



Department of  
**Education**

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To: Principals and Boards of Governors  
of all 11-18 Grant-Aided Post-Primary Schools

5 May 2011

## **NEW PROCEDURE FOR REQUESTING EXTRA SIXTH FORM PLACES FOR YEAR 2011/12**

1. The purpose of this letter is to outline a new procedure for the Year 2011/12 for requesting extra sixth form places. For schools likely to be oversubscribed when receiving Year 13 applications this August, this letter is a follow-up to meetings held with a number of such schools in the week commencing 4 April 2011.
2. Over the past two years there has been a very significant increase in post-16 demand which has led to many 11-18 schools requiring temporary increases in their enrolment numbers in order to respond to that demand. The increased level of demand has placed considerable pressure on School Access Team to respond to post-primary school requests for extra places in the very short period of time between the publication of GCSE results and the start of the new school year. In the interests of pupils, parents and schools, it is essential that the existing process is improved to address many of the difficulties that were experienced last year.

### **Outline of existing policy**

3. DE policy on extra sixth form places is generally to give these to a school that needs them to extend its ability to admit its own pupils returning to Year 13. DE

also then gives extra sixth form places to schools for young people who otherwise would not be able to pursue the majority of their post-16 course-choices at a suitable school without undertaking an unreasonable journey (i.e. a journey that by public transport would be over an hour from where the young person lives). Annex A explains how DE defines a suitable school. This policy is not changed by the process proposed in this letter – rather changes to the process are proposed which will better deliver this existing policy.

4. Schools should be clear that the order of priority that they assign to those pupils for whom they request extra sixth form places is very important. If pupils whose cases qualify for extra places under the policy described in Paragraph 3 are ranked in the order of priority below pupils whose cases do not qualify, School Access Team will not be able to grant extra places for these pupils, however they may qualify for them. In order to continue to be in keeping with primary legislation on school admissions, extra places for sixth form pupils can only be granted when pupils' cases both meet this policy and are "next in line" for the next available place at a school. In this regard a school's admission criteria for sixth form, which are entirely a matter for a school Board of Governors, play a significant role, in that these can result in certain pupils 'blocking' other pupils who would otherwise be granted an extra place and admission.
5. The key constraint within the existing process which causes most of the delays is this problem of blocking. Thus when considering a school's application for extra places, it may be possible to grant only a couple of extra places before a blocking pupil is reached. Time is then taken to try to overcome this situation, only to then find that a similar situation occurs soon afterwards in the rank order. Thus officials frequently have to liaise with the same school a number of times before a final number of additional places can be established. This, as you will appreciate causes delay and a build-up of pressure for all concerned.

#### **Proposed changes**

6. The proposed procedural change to remedy this is that 11-18 schools likely to be oversubscribed by applications to sixth form in August 2011 should publish a

small addendum to the criteria that they will apply at this point. The addendum is a new criterion to apply only to the order in which applicants will be admitted to any extra places that a school, on request, receives. It will not affect the basic eligibility criteria that schools apply in order to consider applicants eligible for sixth form admissions, prior to any question of admissions priority. It will also not affect the admissions criteria by which schools determine the admissions priority of applicants for places available within their enrolment number. It still remains the case that at all times it is entirely the choice of a school whether or not to request any extra places or none. The proposed criterion, **to be appended to a school's existing sixth form criteria**, is outlined at Annex A.

7. If an 11-18 school publishes the proposed criterion as an appendage to its existing criteria, then the school will get the maximum number of extra places that the policy for these permits but without delays caused by blocking. School Access Team's positive response to a school's request for extra places in relation to "returners" will, in this scenario, be given immediately to the school – to the benefit of applicants and schools. Indeed, for a school there is no negative side to making this change of which we are aware. It can only hasten a school's acquisition of the maximum number of extra places it may have received under the existing policy.
8. Indeed, if a school changes its criteria as suggested then, from the point at which that change has been approved by DE and published, that school can, if it wishes, inform pupils in its own Year 12 and hoping to return to pursue sixth form study that if they get the required grades (as established by the school), then they are assured a place. Thus when such returning pupils approach schools in August with the required grades, then, subject to the important points made in Paragraph 9, their admission can be immediately confirmed. The process of requesting and receiving extra places for these pupils will be a formality which follows and does not delay admission. Provided a school makes the suggested change to their admissions criteria as outlined above, it will improve the process for approximately 75% of current applications and will free officials to work on the remaining applications for extra places which relate to external pupils transferring from 11-16 schools.

