

Professor George Bain
Strategic Review of Education in Northern Ireland
July 2006

- 1.1 NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Northern Ireland Strategic Review of Education announced by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and led by Professor George Bain, which has the following terms of reference: *“To examine the funding of the education system, in particular the strategic planning and organisation of the schools’ estate, taking account of curriculum changes, including the wider provision for 14-19 year olds, and also demographic trends.”*
- 1.2 NASUWT is the largest union representing teachers and principals in Northern Ireland and throughout the UK.
- 1.3 NASUWT’s response focuses on issues arising from the open discussion document provided to the Secretary of the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Council on 6 June 2006, as well as the specific matters included in the accompanying letter to the document, in the context of the terms of reference of the review.

GENERAL COMMENTS

- 2.1 NASUWT organises throughout the UK, and is actively involved in national negotiations and consultations on developments in education strategy, funding, and pay and conditions of service in England, Wales and, Scotland as well as in Northern Ireland. The Union, therefore, is able to bring a wealth of expertise and experience to bear on these

issues. In England and Wales, NASUWT is involved in a unique social partnership with the Department for Education and Skills, Welsh Assembly Government, the National Employers' Organisation and other school workforce trade unions. This partnership has defined a new and beneficial way of working and NASUWT believes that the Bain Review provides a real opportunity to consider a new way of working in Northern Ireland, based on the social partnership model, to address the challenges facing schools, whilst at the same time delivering higher standards. This issue is explored in greater detail later in this response.

2.2 NASUWT supports fully the policy direction defined in the statutory duty of the Department of Education, under the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 (ERO), which formed the basis of the strategy set out in the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education document '*A Shared Future*' (ASF) and the recommendations contained in the report '*Towards a Culture of Tolerance – Integrating Education*' (TACOTIE).

2.3 Further, as NASUWT has stated in its response to the consultation on the Northern Ireland Review of Public Administration, the Union supports the replacement of the five education and library boards and the bringing together of direct support services currently delivered by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education with a single employing authority for all teachers and education support staff. The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority in their place should assist in reducing wasteful duplication, promote operational efficiency and ensure the release of funding to support the improvement of "frontline" service delivery.

2.4 The provision of education in Northern Ireland clearly will undergo significant change in the coming years. NASUWT believes it is essential, therefore, to secure adequate levels of capital funding in order to support the development of the schools' estate, and to

maintain and develop the level of revenue funding available to each school through this period. The Union believes it to be necessary to quantify the level of investment available from Government, in order to enable relevant bodies to undertake strategic planning activity with confidence. At present, the only information readily available to NASUWT in respect of such funding is a commitment made in April 2004, by the then Education Minister, for a £222 million building programme and estimated figures from the daft Investment Strategy of £3.6 billion over a ten-year period (£360 million per year).

2.5 It is also vital, if reform is to be successful and sustainable, that the mechanisms for the distribution of capital funding are transparent and efficient and secure the improvements in education provision to the benefit of all the children of Northern Ireland.

2.6 Similarly, it is important to ensure that revenue funding provided is sufficient to meet the new expectations on individual schools throughout, and beyond, the period of review, to ensure that:

- employment and appropriate levels of remuneration of teachers and the wider school workforce is secure;
- workload is controlled and standards of education rise by putting in place strategies which create capacity by freeing teachers and principals from tasks which do not require the skills and expertise of qualified teachers thus enabling them to focus on their core role of teaching and leading teaching and learning;
- all schools are properly and adequately funded to deliver the curriculum entitlement of all pupils;
- all schools, teachers and pupils have guaranteed access to appropriate books, materials and equipment, particularly technology, to support high-quality teaching and learning;
- the fabric of all school buildings can properly be maintained and provide a suitable and safe environment for pupils to learn and staff to work;

- effective continuing professional development opportunities for all staff provided and secured to sustain educational improvement.

