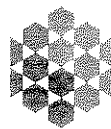


FROM THE PERMANENT SECRETARY
Aideen McGinley



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
www.delni.gov.uk

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PPPSU ON

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4 August 2006

Dear *George*

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF EDUCATION – CONSULTATION PAPER

In response to your letter, dated 4 July 2006, and following on from my earlier correspondence of 7 July, the Department has now considered the above consultation paper and would offer the comments set out below.

You have asked, specifically, for DEL's views on how post-primary and further education provision, for the 14-19 cohort, could be planned in a coherent way, to optimise the use of resources in the delivery of the curriculum entitlement.

In its strategy for further education, FE Means Business, the Department has outlined a vision in which all young people in the 14-19 age group can choose from a range of qualifications and courses, which meet their needs and enable them to progress from school into further and higher education, or training, and, ultimately, employment. This vision recognises that professional and technical training is a valuable alternative to the traditional academic pathway, and that schools and further education colleges, need to work in partnership to deliver a wide range of professional and technical subjects within the curriculum offer.

This has been articulated further in the Post Primary Review, where it has been acknowledged that co-operation and collaboration between schools and the further education sector will be necessary, to provide the range and choice for 14-19 year olds, in the delivery of the Entitlement Framework at Key Stage 4 and Post-16.

The Department is already working closely with DE, in the realisation of this vision, through the joint development of policy for 14-19, and through the piloting of collaborative models of provision by post primary schools and FE colleges, as they move towards the implementation of the Entitlement



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Framework. The aim of the pilot project, called the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP), is to ensure that all 14-19 year olds in statutory education have access to high quality professional and technical education through the development of robust collaborative partnerships between FE colleges and post primary schools.

In the forthcoming Year 3 of VEP, the 16 FE colleges will be working with approximately 190 schools, to deliver professional and technical courses to over 1400 school pupils. Examples of the type of collaboration in operation within the VEP include lecturers delivering courses in schools, where the courses require the specialist expertise of lecturers but not the specialist machinery and equipment, and, school pupils being taught in FE colleges, where specialist resources are required.

Currently, schools do not have the capacity to deliver the full Entitlement Framework, as they do not have the necessary specialist equipment, appropriately qualified lecturers, or even student numbers to deliver courses in many subjects particularly areas where they require intensive, industry standard resources including in areas such as software engineering, electronic, specialist engineering, CAD/CAM, plumbing, brickwork, plastering, vehicle maintenance or heavy engineering. There is an FE college in most of the main towns and cities in Northern Ireland and the majority are capable of delivering the full range of professional and technical courses, both in terms of infrastructure and qualified teaching staff. In the last three years alone, capital investment of over £100 m has been made in the further education estate, and the modernisation of the infrastructure is continuing apace.

It would be unrealistic to expect the post primary schools to replicate the facilities that are available in the FE sector, nor would it be an effective use of public money to attempt to duplicate provision by developing separately the schools estate to industry standard to deliver professional and technical subjects. Of equal importance is the need for appropriately qualified staff with industrial experience.

The colleges are confident, and are demonstrating through the VEP, that they are capable, of delivering this service. Following the creation of the six larger colleges, they will be even better placed to develop appropriate strategies, to ensure optimum planning, in conjunction with the schools within their areas, for future delivery. You should note that although the college management is reducing to six, the number of locations will remain.

Therefore, it is DEL's contention that the strategic approach to the planning of post primary provision, as proposed in the consultation document, should take into consideration the staff expertise, facilities, infrastructure, and teaching resources already available in the FE sector. It is only through partnership with FE that all pupils will be able to access an appropriate curriculum, and that the quality of the teaching experience can be maintained across the whole Pupil Entitlement Framework.

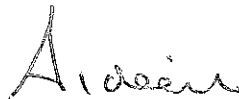
DEL has been working with DE to examine the provision for A levels in colleges. College's main provision will be in professional and technical subjects and the number of A levels on offer to young people will be reduced substantially.

Another advantage of enhanced collaboration between schools and FE colleges, is the exposure of school pupils from the various sectors to a fully-integrated education environment. The FE colleges have a deserved reputation for maintaining an integrated/neutral learning environment, and there is real potential for school/FE college partnerships to help build the foundations for further development of an integrated educational ethos, through sharing resources and creating new opportunities for interaction.

The Department already has very close links with DE, and is anxious to participate fully in the development of a strategic planning framework, which incorporates the facilities and resources available through the further education sector.

I hope you find these comments helpful and I would welcome the opportunity for further engagement with Review team, on the role that the further education sector can play.

Yours sincerely



AIDEEN MCGINLEY