CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The birth of the free-education scheme
Authors	Hyland, Áine
Publication date	2018;2018
Original Citation	Hyland, Á. (2018) 'The birth of the free-education scheme', in Harford, J. (ed.) Education for All? The Legacy of Free Post-Primary Education in Ireland. Oxford: Peter Lang Ltd, pp. 27-44.
Type of publication	Book chapter
Rights	© 2018, Peter Lang AG. All rights reserved.
Download date	2026-11-03 15:17:32
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/17155

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Áine Hyland, *The Birth of the Free-Education Scheme*

(Chapter for inclusion in book on Free Education to be edited by Judith Harford and Brian Fleming – September 2017)

Background

This chapter provides a backdrop to the birth of free second level education in Ireland in September 1967. It is written from the perspective of this author, who was a civil servant in the Department of Education from 1959 to 1964 and worked as a research assistant with the *Investment in Education* team from September 1962 to September 1964. The article does not pretend to be a comprehensive analysis or critique of events of the period nor does it claim to be dispassionate or neutral. It is an insider's view of some educational developments during the period from 1962 to September 1967, and as well as drawing on published and unpublished material, some of which has not previously been in the public domain, it is based on the author's own recollections of events. The chapter analyses and discusses the influence of the *Investment in Education* report (Department of Education, 1965) and the role played by the Development Branch of the Department of Education in initiating and implementing the free education scheme. The setting up of a development unit was recommended by the *Investment in Education* report, and its formation was formally announced by Minister George Colley in his Estimates speech in July 1965 (Dáil Debates, 16th June 1965).

The *Investment in Education* team began its survey of Irish education in summer 1964 and its report was published in December 1965. The team was chaired by Professor Patrick Lynch, Professor of Economics in University College Dublin and it had three other members – William J (Bill) Hyland, statistician in the United Nations office in New York; Martin O'Donoghue, lecturer in Economics in Trinity College Dublin, and Pádraig Ó Nualláin, inspector of Mathematics in the Department of Education. The Secretary to the team was Charles Smith and this author was seconded from the Department of Education, where she was an Executive Officer, to provide research assistance to the team. An earlier paper by this author, which was published in *Irish Educational Studies* in 2014, discussed the workings of the *Investment in Education* team and the conditions under which it operated (Hyland, 2014). In spring 1966, having returned to his post in the U.N. 18 months previously, Bill Hyland was contacted by the Department of Education in Dublin and offered the post of senior statistician in the newly-formed Development Branch of the Department. Bill had been a statistician in the Central Statistics Office in Dublin in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He was appointed statistician in the United Nations office in New York in 1952. Ten years later he was seconded back to Ireland for a two- year period as a member of the *Investment in Education* team. He was the main drafter of the 500-page *Investment in Education* report and was single-handedly responsible for the report's 750-page Annexes and Appendices.[1] At the end of his secondment period in summer 1964, he returned to the United Nations (to the Economic Commission for Europe office in Geneva) and remained in contact with the other members of the Investment in Education team, drafting and re-drafting sections of the report and the annexes and appendices until final copy went to the printers in mid-1965. Having accepted the post of statistician in the

[1] The full text of the report (over 500 pages) and the Annexes and Appendices (750 pages) can be accessed online at http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/?pageNumber=5
I am grateful to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills, Seán Ó Foghlú, for arranging to digitise and make the report available online to mark the 50th anniversary of its publication.

Development Branch in summer 1966, he was a key member of its staff until it was prematurely closed down by Richard Burke, Minister for Education, in 1973.[2]

Bill was passionately committed to equality of educational opportunity, and throughout his period on the survey team, he was deeply engaged in trying to come up with solutions to the inequalities uncovered by the *Investment in Education* research. In early 1964 he began to collate and analyse data which culminated in the chapter in the Annexes and Appendices entitled *School Location Analysis*. This author spent many hours with Bill in the early months of 1964 trying to develop a statistical model which could be applied to educational planning in Ireland, with a special focus on developing a model which would ensure that every young person in the country could access post-primary education. Various successful and unsuccessful attempts at developing a statistical model were filed away and kept by this author as were drafts of sections of the report which were dismissed by other members of the team as well as some initial drafts of papers which Bill prepared during his early months in the Development Branch in summer 1966. These papers were consulted in the writing of this chapter. Because of the marriage ban, the author had to retire from her post in the Department of Education on her marriage to Bill in 1964, but she remained interested and involved in educational debate about opening up access to education. How the challenges surrounding full participation in second level schooling would be resolved dominated conversations between the author and her husband throughout 1965 and 1966, leading up to the birth of free second level education - as well as the birth of two of our children – the first in May 1965 and the second in September 1966 – just two weeks after Minister for Education, Donogh O'Malley announced his plans to introduce free second level education in Ireland.

The Provision of Second-level Education in Ireland before 1967:

Before 1967, post-primary education was provided in (voluntary) secondary schools; vocational schools; secondary tops; preparatory colleges and juniorates of religious orders and congregations. Although government funding for voluntary secondary schools was limited, and all schools had to charge fees, the numbers of pupils attending secondary education grew from the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s, as the following table shows:

Table 1. Numbers of secondary schools and pupils in selected years between 1926/7 and 1962/3

YEAR	No. of secondary schools	No. of Pupils in Sec. schools
1926/7	283	24,766
1936/7	329	35,890
1946/7	393	42,927
1956/7	480	62,429
1960/1	526	76,843
1961/2	542	80,400
1962/3	557	84,916

Source: Reports of the Department of Education for the School Years 1927-1963.

