in the new culture of co-operation and consequently NASUWT believes they should be discontinued.

75. The current Post Primary school prospectus holds information about a specific school. In an environment where the Entitlement Framework will be delivered by co-operation between schools NASUWT considers that there will need to be an entirely new approach to the information required of a school prospectus. It would be completely inappropriate for an

individual school prospectus to contain information specific to other schools.

76. NASUWT must again express concern at the vague and non-specific nature of some of these recommendations. Reference to parents meeting with post primary schools gives no indication of who should conduct such a meeting. Bearing in mind that many schools have an intake number in excess of 100 and a minimum of half an hour would be needed for a meaningful interview this is in excess of 50 hours of interviews. When in the school year does the Department anticipate such interviews taking place? NASUWT will resist any attempts to impose additional workload burdens on members.

77. Furthermore, there is still no indication of how collaboration between schools would be addressed in such interviews. Reference is still being made to opportunities within a 'particular school'.

78. Yet again the references to the Pupil Profile being available to the Post Primary school in advance of the interview is of serious concern. The Union reiterates its view that the pupil profile should not be available to the post primary school prior to the pupil being accepted.

79. NASUWT would wish to be consulted on all aspects of these developments.

80. Again if these interviews are to take place in time to allow parents to make a final choice and for schools to finalise their numbers the Pupil Profile would need to be available in the first term of P7.

NASUWT

recommends that:

- ***there should be no increase in the number of required open days from 1***

Advice from DE / Education and Library Boards

Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
TEACHERS AND HEADTEACHERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THROUGHOUT THE UK

81. NASUWT believes that the ELB booklet will need to be considerably extended but is not in a position to comment specifically until substantive detail is available. NASUWT would expect to be consulted on the development of this advice. The Union considers it essential that any help line set up must be available at all times during the working day. However, the ELB must ensure that advice given does not in any way reflect on the teachers in either primary or post primary schools.

Continuing Advice During Post-Primary Education

82. NASUWT continues to be sceptical about the value of the Pupil Profile and also reiterates its concerns with regard to teacher workload and protection.

83. The Union must insist that should a Pupil Profile be introduced it will replace all current reporting procedures and will be the only reporting procedure in use.

84. The Union insists that there is no increase in teachers' workload as a consequence of the introduction of a Pupil Profile.

85. NASUWT is seriously concerned by the apparent lack of connection between the comments in this paragraph and those in previous parts of the document. There is no indication here as to how this flexibility will be introduced. Much of the document refers to individual schools both with regard to parental consultation and choice of school. The vagueness which characterises all references to the delivery of the Entitlement Framework is compounded in the reference to flexibility in this paragraph.

86. Much clearer thinking on the part of the Department is necessary for teachers to identify the implications of these new admissions arrangements.

87. Yet again NASUWT is concerned by the woolly thinking evidenced in this paragraph. This document is dealing with New Admissions Criteria

between P7 in Primary Schools and Year 8 in Post Primary Schools but it is quite clear that progression through Post Primary Education is also being considered.

88. The availability of the Entitlement Framework in the vast majority of cases will require collaboration between schools and may well require the movement of pupils between schools.

89. In such circumstances NASUWT wonders how this will sit alongside specific admissions criteria applied rigorously to specific post primary schools.

90. NASUWT is concerned that advice from Careers Service of Department of Education and Learning (DEL) would be available to all pupils. However, the Union is even more concerned at the value given to advice from teachers. Should there be conflict between DEL advice and the teacher's advice the Union would be concerned as to the standing of the teacher's advice. The Union also considers it unnecessary to add into the process advice from ELBs.

91. NASUWT would wish to be involved in consultation on specific details with regard to these issues.

NASUWT

recommends that:

- ***the introduction of a Pupil Profile must replace all other reporting***

Timetable for Admissions Process

92. NASUWT is extremely concerned at the suggested timetable for the following reasons

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- (i) If the DE is setting admissions criteria

for Post Primary Schools a full year in advance there is no indication of any opportunity to review these figures. There is no indication in this document as to the criteria the DE will use to set these numbers.

