

Annex B

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC FORUM WORKING GROUP ON 'INCLUSION AND PROSPERITY'

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SECURE IMPROVED OUTCOMES FROM EDUCATION

The Minister requested the Strategic Forum to consider how the education system might more effectively contribute to promoting inclusion and prosperity for all young people in Northern Ireland. The Strategic Forum tasked a Working Group representative of the broad constituency of the Forum to develop its response.

Introduction

1. This Working Group of the Strategic Forum set out to consider how the current education system is performing in relation to: educating our young people to play a full role in society; and how their contributions to the economy may be maximised for themselves and for society as a whole. The Group has sought to signpost a direction of travel aimed at promoting a more inclusive and prosperous society and economy. The Working Group hopes that this work may serve to assist the Minister in influencing the content of the next Programme for Government (PfG).

2. The Working Group confined its deliberations, given the potential scale of the task, to consideration of a number of high level key policy drivers and constraints within the current system. The Group's deliberations were informed by its vision of education at the centre of a strong and inclusive society underpinned by a high wage, high skills economy, rather than just considering education and the acquisition of qualifications as an end in itself. The Working Group set out to define at a high level, the broad purposes of education for the individual, the economy and society. It was agreed that education should not be an end in itself; that it should operate on the principle that all learners have talents and abilities; that individuals learn differently and at a varying pace; that they respond to positive reinforcement and recognition of achievement; and that education is about facilitating opportunity for all.

3. In order to manage the work, the group set out two main strands. The first was to consider the effectiveness of the current arrangements for the individual, the economy and society and to consider this in light of how our competitor countries in the UK and beyond perform. The second strand was to improve the means to achieve the Department's five key goals in its Corporate Plan. The Group identified incidences across key policy areas of non-alignment leading to "policy incoherence" inhibiting the delivery of the Department's two main goals particularly that pertaining to 'Closing the Gap' in outcomes for young people from different social backgrounds. These failings create an impediment to achieving inclusion and prosperity. This strand also considered some aspects of the operation and impact of academic selection and other policies affecting school admissions such as Open Enrolment and the absence of specific legislation on Area Planning. In addition the group

considered a range of papers and inputs from the Departments of Education, Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Employment and Learning, from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and other sources including the recently published Ulster University 'Skills Barometer'.

4. The Group identified a range of relevant issues across several aspects of legislation, policy and practice. Not all of these discussions are reflected in this document. The Group recognised that within the limited time span available to it, it could not interrogate all of these issues in detail. This was particularly so with respect to operational practice. The focus, therefore, was to produce a number of high level recommendations which, it is believed, could impact positively in influencing the next Programme for Government 2016/20 by:

- Enhancing the value of education across Government for the benefit of society and the economy;
- Improving the effectiveness of the education system and thereby the quality and outcomes from education for all our young people;
- Increasing access to services in support of inclusion for all our young people.

5. The Group also identified a number of issues which it is suggesting the Executive and the Department of Education investigate further in order that the evidence base on how the current system operates is better informed and how it might be improved.

SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS

1.0 Overview

1.1. Across the four jurisdictions of the UK, education policy is under the leadership of politicians representing radically different, political standpoints. Notwithstanding this, it is the ambition of each to achieve strong economic growth and social cohesion. Progressive nations recognise the critical importance of education as an essential aspect of increasing competitiveness and boosting inward investment.

1.2. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Education International (EI) in 2011 and 2012 identified the UK as one of the 20 highest achieving and fastest improving education systems in the world (OECD, 2012a and 2011), while the outcomes of the 2011 TIMSS and PIRLS studies identified the England and Northern Ireland education systems as particularly effective in relation to pupil achievement in reading, mathematics and science (Mullis et al., 2012a and 2012b; Martin, 2012). These findings were based on the developments initiated by the previous administration from 1997 to 2010. Questions raised by these studies include:

- (i) is this contributing to economic growth and increased wages in NI?
- (ii) is it likely to 'close the gap' in educational outcomes and thereafter promote social inclusion?

“For lower middle income countries, the discounted present value of economic future gains from ensuring that all 15 year olds attain at least the PISA baseline level of performance would be 13 times the current GDP and would average out to a 28% higher GDP over the next 80 years. For upper middle-income countries, which generally show higher learning outcomes, the gains would average out to a 16% higher GDP. In other words, the gains from tackling low performance dwarf any conceivable cost of improvement.” Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills OECD: Low performing students: why they fall behind and how to help them succeed (OECD 2016).

2.0 Comparators in other jurisdictions in Europe

2.1. The OECD paper 'The Impact of the 1999 Education Reform in Poland' (2011) highlights the reasons for the impressive rise in reading and mathematics scores in Poland over a 6 year period from 2000 to 2006. This gives an insight to the effectiveness of system change. The reforms restructured the primary and secondary schooling from an 8 year primary structure followed by 4 year secondary school or 3 year vocational school to a 6 year primary structure followed by the establishment of a 3 year 'gymnasium' course. This is followed by a 3 year secondary (specialised 'Lyceum'). The effect was to postpone for one year, the choice between the secondary level general or vocational curriculum). This was accompanied by curricular reform, increased autonomy for schools and a system of tests and examinations at the end of primary and lower secondary education was introduced. The results of these reforms were significant:

- In PISA tests, Mathematics improved by 0.25 of a standard deviation (SD), in reading an improvement of 0.28 SD and science by 0.16 SD. These figures convert to an improvement for likely vocational students of over 100 points or a full SD.

- In PISA tests from 2000 to 2006, Poland has gone from 479 below OECD average to 508 and is now 9th in the world in reading. In Mathematics the improvement was from 470 in 2000 to 495 in 2006 and in science from 483 to 498. The clear message emanating from Poland is to postpone the uptake of vocational education until post 15 and then to ensure that the professional and technical studies are delivered in parallel with literacy and numeracy teaching. This model is similar to Germany where the academic/vocational choice is postponed and reading skills and numeracy are still studied to a high level irrespective of the course pathways.

3.0 Performance at PISA Proficiency Levels - and below/Level 5 and 6

3.1. In PISA 2012 Northern Ireland had around average performance in Mathematics, reading and science (OECD Education Policy outlook UK 2015). In the ROI, for the first time in PISA, Irish students performed significantly above the OECD average on print mathematics. Ireland was placed 13th of the 34 OECD countries and 20th overall of the 65 countries. The score achieved by the lowest performing students (students at the 10th percentile) on overall mathematics in Ireland was higher than the corresponding OECD average. However, the score showed little change from that achieved by this group of Irish students in 2003.