Enrolments in secondary schools had almost quadrupled in the 35 years following Independence. Until the early 1960s, those involved in educational policy saw no need for Ministerial intervention to improve participation rates in post-primary education. In 1949, the

[2] For more information on Bill Hyland's contribution to the *Investment in Education* report, and to his views on education, see Áine Hyland, "The investment in education report 1965, - recollections and reminiscences" in *Irish Educational Studies,* Vol. 33, no. 2, June 2104.

then Minister for Education, General Richard Mulcahy, had likened the role of the Minister to that of a plumber, stating (INTO, *Irish School Weekly*, 30 April 1949).:

> I regard the position as Minister in the Dept. of Education as that of a kind of dungaree man, the plumber who will make satisfactory communications and streamline the forces and potentialities of the educational workers and educational management in this country. He will take the knock out of the pipes and link up everything.

Twenty more years were to pass before a Minister for Education would take the initiative to introduce free post-primary education.

The Report of the Council of Education on the Curriculum of the Secondary School 1962

A Council of Education was set up by Minister Richard Mulcahy in 1950 to advise government on the development of primary education in Ireland. It was an unrepresentative council of almost 40 members, 26 of whom were professional educators and eleven of whom were clerics of various denominations, chaired by a Catholic cleric. Trade unions were not represented nor was there a representative of the inspectorate nor of parents (McManus, 2014, p. 82). In November 1954, the council was asked to report on the curriculum of the secondary school. Its deliberations were long-drawn out, and its *Report on the Curriculum of the Secondary School* was not completed and submitted to the Minister for Education until 1960. The report, which was not published until 1962, was a conservative report, and while it contained some interesting analyses of the secondary school curriculum of the time, it saw no need for any significant expansion of secondary schooling stating (Department of Education, 1962):

> Even a superficial examination of the demand (for free secondary education for all) will show that in this unqualified form it is untenable …. The unqualified scheme of "free secondary education for all" is utopian: if only for financial reasons…… There are also objections on educational grounds. One of these is that only a minority of pupils would be capable of profiting by secondary (grammar school) education …. Furthermore, if secondary education were universally available free for all, the incentives to profit by it would diminish and standards would inevitably fall.

It was subsequently suggested that the reason for the delay in publishing the Council of Education report was because it no longer reflected the predominant views of politicians or policy-makers. T.K Whitaker's first report on Economic Expansion had been published in 1958, and in October 1959, within six months of his appointment as Minister for Education, Patrick Hillery had announced that government policy was to 'bring about a situation in which all children will continue their schooling until they are at least 15 years of age …..Our immediate policy is to increase the facilities for post-primary education' (*Dáil Debates*, vol. 177, cols. 470 – 1, 28/10/1959, quoted in McManus, 2014, p. 103).

Interim Report of a Department of Education Committee on Post-Primary Education, December 1962

In June 1962, a committee was set up within the Department of Education to consider the future development of post-primary education 'particularly in its social aspects.' The committee was chaired by Dr. Duggan, Chief Inspector of Secondary Education and its secretary and author of the report was Dr. Finbarr O'Callaghan, an inspector in the Technical Instruction Branch. It would be interesting to know why the committee was set up, given that the same month, the Minister for Education, Patrick Hillery had announced the setting up of the Investment in Education survey team. One explanation is that it was expected that the *Investment in Education* survey team would confine its deliberations to the economic aspects of education

and the internal departmental group would focus on the social aspects. (Hyland and Milne, Vol. 2, p. 555). The committee was not expected to report until 1963, but in November 1962, it was asked to produce an interim report before the 8th December 1962. The interim report unhesitatingly recommended "a compulsory and free period of post-primary education for all Irish children", stating that (Department of Education, 1962):

> a comprehensive system …. a common form of post-primary course, extending over a three year period, should be available both in existing vocational and secondary schools….. The units we envisage following this common course would be termed "Junior Secondary Schools". They should aim at operating with a minimum of 120 pupils i.e. an annual intake of a minimum of 40 pupils….

However, the committee was equally clear that senior cycle courses should not be free, stating 'we are not prepared to recommend that senior secondary school courses should be available free to all pupils who wish to partake of them.' From that point onwards, until September 1966 when Minister O'Malley announced his free education scheme, the position held by senior policy-makers in the Department was that a common junior cycle should be provided for all pupils, that an annual intake of 40 pupils would be sufficient to maintain a viable second level school, but that free senior cycle secondary school courses should not be free.

Investment in Education Report, 1965

It would be impossible in one short chapter to summarise the findings of the *Investment in Education* report, which was completed in mid-1965 and published in December of that year. The report was a fact-finding, empirical analysis of the Irish educational system. It highlighted significant disparities in participation rates in full-time education according to social group. It pointed out that 35% of pupils left full-time education either during or at the end of primary school; fewer than 50% completed junior cycle education and only 20% completed Leaving Certificate. Fewer than 4% of the cohort (about 2,000) went on to university, and up to 20% of these either failed to get a degree or dropped out before completion. Young people from professional backgrounds were at least five times more likely to complete senior cycle than children of the unskilled workers or the unemployed, and were more than 25 times more likely to enter university. There were also significant disparities in participation between those from rural backgrounds and those from urban backgrounds, with distance from the nearest post-primary school identified as a barrier to participation. The following table summarises the participation rates by age of young people in full-time schooling:

Table 2. Participation by young people in full-time schooling in Ireland – by type of school and selected age group, February 1963.

	6-12	**13 years**	**14 years**	**15 years**	**16 years**
National Schools	389,739	31,039	5,843	938	254
Sec. Schools and Sec. Tops	6,832	17,715	21,139	19,472	15,438
Vocational Schools	135	4,714	10,268	8,334	4,185
Population (est.)	401,400	56,600	56,400	56,600	56,200
Percentage Participation	**98.8%**	**94.6%**	**66.4%**	**51.6%**	**36.8%**

Source: http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports.

