



**WESTERN EDUCATION
& LIBRARY BOARD**

**RESPONSE TO THE
CONSULTATION ON**

**NEW ADMISSIONS
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

*Submitted
Tuesday 28 June 2005*

**WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD
RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT ON
NEW ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS FOR POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

The Western Education and Library Board welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the response to the Consultation Document on New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools, January 2005. The Board has attempted to consider the questions in the Consultation Document in a pragmatic manner, in light of the practical implications of the outcomes, based on the experience of the members and officers of the Working Group.

CHAPTER 1 - CONTEXT FOR NEW ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS

Paragraph 1.11- 1.16

Specialist Schools

The Board would suggest that the following issues need to be taken into account in any consideration of plans for the development of Specialist Schools:

- the potential adverse implications for schools not deemed Specialist Schools;
- how transport policy might possibly inhibit parental preference;
- the rurality issues in the Western Board that might militate against the effective implementation of Specialist Schools; and
- the need to support those schools that will not become Specialist Schools to ensure their continuous improvement.

Oversubscribed Schools

Since pupil enrolment is central to the allocation of school budgets, the new arrangements should promote parity of esteem for all schools within their communities, including unpopular schools. The Board recommends that significant resources, financial and human, be provided to ensure high quality provision is available for all pupils.

CHAPTER 2 – PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES

Paragraphs 2.1- 2.3

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.

The Board agrees that the principles and objectives outlined provide a sound basis on which to develop the new admissions arrangements but would suggest that with regard to:

- **Paragraph 2.2 (i)**
The interests of the child may be better served if he/she is given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, as is the norm in the Code of Practice which highlights the importance of pupils participating in all decisions about their education.
- **Paragraph 2.2 (iii)**
'Informed choice' may raise parental expectations. As it will always be constrained by the physical capacity of a school, parents will need to be made aware of the actual number of places available in the post-primary schools they are likely to be considering for their children. The arrangements will enable parents to make choices but providers may not have sufficient places available;
- **Paragraph 2.2 (v)**
The term 'local community' needs to be legally defined. There needs to be clarity as to what it actually includes in terms of variables such as traditional catchment area, county. etc.
- **Paragraph 2.3 (ii)**
The objective 'maximise opportunities for parents to exercise their preference' may be inhibited by the fact the Government is reducing places in schools. Thought needs to be given to the transport assistance that will need to be available to support the exercise of preference;
- **Paragraph 2.3 (iii)**
There will need to be a consistent approach to admissions criteria. The Board recommends that there should be a statutory requirement, possibly in the form of an external moderation process, on all post-primary schools to use consistent admissions criteria. The Department of Education should also consider ways to cater for unique circumstances pertaining to particular sectors within a common admissions framework. Each pupil

should have an opportunity to be placed in a suitable school of his/her realistic choice. Boards of Governors would also need to have tie-breaker arrangements in place so they can place pupils down to the last available place: and

- **Paragraph 2.3 (iv)**

The term 'special education needs' needs to be legally defined to include high as well as low achievers.

It is important to ensure that parents have confidence in the fact that all schools are good enough for their children. The Capital Building Programme, the New Curriculum and the Entitlement Framework, along with an overall reduction in pupil numbers, will not in themselves ensure this objective. It is unduly optimistic to assume that parents will feel confident about being able to secure a place for their child in a school which will be suited to his or her educational needs, interests and aspirations. The Government must be prepared to identify and take remedial action against schools which parents perceive are not yet 'good enough'. First preference applications are a sound indicator.

The Board would have reservations that the 'Entitlement Framework' will be extended enough by 2008 to enable pupils to have access to the full range of choices at Key Stages 4 and 5. Government decisions need to be made quickly, and funding made available, to ensure that parents are confident schools will be able to deliver the 'Entitlement Framework'.

CHAPTER 3 - CHOOSING A POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL

Paragraphs 3.1 – 3.20

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.

