

PART C

Strategic Planning of the Schools' Estate

CHAPTER 8: CURRENT APPROACH TO PLANNING

- 8.1 This chapter assesses the current approach to planning the schools' estate within the existing framework for the administration of education in Northern Ireland. It draws substantially on the report by PricewaterHouseCoopers (PWC), *New Procurement and Delivery Arrangements for the Schools' Estate* (March, 2005), commissioned by the Department of Education (DE) and the Strategic Investment Board Ltd (SIB).
- 8.2 The objective of an estate planning process is to provide the appropriate mix of schools, of the right size and quality, in the right location. The Review's consultation paper asserted that "communities need schools that reflect diversity of aspiration and choice, and which, taken together, are effective in meeting the needs of all pupils, are educationally and financially viable, and are sustainable in the long-term." It is widely accepted that the problems inherent in existing planning arrangements are such that these goals cannot be achieved without a radically different approach.

Current Planning Processes

- 8.3 The current planning process is complex and requires significant involvement of branches within DE as well as the education authorities. In addition, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), provides advice on the educational implications of the proposals.
- 8.4 Seven key phases occur in the planning process:
- identification of possible capital schemes;
 - review and categorisation of schemes;
 - feasibility studies, if required, and economic appraisals to determine the preferred option;
 - determination of capital and other resources available;
 - selection of procurement route;

- prioritisation of schemes to determine which will receive funding; and
- decision and announcement of capital funding.

8.5 There are acknowledged inefficiencies and other weaknesses in the current planning process. The principal concerns are:

- the lack of integration, co-ordination and consistency between the planning activities of the education authorities, which can result in the overprovision of pupil places for an area;
- education authorities identifying their proposed schemes based on their knowledge of the sufficiency and condition of the accommodation, with suitability of accommodation being considered only at a later stage;
- the lack of robust and consistent information on the condition and suitability of the schools' estate across all sectors, which means that the schemes proposed by the education authorities may not necessarily be those with the greatest need;
- the differences between sectors as to how planning and development matters are resourced;
- the time taken to complete the planning process, and that there is only one announcement of capital projects each year, resulting in staff workloads that are cyclical and not evenly distributed throughout the year;
- the variable quality and reliability of deliverables submitted to DE as part of the planning process;
- the duplication of activity that occurs, with DE revisiting and re-assessing much of the planning work that is undertaken by the education authorities;
- the requirement for strict adherence to the *Building Handbook*, which is considered by some to restrict innovation in school design and delivery; and
- the very complicated process for taking forward minor works in the Catholic maintained sector, which makes the planning and delivery of schemes difficult to achieve within the financial year in which resources have been allocated.

Key Criteria: Sufficiency, Suitability and Condition

8.6 Planning of the estate and prioritisation of future investment requirements are based on three key criteria:

- the sufficiency of pupil places relative to local need;
- the condition of the school buildings; and
- the suitability of the school buildings for implementing the curriculum.

PWC identified significant problems in the assessment of sufficiency, suitability and condition. These are considered in the paragraphs that follow.

Sufficiency Assessment

8.7 Ensuring a match between the number of available pupil places and future pupil demand is one of the most challenging planning tasks. Chapter 2 of this report referred to the issue of surplus capacity in schools and provided some statistics on surplus places. Chapter 7 examined in detail surplus capacity within Northern Ireland's schools and demonstrated the significant planning challenge that this presents to managing authorities. The planning challenge is not just about managing down the surplus, but establishing a sound basis for anticipating the pattern of future demand in response to a highly complex set of dynamics.

8.8 There are a number of factors that influence pupil demand. The principal factors include:

Declining Enrolments: Chapter 2 has provided statistics on trends in the school population. Over the last ten years the number of pupils of compulsory school age has fallen by just under 10 per cent as part of a longer-term trend. This has had a significant effect on controlled and Catholic maintained schools, with the decline in pupil numbers in these sectors being exacerbated by the increase in enrolments in the Integrated and Irish-medium sectors. Chapter 2 has also commented on the substantial projected decline in the number of pupils of compulsory school age in the medium and longer term.

Population Shifts: Other population characteristics also change over time. For example, there will be an oversupply of places in certain housing estates where

the population has matured. Oversupply also occurs as a result of changes in the religious balance of the population. In such circumstances, the total number of pupil places may remain relatively constant, but the demand for pupil places in each type of school may change significantly. More recently, inward migration from other countries has increased the demand for school places in certain areas. Finally, the long-term effects of new rural planning laws are unknown.

Economic Development: The distribution of population, and the consequent requirement for school places, will be influenced by the future pattern of economic development, especially job creation and housing starts.

Parental Choice: Under the policy of open enrolment, it is likely that popular schools will continue to fill to capacity. At a time of falling numbers, therefore, the result will be a greater number of small schools, some of increasingly questionable viability. The Costello Report considered that grammar schools would continue to fill to capacity, resulting in reduced enrolments in other post-primary schools. Statistics on admissions show that the grammar school sector, though not necessarily each school, by admitting pupils from an increasingly wide range of transfer grades is maintaining the level of enrolment within the sector.

Integrated and Irish-medium Schools: The effect of the emergence of Integrated and Irish-medium education on enrolments in controlled and maintained schools is likely to continue for some years. Specific planning issues associated with these schools are discussed later in this chapter.

Change of School Leadership: Finally, there are many examples of schools with declining enrolments that have been revitalised through change of leadership. This shows that long-term viability cannot be determined solely by looking at population factors.

- 8.9 The key figure in the analysis of future demand is the predicted long-term enrolment (LTE). The standard methodology for calculating LTEs is based on projected enrolments to be achieved in seven years for post-primary schools and five years for primary schools. In a context of declining demand for school places, projections based principally on current enrolments in existing schools will be generally higher than actual future enrolments. The forecasting method therefore tends to overestimate demand. For controlled schools, capacity planning is undertaken by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) for their own areas. A

common issue is that Board boundaries do not necessarily reflect the boundaries of pupil flows, but this inter-relationship is not explicitly addressed in the planning process, as capacity planning is undertaken independently by each Board. For maintained schools, the planning process is managed by CCMS on behalf of the Senior Trustees. A particular feature of its planning process is the use of baptismal records to predict future demand for Catholic maintained primary schools, although this method does not take account of parents who choose other types of school.

- 8.10 Whereas the need for controlled and maintained schools is based on projected demand, the planning and development of Integrated and Irish-medium schools is taken forward on a different basis. In these sectors, new schools are established in response to demonstrated parental demand. For Irish-medium schools, viability is demonstrated in terms of enrolment, while for Integrated schools it is demonstrated in terms of enrolment and religious mix.
- 8.11 As already stated, LTEs in the Voluntary Grammar sector are expected to be generally stable, even after revised arrangements for post-primary education are in place. The only exceptions might be in a few specific locations where shifts in the balance of Catholic and Protestant populations affect the level of applications to a local school. In the foreseeable future, therefore, the requirement for estate planning in the Voluntary Grammar sector is likely to be driven mainly by the need to replace or refurbish existing buildings for condition or suitability reasons. Projected enrolments, however, may have to be adjusted to reflect downward demographic trends and, in certain situations, rationalisation of provision may be necessary.

