CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	A response by Dr. Áine Hyland, University College, Dublin, to the Green Paper: Education for a Changing World
Authors	Hyland, Áine
Publication date	1992-08-22;1992-08-22
Original Citation	Hyland, Á. (1992) 'A response by Dr. Áine Hyland, University College, Dublin, to the Green Paper: Education for a Changing World', Education Review - a supplement to the Irish Times, 22 August 1992.
Type of publication	Contribution to newspaper/magazine
Rights	© 1992, The Irish Times.
Download date	2026-11-15 02:15:22
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/17808

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

3 **A Response by Dr. Áine Hyland, University College, Dublin, to the *Green Paper: Education for a Changing World.* Submitted for publication to *Education Review* – a supplement to the Irish Times 22nd August 1992.**

The Green Paper which was published in June 1992 is an historic document and presages the start of a new era in Irish education. The three Ministers involved in its preparation and their advisers must be congratulated in bringing it to this point. Following a period of consultation, the Minister intends to issue a White Paper and to follow that with legislation. It had been expected that the proposed legislation would be all-embracing - a major education act, perhaps of the scale of the 1988 Education Act in England with its 238 clauses and 13 schedules. It now seems more likely that the outcome of the current debate will be a series of education acts, each addressing different aspects and possibly different levels of education. Unfortunately, the delay in publishing the Green Paper (it was originally mooted by Minister Mary O'Rourke over two years ago) creates timing difficulties for the government. The term of office of the present government cannot extend for more than another 18 months and it seems increasingly likely that we will have a General Election within a year. The discussion period for the Green Paper will not end before December of this year. (Earlier this year the Minister indicated that he looked forward to "six months of a Great Education Debate which will forge a national consensus of where Irish education is going"). An internal Departmental team working full-time on the drafting of a White Paper (if such a team could be released from their ordinary duties in the Department) could not be expected to complete it before Easter of 1993. The drafting of legislation - even a relatively simple initial bill - would take at least a further three months (assuming that parliamentary draughtpersons are available and not otherwise engaged on other legislation). This means that we cannot realistically expect to see new educational legislation being debated in the Houses of the Oireachtas until after the summer recess of 1993 at the earliest. Consequently the likelihood of an Education Act being passed during the lifetime of the present government is becoming increasingly remote. This however should not prevent us from participating in the current debate and from addressing the issues raised in the Green Paper with "clarity and courage" as urged by Minister O'Rourke in March 1991. This is an opportunity to consider Irish education in its totality and to agree an overall plan for educational development which will bring us well into the next millenium.

In reading the Green Paper, I think it is useful to put oneself in the position of those involved in drafting it and to ask whether one would have produced a different or better document given the context and constraints within which the education system operates. It is understandable that individual interest groups - whether they be teacher unions, management bodies, parent groups, employers etc - all have their own agenda and will find aspects of the Green Paper that might challenge or undermine this agenda. But the task of a

Minister is much more difficult than that of a specific interest group. A Minister must take account of the national interest as best s/he can while bearing in mind that each pupil is an individual to be educated, supported, nurtured and helped to develop his/her full potential. It is all too simple (and too common in this country) to torpedo discussion papers and consultative documents on education. It is much more challenging to respond in a critical but constructive way to such documents. Hopefully, this article will be a constructive response and will contribute in a positive way to the Great Education Debate - a debate which began in the last issue of Education Review which included a summary of the six key aims of the Green Paper and some initial responsse from the Teachers' Unions.

Moving Towards Equity

Despite an often articulated policy of "equality of educational opportunity", Irish education has not contributed to an equitable society in the past 25 years - on the contrary, some sociologists have argued that education has provided further advantages for the advantaged while exacerbating the disadvantages of the disadvantaged. The discussion on equity in the Introduction to the Green Paper is a considerable advance on the simplistic policy statements with which we were familiar in the past. The complexity of the issue is recognised in this paper and the barriers to equity are listed. In analysing the more specific proposals of the Green Paper it must be borne in mind that positive discrimination in favour of the disadvantaged with a resultant weighting of resources in their favour will be necessary in order to redress the current imbalance. At a time of financial stringency this may well mean a redistribution of the already meagre resources for education - an approach that will undoubtedly be unpopular and might be politically very difficult to implement.

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. Let us hope that the review of the National School rules and of the Curriculum Handbook will result in a return to the pre-1965 situation, where formally at least, children could attend national schools for secular instruction without being required to attend religious instruction.

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 seems to me that it avoids the pitfall of over-emphasising the vocational/ technical approach - an approach which was recommended by the Culliton report earlier this year.

Curriculum

The Green Paper puts forward a number of new proposals for curriculum content at all levels of education. At **primary** level, schools will be encouraged 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". This proposal was adverted to - rather amusingly - by Arthur Riordan in his *Dear Albert* article in the last issue of *Education Review* as an indication of "efficient businesslike clarity"! I hope that Arthur believes as I do that the explanation in section 4.2. of the Green Paper clears the air - "the awareness might vary from introducing children to the diversity of languages that exists in mainland Europe to a focus on a simple introduction to a selected language, with particular reference to aural comprehension and simple conversation". 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.