The Board believes that it is essential that the Pupil Profile is completed honestly and objectively and reflects the pupil's educational needs, interests and aspirations. With regard to the Pupil Profile, there is a body of 'good practice' already existing in some primary schools and this should be recognised. Uninformed parental perception with regard to the Pupil Profile could result in the potential for litigation against the Primary School Principal, where parents perceived they were not fully informed as to their child's attainments and/or achievements.

Quantitative and qualitative information, such as attitudes to and aptitudes for learning, should be high quality information that is 'parent friendly' and can be 'backed up' by hard evidence. Tools such as the NFER Tests and Cognitive Ability Tests (CATS) might be used to both substantiate the quantitative information and bring more objectivity to the qualitative information contained therein. It is essential that some form of standardisation and external moderation be employed to further promote objectivity across all schools. Standardised tests will need to be designed more specifically for Northern Ireland pupils and this will mean including a higher number of pupils in the sampling process to make the tests more accurate for the province. These tests would also give a clearer picture, across the province, of pupil attainment and allow for direct comparisons. However, the Board recognises that the assessment tools schools use to inform their judgments are in the public domain and could be accessed by anyone wishing to influence a pupil's progress, or the evidence of a pupil's progress.

There is concern, that if used as part of the transfer procedure, the Pupil Profile will become a legal document that will be contentious and could lead to litigation against the Primary School Principal. Honesty and objectivity could be tempered by fear of litigation and the need to appease demanding parents.

However, the Board has major concerns about the time implications and would seriously question if the new curriculum and assessments arrangements are being taken forward concurrently with the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools. There is an urgent need for the Department to issue clear guidance as to how these arrangements can be fully implemented within the limited time available.

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.

Every parent and every child must be involved in the transfer process. Information for parents is paramount. The Pupil Profile should carry all information to help teachers teach the pupil and be a vehicle to help parents make informed decisions. Parents should have the opportunity to inform the Pupil Profile with regard to their child's achievements outside of school. As a result, it should be easily used by parents and pupils in making an informed decision on their choices of post-primary schools. However, the Pupil Profile will make little impression on those parents who take relatively little interest in their children's educational progress.

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 discussions envisaged at the annual parent-teacher meetings with P6 teachers and with Principals of potential post-primary schools will involve a significant amount of time on the part of both teachers and parents and could result in an increased administrative burden with regard to transfer arrangements. The Board has major concerns about the time implications of the proposed arrangements and would encourage those framing them to consider the need for reasonable time and resources to be built into the system for both sectors so that teaching time does not suffer.

Each post-primary school would have to arrange interviews for all potential preferences with nugatory effect, thus creating a massive burden on schools. It could also result in raising parental expectations that in the case of over-subscribed schools cannot be realised. This proposal could result in a substantial number of appeals – particularly where Principals make any comment on the suitability or non-suitability of the school for individual pupils. There should be a requirement that post-primary schools give information – not advice – since they cannot accept/refuse a pupil a place on the information in the Pupil Profile. There should be a strengthening of information currently available in prospectuses before a parent nominates preferences.

The process for parents to follow should be to:

- (a) gain a thorough understanding of the Pupil Profile of their child;
- (b) access appropriate prospectuses based on the information gained at (a) above; and
- (c) nominate their preferences in line with the published admissions criteria, which should be easily understood by parents.

In indicating the need for the above process the Board is very conscious of the fact that it will take a considerable time for it to become ‘a way of working’ for both teachers and parents.

The Board has reservations about how reasonable, or practical, it would be to expect post-primary schools to meet parents on a ‘one to one basis’ to discuss how their child’s needs could be met at a particular school. The hours spent on such an exercise would be immense. Parents should be adequately informed through information provided in prospectuses and open days/evenings.

Statements and declarations in prospectuses should be written in such a way that they are not open to legal challenge. With respect to collaboration with other institutions, schools would need to ensure they do not make commitments about future provision that may not materialise for various reasons beyond their control eg viability of certain courses.

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.

