

## Strategic Advisory Group

### Minutes of 6th Meeting of Strategic Advisory Group

Dunadry Hotel - 23 November 2004

**Present:**

Chairperson  
Members

Secretariat

Apologies

#### **Chairman's Introduction**

1. The Chairman welcomed members to the continuation of the meeting on 1-2 November and reminded them of the stage reached. He emphasised that the aim was to provide advice about what should be included in the consultation document on admissions to be issued at the end of the year.

#### **Minutes of the previous meeting**

2. The minutes were agreed.

#### **Paper 6.2**

##### **Compelling individual circumstances**

3. The general view was that specific provision should be made for children with compelling individual circumstances. These should be extraordinary circumstances: children with special educational needs would be considered through the normal statementing process. It should not be used as an appeal mechanism or as a "back-door" admissions system.

4. expressed concerns about resource implications, in particular that the new arrangements will require additional resources at a time when resources are limited.

5. Members' comments are set out in Annex A.

### **Order in which criteria are applied**

6. Members discussed the issues of giving schools some flexibility in determining their criteria by selecting them from a menu or of criteria being applied in a prescribed order. The overall view was that the consultation paper should seek views on a menu approach to permit schools a degree of flexibility.

7. Members' comments are set out in Annex B.

### **Menu options**

8. The overall view was that the options presented should be included in the consultation paper. Members' comments are set out in Annex C.

### **Admissions process timetable**

9. Members were broadly content with the timetable for the process. A number suggested a move towards an IT based system for providing information about the transfer process and about schools. However it is important to bear in mind the need to ensure that those without IT access are not disadvantaged. There should be some consistency in the range of information provided by schools. Members' comments are set out in Annex D.

### **Streamlining the arrangements**

10. Members considered the existing arrangements and the potential of IT to streamline the arrangements. They acknowledged the need to ensure that key data is verified and that an IT system would need to be fully tested.

11. Members were reminded that the meeting scheduled for 7 and 8 December had been cancelled in order to allow the Department time to progress many of the issues which the Group had considered. Members will be contacted about their availability for meetings in the period January to June 2005.

12. The Chairman thanked the members for their contributions.

Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Annex A

### Cases of compelling individual circumstances

#### Discussion

#### What sort of cases should be considered?

##### Definition

- Irish medium – special circumstances?
- Should tightly define “special”
- Criteria should be very clearly defined
- Some Christian parents will also require access to single sex schools – not just Muslim parents
- Special circumstances should relate to a particular school and not a school type
- Need to separate out the Special circumstances – it should be small range
- Must be inclusive – children with special medical circumstances must have access where it is appropriate

##### Central Body

- BOGs would welcome and outside/central body
- BOGs should have the opportunity to recommend approval and then an outside body could examine the case
- Central body should not be overly bureaucratic – low number of cases on a seasonal basis
- Should be dealt with by a central body

##### Timing

- Make it high risk and up front
- Special circumstances criterion should be high up the list of admissions criteria
- The special circumstances should not come late in the process otherwise it becomes an “appeal” process – should they be outside the normal schools admission criteria
- Will this not only arise when a child does not get a place under the normal admissions criteria?
- Should ensure that people are not manipulating the system
- Need to identify if it applies before or after the normal process
- Cases only arise when pupils don’t get the school of their choice – should ensure that there is adequate provision
- Prep Schools – parents will believe they have certain rights as will those in single sex schools or co-ed schools

##### Resources

- Chance now to simplify the process – to keep costs to a minimum
- BOGs have been trying to apply a system that requires resources – assume that we will have additional resources (will be addressed under new special needs legislation)

**Whether these cases should be supernumerary?**

- Should not be supernumerary
- Too many externally placed children may be difficult for schools – BOGs should admit the pupils
- Should be supernumerary – schools will have to consider these cases very seriously due to impact on overall admissions numbers
- Children with special educational needs should be outside the normal system – special circumstances should also be outside the normal arrangements
- If it is an outside body deciding then they should be supernumerary?