Various commentaries on the *Investment in Education* report correctly emphasise that it made only one recommendation i.e. that a development unit should be set up within the Department of Education. However, many of those commentaries understate the conclusions of the various chapters of the report, including 'conclusions based on an analysis of participation rates in full-time education' which were effectively recommendations under a different name. In relation to participation, these conclusions stated that 'the main areas in which improvements might be sought are as follows':

1. The number who leave school without having reached primary cert level
2. The low rate of participation in post-primary by children from social groups F and G (unskilled, semi-skilled, unemployed etc.)
3. The high rate of early school leaving from junior cycle
4. The small proportion of continuation pupils who reach third level
5. The low rate of participation in university – and the relatively low certificate attainment of many entrants.

The report contained numerous statistical and analytic tables which were to provide an invaluable basis for subsequent educational planning. There would no longer be any excuse for basing educational policy on surmise and anecdote. *Investment in Education* provided an immense evidence base for subsequent education policy making. Much has been written about the influence of the report on subsequent educational policy. The National Industrial and Economic Council, writing in May 1966 stated (NIEC, 1966, p.31):

> The sober and detailed factual analysis in *Investment in Education,* by challenging complacency and conventional wisdom and leaving no excuse for ignorance of relevant facts, has given an impetus towards that critical examination of our educational system in all aspects that alone can lay the basis for permanent improvements …. if we are to move towards the ideal of equal opportunity for all, these causes of the present inequalities must as far as possible be removed.

In 1986, Seán O'Connor, who was head of the Development Branch and subsequently Secretary of the Department wrote (O'Connor, 1986, p. 10):

> The importance of the (*Investment in Education)* report to the Department of Education cannot be over-emphasised. The public were now aware of the deficiencies and inequalities of the system and remedial action could no longer be postponed.

Writing in 1989, Seamus O' Buachalla stated (O' Buachalla p. 72):

> *Investment in Education* offered the quantitative basis for a coherent rational policy which might well tax the political energies and economic resources of an enthusiastic government for a few decades. It illustrated convincingly the nature and the extent of inequality; it drew attention to the low rate of participation in post compulsory education by children of the lower social groups ……

And in a scholarly analysis of the period, published in 2009, John Walsh commented (Walsh p. 120):

> The *(Investment in Education)* report's conclusions not only illuminated the failures of educational policy in the past, but also charted a way forward for constructive development in the future. Investment was a devastating analysis of the Irish educational system, and made a compelling case for radical reform.

Annexes and Appendices of the *Investment in Education* Report

Six months after the *Investment in Education* report was published, a 750-page volume of annexes and appendices was published. The timing of the publication of the Annexes and Appendices coincided with the publication of the National Industrial and Economic Council's report on *Investment in Education* by which time government had effectively accepted the findings of the report and had decided that action would have to be taken to address the inequalities which had been highlighted. As a result, the annexes and appendices, which contained wide-ranging and previously unavailable statistical detail, received little or no publicity, although they included material and data which had very significant implications for subsequent policy development.

This was particularly true about the School Location Analysis (Chapter XII.B of the Annexes and Appendices) which suggested a number of different options for a nationwide system of post-primary education. The language and terminology used in the chapter was detached, dense and technical, and in retrospect, understated the richness of the data provided and its potential implications for policy. However, this chapter was to have a profound effect on the development of post-primary education in subsequent decades. The Location Analysis was made possible as a result of a nationwide census of schools, carried out by the survey team in February and June 1963 and again in February 1964 (Department of Education, 1965, pp. 393-453). As indicated by this author in another paper, one of the major challenges initially faced by the team was the paucity of statistical data – not only in relation to schools, pupils and teachers but in relation to the population generally (Hyland, 2014). Following a preliminary analysis of the 1963 February census, it was decided to collect additional information, through the inspectorate, about primary schools, including the age and physical condition of the schools and their distance from the nearest post-primary school. This data enabled the team to analyse the implications of making post-primary education accessible to all young people and to evaluate the consequences of using different catchment areas as a basis for developing post-primary facilities.

Bill Hyland conceptualised and led the Location Analysis and it was one of the main areas of work during the early months of 1964, which this author, as research assistant, was asked to undertake. It was a mammoth task, requiring detailed and painstaking work. This author still has the papers which set out the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis. Given the considerable number of mathematical options that were theoretically possible, Bill decided that he would have to try to get access to a computer, which would enable him to try out various statistical models. In the Appendix to the Investment report, he explained why:

> One of the most important technical aspects of educational planning is the development of techniques for accurate and detailed evaluation of the consequences of alternative strategies. This has always proved very difficult in the past. The advent of the computer has meant a significant transformation of the conditions under which such evaluations are made. It is now possible to programme a computer to analyse in great detail the consequences of a large number of different strategies.

In 1963 an international technology firm, International Computers and Tabulators, had opened a new facility at the junction of Dublin's Adelaide Road and Harcourt St., where they had installed one of their then new mainframe ICT series 1300 computers, on which time could be rented on a commercial basis. It was physically a huge machine, requiring 700 sq. ft. of floor space and weighing 5 tons. It had 20 bytes of memory – miniscule by to-day's standards! Bill persuaded the Department of Education to rent some time on this machine and he taught himself computer programming in order to analyse various simulations and strategies[3] Over a period of months in early 1964, I would deliver the programmed punch cards to the ICT facility on my way home from work, they would be run through the computer during the night, and I would collect the results on my way into the office the following morning.

Bill initially suggested that a possible option for analysing educational date might be 'units already in use in connection with the provision of services e.g. those units used in the administrative organisation of the Public Health Services.' In support of this approach, he pointed out that the organisation of the Public Health Services was based on the Registrars' Districts and the Dispensary Districts, and that population data for Registrars' Districts were available from the Central Statistics Office by gender and five-year age group. He suggested that these data could provide a basis for local planning and asked 'whether the catchment areas defined by these districts might also have some function in the administration of education and other social services?'

