

SUB/18/2004 (Jan)

FROM: David Woods
Head of Curriculum & Post Primary Review

DATE: 16 January 2004

To: Jane Kennedy

cc see distribution below

ANNOUNCEMENT ON COSTELLO

Objective: To provide further material associated with the launch, for your consideration.

Timescale: URGENT.

Recommendation: That you consider the enclosed material (Commons Statement and Newspaper article) and let us have any amendments required.
That you agree to the proposed letters to other Education Ministers and to your local Ministerial colleagues.

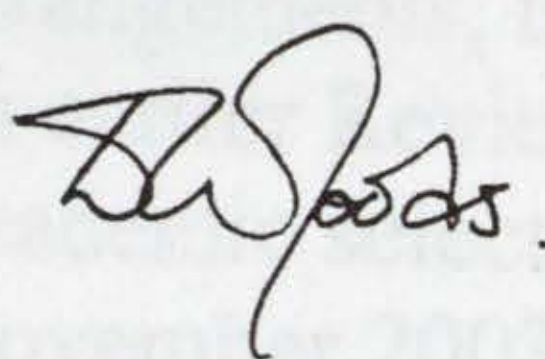
Presentational Issues: This is part of the overall launch strategy, in which EIS colleagues are closely involved.

Background

In anticipation of clearance of the text of the announcement, we have prepared the enclosed draft Commons Statement and newspaper article. The latter will appear in the News Letter and Irish News on the morning after the launch.

2. You are also due to meet Charles Clarke next Tuesday afternoon to update him on our plans. We have been in touch with his officials to assist them in providing suitable briefing. In so doing, we have provided them with an advance copy of the Commons statement (explaining that it is draft only, pending your clearance). As well as being a succinct way of explaining what we are about, this is particularly relevant to them in that, when the statement issues, it will likely be the basis on which any subsequent questions arise for DfES.
3. The draft newspaper article has also had the benefit of drafting input from Press Office.
4. As a matter of courtesy, and also so that they can respond on an informed basis to any issues raised in their respective jurisdictions, we need to provide advance copies of the report and our main 'lines-to-take' to the other 3 Education ministers. In addition, direct rule Ministers need to be up to speed, as they could easily be doorstepped about aspects of the announcement. Two template letters with which the material would issue to Education Ministers and NI Ministers are attached for clearance. We would aim to get these out by no later than the middle of next week.

5. A draft press release is currently in hand and will be forwarded as soon as possible. It can be cleared as part of the pre-brief/rehearsal session next week. There are also some remaining items of background briefing which will be included in the final briefing pack.



David Woods

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cc **Gerry McGinn**
Eddie Rooney
Stephen Grimason
John McKervill
Jill Garrett
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Entitlement Framework

The central focus of the Working Group's advice is that all children should have guaranteed access to a wide choice of educational provision, irrespective of where they live or the school they attend. The Group recommended a curriculum 'Entitlement Framework' which aims to guarantee that every pupil, including those with special educational needs, should have access to a wide

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Draft Written Ministerial Statement for House of Commons [to be amended for House of Lords]

Today I am announcing my decisions about future arrangements for post-primary education in Northern Ireland. This is in response to advice from a Working Group which I established last May, under the chairmanship of Mr Steve Costello. The Group was asked to give me advice about new arrangements, taking account of the responses to the extensive consultation on an earlier Review (the Burns report), including the diversity of views on academic selection. The Working Group gave me its advice at the end of November 2003. I want to pay tribute to Steve Costello and the members of the Group for the time and commitment they gave to this task.

I have considered the Group's advice. I believe it provides a sound basis for moving forward and I have accepted its recommendations. I am publishing the Working Group's advice in full, and a copy has been placed in the Library.

It would have been preferable for a devolved Assembly to take decisions on these issues. However, the review has been ongoing for over 5 years. In the interests of pupils, parents and schools, it is time to end the uncertainty about the shape of future post-primary education in Northern Ireland.

Despite the generally high reputation of our schools, the current transfer and post-primary arrangements have significant weaknesses. They do well for some pupils, but less well for others. The recent PISA research shows that the gap between the highest and lowest scores in Northern Ireland is among the widest of the participating countries. We need to address these weaknesses and focus on raising standards for all pupils. We also need to ensure that the schools' estate is properly structured to reflect the decline in the school age population.

Each child deserves the best possible education relevant to his or her needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations. They must be equipped with the subject knowledge and the skills that are required in today's world. These include ICT skills and wider technical and vocational skills. Currently, the range of subjects that pupils can access is extremely uneven and there is under-representation of vocational provision.

Entitlement Framework

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range of learning opportunities. I endorse this view. We must keep pupils' options open rather than closing them down.

Fundamentally, the Entitlement Framework aims to secure:

- a sound general education for all pupils in the early part of secondary school, with the end of Key Stage 3 being the first major decision point about learning pathways, and subsequent provision increasingly reflecting pupils' personal choice;
- at Key Stage 4, all pupils should have access to a menu of at least 24 courses, of which at least one third should be vocational and at least one third academic;
- at Post-16 stage, all pupils should have access to a menu of at least 27 courses. Again at least one third should be vocational and at least one third academic.

