

Report of the Review Body on Post-Primary Education (Burns Report)

SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

Transfer Tests and Academic Selection

The transfer tests (11+ tests) should end as soon as possible. Schools would not be allowed to use academic ability measured by a test or any other method to decide who should be given a place (as grammar schools do now).

Pupil Profile

In the last 3 years of primary education, schools would collect information about each child. This would be called a Pupil Profile. It would include details of how well a child is doing in all areas of schoolwork (not just English, Mathematics and Science as in the 11+ test), how hard a child works and concentrates, how well a child gets on with other children, what the child enjoys etc.

Choosing a school

In the last year of primary school the principal or teacher would discuss the Pupil Profile with parents to help them to decide what type of post-primary education would be most suitable for their child's progress, talents and interests.

After getting advice from the primary school, parents would decide which schools to apply for and would list them in order of preference.

Post-primary schools would not be allowed to use the Pupil Profile, or any test, to decide who should get a place.

Admissions (How would it be decided which school a child will go to?)

At present, many schools receive more applications than there are places available and this would continue. Under the current system, each school decides its own criteria except that Grammar schools must use transfer test results in strict order of grade ie A, followed by B1, B2, C1 and so on and other schools are not allowed to use any method of academic selection.

The Review Body proposes that no school should be allowed to use academic criteria and that all schools should use the criteria below to decide who should get a place:

- children whose parents listed that school as their first choice over those who listed it as second choice and so on;
- if there is a brother or sister already at the school or the child is the eldest child;
- if one of the parents works at the school (as a teacher or in some other job);
- if there are special circumstances ie for social, welfare or other personal reasons;
- distance of the school from the child's home.

Curriculum - What would be taught?

The aim is to provide education to meet each child's individual needs. In the first three years, largely the same subjects would be taught in all schools. In years 11 and 12 there would be some flexibility to allow children to take a greater choice of courses and some schools may become specialist centres for some subjects (eg arts, science and technology, music, languages etc).

Collegiates

These are networks of schools in each area and each Collegiate would be made up of different types of schools. The Review Body proposes a structure of 20 Collegiates made up of from 6-15 schools. All the schools in each Collegiate would work together to make a wider range of courses available to pupils than any individual school could provide and to help raise the standards of all children.

A number of schools in a Collegiate could decide to become specialist schools or to have an emphasis in some area. Examples might be modern languages, sport, new technology, sciences or the performing arts.

The Collegiates would give all pupils the opportunity to experience different types of courses. There would be the opportunity for children to take some courses in other schools or, depending on their progress, interests and career plans, to transfer to other schools.

Schools in Collegiates would work with further education colleges and training organisations to offer courses currently not available in most schools.

Collegiates would be responsible for providing support for teachers, for the continuing development of teachers' skills, for providing a learning support service for schools and for providing careers advice and guidance.

To ensure that each Collegiate provides the best possible service for all the pupils in all its schools there would be:

- A Board of Principals - its role would be to develop Collegiate policy and the Principal of each school would be a member;
- A Collegiate Liaison Council - members would come from further education colleges, training organisations, universities, employers and the wider community to ensure that the schools in the Collegiate are meeting the needs of the wider community;
- A Collegiate Standing Conference - made up of members of the Board of Governors of each school, the Board of Principals and the Liaison Council to oversee all the work of the Collegiate and work to raise standards.

Time-scale for Implementation of the Review Body's proposals

It is important to emphasise that no decisions have been taken on any of the Review Body's proposals.

The Review Body suggested that 2002 would be the earliest that the Transfer Tests could end but this will be dependent on the outcome of the consultation, decisions of the Executive and the Assembly, and any necessary changes to legislation.

If agreed, the Review Body estimated that full implementation of its proposals, including the development of the Pupil Profile and the Collegiate system, could take up to 8 years.

The arrangements for Consultation

The Department of Education is consulting on new arrangements for post-primary education. The Burns proposals represent a possible way forward. However this consultation is not restricted to discussion of the Burns proposals only. As the Review Body itself has acknowledged, people may see improvements or changes that might be made, or may have suggestions about alternative arrangements. The Department of Education therefore wants to receive:

- comments on the Burns proposals; or
- suggestions for modifications to the Burns proposals; or
- suggestions for alternative arrangements.

The consultation period ends on 28 June 2002. No decisions will be taken until all the comments received have been fully considered.

It is important to have a realistic timetable for change. This will be influenced by the outcome of consultation. The current arrangements, including the Transfer Tests, must remain in place until decisions have been taken on new arrangements. This will require a decision on the key issue of whether or not to continue with the current system of academic selection. The Assembly, the Education Committee and the Executive will be fully consulted before final decisions are taken and any necessary legislation will be taken through the Assembly.

Until final decisions have been made and the necessary legislation secured, the existing system will be managed effectively to protect and safeguard the education of children currently in schools.

A copy of the Review Body's Report is available from:

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and may be accessed on the DE web-site – www.deni.gov.uk