However, the eventual analysis was not based on civic or census areas. Since the national school system was a denominational system and national schools had historically been provided on a parish and diocesan basis, there had been no tradition of planning educational facilities on a civic boundary basis. Consequently, a more pragmatic approach to catchment area planning was adopted and so-called 'Major' and 'General' centres were identified. The 'major centres', were selected primarily on the basis of population. As they all had full post-primary facilities (in 1964), they were regarded as a minimal group of centres. The 'general centres' were defined by reference to population, geographical location and existing facilities. All of the general centres either already had some post primary facilities (e.g. at least junior cycle provision) or it was planned to provide some facilities. Data was also provided for Superintendent Registrars' Districts (total 126) and Registrars' Districts (total 655), but these areas were not eventually used for educational planning. The analysis was undertaken on a county basis - therefore when it was decided to undertake consultation about post-primary provision on a county by county basis, the statistical data to undertake this exercise was already available.[4] The potential of the statistical analysis that had been undertaken was recognised in the Appendix:

> While the location survey has been used initially to measure the size of catchment areas in terms of the numbers of children in national schools and potentially in post-primary schools, it will be clear that the data may be useful also in the planning of a variety of social services apart from education.

A key table in the School Location analysis was the table showing the distance of national school pupils from their nearest post-primary school.

Table 3. Distance of National School Pupils from the nearest post-primary school, June 1964:

[3] Bill subsequently graduated (in 1969) with a Masters degree in Computer Science from Trinity College Dublin.
[4] For further information on the County Reports see Chapter xx of this publication.

Type of School	Under 1 mile	1 – 4 miles	5 – 9 miles	10 miles and over
Boys' Secondary	50.2%	11.2%	24.1%	14.5%
Boys' Vocational	53.1%	14.5%	25.4%	6.9%
Nearest Boys' Post-primary school	55.1%	16.1%	23.9%	4.9%
Girls' Secondary	54.9%	12.2%	22.7%	10.2%
Girls' Vocational	54.3%	13.5%	25.2%	7.0%
Nearest Girls' Post-primary school	58.1%	15.4%	22.4%	4.1%

Source: http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports.

Another important table in the Annexes and Appendices was table 18 of Appendix V which showed the proportion of pupils attending secondary schools charging various levels of (tuition) fees. This table showed that 62% of all day pupils attended schools which charged less than £15 p.a.; 74% of pupils attended schools which charged less than £20 p.a. and 81% of pupils attended schools which charged less than £25 p.a. With this information, it would be possible to estimate the cost of abolishing tuition fees and introducing a grant in lieu of fees, when free second level education was introduced.

The statistical information provided in the annexes and appendices to the *Investment in Education* report was invaluable. For instance, the realisation that almost 40% of young people were attending a national school which was located at least 5 miles from the nearest post-primary school meant that the number of children for whom transport arrangements would have to be made could be estimated with a high degree of accuracy. The School Location Analysis also provided information on the age of school buildings, the facilities available in them and the potential costs of replacing or upgrading school buildings where necessary. Because of the information provided in the report and appendices, policy decisions from here on in could be evidence based. So for example, when Donogh O'Malley made his historic announcement about the introduction of free post-primary education in September 1966, he made that announcement with knowledge of the resource implications of such a policy, as will be seen in a later section of this chapter.

George Colley, Minister for Education, May 1965 to July 1966:

George Colley was appointed Minister for Education in May 1965. Within two months of his appointment he introduced to the Dáil his first Estimates as Minister for Education. Colley did not believe that a Minister for Education should play a passive role. In his view, 'the role of the Minister is to think, decide, initiate, affect, and finally guide educational reform' (Irish Independent 07/02/1966). This was a decidedly different interpretation of the role of Minister for Education than that articulated by his predecessor, Richard Mulcahy, fifteen years earlier.

During Colley's term of office he continued the annual increase in the education estimates which had begun with his predecessor, Patrick Hillery. Colley initiated the restructuring of

post-primary provision, appealing (as his predecessor Patrick Hillery had done) for collaboration between secondary and vocational schools with a view to providing a comprehensive curriculum for pupils. His intention was to raise the school-leaving age to 15 in 1970, and to develop a system of secondary education which would provide junior cycle schooling for all – to be followed by two years in senior cycle. This would coincide with extending the then two-year course in vocational schools to three years. Post-primary education would be organised on comprehensive lines 'wherever conditions are favourable.' (Dáil Debates, 5th February 1964).

In his speech in July 1965, Colley also formally announced the setting up of a Development Branch in the Department of Education. The *Investment in Education* report had recommended that a development unit be set up and that a new post of Assistant Secretary should be created who would be directly responsible for long-term planning work. The report had stated: 'the professional head of the development unit should be a first-class statistician who, ideally should have considerable administrative experience as well.' The unit should also have the services of 'at least one full-time economist and an inspector of schools.' A fourth professional member should 'possess skills in the application of quantitative methods to decision-making processes' and 'to complete the professional personnel of the unit, a sociologist would be needed' (*Investment in Education,* 1965, p. 466). However, when the unit was set up in 1966, it was but a pale imitation of what had been envisaged in the report. Seán O'Connor was appointed head of the Development Branch, at Assistant Secretary level. Bill Hyland, who was appointed as statistician, was never given the title of professional head of the unit and the only other professionals appointed within the first year were inspectors seconded on a short-term basis from within the Department of Education. There was no economist, no sociologist and no other professionals.[5] Bill was regarded by his colleagues in the Department as an outsider and was not deemed eligible for promotion under either of the two professional promotion pillars – the administrative pillar or the inspectorate pillar. In the early years of the Development Branch he had some influence and his views were listened to by policy-makers, but as time went by, he became increasingly marginalised and many of his proposals were regarded as too radical or challenging, particularly by Minister Richard Burke, who closed down the Development Branch in 1973.

