

# **SOUTHERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD**

## **RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION PAPER INDEPENDENT STRATEGIC REVIEW OF EDUCATION (JUNE 2006)**

27 July 2006

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## **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.”***

This Response presents the views and recommendations of the Southern Education and Library Board (hereafter referred to as ‘The Board’) in relation to the above Terms of Reference.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Board welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Consultation Paper on the Independent Strategic Review of Education, June 2006. It has considered the issues contained within the Consultation Paper in a pragmatic manner, based on the considerable experience to date of school rationalisations by the members and officers who have contributed to this response.

The context in which the Board responds is that of remoting higher levels of learning and teaching through enhanced facilities for pupils.

In order to prepare for future planning, a review of the current provision is essential. Boards are currently involved in the establishment of asset management plans through both condition and suitability surveys, as well as planning for further reductions in enrolments. In order to develop successfully the strategic planning of a schools’ estate that is essentially collaborative and sharing in nature the Board, over a number of years, has been actively involved in the assessment of current provision by:

- planning new replacement schools;
- rationalising/amalgamating schools to provide sustainable provision for the future; and
- facilitating the closure of schools and relocation of pupils, where all options consider pupil needs/development as a priority.

The Board’s Sub-Committee for Controlled Schools ensures equality in the planning of schools in respect of area, demographic and local requirements and makes recommendations in respect of schools with falling enrolments. It receives the views of those involved in the consultation process and makes recommendations to the Education Committee on development proposals.

The work currently carried out within the Board will form the foundation of further strategic planning and organisation of the schools’ estate within the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA). The Board acknowledges that the ESA will have a wider responsibility for schools than the current responsibility of the Board, and envisages that the procedures already in operation within the Board will form the building blocks in terms of sufficiency, suitability and sustainability of the entire estate.

## **THE RESPONSE OF THE BOARD ON SPECIFIC ISSUES**

This paper seeks to comment on the specific matters raised in Professor Bain's letter of 6 June 2006 addressed to the Chairperson.

In considering the strategic planning and organisation of the school estate it is important to take account of both the realities of the present provision in relation to our divided society and the present and future requirement of children and young people growing up in an emerging multi-cultural society.

### **The present reality:**

Currently a diversity of provision exists which reflects the different aspects and aspirations of our divided society. Many schools in the Board are located in areas which have suffered considerably as a result of the 'troubles'. This has resulted in high levels of polarisation within communities and movements of population which have left minority communities from both sides of our divide having a deep sense of loss. Often the school is seen as the last remaining statement of the identity of the minority community and so parents and community leaders fight strenuously against any moves to close or amalgamate their school. Evidence from local consultations shows that considerable further changes in the religious make-up of areas have taken place since the 2001 census.

In addition to the issue regarding the religious make-up of area there is a further issue that is particularly relevant to the Board and that is rurality. The loss of the rural school has a similar impact to the loss of a minority community school where the community feels considerable loss particularly when children have to move to a town school. Many of the parents see the loss of the school as a major blow to the viability of the rural community.

### **Future requirement of children and young people growing up in an emerging multi-cultural society**

Acknowledging and respecting the realities of any situation are important features of the development of a shared future and account must be taken of the impact of any changes in these communities. Any new arrangements must enable the community affected to move on and care and time must be given to facilitate this process. Clear policy from central government on what constitutes a sustainable school at both primary and secondary level is required to provide a sound basis for encouraging change. This policy must also include details of what criteria or circumstances can be considered to allow for deviation from this policy. Lack of policy from central government or inconsistent application of policy by government ministers has made the job of effectively planning the school estate very difficult if not impossible. Officers from this Board have spent long hours in meaningful consultation and negotiations with local communities to help them

move forward in their thinking on what constitutes a sustainable school but this work has often been undermined by the lack of policy from central government.

In order to convince communities it is important that they are enabled to see considerable gains in the education provision for their children and young people particularly as they perceive any change to their status quo as being a loss. The inducement of a new building is not always a factor that will address this loss particularly when under the present procurement procedures most of the children in the current school will have passed through the school in the time it take to secure approval for the new school and to build it. Incentives must also be provided which provide for additional teaching and curriculum benefits from any new rationalisation or collaboration arrangement.