3.2. The score achieved by the highest performing students on overall paper mathematics (those at the 90th percentile) in the Republic of Ireland was not significantly different from the average across the OECD and represented a slight drop in performance of this group of Irish students compared to 2003.. In reading, the mean performance of Irish students was significantly above the OECD average. Ireland ranked 4th out the 34 OECD countries and 7th of all 65 participating countries.

3.3. In print reading, Ireland performed significantly below five participating countries (all Asian) and above 54 countries including New Zealand, Australia, Germany, the UK and the US. Finland, Canada and Poland were among the five countries whose performance in print reading was similar to Ireland. Students in Ireland significantly outperformed their counterparts in Northern Ireland.

Mathematics

3.4. NI has a relatively long tail of underachievement compared with the highest scoring countries. The proportion of pupils in NI at proficiency Level 1 and below is greater than the OECD average (NI =24.1% OECD =23%). In comparison, countries, including ROI, Scotland and England, had (proportionately) fewer pupils at or below Level 1 than NI. It is unacceptable for an education system in a developed country such as NI to have approximately one quarter of its pupils at age 15 being categorised as low performers in the PISA study at Level 1 and below.

3.5. The attainment of pupils in NI at proficiency Level 5 and above is again below the OECD average. The number of pupils scoring at these high levels does not compare well with the higher performing countries.

Reading

3.6. NI had fewer pupils than the OECD average achieving at the lowest proficiency levels in reading, and fewer pupils than the OECD average achieving at the highest levels of

attainment. Within the UK and Ireland, the widest spread of achievement was in England and NI, both of which had a slightly higher proportion than Scotland at the top two levels, but also a greater proportion below Level 2. The Republic of Ireland had the lowest percentage at Level 1 or below and the highest percentage at Levels 5 and 6.

Science

3.7. NI had fewer pupils than the OECD average achieving at the lowest proficiency levels in science, and a greater proportion than the average achieving at the highest levels of attainment. Within the UK and Ireland, England and ROI had fewer pupils than NI at the lowest levels of proficiency and a greater proportion of pupils at the highest levels. Scotland had (proportionately) fewer pupils than NI at the lowest levels, but also fewer at the highest levels.

3.8. These figures confirm the level of underachievement particularly at post primary level. This is a concern for Northern Ireland because it shows that as a society and an economy, we are neither facilitating the means for young people from all social backgrounds to succeed in and benefit from education and we are not utilising our national resource of talented young people to grow our economy.

4.0 Addressing the gap in achievement in NI

4.1 Sir Robert Salisbury, in an address to the Policy Forum for Northern Ireland in December 2015, cited examples of where the achievement gap for NI is the widest in Europe. Sir Robert reported that no schools in England had such poor achievement rates as the lowest achieving schools in NI. He reiterated that education funding in NI was on a par with schools in England and Wales but the distribution of finance in NI was significantly different e.g. in support for small competitive 6th forms, small schools support, considerable overlap with FE provision and funding for a wide range of school types, with a diverse range of management and governance.

4.2. The figures below have been updated for 2014/15 based on the Summary of Annual Examination Results (SAER):

Of 195 secondary schools:

- 28 schools reported 30.1%-40% pupils achieving 5A*- C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) including GCSE English and Mathematics;
- 12 schools 20.1%-30% 5 A*- C (or equivalent) including GCSE English and Mathematics;
- 5 schools 10.1%-20% 5 A*- C (or equivalent) including GCSE English and Mathematics;
- 0 (zero) schools with no pupils achieving 5 A*- C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) including GCSE English and Mathematics.

4.3. In the ten years ending 2009/10, the proportion of Year 12 pupils in NI failing to achieve any GCSEs fell from 4% (in 2000/01) to 1% (in 2009/10) to 0.1% (in 2014/15). During this period, the proportion who did not achieve 5+ GCSEs at grade C or above also fell from 43% to 29% to 17%.

4.4. An alternative indicator ‘5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C (or equivalent) including GCSEs in English and maths’ was first collected in 2008/09. Since its introduction, the proportion of Year 12 pupils achieving this standard has increased by almost 10 percentage points, from 57.3% (in 2008/09) to 67.0% (in 2014/15). While this is to be welcomed, there is still a long way to go in terms of ensuring that the great majority of our young people leave school with a high level of achievement ensuring that the gap between the social classes in terms of educational achievement is closed.

4.5. The Centre Forum’s paper “Education in England 2016” sets out to quantify the gap in achievement between disadvantaged children and more affluent children. Using parameters of disadvantage, such as Fisher Families Trust (FFT) scores, a numerical measure of achievement gap has been established for England. There is no reason to believe that Northern Ireland would produce significantly different results. In 2015 the gaps in progress at the key stages (KS) 2 and 4 are 9 months at KS2 and 19.9 months at KS4. While the gap at KS2 appears to be closing, the gap at KS4 remains stubbornly constant. The Centre Forum has proposed reducing the gap at KS4 to 4.1 months by 2030.

4.6. The effect of academic selection at 11, alongside Open Enrolment are widely accepted as a major contributory factors in concentrating lower achieving pupils often from socially and economically deprived areas into a small group of 11-16 schools. *“This differentiated pattern in NI, with a consequent over-representation of low-achieving schools, may be the inevitable consequence of a selective system. Any school system is likely to contain some low achieving schools but, this evidence suggests that a selective system may produce more of these schools”*. (Gallagher and Smith ‘The Effects of The Selective System of Secondary Education in NI 2000’). This concentration of disadvantage in some schools further exacerbates the negative influences of academic selection. In the document ‘Low performing students: why they fall behind and how to help them succeed (OECD 2016)’ it is stated:

“Analysis shows that the degree to which advantaged and disadvantaged students attend the same school (social inclusion) is more strongly related to smaller proportions of low performers in a school system than to larger proportions of top performers. These findings suggest that systems that distribute both educational resources and students more equitably across schools might benefit low performers without undermining better performing students.”

4.7. The OECD (2012b: 4) confirms that it is the ‘concentration of disadvantage in schools’ that contributes to low attainment and highlights the need for the UK to initiate ‘changes in other areas of social policy besides education, such as housing to promote a more balanced social mix in schools’. This has implications for the continued operation of selective systems of education by schools, as in the case of Northern Ireland. The OECD proposals also provides the means by which NI can increase social class, religious and ethnic integration through increased ‘sharing’ in the provision of education.

4.8. Schools labouring under these twin disadvantages of Open Enrolment and Selection struggle to succeed given the current formula funding arrangements, incoherence of education policies and the fragmented nature of initiatives to address the achievement gap.

