



Department of  
**Education**

[www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk)

AN ROINN  
**Oideachais**

MÁNYSTRÍE O  
**Lear**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# RESEARCH BRIEFING

ISSN 1366-803X

RB 2/2004

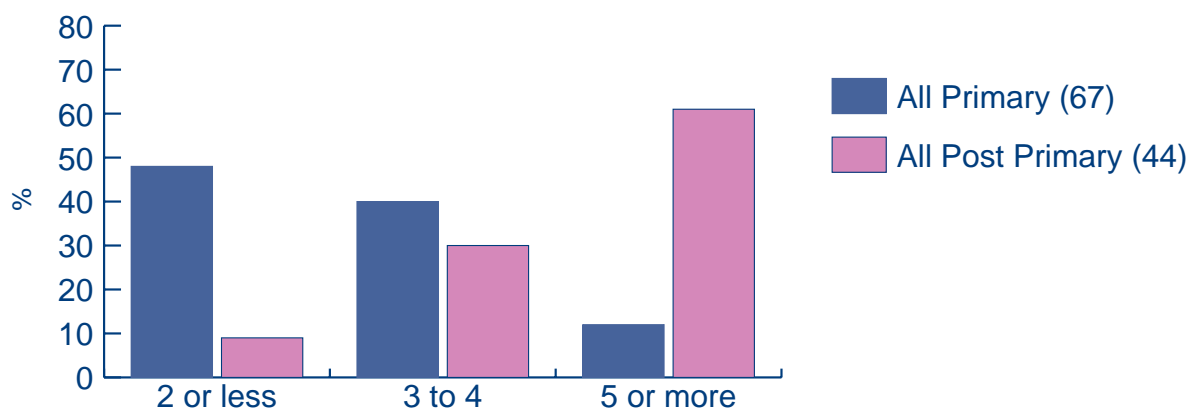
March 2004

## OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS LEARNING PROVISION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

### KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ Nearly all schools provide Out of School Hours Learning (OOSHL) activities, predominantly after school but also at lunchtime and during weekends and holidays. A wide range of activities is provided with the most popular being sport, arts and maths/ICT.
- ◆ About half of all schools have increased provision since 1999.

**Figure 1: Average number of days per week that activities are offered during term time (Base = 111)**



- ◆ Schools run activities mainly in order to provide enrichment and raise motivation; other reasons include promoting inclusion, engagement of parents and the community and raising school performance.
- ◆ Three-quarters of schools reported that OOSHL contributed to overall school improvement, eg by positive impact on motivation and attitudes. 84% of post-primary principals said that it contributed to raising pupil attainment.
- ◆ Most schools rely on teachers to run activities although up to two-fifths now use paid providers as well.
- ◆ Less than half of all schools had received specific funding for OOSHL. About one-third had received funding from the New Opportunities Fund, while four-fifths indicated that they would like advice on sources of funding and bid writing.
- ◆ Nearly two-thirds of pupils reported attending activities in the survey week.
- ◆ Pupil awareness of activities varied considerably. A quarter of pupils who knew about activities reported that they did not know how to join in.
- ◆ The factors that affect individual participation include the nature and range of activities, pupil interest and motivation, and practical constraints such as transport and timing.
- ◆ High levels of pupil and parental interest and the availability of specialist and voluntary help were reported as real opportunities for new provision in schools. Lack of staff time and difficulties with transport were regarded as the main barriers.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. This report describes a two-phase study of principals, pupils and parents conducted in Northern Ireland schools during 2002. The purpose of the study was twofold:
  - ◆ to obtain baseline information on the provision of, and participation in, OOSHL activities; and
  - ◆ to gain an understanding of the perceived contribution that out of school hours learning activities can make to school improvement.
2. OOSHL is learning activity outside normal lessons which young people take part in voluntarily. It includes activities such as homework and revision clubs, help with key skills, sport, games, creative activities, residential events, volunteering and community service, mentoring, specific hobby or special interest clubs and learning about learning. These are normally school-organised activities which take place before or after school, during lunchtimes, at weekends or during holidays.
3. Schools have traditionally provided 'extra-curricular' activities on an ad hoc basis as a means of enriching pupils' education through a broader range of experiences than the curriculum can provide. Over recent years, however, increasing evidence has been found of the positive impact of participation on pupil attitudes, attainment and attendance.
4. Where OOSHL is developed in a strategic and co-ordinated manner, there is evidence that it can make a broad and positive contribution to school improvement, impacting on school ethos and relationships with parents and the community.
5. Although at the time of the study there was no specific government funding of OOSHL activities for schools, dedicated lottery funding had been available to them since 2000 through the New Opportunities Fund (NOF)<sup>1</sup>.