The issue of assessment or **"quality assurance"** is also discussed in relation to education at all levels. At primary level it is recognised that many schools currently administer tests on a regular basis and the Green Paper proposes to extend testing to all primary school students as a diagnostic aid. Tests at ages 7 and 11 are considered to be most appropriate for this purpose. The results of individual tests will be confidential to schools and parents but results in aggregated form would be made available to the Dept. As such, they would

provide valuable public data on which to base remedial efforts and the targeting of such efforts. This proposal, on the face of it, seems to be a reasonable one. There was concern in educational circles that testing on the scale of that introduced in the U.K. following the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989 would be proposed here in Ireland. The U.K. situation has been fraught with difficulties and there is growing evidence to suggest that the system there is breaking down and may well be counterproductive. Great care will have to be taken here during the coming months to ensure that if a system of assessment is introduced here in Ireland, it will be capable of being implemented by teachers without unduly infringing on their teaching time and that it will be beneficial to pupils.

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. Other curricular requirements referred to at this level include Religious Education ("with due regard to the constitutional rights of parents related to the participation of their children"); P.E., which should also form part of the curriculum; Art and Music. in regard to these latter subjects, it is stated that it would be desirable "that students are exposed to subjects such as Art and Music that would develop their expressive abilities". (Perhaps Arthur Riordan might indicate how this exposure might work!) It is disappointing that Art and Music are yet again the "also-rans" of the secondary school curriculum. 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 on curriculum design which would enable these subjects to be given their fair share of curriculum time. 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 for all curricular areas.

As regards assessment at this level the Green Paper is clear that testing should consist of two elements - an externally conducted examination and complementary but separate school based assessment. The latter would test the progress of students - the former would ascertain their attainment against the broader aims and attainment targets of the programmes. The issue of school-based assessment has been a controversial one for a

number of years and is referred to in the last issue of the *Education Review* by both the Teachers Union of Ireland and the ASTI. It is time for this impasse to be resolved - the point is well made in the Green Paper that "Ireland is exceptional among the EC member states and indeed among developed countries internationally, in having a fully externally examined system of assessment at the junior cycle phase of secondary education".

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 basis for rejection is that that such a stream would most likely be regarded as providing only for less able children and would not meet the objective of "ensuring a broadly based education for all with vocational options and orientation" up to the completion of the second-level stage. 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 seems to reject the proposal of the NCCA that students could choose courses from within two national programmes - the Leaving Certificate and the Senior Certificate, appearing to favour instead the development of alternative Leaving Certificate courses. The buck has been passed yet again to the NCCA who have 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.

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.

Boards of Management

During the months preceding the publication of the Green Paper it was generally expected that "a lessening of clerical control over schools" would be proposed. The Minister indicated at the annual general meeting of the C.P.S.M.A. at Easter that the Patron or trustees of schools should no longer nominate the majority of the members of the Board of Management. This proposal was strongly opposed by both the Catholic and the Church of Ireland authorities and it does not in fact appear in the Green Paper. The *volte face* on the composition of Boards has resulted in a contradiction between the underlying philosophy of the Green Paper in this regard and the actual proposal put forward. In his interview in *Education Review* in June the Minister indicated his desire to strengthen the democratic base of Boards of Management and to maximise parental involvement. This same philosophy is reiterated in the Green Paper which refers to "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". Nevertheless 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 national schools with five or more teachers and in the case of all secondary schols only two of the 11 members will be elected parents (at present 2 of the 8 members are elected parents). However, the proposal that the chairperson of the Board be elected from among the members of the Board is put forward in the Green Paper. The proposal that Boards should be responsible for the appointment of the principal and staff will mean in effect that the Board will have the full say in the setting up of selection boards for appointment. (At present some members of selection

boards are appointed by the Patron or trustees). The main area of difference here will relate to Vocational schools. At present vocational school teachers are appointed by and employed by the V.E.C. - not by the school in which they teach. The proposed change will be quite significant for vocational schools.

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 managemement 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 production of the annual report and the running of the AGM of many small businesses costs about the same as the annual capitation grant paid by the Department for the running of a small national school.