Condition Assessment

- 8.12 The ELBs are responsible for maintaining the controlled and Catholic maintained schools. The PWC report identified problems with the Boards' rolling programme of surveys of the condition of the schools' estate which constrained the potential usefulness of the data gathered. PWC commented specifically on difficulties in maintaining up-to-date data and on variations in the standards applied. Those schools that are proposed by the education authorities for inclusion in the Capital Priorities Planning List are also subjected to a separate condition survey, which is submitted to DE as part of the capital planning process. These surveys are reported

to be of variable quality. This second set of surveys would not be required if the cyclical surveys were conducted on a frequent and consistent basis to the required standards, so that there was robust, up-to-date condition data to support a case for a school's inclusion in the Capital Priorities Planning List. There are, therefore, concerns about the robustness of the existing condition data and their usefulness as a basis for the long-term planning of the estate.

Suitability Assessment

- 8.13 It is reported that the education authorities do not routinely collect information on the suitability of the accommodation within the schools' estate and, therefore, the schemes that are proposed by education authorities for inclusion in the Capital Priorities Planning Lists are usually identified on the grounds of sufficiency and condition. This means that schools with unsuitable accommodation, which are appropriately sized and in good condition, are unlikely to be considered for capital schemes. Given the importance of suitability of the accommodation for teaching and learning, it will be essential that future investment decisions take account of robust data on the suitability of the estate.

Issues with the Current Planning Processes

- 8.14 The existing planning arrangements more or less ensure that there will be surplus capacity in the system as a whole, and they are not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that investment is directed at those schools with the greatest need. The principal causes of the current inefficiencies in the planning process are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

Independent Planning of the Estate

- 8.15 In the present system, the education authorities have lead responsibility for planning their segment of the estate and translating their plans into priorities for specific schools. The education authorities plan their estate independently, and therefore the Department's role is mainly to validate the analysis, consider the interrelationships between authority plans, and reconcile those areas of the estate where there is likely to be competition for pupil numbers. Although the controlled and maintained sectors have achieved a degree of rationalisation in recent times,

albeit within their sectors, planning has focused for too long on individual schools rather than taking a broader more strategic view of the need for provision.

- 8.16 The reconciliation of plans across the sectors suggests a difficult role for DE, particularly given that plans are often developed on different bases and to different timescales. This results in inequalities, inefficiencies, over provision and different approaches to implementing policy. While there is an emphasis within DE on identifying and addressing potential duplication of provision, the current planning processes, which do not address the overall investment needs of each area, continue to provide an oversupply of pupil places.

Inconsistent Planning of the Estate

- 8.17 As already stated, Integrated and Irish-medium schools are planned and established in response to demonstrated demand, whereas controlled and maintained schools are planned on the basis of projected demand. This inconsistency in planning approach is problematic, as it systematically contributes to the oversupply of pupil places in the schools' estate. For example, the controlled and maintained estates are currently planned, and validated by DE, on the basis of the known provision of pupil places within existing schools in an area. The plans do not usually take account of potential future provision in the Integrated or Irish-medium sectors, as planning for provision in these sectors is essentially responsive in nature, with schools being established according to an expressed level of local demand. Given that school buildings are currently designed to have a life of at least forty years, the unforeseen emergence of an Integrated or Irish-medium school will inevitably divert some pupils away from the controlled and Catholic maintained sectors, resulting in an oversupply of pupil places in schools that were previously believed to have a stable long-term future. Currently, the Integrated and Irish-medium sectors do not have a sufficiently sound methodology for planning on the basis of projected demand in specific areas. Expressions of parental interest in Integrated or Irish-Medium schools, for example through regional surveys, do not translate into reliable data for local planning purposes.

- 8.18 This chapter has provided an appraisal of the main features of the current approach to planning the schools' estate within the current arrangements for the administration of education in Northern Ireland. The task of ensuring a match between provision of, and need for, pupil places is all the more complex in a diverse system of schools faced with a declining demand for long periods of time. The various approaches and perceptions that exist in relation to planning the estate indicate that there is currently no agreed basis for balancing the competing needs of optimising the use of capital resources in the education system with enabling parents to access a school that embodies their preferred ethos. The main problem is the lack of integration, co-ordination and consistency between the planning activities of the education authorities. This problem, and other issues raised in the chapter, need to be tackled through a radically different approach. Chapter 9 addresses the issues and sets out a more strategic approach to planning the schools' estate.

CHAPTER 9: PLANNING: A STRATEGIC APPROACH

- 9.1 Chapter 8 provided an appraisal of the main features of the current approach to planning the schools' estate within the existing arrangements for the administration of education in Northern Ireland. It concluded that the problems inherent in these planning arrangements are such that a radically different approach is required. This chapter addresses those issues, explores key considerations in approaches to planning, and provides the basis for the Review's recommendations on strategic planning of the schools' estate. It also takes account of the impending changes in the administrative structures for education and the likely functions of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), to which reference was made in Chapter 2.
- 9.2 The stated goal of the capital investment programme is a "fit for purpose schools' estate, efficiently delivered and managed", where fitness of purpose is measured in terms of sufficiency, suitability and condition of accommodation. The objective of the estate planning process is to provide a sufficiency of school places through the appropriate mix of schools, of the right size, in the right locations. As stated in Chapter 2, there is widespread agreement that current planning, procurement, and delivery arrangements are inadequate to achieve this objective in a cost-effective manner and on the scale required within acceptable time frames. Nor, without a radical reconfiguration of the schools' estate, is it possible to fund improvements that will provide all schools with suitable accommodation and facilities that make for a stimulating, safe and healthy learning environment. The long-term development and maintenance of the estate need to be planned to ensure cost-effective use of public funds, and to avoid placing unsustainable demands on capital and recurrent expenditure to the overall detriment of schools. The challenge is how to make best use of funding to ensure that communities are well served by sustainable, educationally effective and efficiently functioning schools, optimising the use of their facilities for the good of all through, where appropriate, agreed models of collaboration and sharing. Capital investment and sustainable operational costs need to be considered together in any new build. It is also essential that any strategy for the schools' estate should take account of the Further Education estate since it too provides education and training for 14-19 year olds. The importance of preventing wasteful and avoidable duplication

in terms of curricular provision, teaching expertise, accommodation and resources is developed in Chapter 10.

Planning Principles

9.3 Our consultation paper set out a number of principles to underpin the planning of the schools' estate to ensure that communities are served by successful schools that:

- provide high quality educational experiences and outcomes for all pupils;
- reflect the pluralist nature of Northern Ireland;
- ensure equality, accessibility, diversity and parental choice;
- taken together, are effective in meeting the needs of all pupils in the community;
- are educationally and financially viable;
- operate cost-effectively, maximising expenditure on the things that really matter in respect of quality and standards;
- are affordable and sustainable in the long-term;
- optimise the use of their facilities for the good of all through agreed models of collaboration and sharing; and
- represent good value in relation to capital and recurrent expenditure.

9.4 This set of principles, endorsed overwhelmingly in consultation, provides a foundation for planning. Some of the principles are in tension, but they are not contradictory. There is, for example, a trade-off between choice and diversity, and the notions of affordability and good value in respect of capital and recurrent expenditure through provision that is cost-effective and sustainable. This tension is magnified in the existing patterns of provision when there has been a reluctance to address the challenge of the implications of falling enrolments. Nonetheless, it is clear that there is considerable scope for reconciling these competing interests.

