

CHAPTER 10: SUMMARY

This has been an exciting and challenging assignment. Many factors are driving change in post-primary education but the most important in our view is the need to prepare our young people for a rapidly changing world. We believe that these proposals will shape the future for our young people and for Northern Ireland society.

Principles

Future post-primary arrangements should be based on the principles of equality, quality, relevance, access, choice, respect and partnership.

Pupil Entitlement

We want to meet the specific educational needs of all our young people. Our proposed Entitlement Framework seeks to guarantee access to learning pathways offering a broader and more flexible curriculum. Every young person should be able to choose a blend of courses including traditional and vocational courses, which best meet their needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations.

Schools

Schools will need to offer a wider and more flexible choice of courses than is currently available, including a mix of both traditional academic and vocational courses. Schools acting in isolation will be unable to provide the entitlement for all pupils. They will need to work with other schools and with FE institutions in a new culture of collaboration and partnership.

We do not believe in a “one size fits all” model. New arrangements will need to be developed locally to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met, taking account of local circumstances. Arrangements may take a variety of forms provided they meet the Pupil Entitlement Framework. All of the existing types of schools will have a role to play, and we anticipate the development of new types of school, for example specialist schools, as we focus on meeting local needs.

Transfer

The present Transfer Tests should end. Transfer from primary to post-primary school should continue to be at age 11 but should be on the basis of choice by

parents and pupils, supported by appropriate information including the Pupil Profile. Choice of post-primary schools will be between local schools with distinctive characteristics but which will be of equal high quality, equally valued, and which provide access to the breadth, choice and flexibility offered by the entitlement. The first main decision point about learning pathways will be at age 14 and should also be based on informed parental and pupil choice.

The last Transfer Tests should take place no later than Autumn 2008. This time will be needed to implement the new curriculum, to develop the Pupil Profile and new arrangements at local level. However, these new arrangements could be developed in some localities in advance of the formal ending of the Transfer Tests. Grammar schools can already choose to move away from ability based admission arrangements. We encourage schools to begin to work together to implement the proposals immediately.

Implementation

Our vision will be achieved only with a significant increase in the range and quality of choice available to our young people. The achievement of the vision will require excellent strategic planning at a regional and local level; very significant support for schools, teachers, parents and pupils as operational changes are made; and sufficient resources.

Conclusion

These far reaching proposals offer a new beginning for post-primary education. They will significantly enhance the range of provision available for all pupils, and provide choice and flexibility to best match pupils' needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations. The proposals are crucial to the preparation of all our pupils for life and work and to enable them to play their part as responsible citizens in a vibrant, modern society and prosperous economy.

We believe passionately that a vision has been painted; the challenge now is for all those in education to make it a reality by working together with the common purpose of providing all pupils with the best possible educational opportunities and to deliver a world-class service.