Two 'Planning' Papers: (a) Notes on the Organisation of Secondary Education in a Sample Rural Area, and (b) Financial Assistance for Post-primary Students.

While Bill Hyland had kept in touch during 1965 and early 1966 with the thinking in the Department in relation to expanding post-primary provision, when he returned to Dublin in June 1966 to take up the post of statistician in the Development Branch, he got down to work immediately, and drafted a number of papers suggesting how post-primary schooling for all could be delivered in Ireland. Among his papers, this author has found two documents which were written in summer 1966 – months before Donogh O'Malley's announced the free education scheme on 20th September 1966. The first paper was entitled *Notes on the Organisation of Secondary Education in a Sample Rural Area,* and the second one was entitled *Financial Assistance for Post-Primary Students.*

(a) Notes on the Organisation of Secondary Education in a Sample Rural Area,

This 20-page paper started off by asking 'whether the limitations and the uneconomic use of resources of the present system accurately pinpointed in the Report *Investment in Education* will be sufficiently countered by the proposals for the development and reorganisation of

[5] A few years later, Torlach O'Connor was appointed as the Department's first psychologist.

secondary education which seem likely to prevail in the rural areas in the future?' The paper expressed scepticism about the Department's plans at that time for expanding post-primary provision, asking: 'Are they bold enough? Do they go far enough? The contention of these notes is that they may not.' The paper then set down the 'Present Situation and Intentions.' These included the development of a system of secondary (sic) education which, starting in 1970, would provide 3 years of compulsory post-primary education in the junior or first cycle for all; to be followed by 2 further years in a senior cycle and to move 'wherever conditions were favourable' towards the organisation of post primary education on comprehensive lines. It criticised the then proposals for extending and reorganising secondary education, which were based on minimum units for the junior cycle of 6 classes and 150 pupils (an intake of 50 pupils per annum) and for the senior cycle 4 classes and 100 pupils. It went on to set out a number of general planning considerations emphasising the issue of school size and geographical locations, and stating:

> In the majority of West European countries with which Ireland will have increasing economic and other ties, far reaching transformations in the education system have already or are in the process of taking place. The time of change is not by any means at an end. Ireland has the inestimable advantage of deciding relatively late on the reshaping of its own system and is able to profit from the mistakes and experiments of others. It would be a great pity if this advantage was whittled away and she entered on the task of educational renewal with one hand tied behind her back ***because of an insufficiently bold forward view***. (This author's italics).

Concern was expressed in the paper that:

> the present plan based largely on minimum sizes of secondary school of 150 and 100 will fix on the rural areas of the country a system of secondary education by the lowest common denominator, restrictive of educational opportunity, ill adapted to change and limited in its ability to utilise high cost resources economically and efficiently…. The first major move forward in Irish secondary education is likely in the rural areas to be based too often on the smallest equivalent unit. ***The national eye should surely be lifted for this vital service towards a somewhat loftier horizon.*** (This author's italics).

The paper went on to discuss factors to be taken into account in determining the size of the school unit in relation to effective resource use. It discussed the deployment of teachers, especially in subjects where there was a scarcity of teachers e.g. "Science, Maths, Modern Languages." It explored the probability of far reaching changes in teaching methods during the next generation "which are likely to alter both the size and nature of teaching groups" and the implications of these changes for the design of school buildings. Taking Co. Mayo as an example, the paper set out detailed projections, based on statistics collected for the School Location analysis, of the likely enrolment at the 17 centres in the county which at that time had some form of post-primary provision. The paper then categorised these centres into groups, geographically and by size, on the basis that none of the schools would have fewer than a four-form entry every year, i.e that each school would have an enrolment of at least 300 in the junior cycle and 200 in senior cycle. Where a centre could not achieve this size, the paper envisaged that the centre would be deemed unviable and would be amalgamated into the next geographically viable centre. The second paper, prepared at around the same time was entitled 'Financial Assistance for Post-Primary Students.'

(a) *Financial Assistance for Post-Primary Students (Prepared in the Development Branch).*

This provided a detailed analysis and cost estimates of providing free post-primary education for all pupils up to the age of 15. It suggested that one possibility would be to offer a grant in lieu of fees of £10 per pupil in junior cycle to schools with a stated fee of £15 and a grant of £15 to schools with a stated fee of £20. (The justification for not offering the same grant in lieu of fees as the fee charged was that 'all secondary give free places and accept reduced fees in hardship cases and in addition they have collection difficulties'). However, on balance, it was recommended that it would be better to offer a flat grant in lieu of fees of £15 per pupil to all secondary schools willing to forego school fees[6].

The paper also stated that financial assistance would be required for 'poor children' in junior cycle to meet the cost of books, stationery, transport etc. 'So far as the very poor child is concerned free tuition is not enough – he will not have the money to pay for the books and stationery he will need…..It is necessary therefore to ensure that the poor child will be provided with the books and accessories needed for his course.' The paper estimated that approximately 10% of pupils would require such extra financial assistance. The paper also emphasised that free education, including 'a larger subsidy for books and accessories' should be available for 'poor children' to take their education up to Leaving Certificate. It argued that there was no need to provide a grant in lieu of fees to all senior cycle pupils, stating that 'school fees in this country, with some exceptions are very moderate and well within the compass of middle-income groups.' The paper stated that a scheme of financial assistance should be available, 'based on ability and graduated according to income to the low-income group to enable them to proceed to university or technological college.' It proposed 'to confine additional State support to the group with income below say £12 a week … and for those we propose an additional grant of £15 per pupil to the school.'