Area-based Planning

- 9.5 The concept of planning schools on an area basis within a strategic framework of vision, policy, principles and guidelines provided by the Department of Education (DE) was strongly endorsed in consultation. The creation of that shared vision is an essential prelude to giving direction to and harmonising strategic decisions and achieving policy connectedness. This is a vital leadership task for DE. DE's policy approach on "sustainable schools" will be a key element of an overall framework. The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) should have overall operational responsibility for the strategic planning of the schools' estate, within the framework established by DE. Until ESA has acquired the capacity to exercise its estate planning function, DE should act quickly and decisively to initiate, and take forward, area-based planning as soon as possible in the year 2007 with the full support of the relevant education authorities. DE should also establish a provisional timetable, to be refined and taken forward by the Education and Skills Authority, specifying target dates for key steps in setting up and implementing the area-based planning strategy. In view of the new approach to planning, future school building projects should only be approved after area-based planning is established, and previously announced capital projects which are currently underway should be reviewed for their consistency with the area-based approach according to their stage of development. With the establishment of ESA, DE should provide appropriate resources for each sector to ensure that they have the capacity to support the planning of the schools' estate.
- 9.6 A number of factors will influence the identification of suitable areas and that which distinguishes one area from another. Such areas might be referred to as local areas, with the term "local" having a relative meaning. Areas should comprise coherent sets of nursery, primary and post-primary schools, as well as accessible further education provision, and as far as possible lie within a single local council area to facilitate links between education planning and community planning. The locations of provision by the Special Schools Sector are additional factors to be taken into account in the specification of a particular area. Importantly, area-based planning of the schools' estate will facilitate an area-based approach to the planning of curricular provision. To ensure coherence and consistency in education policy, the planning of the schools' estate should harmonise with policy on the curriculum and with that in such areas as Extended

Schools, special educational needs, admissions procedures and criteria, and transport.

- 9.7 The PriceWaterhouseCoopers' (PWC) report took the view that, at local level, planning should focus on "education communities", defined by reference to the pattern of pupil flows in an area that normally centre on one or more post-primary schools with its associated feeder schools. Such flows are typically determined by physical geography, ease of travel and so on. From this perspective, an education community is a geographic area in which the majority of children living within the area go to school in the area and the proportion of children travelling outside the area to attend school is small (e.g. less than 5 per cent). Identifying such communities allows planners to anticipate the knock-on effects of school development plans within an area, while minimising cross-boundary effects. Some schools draw their pupils from a wide geographical area that crosses both local council and other boundaries, a factor that needs to be accounted for in the process of area planning through mapping patterns of enrolment and future expectations. Data are available at district council and at more local levels to identify areas and flows of pupils across area boundaries. In some instances an area might be defined simply by a rural town and its hinterland. There are many schools that are located at a removed site from the communities that they serve and consideration needs to be given to the concept of re-location of schools closer to their communities.
- 9.8 The concept of area planning is closely linked with the notion of community; thus the planning process needs to be based on a proper understanding of local communities. A community cannot simply be equated with the people who live in a geographical area. Communities are defined not just by geography, but are characterised by common bonds. Local communities may be distinguished by aspects of life that are not shared but find identity in what they have in common. The local school has been cherished as a very important element in any given community. The loss of such a school can be perceived as a major blow to people living there. The importance to local communities of the parish or village primary school or the school serving a distinctive rural community is well established. Government is committed to "rural proofing" all policies, that is assessing them for their potential to impact unfairly on rural populations in comparison with those living in urban areas, or for opportunities missed to utilise rural resources as part of policy thinking. Clearly, the planning of educational provision in rural

areas should be subject to rural proofing. For the Catholic sector, the parish school, together with the parish church, is the heart of the parish community, especially in a rural area. Such links are not confined to the Catholic sector.

Planning Process

- 9.9 The planning challenge is not just about managing down the over-capacity in the schools' estate, imperative though that is, but establishing a sound basis for anticipating the pattern of future demand in response to a highly complex set of dynamics in the context of the long-term decline in the school population. There needs to be a long-term strategic plan for the provision of school places in Northern Ireland that achieves the best practicable match of school places to the school population in each local area. Planning at local area level should ensure cost-effective use of capital funds to provide sustainable schools that, taken together, meet the expressed needs and projected requirements of each sector within the area, and the needs of the community as a whole. In the interests of value for money, school accommodation that becomes available through rationalisation and re-organisation should be appraised for its potential as an alternative to new builds to meet identified sector or community requirements. For example, the duty of DE to encourage and facilitate integrated education and Irish-medium education can militate against the most efficient use of the current schools' estate. Ways of accommodating such schools within premises or sites already in use, but that have suitable surplus accommodation and space, should be considered. As indicated in Chapter 7, some spare capacity will be required for structural reasons in a multi-sectoral system, to allow for parental choice, and to accommodate inevitable uncertainties in forecasting demand.
- 9.10 To ensure effective, efficient and participative procedures for area-based planning, ESA should establish, lead and co-ordinate planning groups that are representative of all the educational interests, and bring informed knowledge of local communities and circumstances to the planning process. The proposed approach to planning at area level acknowledges the established roles of the existing sectors, not in isolation from one another, as has been typical of past planning, but within a collaborative approach. Existing sectors should have the right to continue to represent the needs, expectations and ethos of their sector, and their understanding of the dynamics of local communities throughout the planning process. Increasingly, however, sectors should consider not just their

contribution to that part for which they have responsibility but their contribution to the system as a whole. A *Shared Future* calls for proposals on new schools and re-organisation or rationalisation of schools, to demonstrate that options for collaboration and sharing on a cross-community basis have been considered and explored fully. Collaborative approaches to the sharing of facilities and resources should be standard practice, while ensuring that the particular identity or ethos of an individual school is preserved wherever possible. Although the sectors will play their part in ascertaining demand for provision within the sector, and can bring such information into a collaborative planning process, there is a case for consulting directly with the community on a set of possible options for schools in the area, for instance in the context of rationalisation of provision. It would be imperative for such a process to be free from manipulation and exploitation and to avoid the politicisation of educational planning. Such an approach opens up the possibility of establishing schools of new management types to serve all the pupils in a community, for example a community school or a jointly managed school, including a jointly managed church school. Cross-sectoral collaboration and cross-community sharing will be central to protecting local provision through cost-effective proposals. Whatever the consultation process, the outcomes in terms of proposals need to conform to the principle of parental choice, coupled with due regard to the cost to the public purse.

- 9.11 There should be an agreed system-wide set of parameters within which strategic planning of the schools' estate should take place and for assessing the likely demand for schools of different types. This will involve DE, ESA and other key stakeholders, including the various school sectors. DE and ESA should establish quality indicators and other criteria and use them consistently in conjunction with a sustainable schools policy, to assess the appropriateness, quality and effectiveness of the educational provision in an area; the sufficiency, suitability and condition of the schools' accommodation and facilities; the nature and quality of the connection between the schools and the community; and the extent to which the provision reflects value for money. Using the specific quality indicators and other criteria, ESA should undertake a detailed area-based audit of provision (including that in Further Education) and, having done so, it should maintain and regularly update the data. Moreover, ESA should be proactive in monitoring and reviewing provision. Planning should be on a whole-system basis, so that the interactions between proposals for contiguous areas are fully worked through before investment decisions are made. Planning should take account of

the projected needs of all sectors based on a consistent approach to estimating long-term enrolments (LTE). This means planning for anticipated rather than demonstrated demand in the Integrated and Irish-medium sectors. Forecasts should consider all the relevant determinants of demand to the greatest practicable extent, including demographics, pupil movements, population shifts, economic development, parental choice and changes in school performance and sustainability.

