

Response to: Independent Strategic Review of Education Consultation Paper, June 2006

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) welcomes the opportunity to make a response to the *Strategic Review of Education* particularly as we recognise the central role that the review has in implementing the government's plans in *A Shared Future* and the first Triennial Action Plan, as well as helping the Department of Education deliver an effective allocation of resources and meet its statutory duty to 'encourage and facilitate integrated education'.

1.2 The IEF is a charitable trust set up to establish a financial foundation for the development and growth of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland and part of the IEF vision is the development of shared education and greater integration. The IEF looks forward to working with the new bodies resulting from the Review of Public Administration (RPA) to support both Integrated and shared education.

The Terms of Reference for the *Strategic Review of Education*, were outlined by the Secretary of State, Peter Hain, at a joint forum of the CBI and Irish Business and Employers Confederation at Queen's University on 8 March 06. Peter Hain said that "the funding of the education system, in particular the strategic planning and organisation of the school estate, taking account of curriculum changes, including the wider provision for 14-19 year olds, and also demographic trends" would be examined. The IEF is confident that the review will recognise the opportunities which Integrated schools offer in all these areas. Peter Hain went on to say, "I also want this review to look at how we best meet our duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education, which is a vital building block towards creating the conditions necessary for long-term peace and stability in Northern Ireland. I now want to see integrated education is at the heart of our strategic planning and this review will look at this alongside how we manage the other sectors in our system."

It is the view of the IEF that major decisions concerning education, and any strategic approach which is developed as a result of the review must take account of the views of parents and local communities. This is in line with the Department of Education's (DE) own Draft Strategic Plan – "to have in place effective arrangements to ensure meaningful engagement of young people, parents and key stakeholders, including the voluntary and community sector, in all major policy consultations by 2008" (1.2).

1.3 The first Integrated school, Lagan College, had to open without government support.

Since then we have seen significant government policies and departmental reports:

- in 1989, the *Education Order (NI)* placing a statutory duty on the DE to "encourage and facilitate integrated education"

- in 1998, the Good Friday Agreement which stated that “an essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing.”

- in 1998, the DE’s report from its own working group “Towards A Culture of Tolerance: Integrating Education” (TACOT:IE)

- in 2005, A Shared Future which stated that “separate but equal is not an option. Parallel living and the provision of parallel services are unsustainable both morally and economically.”

- in 2006, the first Triennial Action Plan (TAP) of A Shared Future which stated that “on the basis of clear criteria to be developed, projects relating to new schools, reorganisation or rationalisation are more likely to justify receipt of financial support if they are shared or operate across community divide.”

Twenty five years after Lagan College opened, despite all of the above, Rowallane Integrated College and Clogher Valley Integrated Primary are opening also without government support.

Until there is a more cohesive strategic approach to meeting parental demand, support from the IEF will still be needed by parents who wish to choose Integrated Education for their children. Independent research carried out by organisations like Millward Brown Ulster or the Young Life and Times Survey¹ have continually pointed to parental demand for Integrated Education, usually well in excess of 60% of respondents.

1.4 Integrated Education has grown from 28 pupils to approximately 18,000 pupils over the last 24 years in Northern Ireland. In the last six years around 5,000 children who could have attended an Integrated school did not do so because of the oversubscription of a number of schools. This continual pattern of growth has occurred despite the general demographic downturn, with many of the schools starting in temporary accommodation, some having their enrolments capped by the Department of Education, and new schools starting without an educational history unlike their ‘competitors’. In Belfast and Ballymena, it is an Integrated College in each area that remains the most heavily oversubscribed despite competition from successful local grammar schools. In the case of transformed Integrated schools specifically, the IEF estimates that around 85% of transformed schools have increased their enrolment following transformation. In some cases the growth of existing Integrated schools and the establishment of new Integrated schools has been dependant on the IEF raising funds and support from individuals, businesses, trusts and foundations, both at home and abroad.

2. Responses to Specific Questions

The IEF response takes the format requested in Sir George Bain’s letter, commenting on specific questions.

2.1 “How the planned investment programme can best be utilised to ensure investment in viable schools that make cost-effective use of capital and recurrent funding”;
“How effectively the current resources are deployed across the education system”; and

¹ ARK. Young Life and Times Survey, 2005 [computer file]. ARK www.ark.ac.uk/ylt [distributor], December 2005.