In order to address the needs of children and young people moving from a divided society to a multicultural society which recognises, acknowledges and celebrates diversity within the context of accepting and understanding others we must facilitate new models of collaboration. This must take account of the rights of the communities to hold on to their deeply held views but also equip them to live in and shape their future in a shared society. Even in our present divided society there have been great strides in joint working and planning and many examples exist of schools from the different sectors working effectively at local level to meet the needs of their pupils. It is important to build on this and to avoid undoing all of the gains at local level by a heavy handed approach to integrating education.

While any new policy can be developed centrally and provide strong leadership, direction and incentives to support and develop collaboration this must be done in a way that takes account of any developments at local levels. This policy development also requires consideration of the diversity of needs of children and young people including those with special educational needs.

### **Developing key mechanisms for successful planning at local area level, as a framework for translating into practice the concept of collaborative and interactive planning by the various sectors**

In order to develop key mechanisms for successful planning at local level there needs to be strong joined up leadership from central government in terms of the overall planning of Northern Ireland. Planning must be carried out within the overall context of the spatial development strategy for Northern Ireland contained within Shaping Our Future. Full implementation of a Northern Ireland strategy will provide a sound context for planning in an educational context and should provide for the mix of facilities that will support collaboration not only with education but within community planning. It is appreciated that to make this happen at local level the four features outlined in the bullet points in paragraph 9 on pages 3 and 4 of the consultation paper are considered to be very appropriate.

The first bullet point addresses some of the issues highlighted earlier in this paper in relation to recognising diversity.

In relation to the second bullet point the Board has long recognised the need to have high quality statistical data which is not only available to government bodies but also to the public. The development of the NINIS website facility has been a major advance in this area and has facilitated the Board officers and the parents from schools under consideration for closure or amalgamation in developing a shared understanding of the realities of their situation. The fact that the information is provided openly to all and in such depth is welcome. The producing of information at a very local level be it ward or super output area has also made it more relevant to the local communities. The use of this information backed up with geo-mapping of pupils has been a great help to the Board. The weakness of the current arrangement is that these figures are often considered only in relation to the sector under consideration.

This leads neatly into consideration of the third bullet point. Currently some account is taken of area planning but the previous system of decision making in the Department of Education encouraged the consideration of a single school and consideration of the impact on other schools as the only factors. The move to planning for specific geographical areas fits in with the earlier point in relation to Shaping our Future.

From a practical point of view there are difficulties in planning for specific geographical areas and it is therefore welcome that the fourth bullet point in paragraph 9 highlights the need “for mechanisms and processes ... to enable a critical consideration of the totality of the plans and proposal unfolding for the different sectors”. In order to work such mechanisms must be set with a framework of principles which underpin the implementation of ‘A Shared Future’. Mechanisms need to be established at Northern Ireland level under the new Education and Skills Authority which provide co-ordination at strategic level within a sound policy framework provided by the Department of Education. This needs to be supplemented at local level by mechanisms possible within the framework of community planning which bring together the various sectors to plan on a unified basis.

Various models of this type of planning have been developed including the Pre-School Education Advisory Group, Local Strategy Partnership, New Opportunity Fund PE and Sports Partnership etc. Despite the best efforts of many it has been difficult if not impossible for these partnerships to set aside their sectoral interests in the interests of the greater good in order to consider models that provide for collaboration. Some examples do exist but these are the exception rather than the rule. In order to develop key mechanisms for successful planning at local area level that support collaboration some consideration needs to be given to why some of the previous mechanism did not work. Perhaps the use of an honest

broker as chair and as secretary to any new planning group might facilitate this process. In this context the challenge for any mechanism will be to avoid the potential of competitive interest being developed through bullet point 1 which will act against the desired outcomes of bullet point four.

**Forms and models of sharing of facilities and resources and of collaborative arrangements among schools, at both primary and post-primary levels, particularly in relation to new builds but also in the context of existing provision**

Anyone visiting schools built in the 1930's cannot help but notice the structural nature of schools designed to provide education in shared facilities in a different divided society. In those days the division was between the two sexes and resulted in different entrances being built for boys and girls. While it not being suggested that this approach should be adopted it does provide lessons on how we can learn from our past. It is likely that many of those planning schools in the 1930's did not envisage a day when boys and girls would meet and be educated in the same schools never mind the same classes but today in most cases this is accepted as normal. Planners also in that era recognised the need to have efficient management of the schools' estate and so had their own form of collaboration and facility sharing.

