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The Green Paper - Implications for Schools
IACD Conference - 17 October 1992
Kathleen Quigley Memorial Lecture

Keynote Address - *An Overview* - by Aine Hyland, U.C.D.

I would like to thank the organisers of this conference for inviting me to deliver the Kathleen Quigley Memorial Lecture this year. I attended what I think was the first IACD Conference in Dun Laoghaire with Kathleen over 20 years ago. Through the IACD and subsequently through other educational groups such as the Educational Studies Association of Ireland and the Dalkey School Project, I got to know and admire Kathleen. She was one of the courageous parents of the 1960s and 1970s who had an avid interest in education and who pursued this interest through the few channels that were open to her in those days. Following her election as secretary of IACD in the 1970s, she committed herself wholeheartedly to the work of the Association and for many people the IACD was Kathleen Quigley. I congratulate the Association for the decision to host an annual Kathleen Quigley Memorial Lecture - it is a fitting tribute to her and I hope I will keep up the high standard which has been set by those who have delivered the Memorial lecture during the past few years.

As I re-read the Green Paper this week when preparing for this address, it occurred to me yet again what a rich and diverse document it is. Since its launch in June I have read it a number of times - each time I find myself interpreting some aspects of it somewhat differently. Moreover, the debate that has developed since its publication, and particularly during the past six weeks, has contributed to a better understanding of many of the issues. Clarification of certain proposals which had led to some concern in the early weeks of the debate has been provided. All in all the Minister's statement at the launch to the effect that "a changing world is not a particularly comfortable place to be; but it certainly is an exciting one; and more importantly, a changing world is the only one we've got" has proved to be particularly apt - even in the context of the debate. The Chinese have a curse - "May you live in interesting times". For some people change is a positive thing - it is exciting and challenging. For others, change is a threat and leads to insecurity and fear. This is as true in the teaching profession as it is in other areas of life and I think it is something we must be sensitive to. However, I would like to think that in our deliberations today we can enjoy some of the excitement of change - at least the excitement of discussing change - and that by understanding the context and the proposals of the Green Paper we will in due course be in a better position to implement the changes which will follow.

It is important to realise that change is not a new phenomenon. The theme of change has been an ever-recurring one in the writings of educational philosophers for over 2,000 years - although most writers tend to refer to change as if they had just discovered it! Perhaps one of the most realistic references to change in education was made by Professor Patrick Lynch in 1965 when in the introduction to *Investment in Education* he wrote: "Change is perennial and will not stop this year or next". The education system needs to be aware of change and to respond flexibly to the changing needs and demands of society but at the same time we need to remember that the same issues emerge generation after generation in education. Excessive focus on the uniqueness of current change might suggest that we have nothing to learn from the past. This would be a mistake - we have much to learn from history, from the problems and solutions of the past - both in terms of what to do and what not to do.

The Key Aims of Education

Some people have criticised the Green Paper for its failure to provide a coherent underlying philosophy of education. I find this allegation extraordinary. In my view one of the strengths of the Green Paper is its clearly articulated philosophy. Apart from the six key aims in the Introduction which set the tone of Green Paper, more specific aims of education are set out in Chapter 1. It is quite clear what the motive behind the various proposals and suggestions are - individual readers may not agree with some of these motives - but I fail to understand how anyone can argue that there is no underlying philosophy.

The six key aims of the Green Paper are worth reiterating here

1. To establish greater equity in education - particularly for those who are disadvantaged socially, economically, physically or mentally.
2. To broaden Irish education - so as to equip students more effectively for life, for work in an enterprise culture and for citizenship for Europe.
3. To make the best use of education resources - by radically devolving administration, introducing the best management practice and strengthening policy-making.
4. To train and develop teachers so as to equip them for a constantly changing environment.
5. To create a system of effective quality assurance.
6. To ensure greater openness and accountability throughout the system, and maximise parent involvement and choice.