## **OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS LEARNING PROVISION**

6. A broad quantitative survey of school principals was conducted to examine the nature of OOSHL provision and how it is funded and organised.

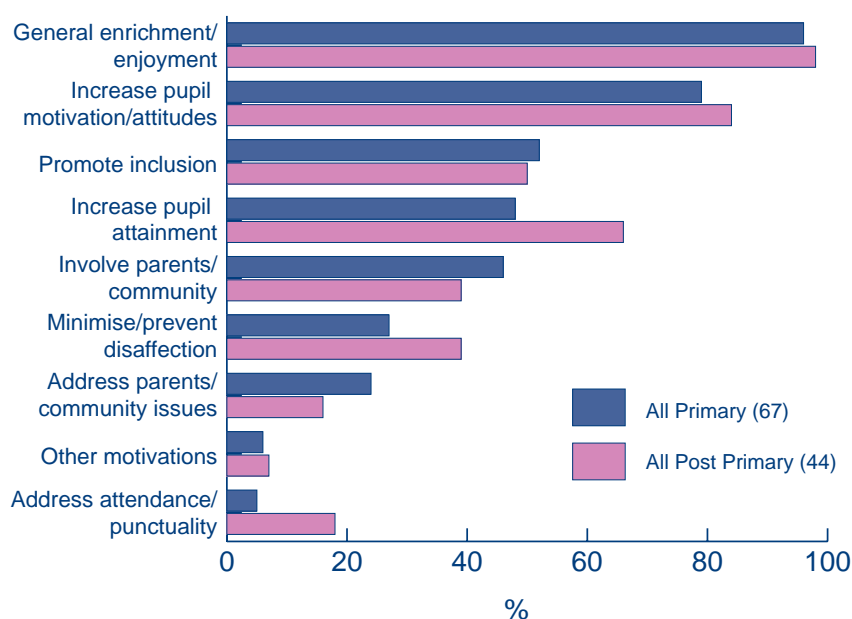
---

<sup>1</sup> £8.6m NOF funding available to Northern Ireland schools since 2000.

## Extent and Nature of Provision

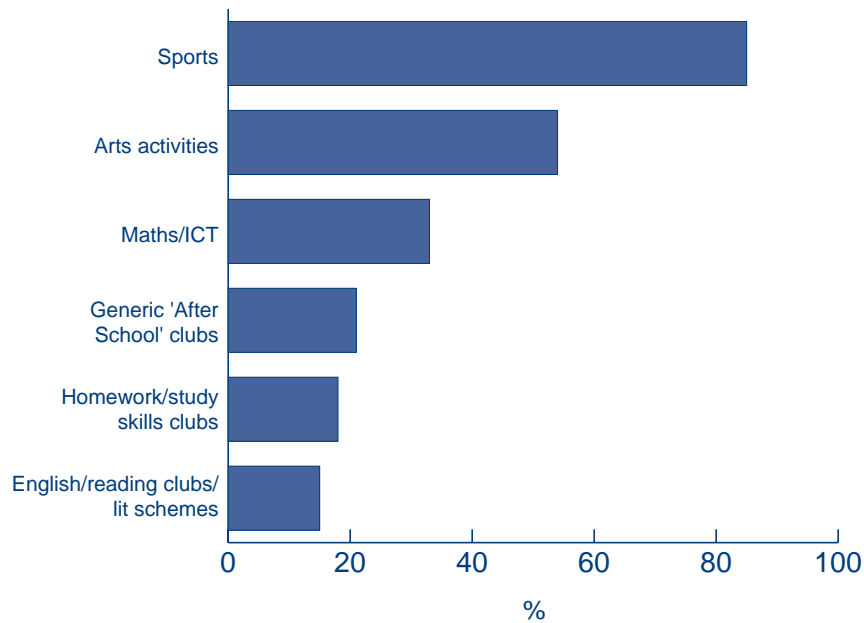
7. The survey of school principals found that virtually all (99%) schools provide some OOSHL activities. The majority (63%) of primary schools offer up to five activities each week, while most (59%) post-primary schools offer eleven or more activities each week. Since 1999, 59% of post-primary and 43% of primary schools have increased their levels of OOSHL provision.
8. The most common reasons for providing OOSHL activities are to provide general pupil enrichment and to increase pupil motivation. Primary principals are more likely than their post-primary colleagues to report a greater emphasis on parental or community involvement, while post-primary schools are more likely to use OOSHL activities to address school performance.