“How resources for education might be used both more efficiently and with greater effectiveness”

It is the IEF’s view that the current planned investment programme should be stopped until:

- a) the DE has completed and made public its Sustainable Schools Policy
- b) the DE is in a position to lead a cross sectoral approach to rationalisation as identified in the TAP
- c) there is shared management of the process as well as accountability with responsibility
- d) the DE is responsible for and suitably resourced to carry out strategic planning for education in Northern Ireland with, for example, appropriate tools such as a geographical information system (GIS) - this has proved successful in planning Further and Higher Education in Scotland.

The stated goal of the current capital investment programme is that all schools must be “fit for purpose schools efficiently delivered and managed”. Future planning options should take into consideration examples of initiatives throughout the UK and other countries e.g. ‘Building for the Future’ initiative in England and Wales, the first wave of which started in 05/06 with schools being rebuilt, remodelled or upgraded to provide flexible, inclusive, attractive learning environments. The community will be involved by extending facilities such as at Blythe College where community use includes a library, open learning centre, cyber café, sports and leisure, crèche, and youth club. In Northern Ireland, in 2005, two schools amalgamated to form the new Downshire School, which was described by the then Minister for Education, Angela Smith, as “sustainable in the long term as a primary school but also has adult education facilities within the school and a mother and toddler group. It is very much a community based school.....Part of the new money ... will be for things like parenting support.” The IEF would be happy to discuss with the Department the possibility of jointly funding a pilot school which would be a model of sharing in practice, providing a world class education, and would meet several of the objectives mentioned in the Department’s draft Strategic Plan eg “to develop the role of schools as learning hubs for the community and to assist parents and carers to support their children’s learning” (1.2).

Investment in such facilities would be expensive and should only be justified in economic terms on the basis that they provide for the widest possible community use and that such facilities would be used by all communities, not just one particular part of that community, and this cross community involvement should be reflected in the management thereof. This would concur with the consensus that in broad terms the education system should be vital to social and community well-being, contributing effectively and appropriately to broader social and economic goals and processes.

One element of sustainability for any school must be popularity and enrolment patterns. It would be unwise and wasteful to allocate significant capital sums to schools where numbers are expected to decline. For example, approximately £17m was invested in Balmoral High School in Belfast which would appear to have a rapidly falling roll despite ‘state of the art’ facilities. Compare this to approximately £7m invested in Malone Integrated College, serving both sides of the community and just a couple of miles away and with a growing enrolment.

Economically, the current system is extremely wasteful, with duplication of resources rather than sharing, collaboration or partnerships, resulting in a massive skewing of education budgets in favour of buildings rather than pupils – capital costs in Northern Ireland are 5.3% of the education budget, compared to 3.4% in England. It is estimated that approximately £25 million could be saved annually if there were not two teacher training colleges. Much of the education budget is also eaten up by the duplication of administration costs, salaries and so on - in 1995,

education spending in Northern Ireland amounted to 10% of GDP, compared to 5% in the UK, but, even with this, 14% less was spent per pupil in primary schools, and 2.5% less was spent per pupil in second level schools. In a recent debate in the House of Lords (17 July 2006), Lord Smith of Clifton noted that “although Northern Ireland has the highest expenditure on education per capita of any part of the UK, less is spent per pupil than anywhere else. That is the cost of maintaining two overlapping systems.”

The bodies within the current education system have to date developed expertise in their respective fields but appear to have limited experience of meaningful collaboration in joint development work and there are few systems or incentives in place to encourage it. The recent situation with regard to the independent Lir Integrated Primary School in Ballycastle and the transforming Ballycastle Primary School is a case in point. Whilst recognising that Lir was indeed an independent school there should still have been more creative thinking and solutions on behalf of the education authorities to ensure a new model of co-operation between the two schools was established. This could have resulted in merger or amalgamation rather than one school closing and another transforming. Current structures and legal requirements would appear to have curtailed what was deemed possible. Fresh creative thinking and appropriate mechanisms are therefore urgently needed to be thought through and put in place if the Department is serious about cross sectoral collaboration and sharing.

Also, if Education for Mutual Understanding is seen as an area where schools can work together, then the current investment level in this area by DE should be re-examined ie funding of approximately £1.3m for 10 ELB staff to work with 1,200 schools.

2.2 Developing key mechanisms and processes for successful planning at local area level, as a framework for translating into practice the concept of collaborative and interactive planning by the various sectors

Any decisions taken about investment in the schools’ estate must be informed, at a regional level, by economic growth, planned housing and demographic trends, and at a local level by community audits and deliberative polling. As described in the TAP (page 57), the presumption for schools in new housing developments which are shared, is to be a shared model of schooling. In the view of the IEF, the requirements of A Shared Future would best be met by Integrated provision and Integrated schools should be the default for both new schools and for rationalisations but we recognise that there are other models that the review could be considering. Consideration of parental choice, however, must be a factor as surplus places in one type of school can be used to deny funding to another type of school which is actually meeting the demands of local parents e.g. when surplus places in local segregated schools are used as a reason not to fund a new Integrated school.