In developing a model for the future we need to develop a shared vision of what constitutes effective and efficient education provision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Just as the planners in the 1930's had to do we need to agree what steps we need to put in place to support our development of a shared future. One model for new builds could be the co-location on a site of different sector primary schools or different sector post-primary schools on the same site with some facilities shared. This could include sharing of school meals facilities, multi-purpose hall and specialist facilities. In the initial stages this could facilitate each of the schools to continue to operate as separate schools with effective timetabling of the spaces.

For those schools who wished to progress their collaboration joint activities could be undertaken which maximise the skills of the staff of the two schools in areas such as music, drama, physical education in the primary school or in a wider range of subjects at post-primary level. This would particularly facilitate the provision of a wider curriculum where the numbers did not exist in either establishment separately to make the provision of certain subjects possible. If the co-location at post primary level could involve some input from further education this could also enable the vocational/applied areas of the curriculum to be developed on site rather than by travelling to a further education site. With the amalgamation of the colleges of further education a shared outreach facility particularly in areas away from the current college of further education facilities could be provided. These could then be utilised by the further education colleges in the evening and weekends for evening classes.

A number of practical issues arise from co-location not the least of which is ownership of land; in the controlled sector this is owned by the government while in the maintained and voluntary grammar sector this is owned by the trustees. This issue is not insurmountable but it has the potential to take away from the perceived ownership of any joint or collaborative solution.

Co-location will not always be possible even in a planned new build but steps could be taken by central government which could make it more attractive. This could include the planning of the co-located schools within the context of a wider wrap around facility perhaps involving Health and Social Services. Given the planning capital infrastructure investment this can become a reality but will require a realignment of some of the current planning mechanisms to remove some of the administrative barriers to this happening. This might include some centrally funded initiatives where geographical areas are invited to bid against a centrally managed fund which has a single project based approach to the delivery of the project.

In terms of existing build some consideration might be given to providing incentives for the sharing of facilities; this might include some approved capital works at either or both locations to facilitate the provisions of specialisms by either school. It is important to stress that this is different from the specialist schools concept in that it is likely to be at a lower level and should not involve the need for external matching funding. Other facilities such as video conferencing facilities could also be provided in a wider range of schools particularly where the geographical location of schools makes the time involved in travelling between the schools impractical.

The development of collaboration learning communities for the 14-19 provision that is currently taking place could provide a basis for the provision of incentives that build on the developing successes of these networks. These will be developing not only the school to further education existing networks but also increasingly the occurrence of school to school collaboration both at staff and student level. These developments will assist schools to move from a competitive environment to a collaborative environment. However it is important that appropriate changes are made to the LMS arrangements to facilitate collaboration rather than encourage competition. The current overdependence of the AWPU to the funding mechanism needs to be addressed if collaboration is to become the norm for all schools.

### **The best combination of factors that can be taken into account in estate planning**

The following factors should be taken into account in estate planning including special schools who meet the needs of 14-19 year olds:

### **Demographic information relevant to the supply of schools places:**

One very important factor in estate planning must be the demographic information relevant to the supply of schools places. This will include information on the socio-economic context including population trends (actual and projected), planned development, religious make up of the area, actual birth rates, local information at output or super output are level about the school age population, school capacities, current enrolment, future forecasts and surplus places.

This must however be set with the context of the total needs of all sectors in the area as opposed to the present position where the consideration is largely single sector.

### **Policies and principles relating to the provision of school places**

This factor must be one of the driving factors in estate planning, without it the planning remains uncoordinated and unfocussed. The policies and principles should be agreed right across the education service in Northern Ireland and must provide a framework for decision making. Without this strong policy and principles link little progress will be made in developing a system which provides an entitlement for all irrespective of their geographical location.

### **Suitability of current buildings for delivery of Education**

This must include both a survey of the physical condition of the building but more importantly of its suitability for the delivery of education set within the context of the requirements of the policies and principles outlined in the previous sector.

### **Potential models for delivery of any required change to the estate:**

Having identified the need for change another factor is that possible models for delivery of the school places are appropriate for the area concerned. This will include a consideration of what is the best model for the whole community which recognises the diversity of that community within the potential resources available.

The appropriate combination of these factors will be dependent on the policy objectives that the Government in consultation with the community wants to achieve.