2.7 NASUWT believes, in order to ensure that these aspirations are met, it is essential that the Department for Education in Northern Ireland (DENI) moves to establish a funding strategy group in Northern Ireland to enable key stakeholders, including NASUWT, to engage with Government on issues relating to the capital and revenue funding of the Education and Skills Authority and schools. NASUWT is committed to work with the DENI to secure a funding system which is fit for purpose, fair and transparent. NASUWT already has extensive experience of working in such a forum where the DfES meets regularly and frequently with stakeholders in a group called the School Funding Implementation Group. As a result of the contributions made in this group, the reform of the means of distribution of funding throughout the system has been well managed on the basis of consensus ensuring that change has taken place smoothly with few difficulties. In addition, the group continues to monitor implementation and progress to ensure it is aware of the impact targeted funding has had on service delivery.

2.8 NASUWT believes it is essential to ensure that clear lines of accountability for funding are established both for policy and management decisions taken at all levels in connection with the disbursement of public funds provided for education. Schools should be able to demonstrate to the Education and Skills Authority that they meet an agreed financial management standard. The lines of democratic accountability should be clear from school level right through to Government.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Capital Funding

- 3.1 Central to the aspirations expressed in '*A Shared Future*' and the recommendations contained in the report '*Towards a Culture of Tolerance – Integrating Education*' will be the improvement, and in some cases the replacement, of buildings which make up the schools' estate. NASUWT believes it is essential to the success of the reforms that this process is managed and controlled very closely by Government to ensure democratic accountability throughout the system. The mix of new and upgraded provision must be planned and developed very carefully to ensure that all communities are confident that their needs are being met. In addition, great care must be taken to ensure that as a programme of new build or refurbishment in an area begins this does not precipitate unnecessary turbulence either for the school populations or to revenue funding. Schools which are providing a perfectly acceptable standard education to pupils should not find themselves disrupted or in difficulty as a result of the funding changes introduced.
- 3.2 To help to maintain stability, NASUWT believes it will be necessary for Government to exercise its powers in relation to procurement and contracting of building and refurbishment works, to make all approvals and to monitor closely progress. The Union also believes that if the ambitions set out in the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education document '*Promoting Shared Education*' are to be realised, then it is vital that procurement and contracting is considered against clear, national criteria which will support those ambitions.
- 3.3 NASUWT seeks assurances from this review that any private sector involvement in the schools' estate will not pass risk or future liabilities to the public sector. Due to developments in education and other public service provision within the UK, there is extensive information and

experience available about private sector involvement and financial provision which this review should consider. NASUWT has assembled a considerable body of evidence on the impact of the private sector in state education and this has informed the Union's view that capital renewal programmes should not be restricted to PPP/PFI schemes and that measures should be put in place to prevent unsuitable companies from being contracted to provide new build, refurbishment and other capital renewal programmes in schools. A copy of the Union's report "The Private Sector and State Education" is attached in pdf version to this response and a hard copy has been posted.

3.4 NASUWT believes that the maintenance of the public service ethos in education is of vital importance. High-quality, fully funded public services are at the heart of a democratic and inclusive society. Public services exist to give expression to the needs and aspirations of individuals and communities and, in doing so, to deliver services which meet individual and wider community needs and aspirations. Public services are democratically accountable; they operate in the public interest, promote community cohesion and are valued and respected. They are owned by the public and are managed and delivered in trust to the public. Public services work to create a better society, by tackling inequalities and by delivering social and economic justice for all. Therefore, the outcomes of this review need to ensure that the public service ethos in education in Northern Ireland is not compromised as a result of changes to the capital funding strategy, and that:

- high standards of educational provision are maintained;
- democratic accountability is ensured;
- educational provision and access promote equality and contribute to wider social cohesion;
- the national framework of pay and conditions of teachers is maintained;
- trade union recognition is assured and that unions are able to continue to provide representation and support for members;

- private sector involvement does not lead to increased burdens on, and risks for, the public purse in the short, medium or long term.