- 9.12 The proposals that result from the local area planning process – involving intra-sectoral, cross-sectoral and cross-community approaches – will need to be reconciled and rationalised at central level into a coherent plan for the area. Evidence to the Review was divided on which body should exercise this role. Some see it as a function for ESA. The Catholic sector, however, has concerns that such a role for ESA could be in conflict with its ownership of the controlled estate. Their view is that the body which makes the ultimate decisions on proposals should have no ownership role for schools. The Review is of the opinion that ESA should exercise this function, but that it will be important to allay the concerns expressed through arrangements that ensure fairness and consistency and for which ESA are accountable, in the knowledge that the ultimate decision lies with the Minister.

Rationalisation

- 9.13 The number of schools in Northern Ireland that are too small to be educationally viable, or to be reasonably cost-effective, makes rationalisation inevitable. Deficiencies in the suitability and condition of the accommodation add urgency to the need for improvement. In the primary phase, where there are many small schools, often in close proximity, ESA should take a proactive approach and encourage, prompt and facilitate streamlining and rationalisation at area level. Rationalisation should be based on firm principles and conditions. As an overarching principle in assessing the long term-term future of a school, the quality of the education of the pupils should be paramount, examined alongside social and community needs and benefits, and financial considerations. The significance of enrolments for school viability was considered in Chapter 7.
- 9.14 It is understandable that governors, families, teachers and others develop loyalties to specific schools and work or lobby to support and preserve them, but in the interests of the children, such loyalties need to be tempered with both realism and

an understanding of the benefits that alternative provision can offer. Timely measures need to be implemented to address the continued operation of a school that falls below a viability threshold without any sign of likely increase in numbers. It is critical for all those involved in rationalisation to foster a climate in which rationalisation and re-organisation, through the construction of new schools, will be welcomed and not rejected within communities. It is important that the focus is not on the deficits in the current position but rather on the real benefits that alternative and better provision can bring for the children, and indeed for the community. When considering the long-term future of a school, ESA and the appropriate sector, should not take into account short-term, and uncertain, funding arrangements (such as those contingent on certain initiatives) that can distort or conceal the financial viability of a school.

- 9.15 There should be early intervention and investigation when there are signs that a school's enrolment is falling and there is a budgetary difficulty. The causes of these should be identified and, if possible, addressed, and a long-term strategy put in place – for example, closure, amalgamation, 'integration' into/use of another school's premises or, in certain circumstances, a form of federation/confederation with another school – rather than leaving decisions to a reach a crisis or for the school to wither away. Not to do so, places inordinate stress on the staff; puts the parents in an unenviable position (loyalties being divided between staying with the school or moving on), and, most of all, it fails children and young people. In the light of submissions to the Review, DE should review existing procedures with the aim of accelerating the rationalisation and procurement process.

Schools and Community Planning

- 9.16 The planning of the schools' estate should, as far as possible, be co-ordinated with planning in such fields as health; social services; adult education; youth provision; sports, arts and recreation; and community regeneration and development. Moreover, planning of educational provision will need to take account of community planning in the new local government system. Although there is currently some use of the schools' estate for other activities – such as adult learning or non-formal learning, including youth work – the practice is uneven and facilities are generally underused, not least during the long vacation. The use of the schools' estate in more versatile and creative ways has the potential to develop further a school's core functions and those services that extend to other

schools, the community and service providers. Opportunities could be created to develop learning communities, foster increased parental interest in education (for parents themselves and for their children), particularly in areas of social deprivation, and to encourage education to be more highly valued in such communities. For example, following an audit of community needs, there might be a focus on family support and development of all aspects of family learning (including parenting skills), citizenship (complementing the provision in the revised curriculum), community awareness, health and well-being.

- 9.17 The Extended Schools initiative (funded through the Children's and Young People's Package) has considerable potential in developing a wider community role for schools. Government has stated its commitment to reducing social, health and educational differentials through the Package by providing funding for extending the role of schools to become centres of the community by offering services and learning opportunities before and after the traditional school day. DE will soon assume responsibility for all early years' provision; there is an opportunity (and reason), therefore, to explore the possibility of establishing children's centres (as has been done in England) based on the nursery schools already 'in situ'. In England, the Sure Start Children's Centre programme is based on the integrated provision of education, care, family support, and health services as key factors in determining good outcomes for children and their parents. The concept itself is not new. Sure Start Children's Centres are about building on existing good practice rather than starting afresh. A natural follow-on from the Government's commitment to reducing social, health and educational differentials would be the establishment of Children's Centres in Northern Ireland. For the most part, nursery schools in Northern Ireland traditionally draw from all traditions and already act as very sound 'hubs' for the broader use of communities, and hence could play a pivotal role in this respect.
- 9.18 Extending school provision into these new areas of service has major implications for the types of buildings, for the range of accommodation needed, and for funding. There needs to be joined-up planning at central and local government levels to ensure that these new policy directions are recognised fully within any review of the schools' estate, including effective funding mechanisms.
- 9.19 A strategic approach to planning the schools' estate provides a fresh opportunity for co-ordinated planning of sports facilities, involving the bodies providing sports

facilities at central and local level. In their submission to the Review, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland advocated a co-ordinated approach to the provision of new sports facilities and the refurbishment of existing facilities in the schools' estate, taking account of provision at other schools in close proximity; other provision in the area (district council facilities, sports clubs etc.); the sports offered by the school; and travel time, and usage patterns. With regard to specification and design, the Council urged that the provision of new sports facilities and, where practicable, the refurbishment of existing facilities within the schools' estate, should meet the specification and design standards for the respective sports, and follow industry best practice. School facilities should be made available to outside groups at reasonable cost, with schools and other providers working together to share the provision and maintenance of sports facilities.

Special Educational Needs and Inclusion

- 9.20 Chapter 7 described the main features of the current review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion established by DE. Given the purpose and themes of the review and the framework for the identification, assessment and provision that may be proposed for supporting children across a wide range of special educational need, the outcomes of the review will have implications for the planning of the schools' estate. These include accommodating school-based support, collaboration between all schools, and the location of special schools, specialist services, and multi-disciplinary teams.

Planning Data

- 9.21 There is significant potential for good quality analysis to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of estate planning. ESA and DE should establish and maintain a data collection and analysis capability, availing of modern data-gathering technology, as a service to all the education partners to enable them to access and use up-to-date and relevant data to help take full account of the determinants of demand, and of the interactions between geographic areas and sectors. Submissions to the Review have highlighted the potential of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland's (OSNI's) Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information System (NINIS) to improve the range

and quality of planning data. Not only are data available at local council level, they may also be accessed at sub-council level, for example at output and super output levels.

9.22 Data that appear relevant to schools' estate planning include:

- suitability and condition of each school;
- school capacities, sufficiency of places, and surplus capacity;
- school enrolments over a period of time;
- enrolment projections;
- population shifts and trends across a range of age bands;
- urban planning details and rural sustainability;
- levels of socio-economic deprivation;
- planned economic development;
- urban planning and rural sustainability;
- new housing developments;
- religious make-up of the area;
- home-to-school travel times and distances;
- potential impact of infrastructure investment;
- pupil travel-to-school patterns;
- pupil flows between educational communities;
- existing and future transport links;
- school transport costs;
- the potential for extended school services; and
- community needs analysis.