The Board would suggest that parents should receive information about the transfer process much earlier than September of the P7 year. Information from the Department, currently being released in June and August, should be released to parents early in the P6 year and the admissions criteria for post-primary schools could be provided early in the P7 year.

A help-line and web-based information would have to be resourced and staffed at an appropriate level and should not be an 'add-on' to existing commitments. The Board would wish to draw the Department's attention to the fact that the present Pre-School Admission Arrangements were assigned to the Boards' Transfer and Open Enrolment Sections without any additional resources being made available to them for their administration. Transfer and Open Enrolment Officers are currently responsible for admission to pre-school, primary, post-primary and transfer between schools and the subsequent appeal procedures. A more realistic approach needs to be taken into account with regard to the diverse procedures operating simultaneously within the Transfer and Open Enrolment Sections.

The Transfer Booklet should be reviewed in light of strengthening prospectuses and the development of web-based information. All school-based information could be obtained directly from the school with DE/Education and Library Boards providing an overview of the procedure. The Education and Library Boards would still require to publish admissions criteria. However, the possibility of reducing hard-copy publications, with a view to posting the admissions criteria electronically, should be investigated as this would result in substantial savings to Boards. The number of 'hits' on Board websites at present would suggest that there is an increase in the number of parents using this facility. The relevant legislation would have to be amended to include this change to the procedure.

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.

Initially the interface between Year 7 and Year 8 should be enhanced by including careers advice in prospectuses about the availability of academic and

vocational pathways, to assist parents in their choice of school. However, the Board believes that careers guidance should start in Year 8 if pupils are to make informed judgements about the appropriate choices of subjects at Key Stages 4 and 5.

Providing pupils with guidance as to the range of subjects they may combine at both post-14 and post-16 will be very important as will the mix of academic and vocational subjects. The Board believes that every pupil should have an entitlement to independent and objective careers advice which focuses on all the potential career options at 16+.

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

The Board feels that the 'Timetable for New Post-Primary Admissions Process' (Page 21) is too closely aligned to the Department's present timetable for the Transfer Procedure and needs to take more account of the needs facing schools and Boards with regard to the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools. The broad timetable for the new admissions process should reflect the following concerns:

- admissions/enrolment numbers should be agreed by April of the P6 year;
- the overlap of appeals and information-gathering of admissions criteria (traditionally two very time consuming periods for Transfer and Open Enrolment Sections);
- the tight deadline for gathering information, publishing and distributing the Transfer Booklet. (If earlier recommendations regarding the format of the Transfer Booklet are implemented these concerns would be alleviated);
- four weeks in November would not be long enough to provide time for discussions with parents and pupils. However, if previous recommendations regarding parental involvement in the P6 year are implemented the four week timescale in November would be more realistic;
- the timetable is tight for the receipt and processing of Transfer Forms;
- the timetable for one-to-one annual parent teacher meetings during May/June (Pg 21) is not practical and these interviews could leave teachers vulnerable to parental pressure;
- the timetable should include consideration of compelling individual circumstances); and
- the June deadline for appeals should facilitate attendance by both schools and parents. The possibility of schools sending out acceptance letters, rather than Boards, should be explored. Schools currently send out letters regarding induction arrangements, uniform, etc. This suggestion would eliminate duplication and effect financial efficiencies.

In the first year of the new admissions arrangements there will be a transition process in that there will be an overlap where Transfer and Open Enrolment Officers will have to manage existing and new procedures alongside open enrolment pre-school and primary procedures, transfer between schools and appeals. All admission timetables will need to be clearly established and integrated to ensure timely delivery. It is also essential that resources are made available and appropriate structures are put in place well in advance to permit delivery of services. The Local Best Value Review of Transfer and Open Enrolment carried out recently in the Western Board would indicate that the present system is not adequately resourced. As a result, the Board believes that there will need to be a radical review of present and future workloads to ensure the service is adequately resourced to deliver on the new arrangements. The Western Board has progressed some way towards developing collaborative partnerships with the other Boards and the Interboard Group is working together in taking forward the strategic recommendations in the Local Best Value Review.