Revenue Funding

3.5 It is essential that the process by which schools are allocated, and receive, revenue funding is fair and transparent. It is crucial that stability is maintained in respect of revenue funding to guarantee that schools continue to be staffed properly now and in the future to deliver pupils' curriculum entitlements.

3.6 Ensuring revenue funding on a fair basis will become increasingly important if the aims of '*A Shared Future*' are to become successful. However, a consequence of increasing parental choice and of funding following the pupil is that there is a danger that some schools become 'unfashionable' and enter into a spiral of decline from which it is very difficult to recover. It is vital therefore that any formula established for the disbursement of revenue funding:

- takes into account actual curriculum and staffing needs of schools;
- provides financial stability to enable schools to plan ahead;
- provides guarantees on base funding levels;
- minimises the use of separate improvement grants and eschews bidding processes for access to funds for targeted improvements;
- provides for appropriate democratic control of the expenditure of public money at all levels, including the school;
- secures transparency and competent financial management at school level;
- prevents stockpiling of funds in school balances and has appropriate controls to curtail overspending;

- provides for recognised school workforce trade unions to be consulted fully on budget management, particularly at school level.

The Social Partnership Model - a new way of working and delivering reform

- 3.7 It is evident that major change and reform are facing the education service in Northern Ireland. If reform is to be successful and change managed effectively it is evident to NASUWT that a new way of working between the Government and employers in Northern Ireland is needed. The current model is based on confrontation and does not deliver real progress or benefits for any of the parties involved and therefore makes little contribution to raising standards of education.
- 3.8 In January 2003, the signing of the National Agreement on *'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload'* heralded a new way of working and a social partnership was established. The catalyst for this development was recognition by government and employers that the school workforce was critical to raising standards; the professional and industrial relations agenda were in fact the same; and that unions were part of the solution not the problem. The unions recognised that constructive dialogue with Government was required to secure improvements and that reform could bring benefits for the workforce.
- 3.9 The outcome has resulted in major improvements to the conditions of service of teachers and principals, increased job satisfaction, the development of the concept of the education team to meet the increasingly sophisticated learning needs of pupils and capacity for the raising of educational standards. Evidence collected by the Training and Development Agency for Schools in England collected on behalf of the school workforce social partners confirms the widespread view in schools that workforce reform and remodelling are making a major contribution to the raising standards agenda. Since the partnership was

established there has been industrial relations harmony and no need for recourse to national action on the pay and conditions of teachers.

- 3.10 The social partnership arrangement is distinct from the traditional collective bargaining arrangements as all parties agree on their shared responsibility to develop solutions to problems, take ownership of and promote the outcomes.
- 3.11 As a result of the social partnership a wide range of issues and challenges for schools are being addressed, ranging from the provision of early years education and childcare, extended services in schools, 14-19 education, improving nutritional standards in schools, and the provision of effective career information, advice and guidance for young people, as well as teachers' pay, work/life balance and support staff career structures, training and pay, and grading.
- 3.12 NASUWT believes that central to the success of this review and delivering sustainable improvements for pupils is the need to commit to establishing a social partnership arrangement in Northern Ireland.
- 3.13 NASUWT believes that there are a number of initiatives within Northern Ireland which provide clear examples of how social partnership working could have provided a springboard to successful reform, but have instead been less successful. The move to the abolition of selection, resulting from the outcomes of the Costello Report in 2004, entails significant change in school organisation and has the potential to result in the growth of an enormously wasteful and unnecessary bureaucracy to support the provision of pupil profiles of performance from primary to post-primary education. NASUWT believes that whilst it is necessary to communicate such information throughout children's schooling, it needs to be done by the correct people, in the most efficient way, and it needs to be provided in a form that is useful to the profession. This has not been achieved and will undoubtedly cause significant problems and

negative reaction. A process by which the reform could have been discussed and shared solutions emerged would have avoided this. Workforce unions could have supported the process.