**In terms of consultation**

- Should be no special circumstances – ask what categories should be included
- Highly compelling circumstances
- If we define any one special circumstances we will have to define all

**Annex B**

**Issue 3 – Should the criteria be applied in a specific order and what should that order be?**

***SAG is asked for its advice on whether schools should be required to apply the criteria in a specific order which would best meet the principles and objectives.***

***Discussion***

- What will be gained by ordering?
- Will this restrict the BOG?
- Ordering provides information to parents on the “chances” of obtaining a place for their child
- Pre-school settings have defined and ordered admissions criteria
- In Maintained sector schools would not like this restriction – based on pre-school experience
- Should allow free will and common sense to prevail
- If we don't have some uniformity parents may find it difficult to understand
- Uniformity may be difficult to deal with
- Should BOG have any input to the determination of criteria?
- The law will determine the legal criteria – will also limit the number of categories
- The system should be driven by pupils' needs not the schools' needs
- Basic criteria - sibling first and geographical area second and in that order?
- Must be transparent and easily managed
- Should take account of impact on transport costs

**Issue 4 – What different options for a menu should be presented for consultation?**

**Open Menu - Compulsory Elements – Defined Order – Compulsory Order** – The Department outlines the acceptable criteria in each category. Schools must select at least one criterion from each category and must apply them in a specified order.

***SAG is asked to advise on whether a number of option(s) should be presented for consultation, and to consider if those outlined above and/or any other options should be included.***

**Discussion**

- Need to know what is on the menu before can decide if it should have compulsory elements
- Current siblings need to get priority and other family connections could possibly be used further down the list
- Issue about geography – the definitions will be crucial
- Context should ensure that people understand “equity of access”.

**TIMETABLE FOR POST-PRIMARY ADMISSION PROCESS**

| <b>ACTIVITY</b>  | <b>CURRENT</b> | <b>REVISED</b>                 |
|--|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Review and set admissions and enrolment numbers for following year   | June-August    | March-May of P6 year           |
| Review Admissions Criteria   | September      | April/May                      |
| Advice leaflet issued to parents in relation to the Transfer Tests   | August         | N/a                            |
| Schools review their admissions criteria   | September      | April - May                    |
| Parents opt in or out of Transfer Test   | September      | N/a                            |
| Transfer Test take place on 1s and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Friday of month   | November       | N/a                            |
| Supplementary Test takes place   | December       | N/a                            |
| ELBs issue guidance to parents on Transfer Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Special Circumstances should be indicated here?</i></li> </ul>  | January        | April/May of P6 year           |
| Annual parents meeting including receipt of the Pupil Profile  | various        | May/June of P6 year            |
| Transfer Booklets published by ELBs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Should include some development of the schools website</i></li> <li>• <i>How will collaborative arrangements be described?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is this an opportunity to change from a paper based system to an ICT system</i></li> <li>• <i>Information must be relevant</i></li> </ul> | January        | October                        |
| Post-primary schools hold open nights for P7 pupils and their parents and issue prospectus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Will be workload implications for primary schools</i></li> </ul>  | January        | October                        |
| Post-primary schools provide time for discussion with prospective pupils and their parents   | N/a            | November                       |
| Boards issue Transfer Test results to parents and primary schools  | February       | N/a                            |
| Primary school Principals hold interviews with parents, complete transfer Forms and forward them to Boards   | February       | Late November – early December |

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| Boards provide post-primary schools with Transfer Forms in preference order<br>1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> preference etc | March-May   | January  |
| Schools issue letters advising parents of post-primary school for which child has been accepted   | Late May    | March    |
| Final date for notice of intention to appeal against decision of Board of Governors   | June        | April    |
| Admission Appeal Tribunals held   | July/August | May/June |

## Discussion

- Should there be greater links between primary and secondary – open days for children? This should be encouraged.
- Consistency is an issue – the Transfer Booklet is a way of doing this
- Quality assurance is a key consideration
- DE could issue guidance on the content of the web page
- DE design link page containing all web addresses for schools
- Also schools have link to DE website
- Do we need to check admissions criteria every year – no only when 1<sup>st</sup> drawn up and if they change
- Should DE “confirm” a schools criteria each year?
- Information should contain pathways available (11-19)
- Should parents have access to what is available in a locality (local area partnership)?