



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

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

“To examine the funding of the education system, in particular the strategic planning and organisation of the schools’ estate, taking account of curriculum changes, including the wider provision for 14-19 year olds, and also demographic trends.”

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

The Board’s Controlled Schools Working Group ensures equality in the planning of schools in respect of area, demographics and local requirements and makes recommendations in respect of schools with falling enrolments.

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

(i) Financial Issues

Consider the overall deployment of resources across the education system in Northern Ireland and assess how effective this is in delivering a high quality education system.

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

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

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

a. Delegated Schools Budgets

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

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

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

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

- Floor Related Premises Factor;
- Small Schools Support; and
- Teacher Salary Protection Factor.

These three factors, taken together, account for £58.0m (or 5.8%) of the delegated schools budget.

If it is accepted that these factors support the current pupils (322,000) and 50,000 (estimated) surplus places currently in the Education System in Northern Ireland, then it can be estimated that a significant rationalisation programme will release 13.4% (50k as a percentage of 372k supported places) of this funding, or **£7.6m**.

b. Board Centre Budgets

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

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

It should be noted that, of the factors outlined above, only the Landlord Maintenance and Rates factor could expect to see a significant reduction in funding distributed if major rationalisation were to take

place. This factor accounts for £49.9m (or 13.3%) of the Board Centre Budget.

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

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

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

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

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

c. Potential amendments to Funding for Schools

It is the view of the Board that it is impossible for the present LMS Common Funding Formula to fund appropriately the vast range of school types and sizes in Northern Ireland, eg from as small as that on Rathlin Island and as large as Methodist College. The Board would advocate that staffing (particularly teaching) costs be centrally funded and managed whilst still providing choice and management discretion at local level through delegation of other resources and teaching resources allocated on a PTR basis. (The Devolved School Management model in Scotland is worthy of consideration in this respect). The Board believes that it would be beneficial to analyse the proportion of teaching costs to total delegated schools budgets. Such

an analysis would illustrate the degree to which schools' viability is determined by the age profile and experience of its teaching staff. A sound source of this information could be collated from the LMS Out-turn Statements for 2005/06, shortly due for completion.

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

There needs to be a standardised approach to funding from the ESA in light of the variations that exist within Boards currently, in respect of delegated and non-delegated funds. It is recommended that there should be a transfer of all earmarked funding to core funding. A major concern is the timeliness of the inception of the ESA in light of the funding allocation for 2008/09. A major part of the planning precedes the April 2008 implementation date. There will need to be interim arrangements put in place to ensure consistency of approach in all aspects of financial planning. This would need to start in April 2007. This approach would also ensure that those schools which are depending on earmarked funds would not be in the high risk category they are presently in. They could make better medium to long-term plans knowing the financial resources are available and this would obviously help to stabilise the learning and teaching environment in such schools.

The introduction of the Consistent Financial Reporting Model developed by DfES would be an excellent benchmark tool to enable meaningful comparisons of expenditure across sectors.

Compare the overall funding available to the education system in NI with funding made available elsewhere

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

Compare Pupil/Teacher Ratios in Western Board Area Schools

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

WELB Schools			
Sector	Total (WTE) Enrolment at October 2005	Teaching WTE at January 2006	Average PTR
Nursery	631	24.00	26.27
Primary	29,806	1,400.19	21.29
Post-Primary	14,867	1,033.58	14.38
Controlled Grammar	2,464	154.30	15.97
Totals	47,768	2,612.08	18.29

A complete analysis is included in Appendix A (attached).

In analysing these figures it should be noted that, in addition to Core Delegated Funding, schools also access funding in earmarked initiatives such as Class Size, Reading Recovery, P1 Initiative and Making a Good Start (MAGS) Initiative which can result in employment of additional teaching staff.