3.14 A further example is the developments in relation to 14-19 provision. There is no clear information regarding:

- how the capacity of schools and FE colleges to provide the reformed 14-19 education model will be assessed;
- the nature of the contributing establishments;
- the nature of the education provision, and whether it will meet the aspirations of the pupils and students concerned;
- how the provision will be delivered and by whom;
- the impact on teachers, lecturers and students; and
- how the protocols will be defined, how different institutions will work together, how staff will be deployed in those institutions, how pupil and student movement will be organised and controlled and how financial arrangements will operate.

3.15 The burdensome assessment system which detracts from teaching and learning and the inadequacy of the outcomes of the Curran Report in achieving meaningful workforce reform and workload reduction to raise educational standards are further examples. NASUWT is under extreme pressure from members to embark upon a further wave of national industrial action to secure progress on contractual change to provide the capacity for teachers to focus on teaching and learning and raise standards.

3.16 Finding a sustainable way of working to address these crucial and major issues is required urgently. The concerns and uncertainty being experienced by the workforce do not bode well for the prospects of any of the proposed reforms and are symptomatic of the significant shortcomings in the industrial relations process in the education sector in Northern Ireland.

OTHER COMMENTS SPECIFIC TO THE REVIEW

- 4.1 NASUWT believes that to secure integrated service provision it is essential arrangements are put in place which will encourage and facilitate collaborative working towards common goals. Such arrangements should include the mechanisms to garner and consider local opinions and concerns, while at the same time having the ability and power to make binding decisions at the strategic level. Therefore, a body such as the planned Education and Skills Authority (ESA) should be charged with providing executive management and leadership for the education service in Northern Ireland.
- 4.2 It is essential to securing the ambitions of the DENI in respect of this policy agenda that all schools are included in the collaboration, sharing and integration programme.
- 4.3 The concept of the sharing of facilities and resources between schools, and between schools and colleges, is sound but recognises that there will need to be developed a comprehensive collection of negotiated and agreed protocols to guide good practice in respect of such collaborative working.
- 4.4 The Education and Skills Authority should be charged with ensuring that school leaders, headteachers and governors should be provided with encouragement and training to engage in collaborative working practices.
- 4.5 NASUWT accepts that school facilities could be used as a wider community resource, but this needs to be carefully measured and managed by schools in order to ensure that it does not impede the delivery of the school's core responsibility for teaching and learning, impact adversely on the workload and safety of the school workforce or affect the infrastructure of the school. The outcomes of this review

must ensure that areas of schools designated for community use are suitable in terms of condition and capacity for the required purpose, and do not compromise the provision of the school curriculum.

- 4.6 It is not clear whether the desire to use school facilities as a wider community resource includes extended provision as is currently being developed in England and Wales. Such provision would be compatible with the policy objectives of the review but if considered must be premised on ensuring the same safeguards for workforce involvement which have been secured in England and Wales, i.e. that extended provision does not mean extended working hours for teachers and principals.
- 4.7 The delivery of effective, combined education and community provision will require improvements and/or adaption to school buildings and, in some cases, the need for new build schools. NASUWT notes the proposal for the Education Infrastructure Procurement Service to act in support of education authorities in the planning of the estate and to be responsible for the procurement of strategic partnerships and local schemes. In addition, it is proposed that the Service will be responsible for ongoing contract and provision performance management. NASUWT believes that it is important that the management of these functions is delivered through the Education and Skills Authority and that programmes are developed in consultation with the recognised school workforce unions.
- 4.8 In the context of the current policy imperative and structural conditions, it is to be expected that some overprovision of school places will be necessary to facilitate parental choice and ebbs and flows of school population. As the reform package rolls out it will be important to its success that the level of flexibility in the organisation of school places will need to be at a higher level than might otherwise be desirable. It would, therefore, be prudent to overprovide at the outset and adjust

surplus place provision in light of experience as the programme unfolds. Research will need to be carried out in order to estimate the surplus place requirements in the short to medium term.