9. Schools should note four important points before acting:

- We would not usually, of course, ask schools to clear with us their proposed criteria. The situation here, however, is different, firstly, in that the proposal is to change published criteria. For such amendments to published criteria our approval role is in line with legislation. Secondly, our clearance of these changes will prove, in effect, to be our approval of extra places ahead of decisions made formally at a later stage – and so should be importantly obtained now.
- That when they request extra places for sixth formers, a school is applying for a temporary variation (increase) in its enrolment number. Extra places awarded to schools through such variations are additional to the calculated and permanent enrolment capacity of the schools as reflected in their enrolment number. Requests for extra places by schools are made entirely voluntarily. **When requesting extra places, therefore, it is the responsibility of the requesting school to ensure that it can safely and effectively accommodate the numbers for whom it is requesting extra places.**
- That if a school decides to change its sixth form admissions criteria in the manner recommended here it should apply to DE to do so, following the instructions set out below. **Please note the recommendation is that the recommended new criterion is simply added as an appendage to the criteria that otherwise your school was intending to operate. Please ensure then that when applying to DE in order to change your sixth form admissions criteria for August 2011 that you enclose the sixth form admissions criteria that you applied to applicants in August 2010.**
- That an extra place that would have been awarded to a "returner" had they achieved the necessary grades, cannot be "transferred" to an external applicant should that returner not achieve the grades. All extra places for

external applicants must be the subject of an application to DE (as set out in Annex B). DE will consider sanctions against any school found to have admitted applicants outwith the appropriate procedures.

**10. If you wish to change your criteria in the recommended manner - what to do now?**

(1) As a basis for approving extra places, DE needs to be able to clear the changes made to their criteria by schools who will be following the recommendations set out above. Accordingly, please write to [susanne.hallworth@deni.gov.uk](mailto:susanne.hallworth@deni.gov.uk) indicating your intention to change your criteria in the manner recommended. Enclose a draft of the total criteria you wish to apply to sixth form applicants in August 2011. Please note that the recommendation is that these should be the criteria to be applied to places available within your enrolment number (unchanged), appended by the criteria to be applied to any extra places awarded to your school by DE. Annex A provides an illustration based on a fictional School A. Please also enclose a copy of the criteria that you applied to applicants to your sixth form in August 2010.

(2) We will reply to you quickly to confirm that we are aware that it is your intention to use this system. You should then publish the change appropriately – on your website and in all fora designed to inform parents and young people preparing for sixth form (open nights etc). If your change is a change to your criteria as they have already been published in hard-copy materials that have already been distributed to parents (e.g. Transfer Booklet, School Prospectus), then your school should consider how best to communicate the addendum to potential applicants or applicants who have already applied. DE would recommend that these communications should stress the purely administrative nature of the change, how it cannot disadvantage any applicant and can only hasten the process by which applicants who qualify for extra places have their admission resolved. Certainly, as a result of this change, no applicant to your school will be able to claim that they have lost out on a place that they otherwise would have got.

(3) Once it has been agreed that you will use the new system and your revised criteria have been published, then you may choose to communicate to your own Year 12 pupils in the manner described in Paragraph 8.

(4) Then when (presumably in August):

- you know that you wish to request extra places from DE; and
- you know how many extra places you wish to request (i.e. after the issue of GCSE results), then
- please make your request using the pro-forma attached at Annex B.

**11. If you do not wish to change your criteria in the recommended manner – what to do now?**

You are not required to do anything until after the issue of the GCSE results. Once you know how many extra places you wish to request both your own returners and any external pupils, please make your request **but do not use the proforma at Annex B**. Instead, please write to DE setting out how many places you are requesting and enclosing a rank-order of the applicants for whom you are requesting these extra places as established by your admissions criteria, and detailing:

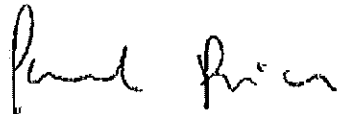
- The year into which they wish to enter;
- The school the applicant attended for Year 12; and
- For applicants who attended Year 12 in a school other than your school
  - The address of each applicant; and
  - The courses they wish to pursue.

DE will process these requests as soon as possible but cannot guarantee to have them completed before the start of the new school year. **No admission that is contingent on the award of an extra place should be offered until DE has responded to this request.** You will not be able to tell any of your returners whether they have a place or not until DE approval is given. You should also be aware that an external pupil may block some of your own returners from otherwise receiving a

place and will continue to do so until either they are placed or their name is removed from the school's rank order.

Should you have any queries please contact Audrey Moore (tel: 91279557). Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Price". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

**Paul Price**  
**School Access Team**

**cc:** Principals and Boards of Governors  
of all 11-16 Grant-Aided Post-Primary Schools

**ILLUSTRATION OF PROPOSED ADMISSIONS CRITERION FOR ANY EXTRA PLACES MADE AVAILABLE BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FOR ADMISSION INTO YEAR 13**

The proposal is that the recommended criterion for any extra places is appended to your existing sixth form admissions criteria. See the example below: School A appends in the lower box criteria "for any extra places made available by the Department of Education for admission into Year 13 (Sixth Form)", to its own criteria (provided as a typical set of criteria and purely for illustration) in the upper box.