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the thinking within the Department from late 1962 until this time, was that free education would be introduced for all pupils up to 15 years of age when the school-leaving age would be raised to 15 – which was expected to occur in 1970. (In the event, the school-leaving age was not raised to 15 until 1972). The Head of the Development Branch, Sean O'Connor and his colleagues, including the Secretary of the Department, T. O Raifeartaigh and influential leaders within the Department such as Finbarr O'Callaghan, were not in favour of introducing it sooner, nor did they anticipate introducing free education for pupils in senior cycle (Fleming, 2016, p. 238). Bill Hyland clearly differed from his colleagues in this regard. He not only envisaged free junior cycle education for all, sooner rather than later, but he held strong views about removing barriers to participation for children of 'poorer' families, by providing additional financial support (including grants to compensate for loss of earnings) up to and including third level education.[7]

Appointment of Donogh O'Malley as Minister for Education 13th July 1966

On 7th July 1966, shortly before the Dáil went into summer recess, the Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, made an important speech on education in which he stated that the recent National Industrial and Economic Council commentary on the *Investment in Education* report emphasised the need

[6] In the context of the current practice of many secondary schools of seeking a "voluntary contribution" from parents, it is worth noting that the paper added: "It would be an express condition of the State grant that the school would provide free education for all day pupils taking the Intermediate Certificate course".

[7] Bill regularly raised the issue of "opportunity costs" - arguing that fees, transport and other costs associated with school attendance were not the only barriers which prevented those from lower socio-economic backgrounds from participating in education. He was of the view that the loss of potential earnings had to be factored into any scheme that targeted full participation in post-primary education.

for a very considerable expansion of financial outlay on educational development. He added (cited in Walsh, 2009, p. 159):

> To an ever-increasing extent the policy of the Government will be directed to this, and we will have to endure the political criticisms which it may evoke from the unthinking, as other desirable developments are necessarily slowed down to enable this essential educational programme to be fulfilled.

In his speech, Lemass pledged that the government would give education 'the priority it deserves' in the future allocation of government funds. On the 13th July 1966, Lemass appointed Donogh O'Malley as Minister for Education. A fortnight later, in a letter dated 29th July to the Taoiseach, O'Malley made it clear that he had more radical and immediate plans than his predecessors, including the rapid completion of three comprehensive schools (which had been delayed due to lack of funding); the establishment of new comprehensive schools in other areas; a national transport scheme for post-primary pupils; a school meals service for primary schools and a scheme of grants for audio-visual aids for schools. He stated: 'This is an imposing list of new and extended services but in my short period as Minister for Education, it has become abundantly clear that we shall have to introduce them quickly if we want to make any progress in education' (Letter from O'Malley to Lemass, 29th July 1966, National Archives, D/T 97/6/437, S.17913).

Memorandum from Donogh O'Malley to the Taoiseach 7th September 1966

Shortly after his appointment as Minister for Education, O'Malley raised the question of free post-primary education with Seán O'Connor who advised the Minister to wait until 1970 when the school leaving age would be raised. (O'Connor, 1986, p. 141). As indicated earlier in this chapter, this had been the policy of the Department officials since 1962. However, as also indicated earlier, Bill Hyland had reservations about this policy and had already drawn up a plan, including costings, for introducing free post-primary education. Consequently, when O'Malley asked that a scheme of free post-primary education be prepared by the Development Branch, much of the material for such a scheme was already available. Seán O'Connor admitted as much some years later. When O'Malley asked him how long it would take to draft a plan for free education, he (O'Connor) said 'Six weeks.' O'Malley wanted it 'for the following Monday,' and O'Connor acknowledged that a short deadline could be met because 'in fact a fair amount of the work had already been done in the Department and we weren't really starting from scratch' (Christina Murphy, 10 September 1986, quoted in O'Dubhlaing, 1997). Within a week or two, Sean O'Connor, Bill Hyland and Seán O'Mahony had drafted the outline of the proposals which formed the basis of O'Malley's memorandum to the Taoiseach on 7th September (O'Connor, 1986). This outline contained much of the material that Bill Hyland had included in his earlier musings and papers.

The memorandum of 7th September 1966 set out two possible schemes for free post-primary education. Scheme A provided for free education up to Intermediate Certificate level for all pupils in vocational and comprehensive schools as well as all day pupils in secondary schools which charged an annual fee of no more than £20. Senior cycle education would be means-tested and would be free for pupils whose family income was less than £12 a week. Scheme B would provide free post-primary education for all pupils up to Leaving Cert level in vocational and comprehensive schools and in secondary schools which charged fees of £20 or less. The memorandum also included details of a transport scheme and additional subsidies for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. In a covering letter with this memorandum, O'Malley told the Taoiseach that he proposed to make a speech shortly in which he would refer to some of the matters referred to in the memorandum (Horgan, 1997, pp. 298-9).

Announcement by Minister for Education, Donogh O'Malley, on 10th September 1966

Three days later, before the Taoiseach or the Cabinet had an opportunity to consider the schemes outlined in the memorandum, O'Malley made his now famous speech at the annual conference of the National Union of Journalists in Dun Laoghaire announcing that as from September 1967, every child in the country would be able to avail of free post-primary education. In his speech, he condemned the inequalities in the Irish education system, pointing out that 'every year some 17,000 of our children finishing their primary school course do not receive any further education.' He continued:

> This means that almost one in three of our future citizens are cut off at this stage from the opportunities of learning a skill, and denied the benefits of cultural development that go with further education. This is a dark stain on the national conscience. For it means that some one-third of our people have been condemned – the great majority through no fault of their own – to be part-educated unskilled labour, always the weaker, who go to the wall of unemployment or emigration.