- 9.23 The Review supports the PWC advice that planning should be based on enrolments projected over a longer time period (PWC suggested fifteen to twenty years) to achieve a closer relationship between the planning of capital investment and projected pupil demand over the life of the school building. The inevitable uncertainty of long-term forecasts should be explicitly recognised by looking at ranges as well as central estimates of long-term enrolment, and by having, at least in outline, contingency plans for dealing with enrolments that are materially higher or lower than the central estimate. The accuracy of projections should be monitored to compare forecasted demand for school places with realised demand, as a basis for improving the quality of forecasting.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.24 This chapter has mapped out the main features of an area-based approach to planning the schools' estate within a strategic framework of vision, principles, policy and procedures, and established an important link between the planning of the estate and the planning of curricular provision in an area. It has identified key roles and responsibilities for the education partners working in collaboration, emphasised the important leadership role that DE must play, and highlighted the overall operational responsibility of ESA for the strategic planning of the schools' estate. It has drawn attention to the importance of joint planning of education and other services, not least in the context of community planning at local council level, and to a wider role for schools. The chapter has also addressed the sensitive but vital issue of rationalisation. Finally, it has highlighted the crucial significance of promoting a positive outlook on change at every level, with the focus not on the deficits in the current position but rather on the real benefits that alternative and better provision can bring for children and, indeed, to the whole community.
- 9.25 Given the evidence and arguments presented in this chapter, we recommend:
11. The Education and Skills Authority should plan the schools' estate on a local area basis, within a strategic framework of vision, policy, principles, and guidelines provided by the Department of Education.
 12. Within the strategic framework established by the Department of Education, the Education and Skills Authority should have overall operational responsibility for the strategic planning of the schools' estate.

13. Until the Education and Skills Authority has acquired the capacity to exercise its estate planning function, the Department of Education should act quickly and decisively to take forward area-based planning as soon as possible in the year 2007, with the full support of the relevant education authorities.
14. The Department of Education should establish a provisional timetable, to be refined and taken forward by the Education and Skills Authority, specifying target dates for the following key steps in setting up and implementing the area-based planning strategy: (a) the Department of Education's strategic framework of vision, policy, principles, and guidelines; (b) the specification of local areas; (c) the review of local provision; (d) the initiation and conclusion of local planning; (e) the submission of area proposals to the Education and Skills Authority; (f) the finalised and approved area plans; and (g) the implementation of individual plans for the estate as a whole.
15. Future school building projects should be approved only after area-based planning is established, and previously announced capital projects that are currently underway should be reviewed, according to their stage of development, for their consistency with the area-based approach.
16. Local areas should comprise coherent sets of nursery, primary and post-primary schools, and, as appropriate, special schools, as well as accessible further education provision, and as far as possible lie within a single local council's boundaries.
17. Planning should ensure that proposals for contiguous local areas are considered together, and that their interrelationships are identified and taken into account, before investment decisions are made.
18. Area-based plans should ensure that each area is served by sustainable schools that provide high quality education for all pupils and that, taken together, balance the expressed wishes of parents and the projected requirements of each school sector, with the cost-effective use of capital and recurrent funding.

19. To ensure effective, efficient and participative procedures for area-based planning, the Education and Skills Authority should establish, lead and co-ordinate planning groups that are representative of all the educational interests and that bring informed knowledge of local communities and circumstances to the planning process.
20. The process of area planning should incorporate intra-sectoral, cross-sectoral and cross-community considerations, and aim to achieve maximum agreement at local level on the proposals that are to be submitted to the Education and Skills Authority.
21. Planning should be open to the possibility of establishing schools of new management types as a result of cross-sector or cross-community agreement to maintain local educational provision.
22. In accordance with *A Shared Future*, proposals for new schools, or re-organisation, or rationalisation of schools should demonstrate that options for collaboration and sharing on a cross-community basis have been considered and fully explored.
23. In area-based planning, the Education and Skills Authority should have the option of consulting directly with communities to ascertain views on options for educational provision, with the information obtained being considered alongside the assessments of need made by the various school sectors.
24. With the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, the Department of Education should provide appropriate resources for each sector to ensure that they have the capacity to support the planning of the schools' estate.
25. The Department of Education and the Education and Skills Authority should establish quality indicators and other criteria and use these consistently, in conjunction with a sustainable schools policy, to assess the appropriateness, quality and effectiveness of the educational provision in an area; the sufficiency, suitability and condition of the schools' accommodation and facilities; the nature and quality of the connection between the schools and the community; arrangements for

sharing and collaboration; and the extent to which the provision reflects value for money.

26. Using the specified quality indicators and other criteria, the Education and Skills Authority should undertake a detailed area-based audit of provision (including that in Further Education), and, having done so, it should maintain and regularly up-date the resulting data.
27. The Education and Skills Authority should regularly monitor area-based provision against the quality indicators and other criteria, identify factors that suggest a review of provision is required, promote innovative ideas for consideration, prompt and encourage linkages, initiate discussion with the sectors and community interests, and work with others to remove hindrances to desirable developments.
28. To ensure coherence and consistency in education policy, the planning of the schools' estate should harmonise with policy on the curriculum, and with policy in such areas as Extended Schools, special needs provision, youth provision, admissions procedures and criteria, and transport.
29. The planning of the schools' estate should, as far as possible, be co-ordinated with planning in such fields as health; social services; adult education; youth provision; sports, arts and recreation; and community regeneration and development.
30. The planning of the schools' estate and of the Further Education estate should be co-ordinated in order to optimise the use of accommodation and resources across the education system.
31. School accommodation that becomes available through rationalisation and re-organisation should be appraised for its potential as an alternative to new builds to meet identified sector or community requirements for additional provision.
32. The forecasting of enrolments should consider all the relevant determinants of demand to the greatest practicable extent, including demographics, pupil movements, population shifts, economic

development, parental choice, and changes in school performance and sustainability.

33. To inform the siting of new schools, maximum travel distances and maximum travel times for all pupils should be established.
34. A data collection and analysis capability, availing of modern data gathering technology, should be established and maintained by the Department of Education and the Education and Skills Authority, as a service to all the education partners, to enable them to access and use up-to-date and relevant data, and to take full account of the determinants of demand and the interactions between geographic areas and sectors.
35. As soon as there are signs that a school's enrolment is falling and there is a budgetary difficulty, the Education and Skills Authority should identify and address the causes and, if these can not be addressed, consider the options for future provision and implement that which is effective and efficient in the interests of learners.
36. When considering the long-term future of a school, the Education and Skills Authority and the appropriate sector should not take account of short-term funding arrangements (such as those contingent on certain initiatives) that can distort or mask the financial viability of a school.
37. The Department of Education should review the existing procedures with the aim of accelerating the rationalisation and procurement processes.
38. The approach to re-organisation should not focus on the deficits in the current position, but rather concentrate on demonstrating the gains and benefits that alternative and better provision can bring to learners and, indeed, to the entire community.
39. School design and schedules of accommodation should be amended to take account of such factors as: the changing nature of schools and their functions in local communities; the potential for using new technologies for teaching and learning; the requirement to ensure that the schools' estate is environmentally sustainable; and the provision of

areas within the school that are conducive to social interaction and individual study.

40. The planning, to quality standards, and the use of sports facilities in schools should be set within a co-ordinated strategic approach, involving bodies concerned with sports facility provision at central and local level.
41. School sports facilities should be made available to outside groups at reasonable cost, with schools and other providers working together to share the provision and maintenance of these facilities.
42. The planning of the schools' estate should take account of policy on Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, including such aspects as accommodation, school based support, and collaboration between all schools, specialist services, and multi disciplinary teams.