**Figure 2: Purpose of provision, by sector (Base 111)**

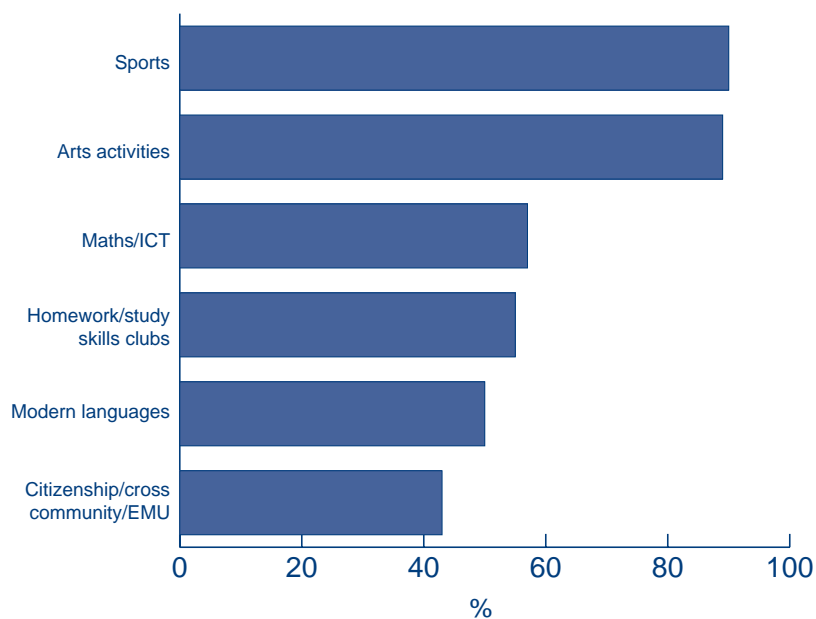


9. Schools reported a wide variety of activities that are offered to pupils, but in both primary and post-primary schools the most frequently offered activities are sport, arts and maths/ICT. The range of provision in post-primary schools reflects the greater focus on school improvement, where schools are more likely to offer curriculum-based activities such as modern languages or homework clubs, whereas primary schools are more likely than post-primary schools to offer generic 'After School' clubs.
10. Other activities reported included: citizenship/Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU), science, environment, English, humanities, Scripture