This marks a significant and exciting new approach to post-primary provision in Northern Ireland. Traditional academic courses remain important and these will still be available. But so too will an increasing range of vocational opportunities relevant to the world of work, a focus on key skills, and access to a range of enrichment opportunities and to high quality careers education and guidance. Together these will provide a broader and more rounded educational experience, and provide additional stimulus, interest and motivation.

The Entitlement Framework will provide a much greater range of courses than the vast majority of schools currently provide and will require schools to work together and with Further Education colleges. I do not propose to prescribe how this should be done, as I believe the arrangements will be best decided at local level.

Transfer

In October 2002, I announced that the Transfer Tests should end as soon as practicable. This requires that there should first be alternative arrangements in place to transfer pupils from primary to post-primary school.

The Group looked at alternative selection systems and concluded that none would be any less problematic than the current arrangements, which entail significant stress for many pupils and can distort the learning experiences of children in upper primary school. It also concluded that it was educationally unsound to select pupils at age 11, which is too early to commit pupils to particular pathways; and unsound also to believe that the more able should follow only academic courses.

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Academic selection will end, but the Group recognised that an academic route should be available for those who wish to follow this pathway. In future, pupils and parents will choose this route rather than pupils being selected for it.

New transfer arrangements will be based on informed parental and pupil choice. Parents will be better informed about the options and opportunities available for their children in post-primary schools. The proposed Pupil Profile will also provide parents with better information about their child's needs, interests and aptitudes. Whatever decision is taken, it will not commit a child absolutely to a particular route. The system will have the flexibility to respond to pupils' changing needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations as they mature.

Admissions

Some post-primary schools will remain very popular even when the new arrangements are in place. Schools must have clear criteria to determine which pupils should be admitted if they have more applications than places. More work is required to determine the criteria. The Department of Education will be taking this forward immediately, with the key interests, with the aim of having a list of potential criteria for consideration by the end of the year.

School Structures

The Entitlement Framework is central to future arrangements. It will secure consistent provision for all pupils across all areas. Any school offering access to the Entitlement Framework has a place in the new arrangements, and the Working Group's report provides examples of a range of possible models.

There has been speculation about imposing a single type of school system and about closing grammar schools. I want to make clear that I am not imposing a "one size fits all" system or specifying what types of school should exist. New arrangements will be developed at local level taking account of local needs, wishes and circumstances.

Nor am I closing grammar schools. Schools where the curricular emphasis is on academic courses will continue to exist, provided they meet the Entitlement Framework. This will mean offering, or offering access to, a range of vocational courses in addition to the traditional academic courses.

New types of arrangements will be considered. This opens up the possibility of new school types, such as specialist schools which are able to respond to local opportunities or needs, for example in ICT, leisure and tourism or in horticulture.

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Implementation

The implementation process will involve groups of schools working together in local areas together with Further Education colleges to develop the arrangements for that area. The Group's report outlines how this should be done. Schools must continue to give priority to the needs of their pupils and arrangements will be put in place to help schools through the change process by supporting and facilitating local discussion and decision-making.

My officials, in conjunction with our education partners, will be taking forward consideration of related policy issues such as school transport, open enrolment and the arrangements for funding schools. This work, together with the work on admissions criteria, will provide opportunities for consultation with our education partners and others on the details of these aspects of the proposals.

Resources

The changes will not come without a financial cost. It is not possible to put a figure on the overall costs until decisions begin to emerge at local level. However, I will be working with my Ministerial colleagues to ensure that the necessary resources are made available.

Conclusion

These decisions are about much more than ending the Transfer Tests. They are a new and bold approach to provide an educational entitlement for every pupil at post-primary level. I believe that in due course this should be given statutory authority.

Alongside parallel work on implementing a revised curriculum, significant changes will emerge from the increasing application of ICT, where the necessary infrastructure is being put in place. The schools' estate is in need of urgent review and updating, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the new Strategic Investment Programme. Together, these amount to a major programme of modernisation and improvement which will enhance the educational opportunities and the life chances for all pupils.

Northern Ireland has highly trained, committed and professional teachers. They are well placed to provide the educational opportunities that will address the needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations of all pupils. We need to prepare pupils for life and work in a modern technological world and a global economic market where the pace of change is accelerating. My decisions today create the conditions to take this forward, to raise standards for all pupils and provide the world-class education they rightly deserve.

Draft newspaper article

Yesterday I announced my decisions about future arrangements for post-primary education and the Transfer Tests. These are very important decisions for education in Northern Ireland.

These issues have been debated intensely over the years, reflecting the importance which people attach to the education of their children. I am very grateful to the Working Group chaired by Steve Costello for its work in developing recommendations on these complex issues.

I asked the Working Group to give me advice about new arrangements taking account of the responses to the extensive consultation on the Burns Report. I have carefully considered the Group's advice. I believe it provides a sound basis for moving forward and I have accepted its recommendations. I have also published the Group's advice for everyone to see.

