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## NORTHERN IRELAND Information Service

5 October 1988

### EDUCATION REFORM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Education Minister, Dr Brian Mawhinney, today announced the Government's decisions on the education reform proposals for Northern Ireland.

Introducing a Department of Education document, setting out the framework of Government's decisions, Dr Mawhinney said:

" This paper outlines the main decisions which the Government has now reached on education reform in Northern Ireland, in light of views received on the consultation paper which issued in March last. The consultation paper drew a considerable volume of comment and I would like to thank all those who took the time to prepare reasoned and constructive responses. On a number of occasions I have been at pains to emphasise that we were involved in a genuine consultative process and that my mind was open to constructive suggestions as to how the proposals might be refined. All the responses, ranging from the Education and Library Boards right

through to individual parents, were considered very carefully and have informed our thinking as we moved towards decisions on the way forward. It would clearly be impossible to accommodate all the advice we received, since some of the views expressed were mutually contradictory. In the final analysis, we have made the decisions which in our judgment are in the best long-term educational interests of all the children of Northern Ireland.

" The decisions set out in this paper represent, in a number of important areas, significant changes to the earlier proposals which result directly from views expressed on the consultation paper; for example, the dropping of the proposal for grant-maintained schools, the adoption of a more flexible approach to the common curriculum and the package of measures to aid the growth of integrated education.

" I am satisfied that what has emerged will best meet the particular needs and circumstances of Northern Ireland, while retaining the essential thrust of the Government's education policy for the United Kingdom as a whole."

Dr Mawhinney added:

" These are the right decisions for Northern Ireland and will lay the firm foundations of an education system designed to promote breadth and excellence. They will lead to the development of a better education service, will raise educational standards, will give parents a greater say in the education of their children and will devolve real power to those most closely involved in the running of our schools and colleges.

" It is now my intention to publish as early as possible next year a Proposal for a Draft Order in Council. This will provide a further opportunity for public consultation and comment. I am also renewing my commitment to continuing dialogue with major interests while the draft legislation is proceeding. When the Order becomes law much work will still remain to be done on the actual implementation of the new arrangements and both I and my Department intend to have further discussions with major education bodies, in particular the Boards,

throughout this process."

Dr Mawhinney outlined the main decisions set out in the document as follows:

- a curriculum common to all schools, not based on foundation subjects as originally proposed, but with 6 broad areas of study within which certain subjects will be compulsory;
- formal assessment of pupils at ages 8, 11, 14 and 16 against specified assessment criteria;
- Religious Education to be a compulsory part of the curriculum in all schools, alongside the 6 areas of study;
- all secondary pupils to study French, German or Spanish. The Irish language will have its own attainment targets, programme of study and assessment criteria which schools may apply to pupils taking Irish as an additional modern language, broadly equivalent to the position of Welsh in schools in Wales;
- the proposal for grant-maintained schools to be dropped but provision to be made for schools to become grant-maintained integrated schools;
- introduction of a new package of measures to facilitate the growth of integrated schools, including financial assistance in the early stages of development of new integrated schools and the introduction of a statutory requirement for Government to encourage integrated education;
- removal of restrictions on school intakes so as to give parents greater freedom of choice of schools for their children;
- transfer of pupils to secondary school to be on the basis of pupils' records of achievement in primary school, including assessments at ages 8 and 11, instead of the present centrally

administered verbal reasoning tests; and abolition of "quotas" for pupils transferring to grammar schools;

- schools (starting with secondary schools) and Further Education colleges to have control over their own budgets;

- changes to the composition of Further Education college Boards of Governors so that they reflect more closely the colleges' responsibilities.

Dr Mawhinney referred first to the decisions which had been taken on the curriculum and said:

"In reaching decisions in this vital area we have endeavoured to meet the concerns which many expressed that the original proposals for 8 foundation subjects could overcrowd the curriculum and would inhibit unnecessarily the flexibility schools need when planning their course provision, particularly in the later years of secondary education. The arrangements now proposed represent a more flexible approach in that the curriculum will be defined in legislation in terms of areas of study within which certain subjects will be formally assessed. The emphasis will be on a curriculum which is broad, balanced and coherent and to which all children will have equal access, irrespective of the type of school they attend or where they live.