The Board would suggest that the term 'induction arrangements' as referred to in Paragraph 3.19 needs to be defined more clearly. The Board's Key Stage 2/3 Transition Programme, quality assured by DENI 1998/99, has been in place since 1997. Its aim is to improve the quality of learning and teaching by promoting continuity in the curricular and pastoral experiences of pupils transferring from primary to post-primary schools.

In the course of this programme a number of concerns have been identified about continuity and progression at the Key Stage 2/3 interface. The programme has consistently revealed evidence that much remains to be done to ensure a smooth transition for pupils from primary to post-primary education. There is generally no shared vision between post-primary schools and their 'feeder' primary schools regarding the Key Stage 2/3 transition process. There is, generally, a lack of consistency and coherence with respect to:

- the timing of the transfer of information, so that it can enable the receiving school to plan curriculum provision;
- agreement about the amount of information required;
- discussion between teachers from the primary and post-primary schools about approaches to learning and teaching;
- dialogue with parents about ways in which they can be involved in the education of their children in post-primary schools, including the new admissions process; and
- the resources (human and financial) available to agree and implement procedures which will facilitate planned continuity and progression.

The absence of some, or all, of the above ingredients, combined with a change in schools, can have negative effects on pupils' performance in Key Stage 3. The issues raised have important implications for both primary and post-primary

schools, and need to be taken into account in the consideration of any new admission arrangements for transfer to post-primary education.

CHAPTER 4 – PUPILS WITH COMPELLING INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR A STATEMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION NEED

Paragraphs 4.1 – 4.10

Q8 The Department is seeking your views on the types of cases which should be considered as compelling individual circumstances.

The Board accepts that it is not possible to give a definitive list of compelling individual circumstances. A compelling individual circumstance should be one that dictates attendance/non-attendance at a particular school on personal safety or welfare and should not take account of arguments based on pupil attainment or aptitude.

With regard to Paragraph 4.5 and the statement: 'it is recognised that these may only emerge in the P6 and P7 years', the Board would query if any research has been carried out in this area to substantiate this claim. The Board believes that compelling individual circumstances may have to include pupils with complex social and medical circumstances and schools will have to allow for totally unexpected circumstances in P6 and P7, from time to time. However, the compilation of the Pupil Profile, from Key Stage1 eventually, should capture most cases of compelling individual circumstances. The criteria for establishing compelling individual circumstances will need to be tightly defined, otherwise there could be unwarranted growth in the number of claims of compelling individual circumstances in the P6 and P7 years.

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

The Board believes that pupils admitted under compelling individual circumstances should be admitted within the approved admissions number because of:

- class size policy including the size of practical classes; and
- the possible negative impact on neighbouring schools.

The procedure and timing of the consideration of pupils with compelling individual circumstances has not been addressed in the proposed timetable for the new post-primary admissions process.

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 size and composition.

The Board agrees that there should be a Central Panel to take the subjectivity out of cases of compelling individual circumstances. The timing of these cases is crucial as they have to be dealt with before other applications are considered - regardless of whether they are supernumerary or not.

Experience of the current officers in Transfer and Open Enrolment would suggest that the Central Panel should be no more than four persons, including the clerk. If Panels are too large experience shows that they become exceedingly difficult to constitute.

The composition of the Central Panel should include the interests of parents and teachers. It should also include medical/social and legal representation. There should be a 'pool' of panel members, from which to draw the panel together, that would serve the five Boards but be clerked on an individual Board basis.

Serious attention needs to be given to:

- the fees/rewards for those persons on the Central Panel. They should be on a par with those of the Special Educational Needs Central Panel (£250/£300 per day); and
- any right of appeal against the decision of this Central Panel.

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

The Board agrees with the statement in Paragraph 4.10 that: 'An alternative approach could be to include those pupils who have statements in the school's admissions number before the transfer process begins; those who are statemented after the completion of the transfer process would be counted as supernumerary'. In the case of pupils who are statemented, supernumerary status may in fact have a negative effect by providing grounds for them to perceive themselves as different from other pupils.