**Figure 3a: Range of out of school provision: Primary school  
(6 most frequently mentioned) Base = 67**



**Figure 3b: Range of out of school provision:  
Post Primary school (6 most frequently mentioned) Base = 44**



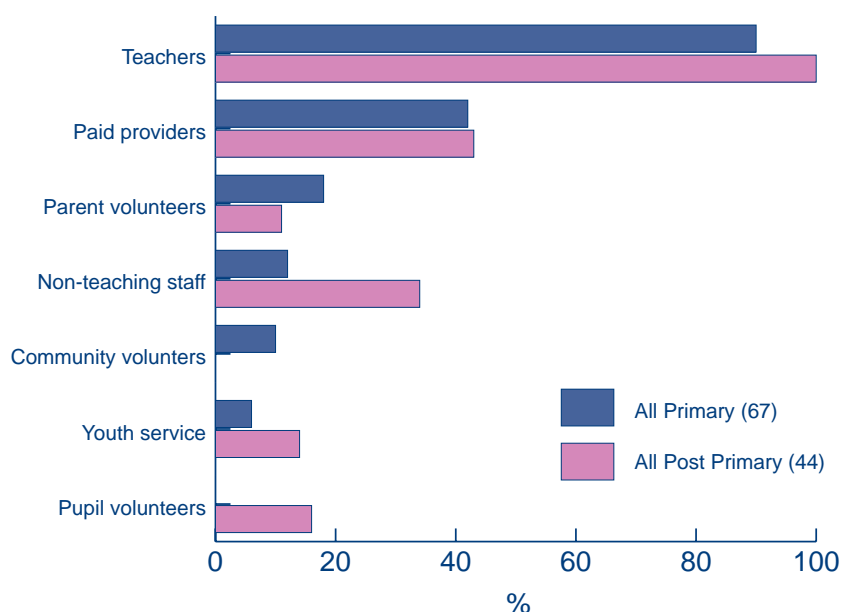
Union/Bible clubs, cycling proficiency, Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, public speaking/debating, Young Enterprise and technology clubs.

11. Virtually all schools (96%) offer activities after school. Post-primary schools are much more likely than primary schools to offer activities at other times with 75% of post-primary schools offering activities at lunchtimes and 61% providing weekend activities. 38% of schools provide holiday activities. Breakfast club provision is offered by 16% of post-primary schools and only a very few primary schools.

## Organisation of Activities

12. The survey found that less than half (44%) of principals indicated that there was a named out of school hours activities co-ordinator in their school. Primary principals were more likely (52%) than post-primary (32%) principals to indicate that such a position existed, but frequently identified themselves or their vice-principal in that role. Where there was no identified co-ordinator, responsibility for this work tended to fall by default to individuals or groups of teachers in post-primary schools or principals and vice-principals in primary schools.
13. Virtually all schools (95%) rely on teachers to run activities, although over two-fifths of schools (43%) also use paid providers. In general post-primary schools draw upon a wider range of groups and individuals to run activities, notably making more use of youth service, pupil volunteers and non-teaching staff.

**Figure 4: Who runs provision, by sector**  
Base = 111



## Consultation

14. Virtually all schools consult staff about provision. In many schools, especially post-primary, pupils, parents and governors are regularly consulted, but there is much less consultation beyond the immediate school community, for example, with youth services or local businesses.

## Reporting/Record Keeping

15. More than half of all schools report on their OOSHL activities in their prospectus, annual reports, report to governors and school development plans. Schools with a named co-ordinator are more likely to report OOSHL activities in their school development plan or school improvement plan compared to schools without a co-ordinator.
16. About half of all schools keep attendance or other records for their OOSHL activities; post-primary schools are more likely to do so than primary schools.

## Funding & New Opportunities Fund (NOF)

17. Less than half (48%) of NI schools receive funding for OOSHL activities.
18. Generally there is a large disparity between the range of OOSHL funds that principals are aware of and those from which they receive money. This differential may be partially explained by limited eligibility criteria, which means that principals are aware of funds for which they cannot apply.
19. Although 87% of schools are aware of the availability of NOF funding, less than a third of surveyed schools (29%) receive funds from this source. Nevertheless NOF is the single biggest source of received funds in schools.
20. The survey found that schools with a named co-ordinator are more likely to be in receipt of NOF or other funds than those without a co-ordinator.
21. Although the study found that a lack of funding did not necessarily limit the number of activities provided, it did show that schools in receipt of funding are more likely to offer a wider range and higher quality of provision.
22. A large majority of principals (79%) said that their school would like advice on funding and bid writing in order to develop their OOSHL provision. This reflects the finding that many principals had been discouraged by unsuccessful funding applications and tended to view the bidding process as a frustrating use of valuable organisational time.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF OOSHL TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