SUMMARY OF NASUWT'S KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations arising out of the section 'General Comments'

- 5.1 Adequate levels of capital funding must be secured in order to support the development of the schools' estate.
- 5.2 The level of revenue funding for each school must be maintained and enhanced as appropriate.
- 5.3 The levels of investment available from Government must be quantified to ensure that relevant bodies can undertake strategic review and planning with confidence.
- 5.4 The mechanisms for the distribution of capital funding should be transparent and efficient to secure sustainable reform and improvements in education provision for all children.
- 5.5 Revenue funding must be sufficient to meet the new expectations on schools throughout and beyond the period of the review.
- 5.6 A funding strategy group including NASUWT and other stakeholders should be established to work with the DENI to secure a funding system which is fair and transparent and to monitor its implementation and impact.
- 5.7 Clear lines of democratic accountability for funding should be established for funding policy and management decisions at all levels. As part of this process schools should be required to ensure that they have met an agreed financial management standard.

Recommendations arising out of the section ‘Specific Comments’

Capital funding

- 5.8 New and upgraded provision should be managed and controlled closely by Government and planned and developed in such a way as to ensure that all communities are confident that their needs are being met.
- 5.9 The planning process should ensure that measures are in place to prevent unnecessary turbulence either in the school population or in revenue funding for schools.
- 5.10 The Government should exercise its powers in relation to procurement and contracting, make all approvals and monitor progress closely. Procurement and contracting should be carried out against clear, national criteria.
- 5.11 Consideration should be given to the experiences gained elsewhere in the UK of the involvement of the private sector, particularly in relation to PPP/PFI schemes in education.
- 5.12 A list of companies unsuitable for involvement in new build, refurbishment and other capital projects should be compiled.
- 5.13 The outcome of the review must ensure that the public service ethos in education is not compromised and is maintained.

Revenue funding

- 5.14 A fair and transparent process by which schools receive revenue funding should be developed, which includes ensuring that:
- schools can be properly staffed;
 - curriculum entitlements can be delivered;
 - planning can take place in a context of financial stability;
 - base funding level guarantees are given.

- 5.15 There should be detailed consultation, in particular with NASUWT and other school workforce unions to establish a formula for devolving revenue funding.

The Social Partnership Model – a new way of working

- 5.16 To enable reform and change in schools to progress constructively and for its outcomes to raise standards, one of the key outcomes of the review should be a recommendation to the Secretary of State that a social partnership model of working with school workforce unions be established as a matter of urgency, which mirrors the successful partnership already delivering reform in England and Wales.

Recommendations arising from the section ‘Other comments specific to the review’

- 5.17 A central body such as the Education and Skills Authority should be responsible for the management of all strategic matters concerned with the delivery of education, including staffing, personnel management, funding and the school estate.
- 5.18 The central body must establish clear mechanisms for consulting with schools and the school workforce and their unions at local level.
- 5.19 All schools should be included in the collaboration, sharing and integration programme. Collaboration between schools should be conducted in the context of national protocols agreed with the recognised unions.
- 5.20 Community use of facilities must be introduced in such a way as to ensure it does not detract schools from their core focus on teaching and learning.

- 5.21 There should be established a clear definition of what is meant by extended provision and this should not result in the extension of working hours of teachers or principals.
- 5.22 The Education Infrastructure Procurement Service should be accountable to the Education and Skills Authority.
- 5.23 To support the strategic change process there should be provision to enhance the leadership and management skills of school leaders.
- 5.24 Effective strategies to manage changes in the distribution of pupils should be developed which should include the recognition of the probable need to maintain in the short to medium term some 'overprovision.'
- 5.25 School workforce unions are involved fully with a view to securing national agreements on these processes.

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