The Aims of Education

The aims of education as spelled out in Chapter 1 are impressive. In seeking to define educational aims, the Paper starts from the basis (contained in Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937) that the parent is the primary educator complemented by the efforts of the State. It recognises that during their formative years children assimilate attitudes, values and aspirations in the home, from their immediate environment and from their peer group. It also recognises that the churches are a significant influence in fostering the beliefs and values of the majority of children. At the same time it appears (implicitly) to accept that there are families who are not affiliated to any church group. The rights of children whose beliefs are different to those of the majority in the schools are adverted to in Chapter 4.2 and it is proposed to take account of this issue when the Rules for National Schools and the Curriculum Handbook are being reviewed, "to ensure that the constitutional rights of children are fully safeguarded". This awareness is admirable, an awareness which unfortunately was missing from many key educational documents since the foundation of the State.

The educational aims (par. 1.3), both personal and national, are sensitively and delicately balanced. They include an understanding of and a respect for the traditions of home and society generally while at the same time encouraging critical thinking and independence of mind. They emphasise the promotion of individual self-esteem and worth and combine with this a respect for the rights and beliefs of others. They highlight the need for each individual to attain his/her full educational potential while at the same time recognising the importance of fostering a spirit of innovation and enterprise. The Paper refers to the need for developing critical thinking, problem-solving ability and individual initiative - skills that an enterprise culture requires. At the same time it avoids the pitfall of over-emphasising the vocational/ technical approach - an approach which was recommended by the Culliton report earlier this year.

The theme of to-day's conference is *The Green Paper - Implications for Schools*. Even with this relatively limited brief it is difficult to know where to start and what to include. The Green Paper is arguably the most comprehensive official educational document produced in this country in this century - its proposals are very significant and if implemented will affect schools for many decades. However, given the limitations of time this address will focus on four key areas:

1. Control, Management and Financing
2. Curriculum
3. The Teaching Profession
4. Time in School.

1. Control, Management and Financing

The Green Paper proposals include

- A priority for students with disadvantage when allocating resources throughout the system
- Most decision-making and responsibility to be taken at school level, not by the Department of Education; (there will be no new intermediate structure such as County Education Committees)
- Representative Boards of Management for all schools, working to a formal School Plan and reporting each year to parents and the community
- an enhanced management role for school principals, and their appointment for fixed terms (perhaps of 7 years)
- a "streamlined" Department of Education, concentrating on strategic policy issues and budgeting
- a campaign to establish gender equity across the education system
- a new funding mechanism for schools based on a unit-cost approach.

The commitment to give priority to students with disadvantage is spelled out in some detail - the Green Paper states that "all schools serving disadvantaged areas would receive a separately identified budget allocation". I am not happy with the general proposal that additional resources should be tied to the school - surely it would be more equitable to associate the additional resources with the individual child - regardless of what school he or she attends. In the Netherlands, for example, a gypsy child is worth the equivalent of 2 ordinary children when it comes to staffing and resourcing schools. Similarly a child from an ethnic minority family whose home language is not Dutch or a child who is orphaned is treated as the equivalent of 1.8 and 1.6 children respectively and so on. This approach could also be adopted in the case of children with special educational needs - children who might traditionally have attended a special school for mentally or physically handicapped pupils.

The issue of "quality control" is also potentially problematic. If the status of schools in a community is measured in terms of examination results, then there will be even less incentive than heretofore for schools to enrol pupils whose exam performance would take away from rather than enhance the school's image. We are familiar with the practice of schools choosing "desirable" pupils but it would be serious if legislation were to legitimise and encourage this practice while reducing the budgets of other schools which have traditionally catered for the less advantaged. While the Green Paper specifically requires secondary schools to state their enrolment policy in their School Plan and says that selective admission policies will be unacceptable, it is very difficult to devise an enrolment policy which is unbiased. "First-come first served" policies tend to give preference to parents who are far-sighted in planning their children's education - such children are not usually "at-risk" children. A lottery system of selection is probably the least biased system that can be implemented, yet in my experience, it is the system most loathed and least acceptable to articulate parents.