Decisions on education provision should not be left to local politicians or vested sectoral interests alone. Consultation with the wider civic community is essential.

The IEF recognises the need and will support attempts to develop a strategic approach to the growth of Integrated Education working alongside all the education partners. A new approach must be flexible but continually “changing the goalposts” would not be helpful, for example, in the past the IEF has supported new parent groups with initial development costs, only to find the criteria changed by government so that the IEF cannot accurately forecast the outcome of their applications for grant aid. Policy changes can occur in the middle of the planning process, and the latest change is the consideration by DE of the impact of a new Integrated school on existing schools in the area, even if the other schools are not Integrated. In effect this would mean that even with sufficient numbers, with religious balance and with a suitable site, parents

who are trying to choose an Integrated Education for their children are being forced to send them to segregated schools because those schools happen to have spare places. If all schools had an inclusive ethos which was proactively pursued, then if a child could not attend an Integrated school, the choice of a segregated school would not seem so extreme.

2.3 Forms and models of sharing of facilities and resources and of collaborative arrangements among schools, at both primary and post-primary levels, particularly in relation to new builds but also in the context of existing provision

Whilst formal Integrated schools would be our preferred model for shared education we do recognise that there could be other models developed in respect of the sharing of facilities and resources and other collaborative arrangements. It may be that a system of financial incentives (or penalties) may have to be considered by government for sharing and collaboration to take place on a significant scale, and to ensure a four way cross sectoral approach where possible, ie Maintained, Controlled, Integrated and Irish Medium. Also, there would need to be a recognised minimum level of sharing which would need to be achieved before funding for such projects was agreed.

Integrated Schools

For the IEF, the most important aspect of sharing is the possibility of bringing together Catholic and Protestant children in a supported educational environment where they can better learn to understand and respect their differences as well as appreciate what they hold in common. This is the experience of pupils in Integrated schools and the IEF believes it is the right of every child in Northern Ireland to be able to avail of this choice. Integrated schools also bring adults together whether as parents, staff or governors. It gives equal recognition to and promotes equal expression of all traditions in Northern Ireland.

Transformation - One of the routes to achieving an Integrated school is for an existing Controlled or Maintained School to transform to Integrated status. Transformation could be viewed as a means for existing schools to increase their enrolment by adopting an ethos and policies that attract all communities to the school. As has been stated earlier, the overwhelming majority of transformed Integrated schools have grown their enrolments. By September 06, 19 schools will have transformed to Integrated status. More parents need to be made aware of transformation as an option for their school. Transformation of a school can be brought about in two ways - a written request to transform to Integrated status by 20% of the parents is submitted to the Board of Governors, or the Board of Governors of the school decides that it would like to consider transformation and then consults the parents. If the school decides to proceed, the parents vote in a secret ballot which is conducted independently by the Electoral Reform Services (ERS) in London. (50% of the parents must take part in the ballot). If the majority of parents who vote say 'Yes' then the school begins its journey to transform to Integrated status.

When a school transforms, cognizance should be taken of the fact that one identified community is expressing its wish to work with the "other" community. Whether this is a lifeline asking for help (for example, a school may be facing possible closure due to lack of pupils) or a real desire, cannot always be ascertained but what is certain is, it is a realization that to exist one must co-exist in harmony.

Whenever a group of parents are proposing to develop Integrated Education in their area, they are required to approach existing Controlled and Maintained Schools to ask if they will consider transforming. Sometimes the parents of those schools are not made aware of the request or of

the possibility. Any request for transformation which a school receives should at least be published in the school's Annual Report to parents.

Teachers themselves should be given more of a voice in the future of their own schools eg at the pre-ballot stage in schools considering transformation.

New Build Schools – The IEF believes that if no existing schools are prepared to become Integrated through transformation or there is no other acceptable shared school in the area, then parents who wish to have their children educated together in an Integrated school should have the right to do so. The IEF therefore supports the right of parent groups to establish new build Integrated schools where there is no alternative. Such groups should of course continue to meet the government criteria for conditional approval ie minimum numbers, religious balance and securing a site for the school.

Jointly Managed Schools

In a speech by the Secretary of State at the Macgill Summer School, Glenties, Donegal on 16 July 06, Peter Hain warned that challenges would not be met “if politicians and community leaders in Northern Ireland are mired in ancient differences.”

