

FOREWORD

In reviewing post-primary education we decided at the outset that we should consider, as a central tenet, the vital importance of focusing on the needs of the young people in our schools. We took the position that all young people should be valued equally and should be enabled to realise their creative potential in their own lives and in contributing to society. We kept this to the fore, being aware of the divergent views that were expressed strongly to us. We carried out an inclusive public consultation exercise that was highly informative and brought home to us the continuing personal impact on people that had arisen from the outcome of a discriminating selection process. We were also conscious of the high standards achieved in many of our schools - both grammar and secondary - and the views that were expressed to us in seeking to ensure that those achievements could not be overlooked or diminished and, not least, the commitment by everyone involved whether pupil, teacher, parent or school governor.

We also recognise that for a developed society which is knowledge-based in an economically competitive world, complacency about education is unacceptable. Thus in forming our recommendations we have sought to anticipate the needs of the future and the competencies that will be required to meet those challenges in the years ahead. We have listened very carefully to all views and we have analysed and evaluated the many submissions and representations made to us. The conclusions that we have reached objectively and in an independent context, seek to ensure that the Key Principles of education that we formulated, as a result of this Review, will be met through the adoption of our recommendations. We recognise that these are challenging, but they do not threaten, that they are visionary, but realistic, and we believe they have the potential for improvement that would be dynamic, and enable our schools to seize new opportunities that will arise. We have sought to encourage schools to recognise those opportunities within the integral nature of our proposals, the outcome of which could provide an enrichment of the quality of life for individuals, local communities and our society through co-operation, tolerance and respect.

Many of our recommendations are predicated on the basis that all of us have a responsibility to ensure that the educational experience available to each child in our society is that which is of the highest quality and most appropriate. We believe that this can be achieved through the new arrangements that we set out and by which personal lifelong learning could be encouraged and developed.

We also acknowledge how fortunate we have been in the cohort of teachers in Northern Ireland, whose competence, commitment and caring have been invaluable through difficult and traumatic times. Their contribution has been enormous and we are anxious to ensure that their role is respected for the generous and professional way that they have undertaken their responsibilities and discharged their duties. It is to them, in the first instance, that we say that post-primary education in Northern Ireland is on the threshold of a new and exciting era of development.

We are very much aware that to achieve significant educational change our society will face a challenging and complex task. However, we are confident that the time is not only ripe but is also of the essence, and that there is a clear expectation of reform. We are confident that the understanding, expertise and commitment of our people are such that we can successfully meet that challenge. The key motivation is the undoubted enhancement of the educational and life chances of all our citizens. The investment of effort and resources to implement the proposal of this Review will prove to be an empowering and emancipatory process with great benefit to all our people and to our society at large.