There are many questions to which one would like to have answers before coming to a conclusion on the merits or otherwise of a unit cost system. What elements would be included in calculating the unit cost? What about capital costs, transport costs, incremental salary costs? The inclusion of capital costs might give an advantage to schools fortunate enough to be housed in adequate, good condition, low maintenance buildings. The inclusion of transport costs might favour schools where few if any of their pupils would require transport to reach the school. The inclusion of incremental salary might militate against schools which have "inherited" a high proportion of long-serving teachers at or near the maximum point of the incremental scale. The potential of a unit-cost must be recognised but it is essential that if such a system is introduced, it should be devised with sensitivity and care.

As regards the constitution of Boards of Management as proposed in the Green Paper, there is a contradiction between the underlying philosophy in regard to greater democracy and increased parental involvement in schools ("the desire to reflect parents' rights and wishes in school management, combined with local community involvement, as part of a genuine partnership with the providers of education") and the proposed composition of the new Boards of Management. The current proposal will result in a situation where the proportion of elected parent representatives on Boards will be even less than it is at present. In the case of larger

national schools and all secondary (including vocational) schools only two of the 11 members will be elected parents (at present 2 of the 8 members are elected parents). The proposals that Owners/Trustees will nominate 5 of the 11 Board members (instead of the present 4 out of 8 with the nominated Chairperson having a casting vote) has caused some Patron/Trustee groups to fear that their control will be undermined. It is a pity that the main Patrons/Trustees are not ready to accept an equal partnership in the control and management of schools with parents and teachers.

The Green Paper has aroused concerns among Patrons/Trustees - particularly in the Church of Ireland - that the religious ethos of the school might be undermined. The most recent suggestion from the Minister that legislation will provide for the safeguarding of the ethos of the school by means of a school charter could provide a solution for Patrons/Trustees, but it might open up the issue of the constitutional rights of parents in areas where there is no choice of school. I cannot see an easy solution to this dilemma nor indeed to the question of the rights of national school teachers, many of whom argue that there should be no religious criteria for selection. We are the only country of the EC where denominationally controlled schools hold a monopoly - in other countries denominational schools exist in parallel with state or public schools and parents and teachers have a choice. When it comes to drawing up legislation, this may well be one of the most intractable problems and may lead to a situation where the question of the constitutionality of legislation may have to be referred to the Supreme Court.

The function and role of Boards of Management as proposed in the Green Paper will be more wide-ranging than in the past. Their specific responsibilities will include quality of student learning; appointment of staff; quality of teaching and development and review of a School Plan. It is proposed that Boards "would provide leadership and ensure effective management for the school, within an agreed school budget and a framework of accountability". The implicit suggestion in the Green Paper that the inclusion of "a representative of the local business community" will in some way improve the efficiency of Boards has been met with a somewhat jaundiced reaction by veterans of Boards of Management. As a member of a Board of Management at either primary or secondary level for almost 15 years, I have been consistently impressed by the competence and dedication of Board members and by their ability not only to manage effectively but also to live within their budgets. It is difficult to imagine how a businessperson - however impressive his/her management skills - will be able to make the government capitation grant of £28 per pupil per annum stretch farther than the incredible lengths it has already been stretched in most national schools!

The proposal to require all schools to produce a school plan and to report to parents and the community on a regular basis on its implementation has much to recommend it. National school principals and their staff have been required for many years to draw up a school plan and the inspector's report on a school's performance takes this plan as the starting point. In recent years parents have been consulted on aspects of the plan - for example, a Departmental 1990 circular made it clear that parents should be consulted on the drawing up of a Code of Behaviour for pupils. If approached in a constructive fashion, the proposal for Board involvement in drawing up a school plan will help to strengthen the partnership between the teachers, parents and the community. Training courses for Board members will be necessary to ensure that the professional role of the principal and teachers will be recognised and respected by non-professional members of the Board. At the same time, teachers should not be unduly defensive about such a development and should recognise the potential value of involvement by non-professional members on many issues.