## FINANCE ISSUES

### 1. Overall deployment of resources across the education system in NI

The overall resources made available for core education services across Northern Ireland for 2005/06 and 2006/07 was as follows:

	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB)	953.9	995.0
Delegated Budgets		
Education and Library Board (ELB)		
Centre Budgets	352.2	374.0*

\* Please note that this excludes the deduction of £7.5m from BELB and SEELB in relation to prior year deficits

#### a. Delegated Schools Budgets

The £995m allocated directly to schools, including ELB funded and Voluntary Grammar (VGS) and Grant Maintained Integrated (GMIS) Schools, under the Common Funding Formula in 2006/07 was distributed using a number of significant factors:

	<b>£m</b>	<b>%</b>
Average Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) Funding*	815.1	81.92
Premises Factor – Pupil Related*	35.9	3.61
Premises Factor – Floor Area Related	23.9	2.40
TSN*	48.1	4.83
Small Schools Support	30.2	3.03
Landlord Maintenance (VGS & GMIS Only)	9.0	0.90
Administration Costs (VGS & GMIS Only)	7.5	0.75
Sports Factor	4.8	0.48
Teacher Salary Protection Factor	3.9	0.39
VAT (VGS and GMIS Only)	3.7	0.37
Children with English as an Additional Language*	2.5	0.25
Children of the Travelling Community*	0.6	0.06
Irish medium pupils and Units funding*	0.6	0.06
Children of Service Personnel*	0.6	0.06
Special Units Lump Sum	0.5	0.05
Transitional Fund	8.1	0.81
<b>Totals</b>	<b>995.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

\*The major driving factor for funding of schools is the enrolment number, which accounts for well over 90% of the funding made available to the delegated schools budget.

It should be noted that, of the factors outlined above, only the following factors could expect to see a significant reduction in funding distributed if major rationalisation were to take place, i.e.

- Floor Related Premises factor;
- Small Schools Support; and

These two factors, taken together, account for £54.1m (or 5.4%) of the delegated schools budget.

If we accept that these factors support the current pupils (322,000) and 50,000 (estimated) surplus places currently in the Education System in Northern Ireland, then it can be estimated that a significant rationalisation programme will release 13.4% (50k as a percentage of 372k supported places) of this funding, or **£7.2m**.

## **b. ELB Centre Budgets**

The £374.0m allocated to ELB Centre Budgets in 2006/07 was allocated on the following basis:

	<b>£m</b>	<b>%</b>
Special Education	114.9	30.7
Curriculum Advisory & Support Services	23.6	6.3
Other Schools Centre	36.5	9.8
School Meals	33.5	9.0
Central Admin	24.3	6.5
Other centrally Held Resources	12.0	3.2
Public Transport	29.7	7.9
Taxis	8.1	2.2
Board Vehicles	17.1	4.6
Other Transport	11.3	3.0
Landlord Maintenance & Rates	49.9	13.3
Targeting Social Need (TSN)	11.0	2.9
Rurality	2.1	0.6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>374.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

It should be noted that, of the factors outlined above, only the Landlord Maintenance and Rates factor could expect to see a significant reduction in funding distributed if major rationalisation were to take place. This factor accounts for £49.9m (or 13.3%) of the ELB Centre Budget.

If we accept that this factor supports the current pupils (322,000) and 50,000 (estimated) surplus places currently in the Education System in Northern Ireland, then it can be estimated that a significant rationalisation programme will release 13.4% (50k as a percentage of 372k supported places) of this funding, or **£6.7m**.

It should be noted, however, that a major rationalisation programme would bring with it significant ELB Centre costs in the following areas:

- Start up costs for Amalgamated Schools;
- Teaching and Non-Teaching Redundancy Costs;
- Collective Agreement Costs for Teachers (for two years after amalgamation);
- Reorganisation Allowances Costs for Teachers;

The most significant increased cost, however, is likely to occur within the Home to School Transport Budget where, as a result of amalgamations and closures, there is likely to be substantial increased entitlement to Home to School Transport. By way of an example, if rationalising 50,000 surplus places were to result in 25,000 more pupils being entitled to free Home to School Transport the increased cost per annum (at an average of £550 per pupil p.a.) would be **£13.7m**.