This approach would prevent a school having to admit an undue number of pupils with behavioural statemented problems. Where statemented pupils are admitted without adequate support it affects the morale of teachers. Other pupils in the class may be neglected because of the disproportionate amount of time that the teacher has to allocate to statemented pupils. The presence of the

classroom assistant(s) in the classroom could also be a distraction for other pupils in the class. All pupils are entitled to be treated equally and should not be disadvantaged by the presence of an undue proportion of statemented pupils with behavioural problems in the class. However, the Board would expect schools to have a number of statemented pupils reflective of the number of pupils in their communities.

Whilst the Board is happy to advise on how these pupils are admitted to schools they, and other pupils, need a broad and balanced education. With regard to entitlement, the WELB Inclusion Policy states that: 'All children are entitled to receive a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum. As far as possible, this should be in a local mainstream school, recognising that appropriate support, advice and resources may be necessary to achieve this'.

CHAPTER 5 – ADMISSIONS CRITERIA FOR OVERSUBSCRIBED SCHOOLS

Paragraphs 5.1 – 5.17

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

The Board agrees that the family-focused criteria of siblings currently at the school and eldest or only child should be included within the menu of admissions criteria in order to keep family units together and for practical and ecological reasons.

The Board would wish to draw the Department's attention to the fact that if 'eldest child' is to remain as a criterion, a careful legal definition would be required to ensure that child is not disadvantaged because an older sibling has a statement and is attending a different school that meets his/her special needs. Consideration also needs to be given to cases where the eldest child in the family is already attending a co-educational school but where the next child wishes to attend a single sex school.

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

The Board's view is that the Community-Based Criteria, Feeder Primary Schools and Parish, should be available if Boards of Governors wish to include them. However, the Board believes that the term 'Feeder Primary School' should be legally defined by the Department. This definition would need to be robust enough to withstand scrutiny under equality legislation.

Experience at appeals shows that parish boundaries are difficult to define. In some cases there is more than one post-primary school in a parish. Current

practice shows that the parish dimension is largely restricted to the maintained sector. The Board acknowledges the difficulties that common admissions criteria could pose for integrated, Irish medium, special and single sex schools, in terms of obtaining an appropriate intake.

Clarification should also be provided as to how a new primary school becomes a feeder school to one or more post-primary schools. The issue of determining feeder primary schools should be overseen by a central body and not left entirely to individual schools to decide. Where an existing primary school takes on integrated status, this could change the traditional feeder primary schools to some controlled, maintained and/or integrated post-primary schools. The Board agrees with the statement in Paragraph 5.10 regarding the need for guidance from the Department in relation to the designation of feeder primary schools and parish areas to ensure that these criteria are effective, fair and transparent.

The Consultation Document is ambiguous in that it states in Paragraph 5.4 that: 'schools normally serve local communities' whilst in Paragraph 5.9 it states; 'many schools serve their local community', without any suggestion that it is abnormal to do otherwise. The term 'local community' needs to be defined by the Department as it seems to take on different meanings in rural and urban areas.

Whilst it is recognised there are benefits to be gained by pupils mixing with others from further afield, the Board believes that, generally, pupils from the local area should be facilitated at the local school. If a pupil in a rural area has to travel a considerable distance to a school and, whilst there, has to commute between the base school and another school, this could result in the pupil spending an inordinate amount of time travelling as opposed to time being profitably spent in the classroom. In view of this possible scenario, the Board is very apprehensive about how policy with regard to commuting will be addressed and administered.

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.**

The Board believes that it is not appropriate to generalise on geographical criteria because of the need to admit pupils into existing schools. There should be equality of opportunity for all pupils regardless of whether they live in the remote rural areas or the leafy suburbs. Geographical criteria could be disadvantageous to some schools at the expense of others. The Child-Centred Criterion is more acceptable than School-Centred because pupils would receive

priority for a place at the most suitable school nearest their homes. However, being a priority case for a school does not in itself guarantee admission.