23. Principals were asked to comment on the perceived contribution of OOSHL to school improvement. School improvement can be interpreted in a number of ways, but for the purpose of this study it is taken in its most general sense, covering the dimensions below, rather than a reference to any specific programme or intervention.
24. The study found that the majority (75%) of principals agreed that OOSHL has a range of positive outcomes that contribute to overall school improvement, by:
- ◆ improving motivation and attitudes toward school;
  - ◆ increasing pupil and school attainment;
  - ◆ promoting social inclusion by emphasising success not failure;
  - ◆ minimising disaffection;
  - ◆ improving attendance and punctuality.
25. More than 90% of principals reported a positive impact on both pupil motivation and attitudes to school. This exceeds the proportion (78%) who plan for this as an outcome.
- ◆ just less than half of pupils said that participation in OOSHL activities made them happier at school;
  - ◆ a quarter of pupils and parents said that taking part in activities had encouraged pupils to get better marks for their school or homework;
  - ◆ a third of pupils and parents thought that participating in OOSHL had given pupils greater pride in their school (a view shared by 86% of principals, who said that the provision/participation in activities had contributed to improved school ethos).
26. The vast majority (84%) of post-primary principals perceived that OOSHL activities have contributed to increased pupil attainment, exceeding expectation for this sector (66% of post-primary principals plan activities for this purpose). Primary principal reports of improved academic success were not as great, but still substantial. Two-thirds of post-primary and two-fifths of primary principals report a positive effect on whole school academic achievement.

27. Half of all principals said that one aim of their provision was to promote inclusion. The study found evidence, from principals, pupils and parents, that participation in OOSHL activities promotes inclusion, in its various forms, by providing opportunities to:
- ◆ recognise non-academic strengths;
  - ◆ develop wider social skills, such as working with others;
  - ◆ enjoy the same social or practical opportunities as others, eg access to ICT;
  - ◆ raise pupil aspirations by increasing awareness of alternative future opportunities.
28. Previous studies<sup>2</sup> have shown that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, or at risk of disaffection, stand to gain the most from participation in OOSHL activities. This study found that although less than a third of all principals (30%) said that they planned to use OOSHL activities to address disaffection, the majority of principals (74%) believed that pupil behaviour was positively affected by participation, thereby reducing disaffection. For example, over 90% of principals agreed that pupil attitudes and motivation had been positively affected; a view shared by about half of pupils and parents who reported greater pupil happiness at school – clearly, happier and more confident pupils are much less likely to be disaffected.
29. Two-thirds of post-primary and half of primary principals agree that attendance and punctuality are positively affected by the provision of activities, but only 18% of post-primary schools and 5% of primary schools had planned for this outcome. Pupils and parents agreed that attending activities had contributed to their children being keener to attend school.
30. The perceived contributions to school improvement are therefore considerable. However while principals understand the potential for OOSHL to contribute to school improvement, and it is increasingly seen as a key part of school identity, many have yet to adopt a strategic approach to OOSHL that would yield the greatest benefit.
31. The study found that the commitment to using OOSHL for school improvement depends on the vision of the principal, which strongly affects the level of whole school commitment to the strategic planning of activities.

---

<sup>2</sup> “The Benefits of Study Support: A Review of Opinion and Research”, DfEE 1999

32. One benefit of strategic planning was that schools more easily overcame some of the practical challenges associated with provision, such as transportation or lack of availability of suitable space. They were also more likely to ensure that activities are relevant and attractive to pupils, are accessible to those who could benefit most and are socially inclusive.

## **AWARENESS OF ACTIVITIES**

33. Having established the potential contribution of OOSHL to school improvement, the report examined the issues that affect pupil awareness and participation in activities.
34. The key factors that affect awareness of activities include:
- ◆ peer influence – almost half of pupils started going to an activity because it had been recommended to them by a friend, or because their friends were going;
  - ◆ school size – pupils in small schools appear to have a more accurate awareness of available activities than their peers in larger schools;
  - ◆ participation rate – pupils in schools with higher rates of participation tend to be aware of a proportionately greater number of activities than those in schools with lower participation rates;
  - ◆ publicity/profile – pupils and parents are more likely to be aware of activities that have a performance dimension, such as choir or drama, or that are actively promoted in school publications or websites.
35. Pupil and parent awareness of activities varied considerably and this was not related to the number of activities provided by the school. A quarter of pupils who knew about activities reported that they did not know how to join in.