CHAPTER 10: COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND FURTHER EDUCATION

- 10.1 This chapter focuses on collaboration between schools and Further Education, not as a separate development, but as a key component in arrangements for 14–19-year olds, involving collaboration between schools, and between schools, Further Education and training organisations. It examines the rationale for collaboration in the context of the Entitlement Framework and explores policy considerations and operational matters. It describes current initiatives by the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to develop collaboration between schools and Further Education. It also describes consortia arrangements in a Local Educational Authority (LEA) in Wales. Finally, it comments on the quality of current links between schools and Further Education and identifies key policy issues that need to be addressed in developing effective collaborative arrangements in the interests of all 14–19 year olds.

Curriculum Entitlement Framework

129

- 10.2 In December 2005, the then Minister for Education, Angela Smith MP, announced *New Post-Primary Arrangements*. Its reforms include a more flexible and less prescriptive curriculum at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and the concept of a Curriculum Entitlement Framework for 14–19 year olds, which has been referred to in previous chapters. The concept of the Entitlement Framework emerged from the work of the Post-Primary Review Group (also known as the Costello Group). It was developed to give pupils access to learning pathways that offer a broader and more flexible curriculum so that pupils could choose a blend of courses, including general (academic) and applied (vocational or professional/technical) courses that best meet their needs, aptitudes, aspirations and interests.
- 10.3 The anticipated timescale for implementing the Entitlement Framework requires schools, from September 2009, to provide access to a minimum of 24 courses at KS4, and schools with sixth forms, 27 courses at post-16. At least one-third of the courses must be general (academic) and at least one-third applied (vocational or professional/technical). All courses must be accredited within the National

Qualifications Framework (NQF). The Entitlement Framework will not require schools to offer a set list of courses, and schools may choose the 24 or 27 courses they consider the most suitable for their pupils. The introduction of the Entitlement Framework is intended to address inequalities in access to educational opportunities evident in the current arrangements for young people in the 14–19 age range. Detailed information on the Entitlement Framework, its introduction, and its development to full implementation is provided in a series of guidance documents issued by DE.

Current Curricular Provision

- 10.4 The Entitlement Framework is a response to the wide variation in schools' provision at KS4 and at post-16, and to the resulting inequality in the choices open to pupils. At present the educational provision, and choices available to pupils, depend largely on where they live and the type and size of school attended. The variations illustrated in the tables that follow exemplify the gap between the current provision of most post-primary schools in Northern Ireland and the requirements of the Entitlement Framework. The information available does not permit analysis of the curriculum in terms of academic and applied subjects

Key Stage 4

- 10.5 For the purpose of the analysis of KS4 provision, schools with no KS4 pupils have been excluded, as well as schools subject to closure or amalgamation. For this key stage, the tables include subject entries for full GCSE courses, GCSE short courses, and GNVQ Part 1 qualifications. Analysis of Table 10.1 shows that one-quarter of the schools provide 17 or fewer subjects, half provide 19 or fewer subjects, and three-quarters provide 22 or fewer subjects.
- 10.6 The relationship between school enrolment and number of subjects provided is shown in Table 10.2. As expected, there is a marked contrast in the range of subjects offered by schools in the smallest band and those in the two largest bands. The most striking finding is the considerable variation in the number of subject entries by schools within the same band.

Table 10.1: Subject Entries for GCSE Courses^a, 2004/05

Number of Subject Entries	Number of Schools	Cumulative Number of Schools
6	1	1
9	1	2
10	2	4
12	3	7
13	3	10
14	5	15
15	12	27
16	20	47
17	15	62
18	19	81
19	24	105
20	21	126
21	19	145
22	24	169
23	22	191
24	17	208
25	8	216
26	6	222
27	3	225
28	1	226

Source: DE.

Note:

^aIncludes subject entries for GCSE full and short courses, vocational double awards, and GNVQ Part 1.

- 10.7 Although based on curricular provision as reflected by subject entries in 2004/05, the preceding analysis highlights significant challenges for schools in providing their pupils with access to the Curriculum Entitlement at KS4.

Table 10.2: Range of Subject Entries at GCSE^a by Enrolment Band, 2004/05

Enrolment Band	Number of Schools	Range of Subjects
0-249	21	6-17
250-499	64	12-27
500-749	53	15-27
750-999	52	18-26
1000+	36	19-28

Source: DE.

Note:

^aIncludes subject entries for GCSE full and short courses, vocational double awards, and GNVQ Part 1.

Post-16

- 10.8 For the purpose of the analysis of post-16 provision, schools with no sixth forms have been excluded, as have those subject to closure or amalgamation. For this key stage, the tables include subject entries for GCE A-levels, GCE A2s, and Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) six-unit and twelve-unit awards. Analysis of Table 10.3 shows that one-quarter of the schools provide five or fewer subjects, provision that represents a very restricted choice for post-16 pupils. Half of the schools provide 16 or fewer subjects and three-quarters provide 21 or fewer subjects.
- 10.9 The relationship between school enrolment and number of subjects offered is shown in Table 10.4. It highlights great disparity in the number of subjects provided by schools within the same enrolment band. The Review does not have the information necessary to explain these wide variations.
- 10.10 The number of pupils in the sixth form is a key factor in the capacity of schools to meet the needs of their pupils in the post-16 stage without disproportionate expenditure. Table 10.5 presents a distribution of sixth-form enrolments. The table shows that of the 109 secondary schools with sixth-form pupils, about one-fifth have sixth forms with fewer than 40 pupils and over half have enrolments of fewer than 80 pupils. The source data show that only one-third have sixth-form

Table 10.3: Subject Entries at A-level^a, 2004/05

Number of Subject Entries	Number of Schools	Cumulative Number of Schools
1	14	14
2	10	24
3	11	35
4	4	39
5	3	42
6	5	47
7	3	50
8	3	53
9	5	58
10	4	62
11	4	66
12	2	68
13	6	74
14	3	77
15	3	80
16	7	87
17	6	93
18	10	103
19	9	112
20	13	125
21	13	138
22	8	146
23	6	152
24	5	157
25	5	162
26	3	165
27	1	166
30	1	167
31	1	168

Source: DE.

Note:

^aIncludes subject entries for A-levels, A2s, and Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education Six and Twelve Unit Awards.

Table 10.4: Range of Subject Entries at A-level^a by Enrolment Band, 2004/05

Size Band	Number of Schools	Range of Subjects
0-249	4	1-3
250-499	35	1-22
500-749	44	1-24
750-999	50	1-26
1000+	35	10-31

Source: DE.

Note:

^aIncludes subject entries for A-levels, A2s, and Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education Six and Twelve Unit Awards.

enrolments of more than 100 pupils. The significance of sixth-form enrolments was considered in detail in Chapter 7.

Table 10.5: Number of Pupils in Sixth Forms, 2005/06

Sixth-form Enrolment Band	Number of Schools					
	Year 13		Years 14-15		Total	
	Secondary	Grammar	Secondary	Grammar	Secondary	Grammar
0 to 39 pupils	52	0	70	0	23	0
40 to 79 pupils	36	6	31	10	36	0
80 to 119 pupils	14	33	6	31	23	1
120 to 159 pupils	4	19	0	20	13	7
160 to 199 pupils	2	6	2	5	7	15
200 to 239 pupils	0	4	0	2	4	16
240 + pupils	1	1	0	1	3	30
Total number of schools with sixth forms	109	69	109	69	109	69

Source: DE.