The Board believes clarification is necessary with regard to building in the necessary percentages into admissions criteria to take account of integrated status, cultural and other religious/social needs.

Whilst it is recognised that percentage limits are difficult to apply and likely to result in an increase in appeals due to their non-transparent nature, the Board feels there would be some merit in further exploration of this option as a means of ensuring a wider and more representative intake of pupils ie building in a balance into the admissions criteria to take account of the local area, feeder primary schools and rurality. The Western Board has particular concerns about Co Fermanagh, in particular, as at present most academic provision is provided in Enniskillen. The Board would suggest that the Department provides models using percentage limits, as is the case in some areas of England, to further inform the new post-primary admissions arrangements.

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.**

If schools are over-subscribed with pupils from the traditional catchment area, random selection would be the Board's preferred option but random selection could rule out a pupil nearest the school or the pupil from further afield. Care should be taken with the Mc's and M's and the O'B's and O's.

A standard method of selection, like that outlined below, needs to be employed:

- siblings;
- community-based admissions criteria; and
- random selection as the final tie breaker.

With regard to the use of different methods of selection, the Board believes that post-code selection is crude and should be discouraged. Also, random selection is not transparent.

There should be a standard method for measuring proximity from home to school if Boards of Governors are to be permitted to use this criterion. Distance is

contentious and expensive if Ordnance Survey (OS) is employed for measuring purposes and this can delay decisions for schools. However, it is anticipated that the Geographic Information System (GIS) measurements should be available for use when the Transport Management Information System becomes fully operational – currently scheduled for implementation in March 2007.

The policy to be adopted on the provision of transport assistance will be an important consideration, particularly in rural areas.

Q16 The Department is seeking your view on any other criteria that you believe should be included in the menu, bearing in mind the principles and objectives outlined in Chapter 2.

If Eldest Child is used as a criterion, it is essential that a child with an elder sibling who has a statement is not penalised in any way.

The Board recognises that there are some in its community who have difficulty in accepting random selection as a legitimate tiebreaking criterion, regarding any such process as tantamount to a lottery and akin to gambling with a child's future.

The Board recognises there could be equality implications for the youngest child with regard to the family-focused criterion 'Eldest Child/Only Child'.

The Board notes that the suggested Family-Focused Criteria (Pg 29/34) does not include any reference to children of staff. This criterion is currently applied in some schools in the Western Board and we believe that it deserves further discussion/consultation.

Criteria for children living outside Northern Ireland, eg Irish Republic and children living within Northern Ireland whose parents are not EU nationals, should be clearly defined by DE in consultation with the relevant government agencies.

A decision has to be made regarding whether or not children moving into an area should be given any special consideration as they will not readily meet the criteria listed.

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

The Board recommends that Boards of Governors should have the option of choosing their admissions criteria with as much choice as possible and at the same time should give parents as much clarity as possible.

The Board strongly recommends that there is clear guidance from the Department with regard to the order of criteria that Boards of Governors should

consider, otherwise frustrated parents will be liable to resort to litigation.

With regard to Option 1 - Open Menu - the Board believes that Boards of Governors could choose whichever criteria they wish to apply from the menu but, in the interests of consistency, Governors might follow a recognised order.

With regard to Option 3 – Optional Categories and Compulsory Order – the Board recognises the importance of parents being able to identify and clearly understand the menu with regard to family-focused criteria. Compulsory order should be common to all schools across the province.

CHAPTER 6 – ADMISSIONS APPEALS

Q 18 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.

The Board strongly recommends that the appeals system in the future should be rigorous, robust and fair. The new appeals process should have all the best features of the present system which has evolved but should be enabled to deal with appeals concerning compelling individual circumstances.

If implemented, the Central Panel's consideration of compelling individual circumstances will impact on the present appeal process. There is a lack of clarity on how appeals relating to compelling individual circumstances will be dealt with, where the Panel will be located and how they will be remunerated. If, as anticipated in the Consultation Document, the number of pupils with compelling individual circumstances is small, the Board believes those pupils should be included in the school's admissions number before the transfer process begins. However, the Board agrees that for those pupils for whom compelling individual circumstances arise after the transfer process has begun, they should be counted as supernumerary.