## **PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES**

36. The study identified three main groups of factors that affect pupil decisions to participate: range and nature of available activities; pupil interest and motivation; and practical constraints. In some ways these are interdependent. They are discussed in the following paragraphs.
37. The study found that in schools with a broad range (ie greater variety) of activities participation rates were higher. The structure of activity (eg timing, competitive element and size/characteristics of participating group), and

whether the activity is run by school or external staff were also found to influence participation.

38. Pupils are attracted to those activities that sound fun, relate to an existing hobby, offer new experiences, or offer the opportunity to be with friends or meet new people. Motivation to attend is also influenced by the extent to which pupils feel ownership of the activity, for example, influencing what is offered or deciding how it is delivered.
39. The study uncovered a range of practical issues that may affect participation. In particular, attendance is often restricted by access to suitable transport. The concern here may be about pupil safety, availability of family or public transport or concern over long journey times. The timing of activities can also affect ability to attend and this may be to do with transport or other issues such as having sibling care responsibilities. Schools offering a range of lunchtime activities have a higher overall participation rate in OOSHL activities than those without lunchtime provision.
40. Pupil participation rates reported by principals varied widely, with most between 20% and 60% and two-fifths between 30% and 50%. However a higher proportion of pupils and parents (almost two-thirds) indicated participation in activities during the survey week.
41. The parents who responded to the survey were satisfied that their children were attending about the right number of activities – only 18% think that their children should join in more. In contrast many pupils themselves would like to see more activities available.

## **OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS TO PROVISION**

42. Principals were asked to indicate which factors had acted as opportunities or barriers to the development of OOSHL activities in their school.
43. The following factors are broadly seen as presenting **opportunity** for provision:
  - ◆ Pupil interest: the majority of principals agreed on the importance of pupil interest. Suggested ways to increase pupil interest included:
    - pupil consultation;
    - offering a variety of activities;

- providing activities that offer a range of options on structure and membership;
- pupil involvement, eg via school council;
- publicity.
- ◆ Parental interest was also identified by more than half of principals as important, not only to encourage children to participate, but to enable participation, eg by providing transport home or paying for activities. The range of options to increase parental interest included:
  - parental consultation;
  - publicity;
  - parental involvement in activities.
- ◆ Availability of specialist or voluntary help was recognised by 50% of principals as an 'opportunity' for provision. There are a number of ways in which specialist or voluntary help can enable schools to provide activities, including, reducing the burden on paid teaching staff, extending the range and quality of provision, and developing stronger links with the community.

44. Principals identified the following key **barriers** to provision:

- ◆ Lack of teacher time to run activities: almost all the schools surveyed rely on teachers to run or help run activities, yet over half of the principals said that limited staff time inhibits their ability to provide activities. Where staff time is more widely available, principals reported a range of benefits, including:
  - improved teacher/pupil relationships;
  - breaking down of stereotypes and pre-conceptions about pupil potential and assisting pupils to realise their potential;
  - improved school morale.
- ◆ Lack of teacher time: principals identified that without sufficient organisational time the range of activities may be limited, specialist or voluntary help may not be accessed, and practical concerns about use of available resources, timing of activities and contingency planning cannot be addressed.
- ◆ Transport: almost half of principals, along with parents and pupils, identified the lack of suitable transportation as a practical barrier to

provision. Some principals reported good practice in addressing this by:

- incorporating transport costs in funding applications;
  - negotiating with Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and others to secure the retiming of buses and taxis;
  - retiming of school day to enable activities to take place during core school hours.
45. Restricted space can limit the number and type of activities. There were good examples of how schools had overcome these restrictions, for example, by utilising resources of other local schools. Other factors such as maintenance and staffing costs can also limit the availability of facilities.
46. In some schools the existence of good facilities acted as a motivator to provide extra activities in order to make best use of resources. In some cases principals were aware that their school was the only available community resource of its kind.
47. Where a high priority is placed on OOSHL, schools are more likely to have developed a strategic 'can do' approach to overcome obstacles to provision, and that leads to a wider range of better organised activities which pupils have been involved in developing. Low prioritisation of OOSHL may lead to barriers remaining unchallenged, staff disillusionment, lower levels of pupil interest, or a lack of consultation on a limited range of activities.