He went on to say, “Nor will an economy which has to fund those differences be sustainable in the long term. The costs of division in Northern Ireland are staggering in almost every sector. In education, for example, there are now 50,000 empty school places in Northern Ireland (rising to 80,000 by 2015) – out of a school population of 333,000. This means a monumental waste of resources: teachers in the wrong places, empty class rooms, scores of small schools which are not viable. Two segregated primary schools in a village and doomed to closure where a merger might be viable and produce higher standards where separately they cannot. Secondary schools with inadequate facilities where a rational school estate with integrated or shared facilities could produce high quality. No society can support this situation, least of all Northern Ireland, with its high skill standards at the top, dismal ones lower down and appalling ones at the bottom. The educational future of Northern Ireland must be shared and focused on what unites, or divided it will be bleak.”

Cross sectoral collaboration should involve consideration of the piloting of schools jointly managed by different education sectors such as the Catholic Trustees and the Transferors Council. There would appear to be no theological barrier to such innovative collaborative arrangements as identified in recent research carried out by the Foyle Trust for Integrated Education. This research documents a number of successful schools operating in this manner including such a school in Ireland and many in England and Wales. It is worth noting that falling enrolments and financial pressures have been a significant driving force behind many of these jointly managed schools. No doubt there would be difficult issues to resolve but if it can happen elsewhere why not in Northern Ireland?

Curriculum Collaboration

The IEF is aware that, in respect of the new curriculum entitlement, there is an increasing need for schools to be co-operating much more closely on the provision of a wider range of subjects at post-primary level. The IEF would support any efforts that would bring schools closer together in this respect, particularly across the sectors. Cross sectoral collaboration would have to meet the need for pupils and teachers from a variety of different backgrounds to feel safe, respected and comfortable in whichever school they were attending or working in. The IEF was disappointed that the DE did not support Brownlow Integrated College's pioneering initiative

with Lismore Comprehensive School in Craigavon (Catholic Maintained) which would have meant a cross sectoral collaboration at Sixth Form. The IEF welcomes the post primary collaboration in Ballycastle with regard to Sixth Form between the Controlled and Maintained Sectors. Through the IEF's Promoting a Culture of Tolerance Grant Making Programme (PACT), we have been proud to support many unique and pioneering initiatives across different schools, albeit with limited funding. Thanks to Senator George Mitchell's Northern Ireland Fund for Reconciliation (NIFR), to date 290 schools and organisations have been enabled by PACT funding to implement and take part in 138 projects using grants awarded totalling approximately £335,000. Since its launch in September 2000 the PACT Programme has received applications for three times the funding available.

More thought needs to be given to teacher training and how teachers are being prepared for educating pupils from different community and religious backgrounds. The continuation of largely segregated teacher training, particularly primary education, does little to prepare teachers for dealing with diversity and the challenge they will face in curriculum collaboration with other sectors or indeed for teaching in Integrated schools. In the recent debate in the House of Lords (17 July 2006), Lord Smith of Clifton noted that "the government should advocate the desegregation of teacher training courses and facilities and the familiarisation of integrated education policies and practices in such institutions..." and "although Stranmillis and St Mary's had produced some outstanding teachers, the teaching was done with a silo mentality. Stranmillis and St Mary's, while having the virtues of being very good educational facilities, have perpetuated the divide."

Shared Campus

The IEF appreciates and understands the concept of shared campuses to provide a more economical and financially viable approach to the schools estate. One imagines such campuses could share state of the art sports facilities, transport arrangements, canteen and catering staff, ICT facilities etc, and shared campuses should, of course, have shared management. However, the IEF believes there is a much greater potential for sharing in Northern Ireland than the above. We would be concerned that the pupils and staff of such establishments would continue to lead largely separate existences and the model could actually reinforce difference and is hardly an example of the type of vision for Northern Ireland as outlined in 'A Shared Future'.

2.4 The best combination of factors that should be taken into account in estate planning

It has to be recognised that the changes to the schools' estate recommended by the DE report "New Procurement and Delivery arrangements for the Schools' Estate" cannot be achieved under existing arrangements. It is vital for all to realise that the current status quo and past ways of planning cannot continue - the economic reasons alone are compelling; the long term effects on Northern Ireland can be demonstrated by the many years of The Troubles and the continuing violence. The present rationalisation of the schools' estate by the various administrative bodies is running into problems as it is being carried out on an ad hoc sectoral basis, without discussion or agreement between the sectors, and without following the government's own guidelines with respect to A Shared Future.