*The key issue to be made here is that a significant rationalisation programme, based in the current funding methodology for schools and support services, will not result in significant savings to the education sector. It would be expected, however, that such a rationalisation programme would result in sustainable, educationally effective and efficiently functioning schools.*

### **c. Potential amendments to Funding for Schools**

It is the view of the SELB that it is impossible for the present LMS Common Funding Formula to fund appropriately the vast range of school types and sizes in Northern Ireland, e.g. from as small as that on Rathlin Island and as large as Methodist College. We would advocate that staffing (particularly teaching) costs be centrally funded and allocated on a PTR basis whilst still providing choice and management responsibility at local level through delegation of these staffing and other non staffing resources. We believe that it would be beneficial to analyse the proportion of teaching costs to total delegated schools budgets, such an analysis would illustrate the degree to which schools viability is determined by the age profile and experience of its teaching staff. A sound source of this information could be collated from the LMS Out-turn statements for 2005/06, shortly due for completion.

In advocating this amendment the Board stresses the caveat that it should not be used to reduce school funding with resulting higher pupil teacher ratios.

This would ensure, once the ongoing need and educational viability of a school is determined, that the school, regardless of size or age profile of staff, will be adequately funded to deliver high quality educational opportunities and experiences in terms of curriculum, learning and teaching and to ensure pupils achieve their potential in terms of their attainment, personal growth and social development.

The Board is concerned that the 5% tolerance level in school expenditure, ie a school may not overspend or underspend its allocation by more than 5% by March 2008, is excessively stringent for small schools and it recommends a higher figure of 10% in respect of the expenditure of all schools, irrespective of size.

**2. Comparing overall funding available to the education system in NI with funding made available elsewhere**

In carrying out any comparison between the overall funding available to the education system in Northern Ireland with the funding available elsewhere it is essential that a suitable “peer group” of regions is chosen which fit well with socio-economic circumstances, demography and rurality of Northern Ireland.

**3. Pupil Teacher Ratios in Southern Area Schools**

The Pupil/Teacher Ratio within SELB schools can be analysed as follows:

<b>SELB Schools</b>			
<b>Sector</b>	<b>Total (WTE) Enrolment @ October 2005</b>	<b>Teaching WTE @ January 2006</b>	<b>Average PTR</b>
Nursery	1,173	37.35	25.89
Primary	37,316	1,765.31	21.07
Post-Primary	21,308	1,405.01	15.17
Controlled Grammar	2,508	165.06	15.19
<b>Totals</b>	<b>62,305</b>	<b>3,372.73</b>	<b>18.47</b>

In analysing these figures it should be noted that, in addition to Core Delegated funding, schools also access funding in earmarked initiatives such as Class Size, Reading Recovery, P1 Initiative and

Making a Good Start (MAGS) Initiative which can result in employment of additional teaching staff.

**4. Multi-Sector Provision, impact of school size, and impact of the rural nature of Northern Ireland**

There are, undoubtedly, significant additional costs incurred in the delivery of education services in Northern Ireland due to the current requirement to support the multi-sectoral approach, i.e. Controlled, Maintained, Voluntary Grammar, Integrated, and Irish Medium Schools. These additional costs are further impacted on the rural nature of Northern Ireland which results in the provision of a least two types of school, within each locality, sometimes both of these schools struggling to be financial viable in the face of falling enrolments.

It should be noted that there is sound evidence to support the educational success of the strong rural primary school and that there may be instances where it must be accepted that a small rural school must be retained, and therefore funded to ensure its ongoing financial viability.

The Board is mindful of the challenge to policy making of rural proofing and the particular role of DARD which should be consulted on issues around rural schools.

Within SELB there are currently 288 schools, excluding VGS and GMIS, with the following range of enrolment numbers:

<b>Primary &amp; Nursery Sector (Controlled, Maintained and IM)</b>			
<b>Enrolment Range</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>Total (WTE) Enrolment @ October 2005</b>	<b>Average Enrolment @ October 2005</b>
0 – 40 Pupils	32	969	30
41-80 Pupils	64	3,842	60
81 – 160 Pupils	71	7,624	107
161 – 300 Pupils	49	10,590	216
Over 300 Pupils	33	15,131	459
<b>Totals</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>38,156</b>	<b>153</b>

<b>Post Primary (Controlled, Maintained excl. VGS &amp; GMI)</b>			
<b>Enrolment Range</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>Total (WTE) Enrolment @ October 2005</b>	<b>Average Enrolment @ October 2005</b>
0 – 250 Pupils	4	815	204
251- 400 Pupils	4	1,360	340

401 – 600 Pupils	14	6,712	479
600 – 900 Pupils	11	8,148	741
Over 900 Pupils	6	6,781	1,130
<b>Totals</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>23,816</b>	<b>611</b>

## 5. Cost/Benefit of an Investment/Rationalisation Programme

As outlined above it is unlikely, in the current funding regime, that significant cash savings will be realised through a major investment and rationalisation programme. The aim of such a programme should be to create a school network which is effective in meeting the needs of all pupils, is educationally and financially viable, and is sustainable in the long term.