## **SPECIAL SCHOOLS**

48. The main survey included a small number of special schools, which were also asked about their OOSHL provision. The findings indicate that making provision is often more difficult but that there are real benefits for pupils:
- ◆ the purposes of OOSHL in special schools place a greater focus on developing social ability and independence, although academic benefit is still recognised;
  - ◆ parents emphasise the importance of participation in OOSHL for enabling and encouraging pupils to develop a 'normal' social life;
  - ◆ there is real potential for the development of OOSHL, such as increasing integration with mainstream pupils and the wider community;

- ◆ the range of activities offered is more limited than in mainstream schools;
- ◆ the barriers to provision, such as transport, staffing and funding, appear to be greater than in mainstream schools.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OOSHL ACTIVITY**

49. The study asked principals to identify support that would encourage them to develop their provision. Pupils and parents were asked to suggest ways of improving existing provision. Where possible, their suggestions are incorporated within the following series of recommendations for schools, ELBs and the Department of Education. These recommendations aim to address the issues and broad findings described in the report.

### **Schools**

50. *Schools should consider the use of OOSHL to achieve strategic aims by:*

- ◆ appointing an OOSHL co-ordinator with responsibility for overall planning and resourcing of activities;
- ◆ including a coherent programme of out of school hours learning activities in school development plans;
- ◆ engaging with the local community to identify and utilise potential sources of funding, paid/voluntary providers and alternative facilities.

51. *Schools should address the barriers to provision and participation by:*

- ◆ reviewing publicity to maximise awareness;
- ◆ addressing the practical barriers to participation;
- ◆ consulting more widely to maximise pupil ownership and the use of available resources;
- ◆ encouraging parental involvement.

52. *Schools should manage the provision of OOSHL by keeping it under regular review to ensure/maintain its appeal, relevance and accessibility. They should:*

- ◆ conduct an audit of existing provision and participation;
- ◆ review the aims of current provision;
- ◆ consult pupils and others on the range and structure of provision;

- ◆ broaden the range of provision to reflect responses to consultation;
- ◆ review timing of activities to maximise accessibility and participation rates;
- ◆ offer pupils taster sessions of possible new activities, to establish interest levels and to encourage wary pupils.

## Education and Library Boards (ELBs)

53. *ELBs should publicise the importance of OOSHL and provide direction to schools by:*

- ◆ appointing a full-time OOSHL co-ordinator in every ELB;
- ◆ providing OOSHL networking opportunities for schools to share ideas and advice;
- ◆ providing schools with access to examples of good practice;
- ◆ supporting schools with advice on strategic development of OOSHL;
- ◆ providing brokering services to schools to help them access specialist help or partner organisations, and facilitating shared school use of facilities or resources.

54. *ELBs should provide schools with funding support by:*

- ◆ consulting with major funding sources, eg European Peace Money to establish best advice to give to schools for successful bidding;
- ◆ collating and disseminating best advice on local and national funding streams;
- ◆ encouraging and facilitating joint funding bids where appropriate.

55. *ELBs should provide access to training by:*

- ◆ identifying and/or developing appropriate training for school-based staff, paid and volunteer providers.

## Department of Education (DE)

56. *DE should communicate the vision of OOSHL to schools and ELBs by:*

- ◆ developing a framework for schools that explains the variety, nature and benefits of quality OOSHL activities;

- ◆ considering a Northern Ireland wide campaign to raise the profile of OOSHL in school improvement.
57. *DE should encourage inclusion of OOSHL in ELB and schools' planning by:*
- ◆ introducing a requirement that every ELB and school should include a reference to OOSHL in school development or school improvement plans;
  - ◆ including OOSHL in the school inspection framework.
58. *DE should support schools and ELBs by providing examples of OOSHL good practice by:*
- ◆ developing an OOSHL website;
  - ◆ providing advice on accessible funding streams.