- 10.11 Although based on subject entries for 2004/05, the preceding analysis poses serious questions about the feasibility of sixth-form provision in many schools. It also highlights the challenges for schools in providing their post-16 pupils with access to the Curriculum Entitlement.

Collaboration

- 10.12 From the preceding statistics on curricular provision it is clear that the implementation of the Entitlement Framework will require co-operation and collaboration between schools, and between schools, Further Education and approved training organisations. Furthermore, the analysis also reinforces serious questions, already raised, about the educational viability of smaller schools, and of smaller sixth forms. Collaborative arrangements cannot be regarded as an alternative to avoiding the decisions that must be taken to re-organise Northern Ireland's post-primary schools into a system of sustainable schools, well placed to maximise the mutual benefits of partnership but also capable of managing the professional, organisational and financial issues involved. Moreover, the benefits of collaboration must be weighed against the costs and the manageability of the arrangements.
- 10.13 Submissions to the Review endorsed the value of partnership and collaboration in providing increased choice and opportunity for young people of all ages, but particularly those aged 14-19. The need for collaboration is further strengthened by the requirement that at least one-third of courses on offer by a school should be of an applied (vocational or professional/technical) nature. Developing the quality of collaboration that is crucial to providing a high standard of education to learners in the 14-19 years age range is a fundamental task for all the partners. Although this chapter concentrates on collaboration between schools and Further Education, partnerships between schools and Further Educations needs to be viewed as a component of a coherent plan for 14-19 provision, involving all schools, Further Education and training organisations in local areas.
- 10.14 The Costello Group outlined its vision for education for 14-19 year olds based on the following principles:
- pupils should be central to planning of provision;
 - all pupils should have access to a wide, balanced and flexible mix of educational provision;

- schools are of varying types and should be seen as of equal value; and
- schools should operate in collaboration with neighbouring schools and further education institutions and other providers, for the benefit of their own pupils and of all pupils in the locality.

The Costello Group appreciated that realising this vision would require engagement and commitment at local level and strong leadership and co-ordination at area and strategic (regional) level, together with the necessary human and financial resources. It urged that all the parties concerned should be involved from the outset, as equal partners, in helping to determine how services should be provided, and considered this especially important if multi-sector solutions are to develop.

- 10.15 The Review endorses this view and also the Costello Group's advice that schools should remain at the centre of a system to develop new arrangements at local level. The Review also agrees with the Costello Group's emphasis on the development of collaboration locally, but within a framework of operational and strategic planning and development, to ensure consistency and coherence in provision, so that young people, regardless of where they live, will have access to the same range and quality of education. There should also be a strategic dimension to planning at local level, in terms of both curriculum provision and institutional roles, to ensure that all learners have access to an appropriate curriculum and that organisations optimise the use of their resources. It would be unacceptable to have a series of loosely coupled arrangements between individual schools and colleges of further education (the generic term college of further education is taken to include institutes of further and higher education). Enrolment and, for those schools offering provision at post-16, the size of the sixth form, are important factors in determining the extent of collaboration a school may "require" to meet the Curriculum Entitlement. Regardless of their relative "self-sufficiency", however, it is important that all schools should take part in local collaborative arrangements for mutual and common benefit.
- 10.16 Collaborative arrangements are much more difficult in sparsely populated rural areas with poor public transport services. Not only in such circumstances, but also more generally, alternatives to pupils travelling from their school should be developed. Possibilities include college lecturers travelling to schools, and the use of educational technologies to facilitate online learning communities.

Partnerships that involve crossing sensitive community boundaries are likely to encounter obstacles, so any proposals involving crossing such boundaries will require considerable careful preparation and greater resources to attract local champions and active community support, and to minimise any sense of threat.

- 10.17 The quality and standard of courses depends on the quality of teaching, the suitability, quantity and use of resources, and the viability of the teaching group. All courses require suitably qualified and experienced teachers, including, for some courses, teachers with appropriate industrial experience. Some courses require specialist equipment and facilities, including industry standard resources. All of these factors need to be taken into account in planning for the optimum use of the human and material resources in schools and in Further Education to support curricular provision for 14-19 year olds.
- 10.18 Chapter 9 emphasised that the strategy for planning the schools' estate should take account of the Further Education estate since it too provides education and training for 14 –19 year olds. To date, however, there has been little strategic drive to plan learning opportunities, and accommodation and resource requirements across schools, Further Education and training sectors. Inspection findings show that more effective collation and sharing of information on the use of the school and college estates are needed to identify spare capacity and constraints. Planning should ensure that there is no wasteful duplication in schools of professional, technical and vocational facilities, when collaboration with a local campus of a college would be feasible. In practice, for example, schools make little use of colleges' specialist equipment and resources available within the Centres of Excellence – designated by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). There is concern that some schools are providing vocational (or professional/technical) programmes in areas where they have neither the pre-requisite capital equipment nor the vocational specialists to deliver the programmes effectively.

Vocational Enhancement Programme

- 10.19 Following the Governments' acceptance of the recommendations of the Costello Report, DE and DEL launched a pilot Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP). Now in its third year, the VEP involves all the further education colleges working with approximately 190 schools to provide professional and technical courses to

more than 14,000 pupils. The VEP is a transitional programme, the aim of which is to provide the two Departments with the opportunity to test models of effective collaborative working, to improve the quality and effectiveness of partnerships, and to disseminate good practice to schools and colleges.

10.20 An independent evaluation of the first year of the 2004/05 phase of VEP has been published and the report of the evaluation of the 2005/06 year is awaited. The first evaluation identified positive aspects of collaboration between schools and colleges, with tangible benefits for the relatively small number of pupils, schools and colleges involved. It also identified a number of obstacles to collaborative working, such as timetabling, pastoral care, difficulties with information and communication technology (ICT), and such structural issues across the two sectors as different funding systems and different qualifications of staff. For its part, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has noted reduced curriculum flexibility for young people when they opt to complete part of their programme at another school or a college of further education.

10.21 The VEP is evolving in the light of these evaluations and the changes deemed necessary by DE and DEL. For instance, DE and DEL are developing guidance on a range of matters, including pastoral care; progression routes and learning pathways; careers information, advice and guidance; different modes of delivery; service level agreements; and monitoring and evaluation of provision. In 2006/07, based on a college-led model of collaboration, schools are expected to take a more proactive approach to forming collaborative arrangements: for example, by grouping together to ensure that applications meet class size viability thresholds. The 2006/07 phase of the programme is promoting a purchaser/provider funding model within the VEP funding arrangements. The VEP funding arrangements, however, are such that part of an individual's programme is double funded; this is an issue that needs to be addressed in sustainable, normalised, collaborative arrangements.

Quality of Current Links Between Schools and Further Education

10.22 ETI has carried out a number of inspections relating to 14–19 provision. These comprise inspections of the VEP, Occupational Studies, KS4 Flexibility, Careers Education and Guidance, and two area inspections involving a sample of schools and Further Education provision in the area. These evaluations provide an

assessment of the current state of collaboration between schools and Further Education and identify issues that need to be addressed to improve the effectiveness of partnerships. Some of the findings have been incorporated into previous paragraphs. In ETI's judgement, collaboration works best when organisations are not in competition and the provision in an area is planned for strategically; when there is commitment from senior management teams; when the learners have access to good careers guidance and tutorial support; when the organisations are situated close together; when one organisation takes a lead in overseeing the provision; when there is adequate staffing; and when there is good communication to ensure that parents and learners understand the reasons for and the benefits of the arrangements.