Although the Department anticipates there will be an extremely small number of pupils likely to be involved in compelling individual circumstances, the Board's experience would suggest that this may not be the case. Whilst a category named compelling individual circumstances exists, it will continue to grow disproportionately - especially in the early stages of the implementation of the arrangements where parents may seek to manipulate the admissions arrangements for their own advantage. It is for this reason that the Board recommends the new appeals procedure is strictly monitored and evaluated after revised procedures have been established/implemented. Any new timetable should reflect the pupils whom the post-primary schools are admitting and therefore the appeal process will need to be completed by early June in order for post-primary schools to arrange induction for new pupils towards the middle/end of June.

Other Issues

Are there any other issues you would like to comment on in relation to new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools?

The Pupil Profile concept is sound but not yet robust, rigorous or sufficiently resourced to carry out the task of placing pupils in the appropriate post-primary schools. The Pupil Profile would need to have been in existence from P1 for seven years, with teacher and parental involvement over that time, in order for it to have gained status and the respect of the post-primary sector. This would ensure that the P7 teacher/s would be confirming the professional opinions and judgements of the child's teachers from P1 to P6 and ensure a more realistic determination of the child's attainments/achievements. With regard to pupils who change primary schools, a good Pupil Profile would help receiving schools to place them appropriate to their needs. The Board, therefore, has serious concerns, on the grounds of sound educational practice, that teachers have not had a substantial 'lead-in time' with regard to the implementation of the Pupil Profile. This would have helped inform the resource implications for each academic year from P1 to P7 of the proposed new profiling system. The Board regrets that, at this stage, a model Pupil Profile has not been made available to it for consideration.

The Burns Household Response Survey indicated that 66% of responding parents were in favour of retaining academic selection, therefore, the parental perception that grammar schools are best will continue to exist into the foreseeable future, until all schools are seen to be of equal worth. In the early stages of the implementation of the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools it is reasonable to assume that many parents will still want to opt for grammar school education because they believe it is the best option for their children.

The Board feels strongly that there should have been an official consultation process with it right from the start with regard to the proposed new arrangements under Costello for post-primary schools. This would have enabled the Board to have had input into the Consultation Document on the New Admissions Arrangements for Post-Primary Schools. The Board is concerned that the Consultation Document does not address the major issue of the funding of the new arrangements. Resources will have to be made available to schools being forced to change as a result of these new arrangements. It is the Board's understanding that £20m has been set aside by the Department but it has reservations about how realistic this amount of funding really is, in light of the expenditure which will be involved in issues such as:

- collaborative arrangements;
- transport;

- statementing;
- compelling individual circumstances; and
- other costs not yet identified.

The Consultation Document does not address the issue of a pupil ending up in a school not suited to his/her ability eg the weak pupil, academically, ending up in a school with an academic ethos or the able pupil, academically, ending up in a school which is non-academic. Pupils must gain access to schools best suited to their educational abilities and pastoral needs, otherwise situations could arise where the academic or vocational ethos of a school is threatened because quality teaching time is being sacrificed in order to deal with behavioural problems. Clarification is required as to what is meant by 'academic ethos' and how it can be maintained by schools in the absence of academic selection. Also, clarification is required as to what is meant by 'vocational ethos'.

The procedure for transfer between schools, years 9 to 14, has not been addressed in the Consultation Document. Criteria for entry within these years needs to be defined in light of the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools.

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

The relevant issues would need to be subjected to a formal equality impact assessment in order to ensure that any potential adverse implications are identified and properly addressed.

Names of Working Group

Board Members

Mr M P Martin (Chair)
 Mrs E F Brunt
 Dr J Cornyn
 Mrs F G Durkan
 Mr S Morrow

Board Officers

Mr A Rainey
 Mr P Mackey
 Mr R Thompson
 Mrs R Watterson