4.9. The focus over the last 10 years on literacy and numeracy in primary schools has paid dividends in moving NI schools up the comparison tables of OECD/PISA surveys. There is

evidence, however, that during Year 6 some children are becoming uninterested because of the focus on these subjects, particularly to do with the emphasis on either the PfG targets or transfer. This also risks alienation of these children from engagement with learning because of the narrowness of the curriculum. While this emphasis needs to continue in a proportionate manner, the good practice needs to be built upon in relation to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (**STEM**) subjects and Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) as well as promoting thinking skills and self-development skills across the curriculum. **(Rec. 7a)**

4.10. Evaluation of various educational initiatives have highlighted schools that stand out in terms of exceptionally good practice. There is a need to learn from and share these examples of good practice, from schools that have succeeded in raising pupil attainment particularly in areas of social deprivation with perceived persistent low achievement, and highlight what strategies have succeeded. **(Rec. 7b)**

4.11. The Department must review and fully support in the short to medium term the literacy and numeracy strategy for NI schools to ensure early identification and thereafter remediation for pupils who present with significant literacy and numeracy challenges. This should be part of an appropriately funded ‘whole of government’ approach to tackling poverty and its effects. **(Rec. 7c)**

4.12. Schools that seek to improve, need to ensure the key skills of communication, problem solving, collaborative working and creative thinking are fully embedded into the teaching and learning practice at primary and post primary levels. **(Rec.7d)**

5.0 The impact of social and economic disadvantage on educational achievement and future employment prospects

5.1. In relation to equality of educational outcomes, PISA data indicates that 77% of the difference in the performance between schools may be explained by the differences in the socioeconomic background of pupil intakes. *“This may not be altogether surprising and highlights the importance of action on poverty and socio-economic inequality as a prerequisite to improving educational outcomes for all”* (Narey, 2009). Hirsch (2007) has concluded that *“just 14 per cent of variation in individuals’ performance is accounted for by school quality”*. Furthermore, Hirsch’s review of evidence for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s Education and Poverty programme found that in the UK ‘children growing up in poverty and disadvantage are less likely to do well at school’ due to the correlation between low income and low attainment of pupils. This has significant implications for social mobility. OECD reports for NI also highlight the stable learning environment in schools and the positive attitude to education displayed by the vast majority of pupils. However the disparity in educational and employment opportunities between pupils from families experiencing socio-economic deprivation and better off pupils is stark. Hence the gap between the achievement of those individuals who come from relatively affluent families and those from deprived areas is wide and getting wider. The effect on an individual’s life opportunities cannot be overestimated.

5.2. Low educational achievement leads to low skills base and low wages or unemployment. This is most clearly illustrated in the paper “The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer” by The Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) and The University of Ulster (UU) (2015). The proportionately increased earning power that accompanies improved qualifications is very significant. Below NQF Level 2 the average wage is £277 per week and only 48% of these individuals are in employment in NI. This rises to £484 per week for NQF levels 4-5 for

employees with a foundation degree/higher level apprenticeship with 79% in employment. At the top, with Higher Degree Masters or PhD NQF Levels 7-8, the average salary is £652 per week with 85% of the cohort employed. In NI the current and emerging top employment growth areas are:

“Professional, scientific and technical, Information and communication, Manufacturing, Administrative, Retail, Catering, Health and social work, construction, Art and entertainment and transport and storage”.

5.3. The school leadership must recognise and respond to this data through the curriculum offer. However the ‘Barometer’ predicts a reduction in the number of employees in public service and particularly in education and some social services areas that traditionally soak up high numbers of employees with qualifications at levels 6-8. This is partially due to the austerity policies of the current government in Whitehall with its subsequent implications for public sector employment in NI. There could be a mitigation of the downturn by increasing the supply of highly qualified employees to the private sector. This will be necessary to rebalance the NI economy. It is essential therefore that the NI economy is capable of generating jobs at the appropriate skills and remuneration levels to incentivise these potential employees to remain in and seek employment in NI.

5.4. In England and NI the likelihood of being in the top 25% of earners is 15% higher if one’s parents had a tertiary degree (Education at a Glance OECD Indicators 2015). NI shows the second largest difference in likelihood of numeracy proficiency if parents had a tertiary degree, second only to U.S.

5.5. A key recommendation “Improving the Image of Further Education (FE)” highlighted the cultural perception that FE study is of lower value than Higher Education (HE)/Academic study. The paper cites the development of Institutes of Technology in ROI as a possible model to address the perceived value gap. This perceived gap is also much in evidence in post-primary schools.

5.6. The wider skills required for employment have been incorporated into the NI curriculum, though to what extent they are fully embedded into teaching and learning has yet to be measured. The Northern Ireland Curriculum up to the end of KS3 is skills based. However, GCSE and GCE are not; these qualifications are based on content and assessment criteria centrally agreed between the awarding bodies for England, Wales and NI. It may be necessary for NI to modify this arrangement to have the qualification system reflect our particular curricular and employment needs. Such changes would require a process by CCEA to ensure comparability and portability. This is a well understood process between jurisdictions around the world. These skills include good communication, problem solving, critical thinking, team working and people management. There is a need to give even more focus to such skills and practical links to students making the bridge from completion of study to being in the actual workplace. This is the key juncture when young people experience difficulties. Access to high quality social /behavioural education for the world of work is often only available through DEL assisted employment schemes, whereas such experiences should be an integral part of skills development in formal, statutory education. Few teachers currently have the necessary training, knowledge and skills to deliver this effectively in school settings. These perspectives ally closely with CBI documents on future employability. They are also closely linked to the multiple intelligences model proposed by Howard Gardiner. **A key question is what steps can the next PfG take to reduce the impact of social deprivation on the educational achievement of young people and the**

subsequent impact on the capabilities of the NI economy. A further question is what are the likely outcomes if no action is taken?

5.7. In addition to the concentration of learners from deprived backgrounds within certain schools, educational disadvantage is associated with a number of interconnected pupil characteristics, including: socio-economic status, household income, parental background/level of education, and the quality of parental involvement in a child's education (Marshall, et al., 2007). It would be illogical to claim that schools or education policy alone can remove these barriers to learning or reverse their influence on educational outcomes. Public education policy needs to be clearly located within the broader context of public policy and reinforced by it, through the PfG, if it is to be effective in securing high outcomes for all children and young people.