10.23 ETI cites a few models of good practice locally on which to draw: for instance, examples of enriched provision being provided for post-16 pupils at colleges of further education – courses in computer-aided design, software development, business and marketing, employer and consumer law – or vocational qualifications for 14–16 year olds as part of a programme to provide greater flexibility at KS4. Good operational models include one in which the coming together of several small schools of different management types enabled the provision on offer at the local college of education to be wider and more inclusive; in another instance, a local forum of principals was established to consider common organisational difficulties.

10.24 Generally, however, ETI concludes that collaboration is at an early stage of development, a view supported by the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC) which, while acknowledging some good links, considers that there is a considerable degree of disconnectedness in terms of planning and provision. Most of the existing partnerships in Northern Ireland are considered to be characterised by forms of co-operation in a competitive environment rather than demonstrating key features of co-ordination and collaboration. To some extent, partnerships take place almost despite an environment of competition, and are all the more commendable for that. Occasionally, though, ETI reports that co-operation is motivated more by the needs of the school rather than those of the young person, and schools and colleges may also have unrealistic, or unclear, expectations of themselves and one another.

- 10.25 The Review was interested to learn about the development of post-primary arrangements in the Neath/Port Talbot LEA. This LEA and the Swansea LEA were previously part of the larger West Glamorgan LEA, which had restructured post-primary provision by establishing a smaller number of much larger schools and introducing consortia of schools involving both small and large sixth forms. This arrangement had to be reviewed, however, in the face of the problems posed by the complex practical nature of the arrangements. A new structure for post-16 provision was created by many schools ceasing to offer sixth-form provision, while larger schools continued as 11-18 schools. The current structure in Neath/Port Talbot comprises nine 11-16 schools, most having between 800 and 1000 pupils, one 11-18 Welsh-medium school, one 11-18 Roman Catholic school, and a tertiary college based on three sites. At age 16, pupils have the option of attending an 11-18 school or a tertiary college. Most of the pupils in the 11-16 schools choose to join the tertiary college.
- 10.26 The schools and college are reported to work well as a consortium in developing a range of courses for pupils in the 14-18 age range, as well as offering comprehensive coverage of post-16 courses. Pupils at the 11-18 schools follow certain courses at the tertiary college, including GCE A-levels, and the college also provides vocational (or professional/technical) courses for the 14-18 year age range. This kind of partnership is said to have allowed maximum use of capital and recurrent expenditure over a period of years. Funding for all post-16 education is devolved from the Welsh National Assembly directly to consortia of this nature for joint decisions to be taken about the most appropriate ways to use the finance available, whereas funding for pre-16 education is provided through the LEA. Pupils have benefited from the arrangement in that they can be taught in classes of reasonable size throughout their time at school, have a full range of subject choice at KS4 and a considerably wider choice of post-16 courses and subjects. The geography of the area is such that the pupils travel only modest distances to school or college. Teachers have benefited in that they are secure in their specialist posts in relatively large schools and, with a stable structure, the LEA can pay proper attention to issues of quality and standards.

Key Issues

- 10.27 ETI identifies significant issues that need to be addressed in the interests of learners. A number of these issues were raised by other respondents in

consultation. The absence of a common and cohesive 14-19 education and training policy and strategy, linked to agreed economic plans that provide the economic and social structure for Northern Ireland, militates against collaboration and the most effective use of the schools and Further Education estate. Policy and strategy need to incorporate the key areas of curriculum, funding and teacher education. Although the Entitlement Framework is a step towards greater co-ordination and cohesion, there remains a sense of piecemeal planning that is not value for money or part of an overarching policy sufficiently focused on the needs of learners. There is a danger that the flexibility and breadth of choice inherent in the menu of subjects permitted by the Entitlement Framework could result in a fragmented curriculum as experienced by the individual learner. To guard against this, learners should be provided with well-informed curricular guidance, good tutorial support, and also impartial careers education, advice, information and guidance (CEAIG). Such support, all the more vital in collaborative arrangements, should help to ensure that the individual's learning is anchored into a learning pathway and provides progression. Each learner should have a host learning organisation that takes responsibility for overseeing the coherence of his or her learning programme, and their progression within it.

- 10.28 The provision in schools, Further Education and work-based learning should be more complementary and better co-ordinated, with each type of organisation capitalising on its distinctive strengths and capabilities, in terms of its provision, teaching expertise, and facilities. Progression routes within each type should be made accessible and clear to their respective users. Staff development is needed across the sectors to ensure high levels of mutual understanding about each others' provision and culture, to help those involved to value difference and diversity without the pressure of organisational self-preservation. There is a need, also, to revise and review current teacher education arrangements, and related in-service training, in order to take account of developments in provision for 14-19 year olds. Parents should be given well-founded assurance that collaboration is in the best interests of their children; for example, parents need to be better informed about the career pathways available through the Further Education and training sectors. And Further Education needs to continue to enhance its image and standing among parents and to develop further the pastoral support it gives to 14-19 year olds.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- 10.29 This chapter has focused on collaboration between schools and Further Education, not as a separate development, but as a key component in arrangements for 14-19 years olds, involving collaboration between schools and between schools, Further Education and training organisations. It has described current initiatives by DE and DEL to develop collaboration between schools and Further Education in the context of the Curriculum Entitlement. It has also outlined structures for post-primary provision in Neath/Port Talbot LEA in Wales. Drawing mainly on evidence from inspection, it has provided an assessment of the quality of current links between schools and Further Education, and identified key policy issues and operational matters that need to be addressed in developing effective collaborative arrangements in the interests of all 14-19 year olds.
- 10.30 Given the evidence and arguments presented in this chapter, we recommend:
43. To ensure that provision is consistent and coherent, and that all young people have access to the same range and high quality of education, the delivery of the 14-19 curriculum should take full account of the defined local areas and involve the collaboration of schools, colleges of further education, and training providers.
 44. The full potential of collaboration – through the innovative use of information technology and movement of staff – should be explored, particularly where it can contribute positively to the quality and range of provision available (e.g. in sparsely populated, rural areas where there are poor public transport facilities, or in areas involving the crossing of sectarian interfaces).
 45. The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning should progress urgently their current review of 14-19 provision, with particular reference to curriculum, funding, and planning of provision, and taking account of local and regional requirements, establish a common and coherent 14-19 education and training policy and strategy.
 46. The provision in schools, colleges of further education, and work-based learning should be more complementary and better

co-ordinated, with each type of organisation capitalising on its distinctive strengths and capabilities in terms of its provision, teaching expertise, and facilities. Progression routes within each type should be made accessible and clear to their respective users.

47. Learners should have access to high quality and impartial services to help them make informed choices based on sound careers education, information, advice and guidance.
48. In order to take account of developments in provision for 14–19 year olds, current teacher education arrangements (and related in-service training), including an examination of the desirability of a common set of standards for qualified teacher status across 14–19 provision, should be reviewed.
49. Staff development should be provided across the schools' and Further Education sectors to ensure high levels of understanding about each other's provision and culture, and to help those involved to value difference and diversity without the pressure of organisational self-preservation.
50. Each learner should have a "host" learning organisation that takes responsibility for overseeing the coherence, suitability, and development of his or her learning programme.
51. An urgent examination should be undertaken of the factors that contribute to a competitive rather than a co-operative environment, such as the open enrolment policy and differentials in funding mechanisms, with a view to removing or at least reducing impediments to collaborative work.