Demographic and other information must be gathered together objectively and applied rigorously across the whole sector – nothing should be considered sacrosanct eg redundant sites should be sold off and the monies reinvested. Information about the growth of ethnic minorities and their needs must also be taken into account as well as how their presence affects schools, their growth in numbers (current and potential) etc.

Again, community audits and deliberative polling are tools which should be widely used in estate planning.

Already approximately 15%² of places in schools are surplus to requirements and a crude translation would lead one to assume that over 190 schools may need to be closed. This is major rationalisation and must be led by DE prior to the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), with clear guidelines in place from the beginning, which are applied fairly and equitably across all of Northern Ireland without regional variation, save for distinctions which would need to be made between the needs of rural and urban communities, and taking into account the future needs of local areas.

2.5 An appropriate level of surplus capacity, allowing for changes and parental choice

As stated earlier, the IEF would welcome the publication of the Sustainable Schools Policy as soon as possible.

How the current figures relating to school capacity are calculated needs to be re-evaluated in terms of the needs of a 21st century school e.g. IT, Special Education Needs facilities, library facilities, Enriched Curriculum etc.

The re-evaluation of school capacity should also consider the current situation facing a number of grammar schools in terms of academic selection. An assessment should be made of the numbers of children likely to require a perceived academic education. One current aspect of surplus capacity in grammar schools is that selection by academic criteria is not being adhered to and children traditionally considered not to be suitable for the academic approach of the grammar schools are being offered places e.g. in the Belfast Education and Library Board 15% of grammar school pupils attained Grade C or below in the 11 Plus. This has resulted in there being more pupils in grammar schools in the BELB area (52%) than in secondary schools (48%). In effect, 15% of grammar school places in the BELB are surplus to requirements.

Attention needs to be given to this situation otherwise a generation or two may be subjected to inappropriate provision to their disadvantage.

2.6 How post-primary and Further Education provision can best be planned together, particularly for 14-19 year olds, both to provide access to the curriculum and to optimise the use of the combined resources of the school and further education sectors

The IEF welcomes the potential for increased collaboration between Further Education (FE) Colleges and post-primary schools. However, FE Colleges would need to be adequately resourced and consideration given to proactive pastoral provision before FE Colleges could be seen as an acceptable option for many families. The IEF welcomes the fact that, in the main, FE Colleges, similarly to Universities, are seen as institutions welcoming to all students and not seen as belonging to one side of the community or another.

It could be argued that the recent developments in Fair Employment, Policing and other areas have now shown not only that change can be difficult and contentious at times but also that it can be achieved with sufficient time, resources and political will: we should expect change in education to be no less challenging and no less expensive – and no less possible.

² Taken from DE New Procurement and Delivery Arrangements for the Schools' Estate

A major communications strategy will be essential to the success of promoting a positive climate of change – the DE must therefore consider how this could be best achieved – deliberative polling is just one example of gauging a community’s interest. It is worth noting that at local level there could well be considerable support for increased sharing where the alternative is the closure of a school ‘belonging’ to one side of the community or another. It will only be when people realise that it is in their best interests to work together that barriers will be overcome. Financial necessity can be a great driver of change and when communities see reinvestment in ‘state of the art’ facilities for all our children then the climate will become more conducive.

2.7 What could those in positions of leadership and influence do to promote a climate conducive to integrating education in meaningful ways, to overcome barriers to sharing, and to help bring about new ways of thinking and working

Those in a position of leadership and influence need to be encouraged to enter into serious discussion about the future of education in Northern Ireland based on the government’s ‘Shared Future’ policy and economic and financial necessity. They need to be encouraged to remember their responsibility to act as stewards of the future – for our children and our society – and to be given the opportunity to take part in this review. Throughout the process, and before the final report of this Independent Strategic Review of Education is published, stakeholders at the highest levels need to discuss the issues together, not in isolation. This would provide an opportunity for exchanges of views and a better understanding of the different positions people hold. The government must think of imaginative ways in which this could be achieved. If necessary such meetings could be subject to Chatham House Rules.

Those in leadership must be encouraged to be open, debate and discuss what it is they must do separately in schools that they cannot do together, otherwise the government should seriously reconsider their funding.

The IEF believes that effective engagement means that the DE needs to not only consult widely with all ‘educational stakeholders’ but also our business, political and community leaders and others. Parental choice must be at the forefront of education reform and therefore the views of parents and young people must be included. Due to the nature of transformation or creating a new build Integrated school, ordinary parents have been empowered by the process and their voices need to be heard. Too frequently, the voices of the people on the ground are not reflected by politicians. Government needs to enter into meaningful discussion with parents about the future of education.

A Shared Future is government policy and our education system must reflect such a policy –if it doesn’t fit, don’t fund it.