He proposed to introduce a scheme 'from the coming school year' whereby no child would be prevented by lack of funds from completing the Intermediate and the Leaving Certificate courses. As well as providing free education in vocational and comprehensive schools, and abolishing fees 'in the general run of secondary schools' he announced that funding would be made available to provide books and equipment to pupils whose families could not afford to buy them. He also intimated that lack of finance would no longer be a barrier to participation in higher education, although he did not elaborate on this. The publicity he achieved for his announcement was more than either he or any of his advisers had anticipated. While some officials in the Development Branch, including Bill Hyland, were aware that O'Malley was planning to give this speech (they had been involved in preparing a draft speech during the previous week) they did not anticipate the huge coverage it achieved in the national newspapers. The *Sunday Press* and the *Sunday Independent* the following day (11th September) gave details of the speech on their front pages. The three daily newspapers covered the announcement on Monday 12th, with an editorial in the *Irish Press* stating that O'Malley's proposal would 'help to lift poorer children out of the serfdom of ignorance.' An editorial in the *Irish Times* stated:

> Caution, not untinged with scepticism, may well be the first reaction of many because of the pace and timing of this burst of speed, but it should be welcomed. The scheme will cost us dear, but a sense of proportion will remind us that if we can pay £15 a head subsidy for a heifer or a calf, we can afford to think in generous terms for the education of a child.

But reaction back in the Department of Finance was much less enthusiastic. Both the Secretary of the Department of Finance, T.K. Whitaker, and the Minister for Finance, Jack Lynch, were very annoyed that the announcement had been made without the prior approval of the Department or the Minister for Finance. Jack Lynch was out of the country at the time and had no prior knowledge of O'Malley's proposal. Whitaker was very critical of O'Malley's failure to follow usual procedures and to obtain approval from the Department of Finance in advance. Whitaker complained to Lemass by memorandum on 12th September (NAI, DT, 96/6/356S12891F, letter from Whitaker to Lemass 12/09/106):

> The free schooling policy has not been the subject of any submission to the Dept. of Finance, has not been approved by the government, has certainly not been examined from the financial (whatever about the educational) aspect, and therefore should have

> received no advance publicity, particularly of the specific and definite type involved in Mr. O'Malley's statement.

However, it is likely that Lemass knew when he met O'Malley on 7th September, that O'Malley was planning to make the announcement. In a subsequent letter, Whitaker said that when he met the Taoiseach to discuss his (Whitaker's) memorandum of 12th September, 'while he (Lemass) did not expressly say so, I deduced from what he said (and the smile on his face) that he had personally authorised Donogh O'Malley to make this announcement' (O'Dubhlaing, 1999). Thirty years later, in 1996, when this author was a member of the Constitution Review Group chaired by T.K. Whitaker, she raised the issue of O'Malley's announcement with him, and he (Whitaker) was still angry about O'Malley's precipitate action. In the context of a suggestion to Whitaker at that time that the Constitution Review Group might recommend that Article 42.4 of the Constitution be amended to remove the word 'for' and to extend the State's provision of free education to include post-primary education, Whitaker visibly bristled and refused to include such a recommendation.[8] While in many ways Whitaker was an extraordinary civil servant, totally committed to the public good, he refused to accept, even then, that the way in which O'Malley had introduced free post-primary education was appropriate, and he expressed doubt as to whether every child in the country should have a right to free post-primary education.

There was widespread support for O'Malley's announcement, which pre-empted the publication of the Fine Gael policy document *Towards a Just Society* in November 1966. Tom O'Donnell, then a Fine Gael TD in O'Malley's constituency, later stated (cited in Browne, 2006, pp. 86-7):

> It was a bold and brilliant move. Donogh was very pragmatic; he always saw the bigger picture. The idea of free education didn't originate with him but that's beside the point. He saw an opportunity to enact a massive change and he delivered on it. He knew exactly what he was doing….

Seamus O' Buachalla wrote (O' Buachalla 1988, p. 284):

> O'Malley's free education and transport schemes were formed from some very deep convictions on the social role of education, the innate injustice of inequality and the long-term national benefit to be derived from expanding educational opportunity. …. He was keenly aware of the fate of those, 17,000 in number, who never transferred from primary to post-primary, whose formal education ended at 14 …

Subsequent commentators have highlighted the significance of O'Malley's decision. In 2005, Dermot Keogh wrote (Keogh 2005, p, 284):

> The most dramatic development in the educational sector in the 1960s was when Donogh O'Malley announced the introduction of free post-primary education. The announcement, made on 11th September 1966, may have taken cabinet colleagues by surprise, but it is almost certain that the O'Malley speech was a ploy used often by Lemass to anticipate opposition and get a radical shift in policy approved by

[8] The 1922 Constitution stated that 'All citizens of the Irish Free State have the right to free elementary education.' This was amended in the 1937 Constitution to read: 'The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions, with due regard however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation' The Report of the Constitution Review Group (pp. 343-4) includes a long explanation (drafted by Whitaker) as to why the provisions of the 1922 Constitution in relation to free education were amended in the 1937 Constitution.

acclamation. This pre-empted interminable cabinet discussion and blocking tactics by the Department of Finance. Educational planning in the 1960s had been moving inexorably in that direction.

Memorandum to the Government 11th November 1966:

Developments between the time O'Malley made his announcement in September 1966 and the introduction of free post-primary education a year later have been well researched and documented and will not be elaborated on in this chapter (See Walsh, 2009; Fleming and Harford, 2014). A subsequent and detailed submission from the Department of Education to the Department of Finance on 11th November 1966 provided costings of the proposed scheme under four headings:– Free Tuition; Free Books and Maintenance; University Education and Transport. However, the proposals as eventually approved by the Dept. of Finance did not include the additional subsidy for maintenance for "poorer children" as proposed in Bill Hyland's paper so that the dream of "equality of educational opportunity" was never fully realised. The path to implementation was not without its obstacles. Between O'Malley's announcement in September 1966 and the implementation of his plan a year later, O'Malley was to encounter some bitter opposition, but he was determined to proceed with his plan. His speech in the Senate in February 1967 encapsulated his frustration but also his determination (Senate reports vol. 62, 9th Feb 1967):

> I know I am up against opposition and serious organised opposition but they are not going to defeat me on this. I shall tell you further that I shall expose them and I shall expose their tactics on every available occasion whoever they are. I see my responsibilities very clearly to the Irish people and to the Irish children. No vested interest group whoever they may be, at whatever level, will sabotage what every reasonable-minded man considers to be a just scheme….. Christian charity how are you.