Such a programme should be based on a Full Economic Appraisal of proposals which should be based upon ensuring that each locality in Northern Ireland is appropriately serviced by a schools network which addresses the needs of all the pupils, currently and projected into the future. For this to be possible all of the following issues need to be taken into consideration in any Business Case:

- Long Term Pupils Numbers;
- Projected requirement by Sector;
- Specialist provision for children and young people with special educational needs;
- Geographic dispersal of pupils in Catchment area;
- Reasonable travelling distance/time for pupils in Primary/Post Primary Sector;
- Acceptability to local community;
- Recurrent Costs of Current Provision (including Backlog Maintenance, Rates and Transport Costs);
- Recurrent Costs of Planned Provision (including Transport Amalgamation Costs);
- Capital Costs of Proposed Development;
- Procurement vehicle (Conventional/PPP); and
- Equality.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING OF THE SCHOOLS' ESTATE**

**Consider the proposed approach being adopted to strategic planning of the estate and how the planned investment programme can best be utilised to ensure it is invested in viable schools that make more cost effective use of recurrent funding.**

There is a need for long-term strategic planning by each sector. There is also a need for an over-arching strategic plan which co-ordinates these plans. In particular geographical areas, CCMS, the Boards and other sectors need to converge in their planning. It would be expected that the Department of Education would scrutinize sector plans to ensure the most effective use of resources.

The proposed approach being adopted to strategic planning will enable all sectors in the planning of the schools' estate to avail of important facilities, skills and resources. The widening of the scope to that of an area plan will allow for partnership planning in the provision of facilities both within and across sectors as well as identifying the impact on a local area. This could be enhanced by an area-based Board of Governors' approach within sectors.

An adequately resourced, Strategic Advisory Body should be established to meet the needs of Strategic Planning. DE/ESA should be responsible for ensuring the effective and timely delivery of a Strategic Plan. However, the Board would express concern about the suitability of the PPP approach to deliver a major investment programme and would question its capability of providing value for money.

**Advise on how the benefits from the investment and rationalisation of the schools' estate can best be communicated to stakeholders and the wider community.**

The key to getting approval to decisions which change the status quo will be to focus on the best educational provision for pupils in the future. A major obstacle in the past to persuading communities to accept change was the lack of conviction that the new provision would be made. There is a need for good communication at all levels to ensure that expectations are met and that modern and sustainable schools are delivered – promoting high-quality learning.

The Board consults widely on any rationalisation proposals. Comprehensive consultation is held initially with the Board of Governors, Principal and Teaching Staff and parents to consider any proposed rationalization or closure. All views are considered and the draft Development Proposal, amended as appropriate, is then taken through the formal consultation stages involving the Board of Governors, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents of pupils attending the school and the Governors and Principals of other schools which might be

affected. A Development Proposal is published to give all interested parties and local communities a forum to express their comments and is a statutory requirement for any proposed rationalisation and informs the Minister's decision on the Development Proposal.

With the proposed approach being adopted to strategic planning, the Board would recommend that further consultation should be made to the wider community such as a PR exercise promoting the benefits of such a way forward. As area plans are drawn up for all sectors, a public meeting within the local area should be arranged to both inform and address the concerns of those stakeholders within the local community and to promote the benefits. Consultation with other local authorities such as local councils and health authorities should be undertaken to ensure that the area plan for education can address the needs of local communities and services.

**Advise on the appropriate level of surplus capacity, allowing flexibility for changes and parental choice.**

Within any educational establishment surplus capacity will exist as a result of migration of families and smaller family units. With the current embargo on rural planning, it is inevitable that further surplus capacity will occur in rural schools and any surplus capacity in urban schools will decrease.

Another issue to be addressed is the influx of foreign nationals to Northern Ireland and the need to take account of educational provision for their children. Their presence and the educational demands associated with their choice of location is not uniform; in some areas the children of foreign nationals may constitute a significant percentage of the school population with a resultant need for intensive provision. However, irrespective of numbers, their very presence in a small school can have significant impact. While policies in respect of English as an alternative language are developing an overarching policy from DE is awaited.