"In particular we have responded to those who were concerned about the position of the Irish language and Religious Education in the curriculum. Under the common curriculum all pupils in secondary schools will have to study a modern European language - French, German or Spanish. This is vitally important for the future employment prospects of all our young people who, as 1992 approaches, must be able to compete as equals with their European counterparts in an increasingly international job market. However, the Government remains sensitive to the sincerely held views of those for whom the

Irish language is an integral part of their tradition and culture. In light of this the arrangements proposed for Irish are in effect broadly analogous to those which will apply to the Welsh language in schools in Wales.

" A number of respondents, including some of those who were concerned about the position of Irish, felt that all pupils should have access at school to information about the various aspects of history, culture and traditions which go to make up the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland. The Government agrees that this could contribute to a reduction in the ignorance of each other's values which many believe is a major contributory factor to our divided society. Cultural Heritage, together with elements of Education for Mutual Understanding which has already proved beneficial in promoting cross-community contact among schools, will therefore be included among a number of educational themes which must be contained in every pupils' curriculum but which will normally be taught on a cross-curricular basis.

"The position of Religious Education will be re-stated in law as an integral and central part of the curriculum of all schools. I believe that this will be warmly welcomed by all those who submitted views on this matter. In addition, I propose to invite the main Churches to collaborate in preparing a programme of study which schools could use as the basis of their RE provision."

On support arrangements for the curriculum Dr Mawhinney said:

"School Boards of Governors and principals will be responsible for securing the implementation of the curriculum in their schools and they will need help to do this. We have decided, therefore, that the Education and Library Boards should be responsible for developing and maintaining appropriate advisory and support services which they should make available to all schools in their areas, both controlled and voluntary. This will be a crucial factor in the successful implementation of the new curricular arrangements and the leading role which is being given to the Boards in this exercise reflects the

importance which Government attaches to their continued close involvement in such key areas of educational provision."

On the associated matter of assessment and testing Dr Mawhinney said:

" Responses to the consultative paper endorsed the Government's view that a method of assessing pupils progress is an essential part of ensuring that every child is receiving the maximum benefit from his or her education. We have decided, therefore, that arrangements will be made for the formal assessment of pupils' progress at ages 8, 11, 14 and 16. The assessment arrangements will be broadly in line with the recommendations, for England and Wales, of the report of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing. Assessment will not, however, as many seem to think be confined simply to pencil and paper tests but will embrace all aspects of the pupil's performance in class, including practical work and listening and speaking skills. We have decided that the first assessment should be at age 8 rather than 7 as in England and Wales, largely to take account of some differences between Northern Ireland and England and Wales in the organisation of primary education at the lower age level."

He added:

" Taken together, the common curriculum and the arrangements for formal assessment at key stages throughout every pupil's school career will provide the springboard for what I believe will be a significant improvement in performance throughout the school system, by setting clear objectives and a clear expectation of what children can and should reasonably achieve at the various stages of primary and secondary education. At secondary level, for the first time all pupils, whether they attend grammar or intermediate schools, will follow a common curriculum right through to 16 - and be assessed along the way in a number of key subjects against common attainment targets and by means of the same objective, externally moderated, assessment arrangements. These measures will, I am convinced, go a very long way towards enabling all secondary schools to strive for

the highest possible levels of performance and parental esteem. Arguably, implementation of these proposals will be the single most important factor in raising educational standards in all schools."

Turning to grant-maintained schools Dr Mawhinney said:

" The great majority of those who responded to the consultative paper were totally opposed, in the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, to schools having the right to opt for the status of "ordinary" grant-maintained school. We have decided, therefore, not to proceed with these proposals.

" On the other hand, many respondents saw the concept of the grant-maintained integrated school as a welcome development which could make a positive contribution to the breaking down of the traditional sectarian barriers in Northern Ireland. We will, therefore, be moving ahead with grant-maintained integrated schools. In addition we have decided to build on the breadth of support for integrated education expressed during the consultative process, when many respondents urged that additional steps be taken to enable parental demand for integrated education to be met. The Government intends therefore to introduce a range of measures designed both to facilitate the expression of parental wishes for integrated education and to support the establishment of integrated schools. These will include:

- provision for schools to opt for grant-maintained integrated status;
- the retention of existing legislation for controlled integrated schools, but in a form which will give greater recognition to parents' wishes;
- the introduction into legislation for the first time of a statutory responsibility on Government to encourage integrated education - this may be achieved in part through an independent body assisted by

public funding;

- financial help for newly established integrated schools at an early stage of their development; and

- priority to be given to capital projects for the provision of additional pupil places in integrated schools."

