

List of Recommendations

Allocating the Education Budget

1. The degree to which schools have control of their own budgets should be maximised, with appropriate arrangements for accountability put in place.
2. In addition to a delegated budget, schools should receive financial and other incentives to share resources and deliver improved provision in collaboration with other schools.
3. The budgets delegated to schools should continue to include resources for teachers' salaries and other staff costs.
4. The methodology used to distribute resources to schools through the Common Funding Formula should be reviewed to ensure that delegations under the formula reflect the costs of the main needs of schools.
5. The rationale for funding Preparatory Departments in grammar schools should be reviewed.

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Effectiveness and Efficiency

6. The policy for sustainable schools in Northern Ireland should ensure that all schools are sustainable in terms of the quality of the educational experience of children, enrolment trends, financial position, school leadership and management, accessibility, and the strength of their links to the community.
7. The sustainable schools policy should ensure that regardless of the financial position of a school or the other services it provides, it is not considered viable if the quality and breadth of the education it provides is less than "satisfactory".
8. (a) The minimum (not optimal) enrolments for new primary schools, and for Years 8–12 in new post-primary schools should be (i) Primary: 140 pupils in urban areas, and 105 pupils in rural areas, and (ii) Post-primary: 500 pupils. When the enrolment in an existing school falls below the relevant level, the future of the school should be reviewed.

- (b) The minimum (not optimal) enrolment for a new sixth form in an 11–18 school should be 100 pupils. When the enrolment falls below this level in an existing sixth form, the future of the sixth-form provision should be reviewed.
- 9. Surplus capacity in the schools' estate should be no more than 10 per cent of the estate's total capacity, distributed across the system.
- 10. Schools involved in rationalisation or closure should be given adequate funding to ensure that a satisfactory education can be provided for the remaining pupils during the period leading up to the rationalisation.

Planning: A Strategic Approach

- 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.

Collaboration Between Schools and Further Education

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.

Perspectives on Integration and Collaboration

52. In undertaking its functions in relation to the planning of the schools' estate, the Education and Skills Authority should be required to maximise opportunities for integrating education within a system of sustainable schools.
53. To encourage and support a more inclusive approach to integrating education, additional funding – in the form of (a) an enhanced unit of resource, and (b) special funding for particular areas of work such as staff development – should be provided to schools that are actively engaged in sharing with other schools, or a school that is developing an inclusive environment in recognition of the diversity of its pupils' religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
54. Either through new arrangements under the Review of Public Administration, or through a dedicated strategic forum, the Department of Education should help education stakeholders to discuss issues pertinent to integrating education and improving collaboration, promoting trust and mutual understanding, and working to develop collaboration and sharing.
55. The Department of Education should make clear that, in discharging its legislative duty in respect of integrated education, it is committed to facilitating and encouraging a variety of approaches to integrating education within a framework of sustainable schools.
56. The Department of Education should develop a comprehensive and coherent policy for Irish-medium education.
57. The planning for Irish-medium education should make use of a variety of feasible options capable of providing the accommodation and facilities that support a high quality of education through the medium of Irish, including:
 - creating new sustainable Irish-medium schools through new builds, adapting existing surplus capacity in the schools' estate, and transformation; and
 - collaborating and sharing within the Irish-medium sector, and with English-medium schools, including the provision of Irish-medium units or streams in English-medium schools.

Models of Collaboration and Sharing

58. Local "success stories" of collaboration and sharing should be encouraged, identified, and used to disseminate good practice.
59. The Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Education and Skills Authority should develop a range of incentives to encourage and support local schools to build on existing levels of shared facilities and staff and to develop their partnership further. Examples of incentives that should be considered include:
 - providing a new high specification common facility, for example, in technology;
 - funding for an additional teacher to facilitate link arrangements and work across schools or between schools and Further Education;
 - modifying the accommodation norms and standards to make it attractive for two or more geographically close schools to gain facilities which, if they continued to operate separately, would be inappropriate (due to school enrolment) or less practicable; and
 - prioritising proposals for school improvements that incorporate sharing and collaboration.
60. Sharing and collaboration between schools should be evaluated, through both self-evaluation and inspection, in order to acknowledge success and to promote improvement.
61. The manifestations and outcomes of the distinctive character of schools, and the contribution of schools to the spirit of *A Shared Future*, should be included in schools' annual reports and in inspection reports, taking account of the community environment of the school.