The Audit Commission in England suggests a 10% as an appropriate level of surplus places but given the current level of surplus places in Northern Ireland and the major changes in demography it may be appropriate to set this as a longer term target with interim targets being set as the investment strategy is increasingly implemented.

**Advise on the best combination of factors that should be taken into account in estate planning, such as projected enrolments, transport, parental choice, the number of small schools, condition/suitability and deprivation.**

One very important factor in estate planning must be the demographic information relevant to the supply of school places. This will include information

on the socio-economic context including population trends (actual and projected), planned development, religious make-up of the area, actual birth rates and local information about the school age population.

The application of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology would impact at all levels on estate planning. The ability to spatially analyse data from various sources would enhance strategic direction and allow informed decision-making with regard to:

- population forecasting models that could create long term projections for enrolment figures;
- batch analysis of pupils attending schools that would give quick and accurate information regarding eligibility for Transport assistance and allow for calculation of any associated financial requirement. Distances from proposed sites for effected families would illustrate any impact on individuals. Parental choice could be enhanced by intuitive web-based GIS applications that inform parents of the available options in a comprehensible spatial context coupled with the ability for them to provide feedback;
- digital mapping when incorporated into Board asset management would enable analysis of service proximity and availability, allowing for the ability to analyse, in real terms, the value of services provided irrespective of the enrolment of the school; and
- incorporation of public statistical data such as census data and deprivation indices into a GIS would also allow for services to be targeted where they are required.

All of the above factors can be incorporated into a single GIS and, with effective correlation, provide solutions that are fit for purpose.

The future planning of the schools' estate should build upon the factors currently being applied by the Board. The Board in considering any proposal will analyse information in respect of demographics, targeting social need, achieving economies of scale, condition and suitability of premises, transport, possible effects on neighbouring schools and the location and area of the premises. These factors have enabled the Board and schools to agree informed outcomes for planning.

In addition to the above, with the scope of estate planning within the ESA involving all education sectors, factors to be investigated in estate planning should be widened to include increased inter-school involvement. There will be a need, through inter-agency working to consult with local councils and health authorities to investigate the extra-curricular and community issues in planning.

With the provision of funding under Extended Schools as well as the Children and Young Persons Funding, there is a need in planning to look at the

community as well as the pupils with regard to the added value aspects of any development and design of buildings fit for both the current and projected needs and use of premises.

**Consider how post-primary and Further Education (FE) provision can best be planned together, particularly for 14-19 year olds, given the challenges of the Entitlement Framework, the new curriculum and the need to optimise collaboration with the FE sector.**

The current development of learning communities for the delivery of the Entitlement Framework is considered to provide a good starting point for the optimisation of the use of combined resources of the schools and further education sector. This could be further facilitated by the planning of the schools' estate to support it. Examples have already been given of how shared school/further education provision on the school site and shared 'specialist' school facilities could be provided.

Significant issues in relation to difference in the approaches to teaching, discipline and pastoral care still need to be addressed in order to allay concerns of parents and staff in relation to provision delivered by further education colleges for schools. Significant progress has already been made by all parties in addressing this issue but more work is required. Some experimental work has already been carried out in relation to the deployment of further education college staff to deliver parts of the curriculum in the schools thus alleviating the need for students to travel however this is sometimes not possible because of the facilities required to deliver that particular subject area.

**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 sharing, and to help bring about new ways of working**

A number of steps have already been outlined earlier in this paper and these are summarised below:

- Provision of policy by central government on sustainable schools.
- Greater consistency of implementation of policy by central government.
- Provide incentives for sharing of facilities.
- Promote provision that meets the continuum of needs of children and young people.
- Remove barriers to joint planning of new building across sectors.
- Make the new Education and Skills Authority responsible for production of School Organisation Plans across all sectors as is the case in the LEAs in England.
- Provide co-ordinated integrated planning at central and local level. This should include a scheme for promoting wrap around facilities on a single site.

- Greater promotion of what a shared future means to all communities and providing safeguards for needs of minority communities in all communities.
- Support development of learning communities.
- Amend LMS scheme to encourage collaboration and reduce reliance on AWPU to minimise competition for students.
- Improve video conferencing facilities in schools.
- Speed up procurement procedures particular in term of rationalisations.