Referring to the decisions in the area of parental choice Dr Mawhinney said:

" The Government believes as a matter of principle that parents have the ultimate responsibility for the education of their children. For the first time all parents in Northern Ireland will have the right, under the law, to state a preference for the primary or secondary school they wish their children to attend. This preference will normally be met, subject to the physical capacity of the school and except where, in a small number of cases, admission to a grammar school would not be in the best educational interests of a pupil. To facilitate this process we are removing all arbitrary quotas and administrative restrictions on school admission levels - henceforth the only restriction will be the physical capacity of the school. Normally therefore, a school will not be permitted to turn away pupils so long as it has vacant places remaining. Where a school is over-subscribed, it must select its pupils on the basis of previously published criteria."

On the subject of transfer from primary to secondary school Dr Mawhinney said:

" The Government agrees with the general consensus of opinion that the new form of assessment should be used in place of the present verbal reasoning tests as the basis for transfer at age 11. After the new arrangements are introduced, therefore, the 11+ transfer procedure as we know it will be abolished and so too will be the fixed quota for pupils transferring to grammar schools. This will

make a further major contribution to the widening of parental choice at secondary level. With the removal of the quota, there will be no justification for the charging of tuition fees in the secondary departments of grammar schools and these will therefore be abolished. However, while these arrangements will undoubtedly result in an increase in the numbers of parents opting for a grammar school education for their children, it is not our intention that grammar schools should have to drop their academic standards to an unacceptable level in order to accommodate all those pupils whose parents wish them to be admitted. In exceptional cases, therefore, grammar schools may seek approval from my Department to enrol fewer pupils than they would otherwise have to where they consider that the admission of certain pupils would not be in the pupils' best educational interests, given the academic emphasis of the school."

Turning to financial delegation to schools and colleges and changes to college governing bodies Dr Mawhinney said:

"The Government considers that those who are most closely involved in the organisation and running of our schools and colleges are in the best position to decide how available resources should be deployed. We have decided, therefore, to proceed with the proposals for the delegation of financial powers and responsibilities to the Boards of Governors of all secondary schools and Further Education colleges. This facility may be extended in due course to other schools as considered appropriate.

"We will also be proceeding with changes to the composition of Boards of Governors of Further Education colleges in order to give them a more appropriate balance of membership in relation to their responsibilities."

In conclusion Dr Mawhinney said:

" The Government is determined to see these changes successfully

implemented and we are seeking the whole-hearted co-operation and goodwill of all those who work within the education system in Northern Ireland to ensure that they take place as quickly as possible in the best interests of all our young people.

" The contribution which teachers, and in particular head-teachers, will make to this task will be crucial. We in Northern Ireland are extremely fortunate in the high standards of professionalism and dedication which the vast majority of teachers bring to their duties in our schools and colleges and our young people have good cause to be grateful to them for this. I have no doubt that in the important days ahead our teachers will play a key role in ensuring the successful implementation of these measures. Success is vital if our young people are to be suitably prepared to meet the demands and challenges of the 21st century."

\* \* EMBARGO WEDNESDAY 5 OCTOBER 1988 11.00AM \* \*

## EDUCATION REFORM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

## EXPLANATORY NOTE

AREAS OF STUDY: ENGLISH  
 MATHEMATICS  
 SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
 THE ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY  
 CREATIVE AND EXPRESSIVE STUDIES  
 LANGUAGE STUDIES (secondary schools only)

COMPULSORY SUBJECTS:	YEARS 1 - 10	YEARS 11 & 12
	ENGLISH*	ENGLISH*
	MATHEMATICS*	MATHEMATICS*
	SCIENCE*	SCIENCE* <u>or</u> CHEMISTRY*,
	TECHNOLOGY*	PHYSICS* & BIOLOGY*
	HISTORY*	TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN*
	GEOGRAPHY*	<u>or</u> CDT*
	FRENCH*/GERMAN*/	HISTORY* <u>or</u> GEOGRAPHY*
	SPANISH*(secs only)	FRENCH*/GERMAN*/SPANISH*
	ART & DESIGN	ART & DESIGN <u>or</u> MUSIC
	MUSIC	<u>or</u> DRAMA
	PE	PE