5.8. It is well known how many pupils in more affluent areas gain advantage in primary education through greater parental support, external coaching, access to resources, better diet and access to study facilities. There is a need to examine how current funding for TSN can be specifically used to compensate for the shortfall in access to a number of the positive factors that can assist pupils from families that are socially and economically disadvantaged, towards achieving their potential. This must be considered, however, in the context of a more collaborative PfG with a whole of Government outcomes focus. **(Rec. 6 and 7c)**

6.0. Full Service Community Networks

6.1. The model of education in Finland which has narrowed educational and social differentials relies heavily on integrating all social and welfare services into the school system. This allows for speedy and prompt intervention and prevents the occurrence of blockages and time delays in providing access to remedial services. The Full Service Community Networks in North and West Belfast could act as a model for such arrangements. This model places the school firmly at the centre of the community it serves. These arrangements could be extended to other areas with similar profiles. This may entail pooling of budgets from different Departments to achieve the desired outcomes as opposed to each separate arm of government spending resources often on the same problem without any real identifiable benefit or longer term structural change. **(Rec. 6b)**

6.2. Extended schools finance is commonly used by individual schools to fund homework and study facilities within an individual school. Within an area plan pooling of such finance could result in more effective arrangements through ALCs whereby qualified specialist teachers would be available to support pupils from a number of schools, in a designated study centre for after school studies. This may also provide much needed employment experience for beginning teachers. **(Rec. 3g)**

7.0 Linking Education to the Economy and Society

7.1. Whilst qualifications and certification are important, these need to be balanced alongside other important purposes of public education, including the fostering of commitment to lifelong learning and preparation for contributing positively for an inclusive society. There should be deep concern that children and young people in the UK enjoy a lower quality of life compared with their peers in other economically advanced countries according to their own assessments of personal 'happiness' and 'wellbeing' (UNICEF, 2007). "*Education should prepare young people for life, work and citizenship*" (Arthur H Canning, 2015). Children and young people need opportunities during their school life to deal with difference (social class, religious, cultural and disability) to be more prepared for living and working in

a more pluralist society. This will complement and strengthen the curriculum objectives of the promotion of local and global citizenship.

7.2. Today, OECD countries are focusing on building a 21st century curriculum, enabling all young people, regardless of background, to be able to compete in the global economy. Whilst the Strategic Forum would not endorse a simple utilitarian purpose for education, there remains a need to give all pupils a relevant curriculum experience fit for the skills attitudes and behaviours demanded by the 21st century employment market. This means that the so called ‘liberal’ curriculum should still be part of the ‘Entitlement Framework’. This means extending entitlement not only to high-quality academic study, but also high-quality professional and technical education for all young people aged 14-19, underpinned by strong commitment from business and employers’ organisations and equality of access to high-quality, practical, hands-on, work-based learning opportunities (cf. Baker, 2013; Corrigan, 2013) needs to be a developing characteristic. It is also necessary to better inform very able young people and their parents of the high earning potential of the ‘professional and technical’ subjects in an increasingly technological world. **(Rec. 7f)**

7.3. A 21st century curriculum should equip young people to be research-driven, flexible, problem solvers – knowledge creators – who have the capacity to adapt as learners to emerging needs throughout their lives. The UK’s global economic competitors know the importance of creativity, project work and the need for multiple ways of assessing pupil progression and achievement. They are focusing on multiple literacies for the 21st century – aligned to living and working in a globalised world, with parity of esteem between academic and professional and technical pathways (Corrigan, 2013). Such an approach needs to be facilitated and promoted in Northern Ireland alongside a recognition that schools should also be preparing young people to contribute to and benefit from the local economy. **(Rec. 7g)**

7.4. Whilst government and industry support the development of subjects in schools that directly impact on the career and life choices of young people, there is sufficient co-ordination among stakeholder groups to convey these important messages to the public at large and young people in particular.

7.5. Assessment systems and the qualifications regime need to be consistent with the key skills necessary for personal development, employment and citizenship. While schools acknowledge the importance of such key skills as problem solving, communication, teamwork and creative thinking, they are rarely explicitly taught and seldom incorporated in a meaningful way into subject or qualification specifications. The acquisition of these skills can clearly be seen in examples such as cross-curricular Talking and Listening at KS3 (CCEA 2015). In the ROI the Transition Year provides opportunities for students to develop more fully these skills in real life projects which they are expected to plan, implement cost and manage as part of a team. These skills also come to the fore in STEM challenges such as the ‘Formula 1 in Schools’ competition where each team member has a specific role in designing a model racing car according to strict criteria. Teams are expected to seek advice, support, sponsorship and publicity and then to demonstrate their communication skills to a panel of judges as well as racing the car against other teams on a track. Students who have been involved in such events have gone on to higher education and have been successful in their chosen career path.

7.6. There is a need to implement a communications strategy aimed at young people, their parents and schools to promote STEM / STEAM and creative subject events and activities in schools. An action group comprised of representatives of schools, education bodies, industry

and businesses across NI should be established to scope the opportunities that currently exist to support teachers and pupils to participate in business and industry based activities. (**Rec. 8b**)

7.7. Many schools have business links and make use of the expertise available through Boards of Governors' (BoGs) membership and parents groups but this needs to be extended and robustly supported in schools serving areas experiencing high levels of social deprivation and associated educational under-achievement as outlined below:

- Business links with schools should be formalised at NI level through strategic planning between the new Department for Education and the Department for the Economy (**Rec. 8f**);
- Action plans to provide industrial experience for beginning and experienced teachers, school leaders and aspiring Principals should incorporate two way movement between school level education and business (**Rec. 8c**);
- Review of Careers advice and support to align the subjects offered in schools more closely with the needs of the local economy and industry and to ensure the teaching of key skills including computing/ICT are embedded (**Rec. 8d**);
- Examine the prospect of having area governance models to oversee a number of schools in a designated area (**Rec. 2e**).

7.8. The Entitlement Framework has set out the curriculum offer that all post-primary schools are required to provide for their pupils either by itself or in collaboration with other schools. However the collaboration between schools is often on the basis of non-selective schools providing professional and technical subject tuition while the academically selective schools provide academic subject tuition for pupils from partner schools. This remains the most intransigent problem in promoting parity of esteem between professional and technical subjects and perceived academic subjects, and in many cases disproportionately disadvantages able pupils working to or capable of exploiting the broader STEM agenda which is growing in demand in the emerging NI economy. This has in turn led to subject streaming in schools where it is difficult for able pupils to pursue professional and technical (vocational) subjects or a combination of both academic and professional and technical subject choices. This problem is further exacerbated by the narrow range of AS/A2 subjects taken by individual pupils where only 3 or 4 subjects may be attempted. The following actions are required:

- Ensure the (14-19) qualifications and assessment system in NI has portability and comparability equivalence with systems in other jurisdictions whilst also identifying the potential benefits of having a wider range of subjects which reflect emerging skills available for study at post 14 level in schools (**Rec. 7e**).
- Vocational subjects need to be defined, extended and rebranded 'Professional and Technical' subjects appropriate for the 21st century skills based curriculum (**Rec. 7f**).
- There is a need to develop communication strategies aimed at parents and teachers as well as young people that will promote parity of esteem between perceived 'academic' subjects and 'professional and technical' subjects (**Rec. 7g**).