## **METHODOLOGY**

59. The study comprised three separate surveys and interviews with principals, administered in two phases:

Phase 1	(March-May 2002):	Survey of school principals
Phase 2	(May-June 2002):	School principal telephone interviews Surveys of pupils and parents

### **Phase 1**

60. The first phase of the study involved either the principal, vice-principal or other designated person completing a largely quantitative postal survey.
61. The questionnaire sought baseline information about the quantity and range of OOSHL provision in schools. To gain a complete overview, the survey was designed to enable responses from the widest possible range of schools, from those offering a well developed, strategic OOSHL programme to those offering ad hoc after school sport and perhaps a Christmas concert or play.
62. Questions also aimed to establish pupil participation rates, how activities are organised and sources of funding. Additional questions focused on identifying the perceived benefits, to both pupils and school, of providing

OOSHL activities, and whether it was felt that these contributed to overall school improvement.

63. Principals were also asked to indicate whether they would be prepared to participate in the second phase of the study, involving telephone interview and pupil and parent questionnaires.

### **Phase 1 school sample**

64. The postal questionnaire was sent to 180 primary, post-primary and special school principals in March 2002. Schools had been selected to provide a sample with a cross-section of schools of different types. A final sample of 119 schools was achieved.

### **Phase 2**

65. The second phase of the study involved an in-depth telephone interview with the principal of each of the 12 participating schools, and the completion of questionnaires by a designated group of pupils and their parents, in order to flesh out findings.

## **THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

66. The project was carried out for the Department of Education by Education Extra. The cost of the project was £44,300.

## **FULL REPORT**

67. The full report, entitled “Out of School Hours Learning Provision and School Improvement in Northern Ireland” by Jenny Evans and Helen Frank with John Crossman and Mary Laverty is available free of charge from the Department of Education.

*This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.*



## **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESEARCH BRIEFINGS (2000 TO DATE)**

Three years later: a follow-up survey of teachers who qualified in 1995	RB 1/2000
Immersion education: a literature review	RB 2/2000
From pre-school to school: a review of the research literature	RB 3/2000
The effects of the selective system of secondary education in Northern Ireland	RB 4/2000
Department of Education funded research 2000/01	RB 1/2001
Assessment of the effectiveness of the Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme (YSCRSS) during 1998/1999 and 1999/2000, in relation to the needs of youth and community groups	RB 2/2001
An investigation of the provision for health education in schools during 1998/99	RB 3/2001
Careers provision in schools at Key Stages 3 and 4	RB 1/2002
Evaluation of Raising School Standards Initiative (RSSI) using Value Added measures of school performance	RB 2/2002
Literature review: effectiveness of different forms of interventions in the schools and youth sectors	RB 3/2002
Outcomes for pupils who received an Irish-Medium education	RB 4/2002
Multiply-suspended pupils: their educational career and support projects available to them	RB 5/2002
Reducing the bureaucratic burden on schools	RB 6/2002
Developing linguistic accuracy in Irish-Medium primary schools	RB 7/2002
Bullying in schools: a Northern Ireland study	RB 8/2002
Community use of schools: an international literature review	RB 1/2003
Department of Education funded research 2002/03	RB 2/2003
A study of careers education and guidance	RB 1/2004

## PURPOSE OF DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESEARCH BRIEFINGS

The Department of Education (DE) places a high value on the wide circulation of research results to ensure that research has the maximum impact on policy and practice in education. DE Research Briefings are designed to provide attractive, interesting and easy access to research findings for policy makers, researchers, teachers, lecturers, employers and the public to facilitate informed discussion of education issues. Research cannot make decisions for policy makers and others concerned with improving the quality of education. Nor can it by itself bring about change. But it can create a better basis for decisions, by providing information and explanation about educational practice and by clarifying and challenging ideas and assumptions.

**The full range of DE Research Briefings can be accessed at the DE Internet site - [www.deni.gov.uk/facts\\_figures/](http://www.deni.gov.uk/facts_figures/)**

DE Research Briefings may be photocopied for use within your own institution.

A limited number of additional copies may be obtained from:

Statistics and Research Branch  
Room G2, New Building  
Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
BANGOR  
Co Down  
BT19 7PR

Telephone: 028 9127 9391  
Fax: 028 9127 9594  
e-mail: [statistics2@deni.gov.uk](mailto:statistics2@deni.gov.uk)

*Edited and produced by Statistics and Research Branch,  
Department of Education*