(\*= FORMAL ASSESSMENT IN THIS SUBJECT)

CROSS-CURRICULAR THEMES: YEARS 1-7  
 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
 EDUCATION FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING  
 CULTURAL HERITAGE  
 HEALTH EDUCATION

YEARS 8-12  
 ALL THE ABOVE, PLUS:  
 ECONOMIC AWARENESS  
 CAREERS EDUCATION

PROGRAMMES OF STUDY TO BE INTRODUCED FIRST IN ENGLISH, MATHS, SCIENCE  
 AND TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN

TRANSFER ON NEW BASIS 4 YEARS AFTER THE PROGRAMMES OF STUDY IN (AT  
 LEAST) ENGLISH, MATHS AND SCIENCE HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED

4 MAIN CHURCHES TO BE ASKED TO DRAW UP PROGRAMME OF STUDY FOR RE

\* \* EMBARGO WEDNESDAY 5 OCTOBER 1988 11.00AM \* \*

## EDUCATION REFORM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

### THE MAIN FEATURES

- \* A CURRICULUM COMMON TO ALL SCHOOLS, WITH 6 AREAS OF STUDY WITHIN WHICH CERTAIN SUBJECTS WILL BE COMPULSORY [SEE OVER]
- \* CURRICULUM OF ALL PUPILS TO INCLUDE HEALTH EDUCATION, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND EDUCATION FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING
- \* 12-YEAR PRESCRIBED PROGRAMMES OF STUDY IN ALL SUBJECTS LISTED, STARTING WITH COMPULSORY SUBJECTS
- \* FORMAL ASSESSMENT IN YEARS 4, 7, 10 AND 12 OF THE PROGRAMMES OF STUDY (AGES 8, 11, 14 AND 16)
- \* RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TO BE PLACED ALONGSIDE, AND EQUALLY IMPORTANT TO, THE PRESCRIBED AREAS OF STUDY
- \* IRISH TO HAVE ITS OWN PROGRAMME OF STUDY AND ASSESSMENT, BUT SECONDARY PUPILS MUST STILL TAKE FRENCH, SPANISH OR GERMAN
- \* A STATUTORY NI CURRICULUM COUNCIL TO BE SET UP, AND NISEC'S REMIT BROADENED TO INCLUDE ASSESSMENT AT ALL 4 STAGES
- \* NO MORE ARTIFICIAL RESTRICTIONS ON SCHOOL INTAKES, SO INCREASING PARENTS' FREEDOM TO CHOOSE SCHOOLS
- \* VERBAL REASONING TEST ABOLISHED: TRANSFER TO BE ON THE BASIS OF PUPIL'S PRIMARY RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT, INCLUDING YEAR 4 AND YEAR 7 ASSESSMENTS, SO NO MORE "QUOTAS" OF PUPILS TRANSFERRING TO GRAMMAR SCHOOLS
- \* CONTROL OF SCHOOL BUDGETS TO BE HANDED OVER TO BOARDS OF GOVERNORS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS, AND POSSIBLY TO PRIMARIES LATER
- \* ALL PRIMARIES TO HAVE CONTROL OVER PART OF THEIR BUDGETS
- \* PROPOSAL FOR GRANT-MAINTAINED STATUS IS DROPPED
- \* NEW INTEGRATED EDUCATION PACKAGE:
  - GRANT-MAINTAINED INTEGRATED STATUS
  - CONTROLLED INTEGRATED STATUS PROVISIONS RETAINED
  - STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITY ON DENI TO ENCOURAGE IE
  - MEANS OF HELPING IE SCHOOLS IN THEIR EARLY STAGES
  - CAPITAL PRIORITY FOR ADDITIONAL PLACES AT IE SCHOOLS
- \* CONTROL OF FE COLLEGE BUDGETS TO BE HANDED OVER TO GOVERNING BODIES, WHICH WILL THEMSELVES BE REFORMED AND RECONSTITUTED