The failure of the Green Paper to provide some intermediate local structure which would facilitate co-operation between schools and which could act as a co-ordinator of services such as a schools psychological service, a visiting teacher scheme for special needs pupils, home/school/community liaison personnel etc. is a matter of disappointment. In the earlier drafts of the Green Paper the setting up of County Education Committees had been proposed but the current Minister has opposed this suggestion. It is difficult to see how the proposed Executive Agencies can fill the role initially envisaged for C.E.Cs - indeed one might question the need for Executive Agencies in some of the areas proposed in the Green Paper.

2. Curriculum

In the curriculum area, the most important proposals include:

- a major shift towards critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- a new subject, Technology and Enterprise Studies for all students, initially at junior cycle level
- a strengthened vocational dimension at Senior Cycle
- greater emphasis on spoken Irish
- a new emphasis on educating students on health and fitness.

At **primary** level, it is proposed to place greater emphasis on science within social and environmental studies, particularly in the senior classes. Schools will also be asked "to provide orientation to modern European languages". There will be a new momentum in P.E. in the primary schools which linked to diet and hygiene, will be an important element in a programme to enhance the health and physical well-being of children.

At **Junior Cycle** level the Green Paper accepts the need for broadly based programmes for all students and accepts the recommendations of the NCCA that the core subjects should include Irish, English, Mathematics, History and Geography and Science. The major new proposal at this level is the introduction of a new subject for all pupils - Enterprise and Technology Studies. Surprisingly, a modern European language is not included among the core subjects despite the fact that a whole chapter - chapter 3 - is devoted to the topic *Irish Education in the European Community*. In practice, there is no doubt that the vast majority of our pupils will study a European language (as more than 90% of them do at present) but it is a pity that it was not possible to include this among the core requirements of the junior cycle. It is astounding that the arts (Art and Music) are relegated yet again to a peripheral position - a questionable decision for a country which has shown in recent years that some of the most successful enterprises earning foreign currency are based on well commercialised artistic endeavour.

The proposal to introduce a new subject at junior cycle - Enterprise and Technology Studies - is an interesting one. Many schools have introduced novel and apparently successful enterprise initiatives within Transition Year and Vocational Preparation and Training Programmes and I would contend that senior cycle is a more appropriate level for developing these skills. The proposal as it stands in the Green Paper raises a number of questions. Will any one teacher in any school be competent to teach this new subject, which seems to contain elements from a number of different subjects (e.g. Business Studies, Art / Craft / Design, Woodwork, Metalwork, Technology etc)? How will it be timetabled? How can a school which does not have any Woodwork or Metalwork teacher or facilities offer this subject?

The junior cycle framework proposed by the Curriculum and Examinations Board in 1986 and a similar framework proposed by the NCCA in 1991 - both based on "an areas of experience" model - had indicated a way forward for curriculum provision at both national and school level which would have helped to overcome the problem of **what** subjects should be compulsory core subjects for the Junior Certificate. It is a pity that the Green Paper took no account of this approach but chose instead to focus on a subject based model which of its nature cannot adequately provide the breadth and balance of curriculum experience which one would wish to offer to junior cycle pupils.

At **senior cycle** level, it is proposed that "a combination of an effective foundation of general education and a strengthened vocational orientation will form the basis for development". The proposal of the Culliton report for a "parallel stream of non-academic, vocationally-oriented education at second level which commands widespread recognition, respect and support" is rejected. The Paper proposes instead to build on and expand the range of vocational options within the existing Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) with the intention of expanding the programme from its present 5% of total to at least 30% from 1994. If this is to be done, I hope that the LCVP, which at present is predominantly taken by boys, will be revised to encourage participation by girls. This is an opportunity for the decision-makers to clarify what precisely is meant by a "vocational" programme. Surely courses geared towards the services sector are at least as "vocationally" oriented as those geared towards construction or

manufacturing industries. Most of the new jobs which have been created in recent years have been in the services sector and this should be taken into account in the development of new "vocationally-oriented" courses and programmes.