Please note it is only with the precise wording and as an appendage to your existing criteria that the text in the lower box is recommended.

School A criteria for admission to Year 13 places available

**Firstly**, in order to be eligible for admission into Year 13 an applicant must have achieved 5 GCSEs at Grades A-C.

**Then**, if there are more pupils eligible than there are places available, places shall be awarded in the following order:

1. Applicants with the highest GCSE score – an applicant's GCSE score being calculated on the basis of GCSE results as follows:

- A = 5 points
- B = 4 points
- C = 3 points
- D = 2 points
- E = 1 point

2. In the event of a tie, priority shall be established by computerised random selection.

School A criteria for any extra places made available by the Department of Education for admission into Year 13 (Sixth Form).

The Department of Education may, on request, increase the number of pupils that the school can admit to its Year 13. Places that become available in this way shall be allocated only to pupils who meet the basic eligibility criteria for sixth form study (as above) and shall be allocated in the order determined by the criteria to be applied in the order set down.

1. Pupils who have most recently completed Year 12 in [your school name].

2. Pupils from other schools where admission to an extra place at [your school name] has been agreed by the Department of Education.\*

\*Parents should note how the Department of Education will, in response to a school's request, increase the school's enrolment number in order to allow an extra post -16 pupil to enrol. DE will first check whether there is another school or schools of a type suitable for that pupil within an hour's journey of where the pupil lives. If there is, DE will then check whether this other school or schools with places available may provide all of the post-16 courses that the pupil wishes to pursue. If these checks find that no other suitable school may provide all of the post-16 courses that the pupil wishes to pursue - then DE will agree a school's request for an extra place.

**What is a school of a type that is suitable for a pupil?** To determine this, DE first considers all schools to be one of 4 types: (i) denominational (ii) non-denominational (iii) Integrated and (iv) Irish-Medium. A school requesting an extra place for a post-16 pupil will belong to one of these 4 types and DE will consider any other school or school from this same type as suitable for the pupil. DE will also consider as suitable for the pupil any school from the same type as the type of school that the child attended in Year 12.

**FORM FOR REQUESTING EXTRA PLACES (INCREASE IN ENROLMENT NUMBER) FROM DE TO ADMIT TO YEAR 13**

**TO BE SUBMITTED TO DE ONLY AFTER ISSUE OF A'LEVEL RESULTS**

**Please enter school details below**

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Ref No: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Contact Name (Block Capitals): \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Do your published sixth form admissions criteria prioritise applicants for any extra places awarded by DE as recommended in the letter from School Access Team of 5 May, 2011?**

**YES/ NO - If yes, please complete and submit the form overleaf.**

**If no, do not use the form overleaf to make your request.** Instead, please write to DE setting out how many places you are requesting and enclosing a rank-order of the applicants for whom you are requesting these extra places as established by your admissions criteria, and detailing:

- The year into which they wish to enter;
- The school the applicant attended for Year 12; and
- For applicants who attended Year 12 in a school other than your school
  - The address of each applicant; and
  - The courses they wish to pursue.

DE will process these requests as soon as possible but cannot guarantee to have them completed before the start of the new school year. **No admission that is contingent on the award of an extra place should be offered until DE has responded to this request.**

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Ref No: \_\_\_\_\_

FOR REQUESTS FOR EXTRA PLACES FOR APPLICANTS LEAVING YOUR OWN YEAR 12 AND WHO MEET YOUR POST-16 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA		
Please enter the number of places that you are requesting for such applicants in the box opposite <sup>1</sup>		
FOR REQUESTS FOR EXTRA PLACES FOR APPLICANTS JOINING YOUR YEAR 13 FROM ANOTHER INSTITUTION AND WHO MEET YOUR POST-16 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA		
<p>Note - DE will process requests for external applicants as fast as possible. <b>No admission that is contingent on the award of an extra place should be offered until DE has responded to this request.</b></p>		
Name and address of applicant and school previously attended	The Post-16 courses the applicant wishes to pursue	DE decision (for official use only)

<sup>1</sup> Schools should note that, if a school has adopted the recommended change to its criteria, DE will always grant to a school any extra places that it requests in order to admit its own "returners" (i.e. those who have just completed Year 12 at the school) who have met the basic eligibility criteria for post-16 study as set by the school. Therefore, a school planning to make such requests can inform the relevant applicants at a very early stage that, subject to their achievement of the eligibility criteria (at the issue of GCSE results), they will be offered a place. **However, an extra place that would have been occupied by a "returner" is no longer awarded if no returner needs it. It cannot be used to admit a young person moving from another institution who must be the subject of a separate request for an extra place. Places "transferred" in this way are very likely to incur sanctions.**