Conclusion

O'Malley's decision in September 1966 to introduce free post-primary education together with a country-wide transport scheme was a game changer, and while it did not remove all the inequalities in education, it made a very significant difference to participation at all levels of Irish education. While O'Malley's predecessors, Hillery and Colley, had each played an important part in expanding the educational horizons of Ireland's young people, O'Malley's appointment as Minister for Education came at a crucial time, when political and public opinion was ready for a "big bang" approach. The statistics and the analysis carried out by the Investment in Education team had provided crucial evidence on the need for expanding post-primary provision. The Location Analysis in the Annexes and Appendices on the Investment in Education report provided a template and a development plan for a nationwide system of post primary education, accessible to all. By summer 1966, the work which underpinned the county reports had already been done and the timing of O'Malley's appointment as Minister for Education in July 1966 could not have come at a better time. O'Malley proved himself willing and able to ride roughshod over the innate caution of some of the senior civil servants and to over-rule their advice that free second level education should await the raising of the schools leaving age to 15 – then planned for 1970. Twenty years later, Sean O'Connor, who was initially of the view that free second level education should not be introduced until 1970, and that it should be limited to junior cycle pupils, wrote (O'Connor, 1986, p. 153):

I now believe that events proved Donogh O'Malley to be right. Had free education been delayed until 1970, I believe that the scheme would have been employed only to students under fifteen, or at most to students following the Intermediate Certificate course, and that there would have been no provision for students following the Leaving Certificate course. By 1970, Seán Lemass had left the government and without his help, no Minister for Education would have been able to overcome the resistance of the Minister for Finance and his Department.

References:

Bonel-Elliott, I. (1994) 'Lessons from the Sixties: Reviewing Dr. Hillery's Educational Reform,' *Irish Educational Studies* 13: pp. 32-45.

Bonel-Elliott, I. (1996) 'The Role of the Duggan Report (1962) in the Reform of the Irish Education System,' *Administration,* 44, pp. 42-60.

Breen, R., Hannan, D., Rottman, D., & Whelan, Ch. (1990) *Understanding Contemporary Ireland: State, Class and Development in the Republic of Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan).

Browne, P.J. (2006) *Unfilled Promise: Memories of Donogh O'Malley* (Dublin: Currach Press).

Coolahan, J. (1984) *Irish Education: its History and Structure* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration).

Daly, M. E. (2016). *Sixties Ireland: Reshaping the Economy, State and Society, 1957 – 1973* (Cambridge University Press).

Department of Education (1962) *Interim Report of Committee on Post-Primary Education* (unpublished).

Fleming, B. (2016) *Irish Education, 1922 – 2007: Cherishing All the Children*? (Dublin: Mynchen's Field Press).

Fleming, B. & Harford, J. 'Irish Educational Policy in the 1960s: A Decade of Transformation,' *History of Education*, 43:5, pp. 635-656.

Garvin, T. (2010) *News from a New Republic: Ireland in the 1950s* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan).

Government of Ireland (1965) *Investment in Education: Report of the Survey Team Appointed by the Minister of Education in October 1962* (Dublin: Stationery Office).

Government of Ireland (1965) *Investment in Education: Annexes and Appendices* (Dublin: Stationery Office).

Healy, J. (March 1988) 'The Wild One', *Magill.*

Horgan, J. (1997) *Seán Lemass: The Enigmatic Patriot* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan).

Hyland, Á. (2014) 'The Investment in Education Report 1965: Recollections and Reminiscences, *Irish Educational Studies*, 33:2, pp. 123-140.

Hyland, Á. & Milne, K. (1992) *Irish Educational Documents Vol. 2* (Dublin: Church of Ireland College of Education).

Keogh, D. (2005) *Twentieth Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan).

Lee, J.J. (1989) *Ireland 1912 – 1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge University Press).

McManus, A. (2006) *Irish Education: The Ministerial Legacy, 1919- 1999* (The History Press: Ireland).

Mulcahy, D.G. & O'Sullivan, D. (1989) *Irish Educational Policy: Process and Substance* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration).

Murphy, C. (10th Sep. 1986) 'How O'Malley launched Free Schooling,' *Irish Times*.

O'Buachalla, S. (1988) *Education Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press).

O'Connor, S. (1986) *A Troubled Sky: Reflections on the Irish Educational Scene 1957* – 1968 (Dublin: Educational Research Centre).

O'Dubhlaing, S. (1997) *Donogh O'Malley and the Free Post-Primary Education Scheme* (unpublished M.Ed. dissertation, NUI Maynooth).

O'Flaherty, L. (1992) *Management and Control in Irish Education: The Post-Primary Experience* (Dublin: Drumcondra Teachers Centre).

O'Sullivan, D. (2005) *Cultural Politics and Irish Education since the 1950s: Policy Paradigms and* Power (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration).
Randles, E. (1975) *Post-Primary Education in Ireland 1957 – 1970* (Dublin: Veritas Publications).
Walsh, J. (2008) *Patrick Hillery: The Official Biography* (Dublin: New Island).
Walsh, J. (2009) *The Politics of Expansion: The transformation of educational policy in the Republic of Ireland, 1957 – 1972.* Manchester University Press.