In general, the Green Paper is less clear on its proposals generally for senior cycle than it is for other areas. It rejects the proposal of the NCCA that students could choose courses from within two national programmes - the Leaving Certificate and the Senior Certificate, and favours instead the development of alternative Leaving Certificate courses. The NCCA has been asked to provide "further advice on this issue". It is unfortunate that there has been so much too-ing and fro-ing about senior cycle provision for the past 8 years. Every year, an estimated 15% of those who sit the Leaving Certificate fail to get at least a Grade D in five subjects. In other words, at least 8,000 young people follow a course each year from which they appear to gain very little. It is time for a clear policy decision on what should be provided for such young people at senior cycle and it is to be hoped that the current debate will finally bring this matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

3. The Teaching Profession

The Green Paper contains a short but vital section on **the teaching profession**. It reiterates a point that cannot be stated too often - "Teachers have made an enormous contribution to Irish society and it is important that the career of teaching continues to be an attractive and professionally rewarding one". It also states that "research supports the widely held view that teaching is a complex and demanding job which requires high quality initial training and preparation, supported by in-career development to meet continually changing needs and demands". In the current situation where recruitment to the teaching profession has fallen and will continue to fall because of the demographic situation, in-service education of existing teachers, or **in-career development** as it is referred to in the Green Paper, is vital. The Green Paper indicates that existing agencies - Teachers' Centres, Education Departments of universities, Colleges of Education - will have a role to play in supporting in-career development but that the schools themselves will be the major determinants of what support should be provided for their teachers. There is evidence from other countries that school-based and school-focussed inservice plays an important role in encouraging and enabling schools to engage in whole-school review and renewal. However, inservice opportunities for professional and personal development outside the school environment should also continue to be available to individual teachers and some of the in-career training budget should be devoted to such provision.

The Green Paper recognises the specific need for developing new skills and for upgrading existing skills of teachers involved in new senior cycle courses. In this regard, I cannot understand why the Green Paper supports the recent decision of the Registration Council that to be registered as a Secondary Teacher, teachers must include one of the **existing examination subjects in their final degree examinations**. Ironically, this decision means that graduates in areas which are increasingly offered as alternative senior cycle and PLC courses, e.g. marketing, journalism, catering and tourism, or media studies might not find it possible to register as a secondary teacher, much less a graduate in politics, sociology or philosophy - all of which are senior cycle subjects in other countries or in examinations such as the European or International Baccalaureate. If we want to ensure that our secondary school curriculum becomes stagnant, then a regulation such as has been introduced by the Registration Council is one way to do it. This seems an incongruous proposal in a Green Paper which is otherwise so emphatic about the need to adapt to a changing world.

Space prevents me from discussing the specific proposals for initial teacher education in chapter 6 of the Green Paper. The current N.U.I. B.Ed. degree course - which includes an academic subject to degree level as well as both the theory and practice of education, provides a sound basis for the proposed consecutive model of initial training. Most student teachers would welcome arrangements which would enable them to take some lectures on a university campus with other university students but this does not necessarily mean discarding what is a highly respected professional qualification for primary teachers. We should look carefully at a model of primary teacher training which has served us well for almost 20 years and which is the envy of many of our European partners and build on the strengths of this model.

4. Time in School

The Green Paper proposes that the school-leaving age be raised from 15 to 16. This is something that has been expected for some time and should not prove controversial. Proposals that might prove more controversial relate to the length of the school year at both primary and secondary levels. In neither case is it proposed to increase the number of days on which children attend school - what is proposed is a system which will ensure that there will be no erosion of teaching time; that at primary level the children will be taught on 184 days and at secondary level they will be taught for 168 days. At both levels a further six days (which have formally been part of the school year for a long time) will be used for "school-related activities such as curriculum development and school planning as well as for special closures". In the case of secondary schools it is suggested that the 12 certificate examination days might be available "for purposes such as in-career training and in-house examinations/assessment, for those not directly involved in the certificate examinations". These proposals will undoubtedly cause tension in the teaching profession, but it has been clear for many years that time must be found for curriculum development and school planning and the Green Paper proposals seem to provide a good starting point for discussions with teachers unions.

Conclusion

There are many welcome proposals in the Green Paper. These include the proposals on gender equity which should be implemented without delay. The proposal to ensure a greater degree of openness and accountability in the education system is also welcome and we hope that this new openness will be apparent in the forthcoming debate and discussions.