



## INDEPENDENT STRATEGIC REVIEW OF EDUCATION

### Comments from the Institute of Directors

**Elaine Armstrong**  
**Room 302**  
**Department of Education**  
**Rathgael House**  
**Balloo Road**  
**Bangor**  
**Co Down**  
**BT19 7PR**

#### **Introduction**

1. The Institute of Directors (IoD) is a non-party political organisation representing the views of around 53,000 individual business leaders in the UK and almost 1000 in Northern Ireland. Members are drawn from the private, public and voluntary sectors
2. The Northern Ireland Division has a particular interest in the education system, which produces the business leaders and workforce of the future.
3. This paper provides a response from the Institute to the consultation document ('the document') issued by Professor Bain concerning his Independent Strategic Review of Education ('the Bain Review')

#### **The IoD's Perspective**

4. The Institute has taken a very keen interest education generally because of its obvious importance to the well being of society in general and to the economy in particular. Through our Education & Skills Committee, we have been very active in responding to a number of consultation initiatives – for example, on curricula, further education, skills development and the transfer arrangements pertaining to post primary education.
5. We strongly welcome the Bain Review with its emphasis on the strategic planning and organisation of the schools' estate. A rationalisation of the schools' estate is long overdue and should lead to the release of funds from the sale of surplus land and property for use in area of the school sector where it is most needed.
6. We have hitherto put forward a number of concerns, which are relevant to the Review, including the following:
  - If the post primary transfer system is to be based on parental preference, as is intended, it is essential that there are sufficient places in schools of good quality to which parents want to send their children. Without that, the system will not be credible, will fall in to disrepute, and in the end will degenerate into one in which selection is practiced mainly as a means of determining how to pick the number of children for whom there are sufficient places in the 'best' schools and how to exclude the rest.
  - All children should have access to schools that best enable them to develop their potential.
  - We would wish to see the development of a strong system of vocational as well as 'academic' education.

- In the course of change, there should be emphasis on keeping our 'best' schools (whether grammar or 'secondary' schools) and on improving those which currently are of a lower standard ('keep the best, improve the rest') in the context of what will meet educational policy requirements post 2009 taking account demographics, location and the physical condition of schools.

### **Values Principles and Goals**

7. We support the Values, Principles and Goals outlined in paragraph 16 of the document. We suggest that to them should be added the goal of ensuring that there are sufficient high quality places in schools to allow all pupils to find places suited to their aspirations and to parental preferences.

### **Demographic Trends**

8. We fully appreciate the significance of the downward trend in the numbers of pupils and that there are already more than 50,000 vacant places in the secondary sector. It is more than time that this situation was addressed in a thoroughgoing and purposeful manner, which eliminates waste and ensures that resources are used to the best effect.
9. However, any process of rationalisation should not be one in which schools are closed or merged simply to reduce their number. There should be a strategic approach in which the opportunity is taken to ensure that the least well performing schools (account being taken of all relevant circumstances) are merged with other schools, or if necessary closed, so that the quality of education in the areas concerned is enhanced and the prospect of satisfying parental preference is increased. Care should be taken to ensure that the best performing schools are not damaged or weakened in the process.

### **Sharing Services**

10. The wording of the terms of reference implicit in paragraph 2 of the document seems designed to steer the Bain Review away from consideration of integration as such and towards alternatives measures or devices through which its benefits might be achieved.
11. A comprehensive strategic review of the funding of the education system and the planning and organisation of the schools' estate should look to ways of overcoming the costs and disadvantages of operating a multi-sectoral school system.
12. However, we believe that there is a variety of means through which some of the disadvantages of the present system may be overcome to some degree. If, perhaps for reasons of social demand, political pressure and pragmatism, integration as such is not to be within the scope of the review we would suggest that consideration be given to such measures as:
  - The sharing of facilities such as laboratories libraries, gymnasias and playing fields.
  - Pupil exchanges for particular subjects or activities enabling all pupils to have access to the best resources and teachers within their catchment areas.
  - The coordination of timetables so as to maximise scope for exchanges and sharing.
  - The joint planning of investment in new facilities across all sectors so as to ensure that they are mutually relevant accessible and useable.