- Support CCEA in developing and introducing a further and increasing range of vocational subjects which will command the support of schools, industry and the wider public (**Rec. 7f**).
- Improve access for all pupils to the full range of subjects in an extended Entitlement Framework.
- Review 6th form access to ensure that all year 12 pupils should have the right to remain in formal education to undertake post 16 courses if they wish, in the 11-19 school in which they are enrolled or have guaranteed access to post 16 provision in an 11-19 school in the area.
- Revise and extend the subject choices at post 16 level in schools to ensure they are in accordance with the emerging skills needs as identified in the ‘Skills Barometer’ and other reports and that career advice and aspirations of pupils is fully informed of emerging skill needs.

8.0 Professional Development of the Teaching Force

8.1. Teacher education and professional development has been pivotal to the success of those countries that are in the top 10 of the OECD tables for high performing education systems. In NI however the level of CPD has decreased in recent years for many teachers and principals. This has been due mainly to funding limitations and changes within the EA including a focus on schools identified as in need of support and improvement. The reduction in the Advisory and Support services in budget and staff terms has further eroded the opportunities for classroom teaching staff to attend In-Service Training (INSET) courses, with a cascade model of training taking precedence in many schools. While online INSET has had some benefits, the networking and sharing of good practice between teachers attending CPD events provided a deeper understanding of the key issues in pedagogical theory and practice.

8.2. The lack of accreditation for high quality INSET has caused CPD to be devalued in the eyes of some school leaders and many teachers themselves. There is a pressing need for a coordinated approach to Initial Teacher Education, Early Professional Development and which establishes CPD as a career long process.

8.3. There is an increasing recognition of the value of ALCs in providing the context for significant aspects of CPD and such approaches would enhance the status and value of ALCs; increase the potential for professional development and make such arrangements more economically viable.

8.4. There is a need to:

- Ensure that teacher Professional Development is an entitlement for all qualified teachers (**Rec. 9a**).
- Require schools to accept responsibility for the promotion of and facilitation for professional development based on the needs of the school curriculum, the broader community and the individual teacher (**Rec. 9b**).
- Review funding and priorities for professional development including leadership development to ensure a prioritised range of development opportunities and on equitable distribution of access for such provision (**Rec. 9b**).
- Review initial and on-going Teacher education to develop teaching as a Masters degree level profession (**Rec. 9c**).

- Consider how teachers might be identified and prepared to deliver new subjects/courses, particularly for post-primary schools (**Rec. 9d**).

SCOPE AND COHERENCE OF POLICIES

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Northern Ireland Education System is complex and multi-faceted. Its administrative arrangements are reflective of a divided society in terms of religious background, social class, ethnicity and disability. This social division is evident in the continuing existence of a selective and non-selective post-primary system. Attempts, prompted by changed political circumstances and the policies of successive Education Ministers from the restoration of a devolved Assembly in 2007, have been made to bring about a more streamlined administrative model. Political disagreement has prevented such a system from being fully realised. Future policies will also struggle to have a meaningful impact unless education can become a positive driver for inclusion and prosperity rather than a contested political entity.

1.2 It is assumed that policies should facilitate the broad purposes and intended outcomes of government. In the case of education those outcomes are encapsulated in the Department of Education's Corporate Plan including its five Corporate Goals. The first two 'raising standards' and 'closing the gap' are most obviously related to the achievement of inclusion and prosperity in their intent, although Area Planning is referenced in the 'Closing the Gap' criteria. 'Improving the Learning Environment' which also refers to area planning can be regarded as an operational and enabling mechanism as can 'Developing the Education Workforce'. The fifth relates to service effectiveness. The effective use of resources has to reflect back to the other 'goals' in that it seems logical that 'effectiveness' should refer to their delivery. It is in this context, therefore, that the coherence of policies to deliver the Corporate Plan must be examined.

1.3 The education system has a wealth of policies on a variety of aspects of governance, funding, curriculum and support amongst others. It is reasonable to assume that these policies should support the five goals of the Corporate Plan which are underpinned by the principles of high achievements for all young people through equity of access to the provision which will support these outcomes. **The question is do they achieve these objectives and if not, why not, and how might they be amended to help achieve these objectives?**

2.0 The Key Policy Areas

2.1. Building an education system for inclusion and prosperity demands that we address the fundamental divisions of religious background and social class in our education system as it is currently configured. There is also a need to consider the increasing number of 'newcomer' families into our schools. It also requires that we examine the relevance of the curricular offer to meet the emerging skills needed to re-build, re-balance and enhance our economy. Education must provide for the personal and social needs of all children and must make additional relevant supports available to those in greatest need.

2.2. Below is a critique of some, but not all, of the key policy areas which influence the education service. The Strategic Forum has included some draft actions which it considers beneficial to progress.

2.2.1 Governance

It is important to recognise the significant contribution of the school governors who have sustained and enhanced our education system. That said, there is a case for a fundamental

review of legislation in relation to the governance of schools. The current governance arrangements place significant powers with the BoGs of individual schools which, in effect, make it difficult to secure system change. There is the potential to improve pupil outcomes in individual schools but not to significantly 'close the gap' as too many schools exercise their powers to protect the *institution* rather than meet the needs of the wider community through their control over admissions *criteria and a range of other functions*. School Governance is based, mainly, on the principle of one BoGs and one principal for each school with a requirement that they protect and promote that institution. There is no legislative requirement to collaborate with other schools or to have any concerns for or interest in the education of young people not enrolled in that school. Any collaboration is either by local, and usually non-binding, agreements such as through ALCs or as a condition of an initiative or funding stream.

This policy incoherence is most evident in respect of the rights of governors to set admission criteria, however, it also impacts on Area Planning where the governors can exert influence on the school owners and, more specifically, where the governors are the owners. This constrains the effective operation of area planning and can also limit the potential for all young people living in the area of a school from access to some aspects of the curriculum offer because of the potential constraints on the operation of an ALC by one or more schools.

Legislation should be developed to require all publicly funded schools to engage fully in processes such as a revised Area Planning process and in so doing take into account the impact on other schools in the Area and/or pupils living in the area not enrolled in that school, when proposing to make changes to the enrolment number, admission criteria, physical capacity or curriculum offer (**Recs. 1 and 2**).