The Role of the VECs

Perhaps the greatest surprise of all in the Green Paper is the failure to propose either the establishment of local education committees or to expand the role and membership of VECs to enable them to coordinate educational and para-educational services in their areas. It is difficult to see what function VECs will have in the future now that each vocational school will have its own Board of Management with responsibiltiy for staff selection and appointment and with the other specific responsibilties laid down for Boards generally. Moreover, now that new legislation for RTCs and the DIT has come into effect, the involvement of the VECs in these colleges has been drastically cut. The Green Paper envisages however that VECs will "play an important role in the development and provision of vocational education and training. They will play an important co-ordinating and support role at the local level in the proposed expansion of activities in such areas as adult education, including literacy and community education, youth and sport services and a range of other special services." Having said this, we are however informed that "the operation and structures of the VECs will be reviewed comprehensively in consultation with all concerned. It is proposed to examine and streamline the current network of 38 VECs." It does not require much reading between the lines to fear that this may be the

writing on the wall for VECs as we have known them. This may be the greatest weakness of the Green Paper and one that posterity will find most difficult to understand.

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 to many. Among the bodies expressing disappointment is the CMRS who could not understand "how the devolution proposal can be effective or equirable without the establishment of an intermediate tier of co-ordination and management". A number of organisations which objected to the proposals for local structures in the 1985 Green Paper *Partners in Education* may now be regretting their response at that time. The structures proposed then had much merit - but like the 1919 Education Bill, they were before their time.

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. Other proposals will be more contentious. The proposed new approach to teacher education, particularly for primary teachers, seems unnecessary in a country where the quality of teachers is exceptionally high. The proposal to set up new executuve agencies is vague. It is not clear whether they are to be free-standing private agencies or semi-state bodies or whether they are to be accountable through the Minister to the Dáil. Readers of *Education Review* should read the Green Paper for themselves and should contribute to the debate when the promised public meetings are held around the country. There has been a long tradition in Irish education of consultation behind closed doors with a small number of specially recognised organisations. There have been very few occasions when the debate has been opened up to every citizen with an opportunity for the ordinary man and woman to make his/her voice heard. To my knowledge such an open debate has only occurred twice before in the history of the State. The first occasion was in the late 1960s when efforts were made to reorganise and rationalise post-primary education and public meetings were held in different centres around the copuntry. The second occasion was in 1984/85 when the Curriculum and Examinations Board held public meetings around the country to discuss the curriculum and assessment proposals contained in the document *Issues and Structures in Education.* On both occasions the debate was exciting and fruitful. It is up to each one of us to ensure that the forthcoming debate will be at least as fruitful.

A response to the Green Paper

(Article for Education Review by Dr. Aine Hyland, Education Dept., U.C.D. 8/92)

Shortly after the appointment of Séamus Brennan, T.D., as Minister for Education, *Education Review* (February/March edition) predicted that the forthcoming Green Paper would include the following provisions: (1) the establishment of county education committees to replace the existing Vocational Education Committees, with responsibility for the co-ordination of all primary and secondary schools; (2) a new board of management structure "which may see a lessening of clerical control over schools"; (3) the raising of the school leaving age; (4) science teaching in primary schools; (5) a lengthening of the secondary school year and (6) the phasing out of State aid to fee paying schools. It also envisaged that the Green Paper would propose (6) a shift of emphasis towards vocational training (7) that it would address the role of religious instruction in primary schools and (8) that it would make proposals for dealing with unsatisfactory teachers. It was anticipated that these latter three proposals would be controversial and would be hotly debated.

The launch of the Introduction to the Green Paper at Easter provided material for the last issue of *Education Review* (June 1992). Initial responses from the three teachers' unions to the Introduction were published and the editor, Frank Connolly is to be congratulated on getting an interview with the Minister and publishing his reaction to the initial criticisms of the Introduction to the Green Paper. Since then, the Green Paper itself has finally been launched and it is interesting to consider whether the long-awaited document measures up to the expectations which had developed during the past two years in the education world.

Before discussing the provisions of the Green Paper, I think it is important to recognise its historic significance. For the first time in the history of Irish education, a major document which addresses every aspect of Irish education has been put before us for consideration and discussion. We have had a Green Paper before - *Partners in Education; Serving Community Needs* issued in November 1985 by Minister Gemma Hussey. That paper made courageous proposals for a network of Local Education Councils throughout the country to replace the V.E.Cs. The proposed Councils would have provided a co-ordinating structure for post-primary schools and also a framework for the development of education related services (such as a psychological service, transport etc.) for all educational levels. Unfortunately, there was considerable opposition to that Green Paper from many and diverse educational interests and its proposals did not even develop to the point of a White Paper. Some five years earlier, in 1980, the then Minister John Wilson

issued a *White Paper on Educational Development,* which was reasonably comprehensive in its coverage of educational issues but which lacked the long-term vision of the current Green Paper. Some people would argue that the 1980 White Paper was more a government policy statement (the then Fianna Fáil government had committed itself to producing such a paper in its election manifesto) than a White Paper in its more usual sense as a document which would lay the basis for legislation. The only major legislation ever proposed for Irish education was the Education Bill of 1919 which was the most comprehensive proposal for legislation for Irish education ever put forward in this country. However the 1919 bill was as innoportune in its timing as it was unacceptable in its proposals and it was withdrawn from the statute books in 1920 without even getting a second reading.