

## **MEETING WITH PROGRESSIVE UNIONIST PARTY – 26 MARCH 2002**

### **Present:**

Minister  
Mark Browne  
Leslie Ashe  
Des Whyte  
Conor McParland

David Ervine  
Billy Hutchinson  
David Rose

### **Key Points/Issues**

The PUP representatives made the following points:

#### **General**

- Working class Protestants didn't see the value in education at school. In the past jobs were readily available and employees gained work related qualifications through FE colleges.
- Many of the major employers have now gone and there is a need to provide new employment opportunities. The skills required for new industries will require a well educated workforce.
- The current education system will lead to a large "underclass" which will be alienated from society.
- Many working class parents had been scarred by their own experience of the education system and were difficult to engage.
- Community Groups were working hard in local areas to raise awareness of education issues.
- Burns does not deal adequately with the problems in education. There is a need to tackle the whole system from pre-school onwards.
- Parenting skills need to be improved and children need to be taught how to learn. Other Government Departments should be involved.

#### **Burns/Post-primary Review**

- The PUP believes in a fully comprehensive system.
- The new system must provide equality of opportunity for all.
- The curriculum does not meet the needs of pupils in secondary schools and needs to change.

#### **Collegiates**

- There is some merit in the proposed collegiate arrangements but they should be given more responsibility. ELB administration must be reviewed.
- Doubt whether collegiates would actually help in achieving a fully comprehensive system.

- Collegiates must rely on the cooperation of the grammar schools and this will not be forthcoming.

### **Pupil Profiles**

- Place a heavy responsibility on teachers. Can they always be objective?
- Need to be properly resourced.
- Difficult to compare non educational skills such as music and sport.

The PUP are adopting a non-sectarian approach to the educational disadvantage in Belfast. They intend to raise the profile of the debate in the community after Easter, but do not expect to gain much support. There remains a strongly held view that working class mainstream unionists do not criticise their leaders in public. The PUP stressed that the Department, in bringing forward plans for future arrangements, must address the disadvantages clearly faced by the Protestant working class community, but which will not be obvious from the responses to the consultation.

**DES WHYTE**

**18 April 2002**