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

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

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

Within the Board there are currently 229 schools, excluding VGS and GMIS, with the following range of enrolment numbers:

Primary & Nursery Sector (Controlled, Maintained and IM)			
Enrolment Range	Number of Schools	Total (WTE) Enrolment at October 2005	Average Enrolment at October 2005
0 – 40 Pupils	25	753	30
41-80 Pupils	58	3,290	57
81 – 160 Pupils	50	5,553	111
161 – 300 Pupils	34	7,667	225
Over 300 Pupils	29	13,174	454
Totals	196	30,437	155

Post Primary (Controlled, Maintained excl. VGS & GMIS)			
Enrolment Range	Number of Schools	Total (WTE) Enrolment at October 2005	Average Enrolment at October 2005
0 – 250 Pupils	8	1,460	183
251- 400 Pupils	7	2,089	298
401 – 600 Pupils	6	2,759	460
600 – 900 Pupils	6	4,835	806
Over 900 Pupils	6	6,188	1,031
Totals	33	17,331	525

Cost/Benefit of an Investment/Rationalisation Programme

There needs to be an acceptance that there will be massive investment over the next decade. An unprecedented opportunity now exists to replace a significant number of outdated school buildings but only if the formula for investment is right and people believe that it is going to happen. There is now an exciting opportunity to consider what new buildings are needed, where they should be and what facilities they should have. A strategic overview is required, led by a clear educational vision for local provision, taking all local needs, aspirations and social and economic factors into consideration.

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

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

- Long-term pupil numbers;
- Projected requirement by sector;
- Geographic dispersal of pupils in catchment area;
- Reasonable travelling distance/time for pupils in primary/post primary sector;
- Acceptability to local community;
- Recurrent costs of current provision (including backlog maintenance, rates and transport costs);
- Recurrent costs of planned provision (including transport amalgamation costs);
- Capital costs of proposed development;
- Procurement vehicle (Conventional/PPP); and
- Equality.

(ii) Strategic Planning of the Schools' Estate

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

There is a need for long-term strategic planning by each sector. There is also a need for an over-arching strategic plan which co-ordinates these plans. In particular geographical areas, CCMS, the Boards and other sectors, need to converge with their planning.

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

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

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

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

The Board consults widely on any rationalisation proposals. Comprehensive consultation is held initially with the Board of Governors, Principal and Board representatives to consider any proposed rationalisation. Consultation is also held with parents of pupils attending the school as well as teaching and non-teaching staff prior to a Development Proposal being published. A Development Proposal is published to give all interested parties and local communities a forum to express their comments and is a statutory requirement for any proposed rationalisation and informs the Minister's final decision on the Development Proposal.

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

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

Within any educational establishment surplus capacity will exist as a result of migration of families and smaller family units. With the current embargo on rural planning, it is inevitable that further surplus capacity will occur in rural schools and any surplus capacity in urban schools will decrease. Another issue to be addressed is the influx of foreign nationals to Northern Ireland and the need to take account of educational provision for their children.

As a result of the aforementioned points, and parental choice, an appropriate level of surplus capacity will be difficult to estimate.

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

One very important factor in estate planning must be the demographic information relevant to the supply of school places. This will include information on the socio-economic context including population trends (actual and projected), planned development, religious make-up of the area, actual birth rates and local information about the school age population.

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

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

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

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

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

With the provision of funding under Extended Schools as well as the Children and Young Persons Funding, there is a need in planning to look at the community as well as the pupils with regard to the added value aspects of any development and design of buildings fit for both the current and projected needs and use of premises.

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

The Entitlement Framework provides an excellent incentive for collaboration at post primary level. Schools have largely accepted its rationale and welcome the principle of the provision of a much wider range of general and applied courses. It is essential to maximise the potential of the Entitlement Framework in developing an education system. In order to ensure clarity of purpose and direction there should be effective strategic leadership, co-ordinated by the new ESA, to give direction to local partnership working and ensure that all stakeholders are working in concert.

(iii) Integrating Education and Improving Collaboration

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

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

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

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

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

Opposition to rationalisation and collaborative provision often stems from parents and the public rather than educational professionals. Recent media coverage has alerted the public to the realities of the economic position of the education sector. However, a Communications Strategy could do more to promote the benefits of the changes, including the Revised Curriculum, to young people, their futures and their economic well-being. Parents want what is best for their

children; the new ESA must demonstrate that these changes constitute what is best for children and young people and not just economic expediency.

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

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

Some suggested models of collaboration and sharing are:

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

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

The contents of this Draft Response are aimed at ultimately moving schools towards province-wide change which is financially sustainable and viable and where a curriculum appropriate for the 21st century is delivered in a fit-for-purpose schools' estate.