There should also be a re-structuring of the ALCs programme to align boundaries more closely with the area planning boundaries (which should now be reviewed). There should be a cross-phase approach to support transition and a duty to engage with other schools to provide curricular access and support to any pupil or group of pupils within the area. There should also be a requirement for schools to collaborate in the continuous professional development of all staff and to avail of any means to develop shared services or staffing.

There should be a process of 'Accountable Autonomy' available to all schools to encourage excellence in curriculum matters, leadership and governance through a process of an initial external assessment and ongoing quality assurance to replace traditional forms of inspection in schools where standards are of a high level and are being maintained or improved further. (**Rec. 2e**)

2.2.2 Funding

Funding is a means to an end not an end in itself. Its purpose in policy terms should be to facilitate the raising of standards for all children and young people through a disproportionate spend to those in greater need in order that every child is supported to achieve to her or his potential.

The Bain Review set out minimum sizes for schools in the primary, post-primary phases and in urban and rural settings to ensure a balanced education for all pupils. The Salisbury Review of school funding set out the principles to ensure that schools had sufficient resources to address their particular circumstances and challenges. The Sustainable Schools Policy was

based upon the Bain recommendations but these recommendations did not consider the ‘Entitlement Framework’ which was not in legislation at the time of development, in advising on minimum enrolments in the post-primary sector. The policies of Sustainable Schools and Funding are in many respects not aligned.

An example of this relates to the Salisbury proposal for the withdrawal of ‘small school protections’ other than where there were exceptional circumstances (including defining how this might be done and what level of support may be provided to such exceptional schools). This part of the Salisbury recommendation was not implemented and this decision should now be reconsidered. This proposal had the potential to align with the Bain recommendations in the primary phase.

The Sustainable Schools policy is in need of review to recognise the delivery requirements of the ‘Entitlement Framework’. A review of the minimum numbers for each phase of education and for KS4 and post-16 numbers then need to be aligned to a funding policy and, where re-organisation is required, the availability of capital resources to deliver the policy. This non alignment of the Sustainable Schools Policy and the earlier Bain Review recommendations with the Entitlement Framework has had the effect of compounding difficulties such as pupil access to the curriculum. Additionally, significant costs have been incurred by the system in terms of transport, school meals and pupil costs. A continued delay in enacting Salisbury’s recommendation regarding ‘small schools’ will have an increasingly significant cost impact on the system as a whole and even more importantly on the curricular access and quality of provision for children and young people enrolled in small schools (**Rec. 4**).

2.2.3 Area Planning

As outlined under section 2.2.2 on ‘Funding’ above, there is an obvious incoherence between the principles underpinning the quantifiable aspects of sustainability and the funding provided to the schools. Under a coherent policy, one would expect to see a relationship between the size of a school, predicated on the minimum level of viability to deliver the curriculum at any phase of education, and the means of funding that school. This is absent from our current system.

Area Planning is about access to the curriculum, not the simple removal of surplus places. The ‘Sustainable Schools’ Policy, which emerged after the Bain Review, was in the Working Group’s view, flawed from the start in that it included six characteristics, not all of which were either quantifiable or strictly to do with sustainability. It did not take into account the practical pupil numbers required to deliver the range of subjects/courses included in the ‘Entitlement Framework’. The most obvious incoherence was the lack of connectivity between the funding formula, the size of the school and its capacity to deliver the curriculum either in a single school or through collaboration.

Area Planning policy needs to be redrafted to be more specific in its goals and to give prominence to accessing the curriculum either in the ‘host’ school or through a more structured and formalised range of ‘delivery models’ under ALC arrangements.

There is no specific legislation to govern Area Based Planning. There is a statutory requirement for the Education Authority to ensure that there are sufficient places and for CCMS to plan for its sector but these roles do not embrace the broader range of leavers to

fully implement Area Planning. This deficit inhibits the potential of the area planning process to operate in the interest of all pupils living in an area because the legal responsibility on a number of fronts, including admissions criteria and retention at post 16, resides with individual boards of governors.

It is incumbent on our education system that diversity of pupils, staff and governors in individual schools and in partnerships/learning communities of schools is acknowledged and celebrated as a way of modelling and preparing children and young people for the world of work. Recognition of the importance of diversity in terms of social class, religion, culture, disability and adoption of an integrated ethos (as distinct from an integrated school) will be critical to helping young people prepare for living and working in a shared space in which tolerance, mutual respect and understanding of the others is accepted and celebrated.

Legislation on Area Planning needs to ensure coherence with the revision of the legislation with respect to governance as outlined under section 2.2.1 (Governance). It is also desirable that there should be some connectivity between Area Based Planning and the structure and operating mechanisms of ALCs which should be expanded to all phases of education to better facilitate 'transition' between phases (**Rec. 3**).

Policy should determine that only schools which are non-selective and desirably co-educational should be approved by the Minister through the Development Proposal process. This will ensure that the needs of all children, including the academically gifted, are met in a context of inclusion to ensure that everyone is equipped to contribute to society and the economy (**Rec. 3e**).

There needs to be further encouragement for managing authorities to work to achieve a range of different delivery and governance models including shared schools, federations and jointly managed schools. There is also a case for considering sixth form colleges in some areas to extend the curricular offer, improve the social mix and align more easily with further and higher education to address career aspirations and the emerging skills needs of employers (**Rec. 3**).

There is a need to give practical expression to the Shared Education Bill through guidance for schools to encourage social class, religious and cultural diversity in governance, staffing and enrolments, through strengthening the advice and guidance for partnerships and the operation of area learning communities. This would involve encouraging individual schools to seek opportunities for educating children of different social class, religious and cultural backgrounds and disabilities together (**Rec. 3f**).

2.2.4 Underachievement

There is clear and unambiguous evidence of the co-relation between poverty and educational underachievement. It is evident from statistical data which shows persistent high levels of deprivation over many generations that our social and educational systems are tolerating and even perpetuating poverty. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is becoming a policy priority in many countries. A growing body of research recognises that it provides a wide range of advantages, including social and economic benefits, better child well-being and improved learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning, more equitable outcomes, a reduction of poverty and increased intergenerational social mobility. These positive benefits are directly related to the 'quality' of ECEC.

Funding has a role in redressing some aspects of achievement deficit, particularly if it is to intervene early with sustained support alongside the utilisation of appropriate supports and services from other Departments, their agents, community and voluntary organisations beyond education and the school. However, funding cannot by itself secure progress on ‘closing the gap’ if the enrolment profile of the school is excessively imbalanced through:

- its location;
- demographic decline;
- the actions of other schools in the setting of admissions criteria;
- policies which facilitate or tolerate differential treatment through the existing operation of open enrolment; and
- the retention of selection by some schools.