## **INTEGRATING EDUCATION AND IMPROVING COLLABORATION**

The implementation of the decisions by the Secretary of State and the Minister of Education needs to be based on a vision to create, maintain and deliver a world class education service, which enhances the life chances of all the young people of Northern Ireland. Such a vision could be delivered through:

- ensuring equality of opportunity by creating a single education system;
- integrating education by taking account of the Policy on a Shared Future;
- the provision of a sufficiency of school places through the right mix of schools, of the right size and in the right locations;
- protecting the ethos of schools;
- creating a more efficient and effective system by simplifying administrative arrangements and creating a coherent planning framework;
- maximising ‘supported autonomy’ for schools;
- having a clear framework for accountability and challenge; and
- significant improvement in the procurement process.

### **Consider how strategic planning of the schools’ estate can best encourage and support cross-sector collaboration and models of schooling that promote greater integrating of education in line with A Shared Future.**

Models of collaboration will be area-specific. All of the employing bodies are currently reviewing the viability of their schools in particular areas. Such reviews, however, should not be going on in isolation from one another. The establishment of the new ESA should result in less territorialism and more coherent planning if it is given responsibility for a School Organisation Plan as in the Local Education Authorities in England. Local Area Partnerships should be considering their capability to deliver on the Revised Curriculum, Entitlement Framework and the Extended Schools Agenda in order to inform this Plan and should also be submitting action plans. Decisions on the schools’ estate and funding could then be taken in the context of this wider picture.

Critical features of such action plans would be high levels of realistic outcomes within acceptable timeframes.

**Advise on how the planned investment to renew the schools' estate can best be deployed to incentivise collaboration and sharing, how the barriers to such sharing can be overcome, and how best to address the Department's duty to encourage and facilitate integrated and Irish medium education.**

Opposition to rationalisation and collaborative provision often stems from parents and the public rather than educational professionals. Recent media coverage has alerted the public to the realities of the economic position of the education sector. However, a Communications Strategy could do more to promote the benefits of the changes, including the Revised Curriculum, to young people, their futures and their economic well-being. Parents want what is best for their children; the new ESA must demonstrate that these changes constitute what is best for children and young people and not just economic expediency.

On the basis of plans devised and agreed by Local Area Partnerships, including the Irish Medium sector, solutions such as co-location with access to improved facilities and resources, sharing of facilities with Further Education and appropriate and equitable funding mechanisms would act as incentives to progress towards 'A Shared Future'.

**Consider what models of collaboration and sharing will work and what are the processes that need to be deployed to ensure that the models can be delivered on the ground, as the investment programme develops.**

Some suggested models of collaboration and sharing are:

- amalgamations;
- co-location;
- federations;
- shared principal scheme;
- 4 to 14 schools
- clustering;
- specialist schools and specialist facilities;
- community schools; and
- multi-faith schools.

However, experience to date of piloting a number of these models shows there are difficulties with curriculum delivery, administration and financial viability.

Future consideration of these models would also need to address the development of school leadership, management structures, LMS Formula Funding and the concepts of shared identity, common purpose, trust, commitment and communication.

It is important that present strengths in the system are protected and providers should be given the opportunity to demonstrate these strengths and open up their provision to all in their area. However, there needs to be a rigorous process by which these strengths are identified. The strategic leadership should provide local area partnerships with criteria to guide them in their planning for collaboration. Such criteria should include the use of 'high quality statistical data', including Performance Outcomes data, to aid objective decision-making. Plans for collaboration would have to show how these criteria are met.

Education and Training Inspectorate activity always acts as an effective catalyst for change and should include inspection of collaborative arrangements and their effectiveness. Funding arrangements should also encourage collaboration rather than competition, as at present.

## **CONCLUSION**

The planning of the schools' estate is an ever-evolving process to meet the changing needs and requirements of the curriculum, pupils, schools and communities. However, within a framework of a Sustainable Schools' Policy that enables collaborations to cope and meaningful procurement delivery arrangements, this change process should be adaptable and seamless and provide young people with the best environment in which to be educated whilst servicing the needs of local communities. The key emphasis must be to enhance the quality of the learning and teaching environment in schools with the focus on providing suitable facilities to enable the delivery of the curriculum. An improved educational environment has a crucial part to play in inspiring learning thereby making a positive impact on student attainment and achievement.

The contents of this Response are aimed at ultimately moving schools towards province-wide change which is financially sustainable and viable and where a curriculum appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is delivered in a fit-for-purpose schools' estate and the ultimate objective of supporting the agenda of raising standards of learning and teaching is secured.