- (ii) This is clearly a procedure which is dependent on pupils' attainment at the end of P6. Bearing in mind the variability in maturity of young children NASUWT finds this astonishing. This will indeed be a transfer not at the end of P7 but in effect based on a pupils attainment at end of P6.
- (iii) The assumptions being made that schools will (a) continue to run open days/evenings (b) move these to the Christmas term and (c) give up periods of time in the summer term for induction of next year's pupils.
- (iv) The reference to induction of Yr 8 pupils in the summer term of their P7 year seems to suggest that disruption to both education of P7 pupils and that of the Post Primary pupils is of no significance.
- (v) The Union does not believe it is necessary for Post Primary Schools to review their admissions criteria annually. The Union again reiterates its comments on standard Northern Ireland wide admissions criteria.

NASUWT recommends that:

- *the DE review the suggested timetable for the admissions process in light of NASUWT comments; and*
- *there should be Northern Ireland wide admissions criteria which would negate the requirement for schools to review their criteria annually.*

Pupils with Compelling Individual Circumstances or a Statement of Special Educational Need

93. NASUWT recognises the existence of Statements of Special Educational Needs. However, the Union cannot respond to 'compelling individual circumstances' when there is no specific detail.

94. Any attempt to depart from standardised admissions criteria must be resisted.

95. NASUWT would wish to be consulted on the detail of Compelling Individual Circumstances when such is available.

NASUWT

recommends that:

- ***any departure from standardised admissions criteria must be resisted.***

Effect on School Admissions and Enrolment Numbers

96. NASUWT wishes to know how the DE has decided that these pupils will not present problems to schools.

97. NASUWT is unhappy that any pupils should be considered outside the normal admissions procedures.

98. NASUWT cannot comment on whether these cases should be supernumerary in the absence of any detail and would wish to be consulted.

Central Panel

99. The Union would wish to be consulted on the development of the criteria which this central panel might use.

Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need

100. NASUWT believes that consultation on this issue will be affected by the introduction of SENDO in September 2005 and therefore should be addressed when the effects of this legislation have been evaluated.

101. NASUWT would wish to be involved, at the earliest stage, in such consultation.

NASUWT recommends that:

- *decisions on pupils with SEN be informed by the impact of the introduction of SENDO in September 2005.*

Admissions Criteria for Oversubscribed Schools

102. NASUWT believes that admissions criteria must be centrally administered and uniformly applied across all post primary schools.
103. NASUWT would have major concerns about criteria such as parish, tradition, religion.
104. NASUWT wishes to know how some of these criteria would fit with Section 75 requirements.
105. NASUWT considers the use of feeder primary schools and geography to be acceptable criteria for admissions.
106. However, both of these would have to ensure that an individual post primary school would have a socially balanced mix of pupils.
107. NASUWT considers that the only acceptable tie breaker is that of random selection.
108. NASUWT reiterates its view that admissions criteria should be straightforward and applied uniformly across Northern Ireland.

109. The Union would wish to be directly consulted on the development of these admissions criteria.

NASUWT recommends that:

- *admissions criteria must be centrally administered and uniformly applied across all Post Primary Schools;*
- *all suggested admissions criteria are considered alongside section 75 requirements;*
- *feeder primary schools and geography are the main criteria to be used;*
- *random selection is the only form of tie breaker.*

Admissions Appeals

110. NASUWT agrees that there should be no significant change to the appeal mechanism.

111. NASUWT considers that, with a Northern Ireland wide common set of admissions criteria, there should also be a central appeals mechanism. There should be no need for individual appeals panels within ELBs.

112. NASUWT accepts the right of representation but would not wish to see this being legal representation.

NASUWT recommends that:

- *the current appeal mechanism is not significantly changed;*
- *the appeal mechanism be centrally applied;*

- *there is no need for individual ELBs to set up their own appeal panels; and*
- *legal representation at appeals should not be introduced.*

Chris Keates

General Secretary

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