The merging of the role of the Children’s and Young People’s Unit from OFMDFM into the Department of Education represents an opportunity to address access to quality ECEC in a more seamless and holistic way and thereby to gain the maximum advantage for children, particularly those from more deprived backgrounds. It is clear, however, that this is a cross-departmental issue which will require ‘family’ support in addition to individual provision. There is a need for a more collaborative, outcomes focussed approach to this challenge through enhanced linking between the Departments of Education, Health and Communities in the main and, as required, from Justice (**Rec. 1b**).

Research by the OECD confirms that a balanced social mix in a school intake brings educational benefits to children from all social backgrounds - but especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Equity of access to schools which are sustainable, appropriately resourced and which can provide the full curriculum and, at post-primary, a full 11-19 curriculum alongside the necessary resources should be used to achieve progress in closing the gap whilst simultaneously allowing the curriculum to evolve to meet the emerging needs of our economy and society.

2.2.5 Post-Primary Access

In post-primary schools the picture in relation to underachievement is more complicated because it is now the law that every pupil should have access to the (full) ‘Entitlement Framework’. This is a particular challenge to schools with an enrolment below the Bain recommended level of 500 which, in effect, may not be compliant with the Entitlement Framework. There are further challenges for pupils with special educational needs. In these situations the only means of ensuring access is by collaboration with other schools, colleges of further education or training organisations and that is reliant on their co-operation or, in the case of FE, the costs of course provision.

There is insufficient compulsion/incentivisation on schools to co-operate; the emphasis is on the willingness of each party to collaborate. Some schools do engage willingly and constructively in the initiative but others use a range of legally sustainable reasons for not doing so.

The Department needs to provide equity of access to all aspects of the ‘Entitlement Framework’. If a ‘guidance’ approach is not working in all cases then stronger legislative approach may need to be considered (**Rec. 3a**).

Any tolerance of underachievement has an ongoing and costly impact on the potential of any young person to contribute to society and the economy. It also adds to the Welfare bill and a range of ‘intervention’ services. The next PfG should build on the Proposed Children’s Act through a duty across all Departments to collaborate under an ‘Outcomes’ approach to delivery.

The education sector should position itself at the centre of the Programme so as to facilitate, with other Departments, particularly Health and community and with other agencies, including community and voluntary bodies, engagement in a long-term structured process to ameliorate and ultimately prevent disadvantage.

Any programme needs to recognise and respond to the advantages of early intervention at the point of realisation of a challenge to the individual child and to her or his family. The support should be personalised and maintained through connected channels, supported by all relevant agencies until the outcomes for the child are consistent with expectations. The funding processes should, desirably, be in place to make the full provision (**Rec. 1b**).

The formal school leaving age should be raised to 19 to ensure that all young people who wish to continue in full-time education should be able to do so. Individual arrangements can be made for other forms of provision such as training or for work where this is agreed by the young person (**Rec. 5**).

Post-primary schools should be expected to take responsibility for each pupil enrolled in that school and to directly provide or make provision for continuous education to 19. Where there are exceptional circumstances, schools which do not currently offer post 16, must become part of a ‘federation’ of schools to ensure equity of curricular access choice and opportunity for students. Such ‘federations’ should be aligned to a specific Area Plan and ALC and be precisely structured and organised to reflect in the curriculum the particular local, as well as global, national and regional, employment circumstances and skill needs.

2.2.6 System and Professional Support Through Collaboration

It is very clear from decisions made in relation to achieving efficiencies in finances, particularly in the Education Authority (EA), that the former Curriculum Advice and Support Service (CASS) and the Regional Training Unit (RTU) will cease and that new arrangements will operate very differently in the future under the ‘School Development Service’ (SDS). At the same time teacher unions, supported by management, are seeking guarantees on the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers and other school based workers. It is evident that any curricular change, particularly in relation to a greater focus on skills and revised qualifications, will require investment in the teaching profession and related services.

It is possible that the review of teacher professional development carried out by the Department might bring forward some proposals in this area. However, it is evident that either stronger guidance or formal direction by the Department is needed to encourage

greater degrees of interdependence amongst schools aligned with area planning proposals and area learning communities.

The advent of ALCs has created the potential for more collaborative working not just in relation to pupil access to a broader curriculum but also in terms of professional development, including leadership development and *shared services*.

The difficulty is that the guidance in relation to both the definition of area learning communities and their operation is vague and primarily contingent on local agreements. The position is even less organised in the primary sector.

The proposed 'Education and Quality' Directorate in the EA will have two principal functions, School Improvement and Leadership and Management but a significantly reduced staffing compared to the five Board CASS and RTU model. The EA provision will be targeted at school improvement and particularly at those schools deemed to be 'at risk' or facing significant change around, for example, re-organisation. This will have to change the expectation within most schools as to the models of support that might be available to them.

A policy context which promotes the interests of a school over the needs of children and, by implication, the entire education service is inconsistent with the principles of inclusion and prosperity.

It is important that the Department considers the range of evidence and advice available to it to redesign the ALC concept, align it more closely to Area Based Planning boundaries and promote, through a revision of legislation and policies, the principles of collaboration over competition, of the child over the school and broader outcomes for society and the economy over narrow school focussed measures if it is to extend inclusion and prosperity.

The recent research report 'School Inspection in a Polycentric Context' published by the Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection and which focussed on work on-going in West Belfast following an 'Area-Based Inspection in 2010' by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), details a follow up strategy which has created a cross-phase 'Area Learning Community' which goes far beyond the ad-hoc arrangement evidenced across most of the rest of Northern Ireland. This arrangement includes nursery, primary and post-primary sub-groups within an overarching group and a focus on transition. While it is acknowledged that this is operating in a single sector context, there are clearly characteristics which are transferable.

3.0 Summary

3.1 This paper is intended to give only a snapshot of the high level policy inconsistencies and incoherence in a selected range of policies with a view to constructively addressing this situation. A number of specific recommendations emanating from this paper are included in the recommendations section of this report. The Working Group is unanimous in believing that our education system has many strengths but that these are not always evident in the outcomes. Legislation, policies and practices which govern the operation of the system are in need of significant review as many of these are not aligned for the benefit of all children and young people.