## Desired outcomes

13. Following from the above, we would support measures emerging from the Bain Review, which:
- a. provide for optimising the use of available resources and maximising learning through sharing;
  - b. afford a measure of funding priority to schools which have been impeded in the pursuit of excellence and the attraction of parental preference by deficiencies in facilities and capital equipment;
  - c. give priority also to expenditure needed for the strengthening of vocational education, or indeed academic education, where it is weak;
  - d. afford, nonetheless, sufficient resources for our 'best' schools to ensure that they are able to maintain present high standards and to continue to make progress;
  - e. embody rationalisation in response to demographic trends subject to what we have said in paragraph 9 above.
  - f. provide resources for, for example, leadership training and the upgrading of knowledge and teaching skills where deficiencies are due to factors other than inadequacy of finance.

## Examining and Monitoring Performance

14. A policy based on the above requires the systematic examination and study of schools to ascertain where standards are high or unacceptable, where the range of provision is inadequate to meet needs, and to identify the extent to which deficiencies can be remedied by targeted expenditure.

## Specific Questions

15. Professor Bain has invited the Institute to address a number of specific questions. Most of these questions require knowledge and experience of the type most likely to be acquired by educational practitioners but we respond to them as best we can –

### 16. **Q1: Developing key mechanisms and processes for successful planning**

Joint planning groups should be established to ensure discussion about what investment is most required and its nature. Groups should include representatives from all schools within agreed catchment areas in which sharing would be feasible, plus a representative from the local College/Institute of Further Education.

### 17. **Q2: Forms and models of sharing facilities and resources and of collaborative arrangements at both primary and post primary levels**

Paragraph 13 above refers to this. The models should include consideration of all activities of all schools. They should enable participating schools to identify the aspects which most interest them, and should provide a context for considering whether common access is a practical possibility and how it might be provided.

**18. Q3: The best combination of factors that should be taken into account in estate planning**

The overriding principle should be sustainability: how to identify those factors which will reasonably guarantee the viability of the school as a high quality provider of education in the new post-2009 context.

**19. Q4: An appropriate level of surplus capacity, allowing for changes and parental choice**

It is impossible for us to respond to this in specific terms. The principle of selection according to parental preference does, however, mean that there should be sufficient capacity to accommodate it. That, in turn, requires surplus capacity at all popular schools. The precise level will depend on the circumstances at each locality. Capacity should be periodically reviewed and adjusted in response to established demand.

**20. Q5: How could post-primary and Further Education provision best be planned together particularly for 14-19 year olds, both to provide access to the curriculum and to optimise use of the combined resources of the school and further education sectors?**

There first needs to be a clear understanding of the roles of the two sectors. The primary function of the post primary sector should be to ensure that pupils have a sound base of generic skills and knowledge which maximise options. Colleges should provide more specialist knowledge and advanced skills. Curricula at post-primary schools and colleges should be mutually relevant and compatible so that there is a good fit and progression is easy. Schools should be able to place pupils in colleges for instruction in matters for which they are unable to provide. The totality of what is involved should take into account both current and immediately visible business and employment needs, but also what is being targeted in longer term economic development strategy.

Regular planning meetings should be held between schools and the colleges to plan provision and the use of facilities. They should be advised by DEL and the business sector on skill needs and by DETI and InvestNI on longer term strategy.

**21. Q6: 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 training, and to help new ways of thinking and working?**

By taking a positive view towards sharing and showing a determination to make it work.

**Conclusion**

22. We should be happy to provide more information about our views and look forward to meeting Professor Bain shortly to discuss the issues with him.

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**Contact**

**Linda R Brown  
Divisional Director  
Institute of Directors**

**4 Royal Avenue  
Belfast  
BT1 1DA**

**T      028 9023 2880  
F      028 9023 2881  
E      [iod.northernireland@iod.com](mailto:iod.northernireland@iod.com)**