It is time to make decisions on these issues. Further general consultation would simply be a rerun of old arguments and would take us no further forward. My decisions will end the uncertainty about the future arrangements and chart a way forward which will be to the advantage of all young people.

I can now put an end to the speculation about the Transfer Tests. I have decided that the final tests will be held in Autumn 2008. I know this will disappoint some, but the reality is that other changes have to be in place so that transfer can take place without tests, and these will take time. Pupils currently in P2 will be the last to sit the tests.

However, my decisions are about much more than ending the tests. They are based on the principle of putting pupils' needs above all other considerations. Every child deserves the best possible education relevant to his or her needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations. It should be enjoyable and prepare them for life and work in the 21st Century.

From 11-14, all pupils will follow a broad and balanced curriculum. At age 14, pupils and parents will then make decisions about the types of courses to be followed. I believe every pupil should have choice and flexibility in the courses they follow so that they can keep their options open for as long as possible.

To provide that choice and flexibility, I want all pupils to have access to a guaranteed minimum number of courses called an Entitlement Framework. Alongside traditional academic courses, all pupils will have access to vocational courses to provide the skills and experience more directly relevant to the wide range of jobs available now and in the future.

This will provide a much broader range of courses than the vast majority of schools currently provide. To make this choice available will require schools to work together and a new era of schools working with further education colleges.

The Costello Group was asked to take account of the views expressed in the Burns consultation, including the diversity of views on academic selection. The Group concluded that it was not possible to devise a suitable alternative to the current tests and it also considered it was wrong, in principle, to categorise pupils at age 11. It therefore recommended that academic selection should end and I have accepted the Group's advice.

On the future of grammar schools, I can tell you that they, along with all other types of post-primary schools, will have a place under the new arrangements. There will be an academic route for those who want it and all pupils, including those in grammar schools, will also have access to a range of vocational courses.

In future, transfer decisions should be based on parental choice informed by advice from the primary school and information in the Pupil Profile. This, together with information about post-primary schools, will help parents to make decisions about which schools best meet their child's needs.

Some post-primary schools will remain very popular even when the new arrangements are in place. It will be important that they have clear criteria to determine which pupils should be admitted if they have more applications than places. More work is required to determine what those criteria should be, and the Department of Education will be taking this forward.

Work on developing the new arrangements will begin almost immediately. Schools will be working together to decide the best way to provide education for pupils in their area. This could involve the establishment of new school types such as specialist schools which would have expertise in specific curriculum areas alongside the normal range of courses. These could be in areas such as ICT, or leisure and tourism, or horticulture. There will be opportunities for parents to be consulted and their views considered at local level as proposals for new arrangements are being developed.

The changes to post-primary education are part of a major programme of modernisation and improvement in education in Northern Ireland. Other elements include implementing the revised curriculum, the increasing role of ICT in schools as the necessary infrastructure is put in place, and the Strategic Investment Programme, which is providing the resources to modernise and update the schools estate.

IN CONFIDENCE

Northern Ireland is fortunate in having highly trained, committed and professional teachers. They are well placed to provide the educational opportunities that will address the needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations of all pupils. We need to prepare pupils for life and work in a modern technological world and a global economic market where the pace of change is accelerating. My decisions create the conditions to take this forward, to raise standards for all pupils and provide the world-class education they rightly deserve.

Notes:

- The Report of the Post-Primary Working Group (Costello Report) is available on the Department of Education website: www.deni.gov.uk/pprb
- A leaflet summarising the Minister's decisions is being distributed to every household in Northern Ireland.

The Review of Post-Primary Education in Northern Ireland has been ongoing since 1998 when research was commissioned by Tony Worthington into the effects of the selective system of education. The publication of the research findings was followed by the establishment of an independent Review Body, an extensive consultation on its recommendations and finally the setting up of the Costello Group. The group, which comprised members drawn from the main education organisations in Northern Ireland, was established to provide me with advice on future arrangements for transfer and post-primary education.

The Review has generated great debate in Northern Ireland and I trust you will read the report and my statement on future post-primary arrangements with interest.

RT HON JANE KENNEDY MP
Minister with responsibility for Education

IN CONFIDENCE

This letter should issue to:

Charles Clarke

Jim Wallace

Jane Davidson

January 2004

**REVIEW OF POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION: ANNOUNCEMENT OF
FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS**

I will be making an announcement on future post-primary arrangements in Northern Ireland on 26 January. In advance of my announcement please find enclosed a copy of my statement and the advice which I received from the Post-Primary Review Working Group (Costello Group). I have also enclosed lines to take on some of the key issues which may be useful should you be asked for comment. I know you will appreciate the need for complete confidentiality until after my announcement.

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This letter should issue to:

Secretary of State

Angela Smith

John Spellar

Ian Pearson

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As you will be aware, this announcement marks the culmination of a long period of debate and consultation and will attract a high level of interest over the coming weeks.

I trust you will read the report and my statement on future post-primary arrangements with interest. If you or your departmental officials need any assistance in dealing with any queries please contact the Private Office in the Department of Education.

RT HON JANE KENNEDY

Minister with responsibility for Education