The Working Group believes that this paper has outlined some of these but its principal purpose is to give some direction as to the need for a policy review and for future policy to promote a positive vision which is inclusive of the talents of all children and young people by providing a public education system which produces a universal service, in a manner proportionate to the specific needs of each child. To do so there is a clear and proven need for an early intervention, cross-Departmental and inclusive processes at the centre of Government and at the centre of the next Programme for Government. This will expand the economy strengthen our society and, through inclusion, diminish dependency and promote ambition, drive and social coherence.

PROSPERITY AND INCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

1.0 The Strategic Forum Working Group on ‘Inclusion and Prosperity’ proposes the following recommendations as a ‘direction of travel’. Much more work needs to be done to expand upon and extend these recommendations to ensure education is placed at the centre of the Programme for Government as a key driver of the economy and society, promoting inclusion and prosperity.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Strategic Forum proposes overarching the following, high level recommendations. These are:

- a. A Programme for Government which is outcomes focussed and which requires all relevant Departments to collaborate, to tackle social disadvantage in a structured sustained and coherent manner in order to reduce educational underachievement and ‘close the gap’ in educational outcomes.
- b. The education service should take all necessary steps to align the school curriculum more closely to the emerging skills needs to the economy and for the assessment and qualification regime to better reflect such skills.
- c. The Department of Education to conduct an audit of all existing legislation and policies within its remit, to assess these against its key goals, particularly in ‘closing the gap’ and ‘raising standards’ and revise governance arrangements to place the child, not the school, at the centre of policy.

3.0 The Group considers that the following, arranged under key headings, are relatively ‘short term’ recommendations

3.1 Funding

- a. develop a mechanism to assess ‘social capital’ as a qualitative measure in determining funding alongside quantitative measures of deprivation;
- b. eliminate over time or limit the use of short-term funded projects unless these are subject to a rigorous process, which through evaluation, may lead to mainstreaming.
- c. keep funding under review to ensure coherence with policies to address the Department’s key goals including access to the curriculum.

3.2 Governance and Curriculum Access

- a. revise the ‘Sustainable Schools’ policy to recognise the statutory requirements of the ‘Entitlement Framework’ placing a greater emphasis on curriculum access and sharing access across Area Learning Communities and ensure the right to remain in formal education to the age of 19 for all young people;
- b. develop formal legislation on Area Planning to incorporate a revised Sustainable Schools policy;
- c. revise the funding mechanisms including the Local Management of Schools (LMS) scheme, the Funding Formula, including the Targeting Social Need (TSN) element to

ensure alignment with the area planning processes and Sustainable Schools policy and provide adequate funding to retain a small number of schools outside of the policy which are identified under specific criteria;

- d. facilitate access to the curriculum through a wider range of governance models and arrangements such as formal cross-sectoral collaborations including jointly managed, shared or federated arrangements by encouraging and facilitating high level agreements amongst Employing Authorities, Trustees and School Owners and place a duty on all Boards of Governors to contribute to and comply with an agreed area plan to facilitate expanded access to the curriculum in all schools within the area;
- e. make the re-organisation of the school estate a priority within capital expenditure and progress Development Proposals for new post-primary schools only when they propose 11-19, non-selective and normally co-educational establishments;
- f. encourage schools to work together to educate young people from different social, religious and cultural backgrounds alongside one another;
- g. develop new models of “accountable autonomy” which should be available to all schools/groups of schools to encourage school improvement in all aspects of provision.

3.3 Early Years and Early Intervention

- a. increase investment in early years education and identify vulnerable children and their families at the earliest possible opportunity, including at a pre-natal stage, to ensure access to positive, structured and sustained interventions;
- b. promote partnership working across government departments, and with community and voluntary organisations to provide supportive pathways for disadvantaged young people and their families.

4.0 In the medium term, the Department needs to:

4.1 Closing the Gap

- a. revise legislation and policy to ensure all schools comply with key areas of policy in, for example, area planning, admissions and exclusions, curricular access and governance;
- b. require every school seeking to undertake organisational change to consider fully the needs of all children living in the area in which the school is situated, and the provision available from all other schools and colleges situated in the area;
- c. ensure all schools have a duty to contribute constructively within their ALC;
- d. promote examples of good practice from schools that have succeeded in raising pupil attainment, particularly in areas of social deprivation or where there has previously been persistent low achievement levels;

4.2 Curriculum and Skills

- a. review the literacy, numeracy and related strategies (including Irish), as part of a funded ‘whole of government’ approach to tackling poverty and its effects, to ensure early identification and remediation for pupils who present with significant reading and

numeracy challenges and to maintain literacy and numeracy as core subjects within the curriculum for all young people up to age 19;

- b. build upon best practice in other curricular areas, including STEM, creative subjects, and languages, and ensure the key skills of communication, problem solving, collaborative working and creative thinking are embedded fully into the teaching and learning practice at primary and post primary levels and review the 14-19 qualifications and assessment system to ensure portability and comparability with systems in other jurisdictions to support future and sustained economic growth and societal well-being;
- c. support and resource CCEA to extend the range of professional and technical qualifications which reflect emerging skills, consider how new subjects/courses might be prioritised and introduced into the curriculum and develop strategies that will extend access to, and promote parity of esteem between perceived 'academic' and 'professional and technical' subjects;
- d. ensure that every young person can, if they so wish, remain in education or training, up to the age of 19, and end the practice where young people are 'counseled out' of school;

4.3 Linking Education to the Economy and Society

- a. fully integrate key work based, personal and social skills into the education system as a force for transformation within our society;
- b. implement a sustained communications strategy aimed at young people, their parents and schools to promote the skills agenda, professional and technical courses, research, innovation and entrepreneurship;
- c. review Careers advice and guidance to align the range of subjects offered in schools more closely with the needs of the local economy and industry;
- d. enable all schools to develop integrated, inclusive experiences either as an individual school or through partnering with another school or schools to prepare young people of different social classes, abilities/disabilities, religious and cultural backgrounds to be educated together to prepare them to live and work in a more pluralist society;
- e. work with the Department of the Economy to make links with employers and other relevant organisations to support schools, especially those serving areas with high levels of deprivation, in recruiting governors with appropriate skills and relevant experiences in business and allied fields;

4.4 Teacher Professional Development

- a. review initial and on-going Teacher education to develop teaching as a Masters level profession;
- b. formalise the provision for continuous professional development, enhancing school leadership and governance and review the funding and priorities to provide a range of such opportunities;
- c. promote the shared professional development of staff within ALCs; and
- d. create structured industrial and business experiences for serving and beginning teachers, school leaders and aspiring principals and promote a two-way exchange between schools and business settings;
- e. develop pathways through until initial education providers and other relevant bodies to facilitate the development of new subjects/courses particularly in post-primary phase.