

# Draft Budget 2011-15 Department of Education

## Draft Allocations and Savings Proposals

### INTO Response

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 INTO acknowledges that the background to the draft budget is extremely challenging in circumstances where the British Treasury has removed £4 billion from the Northern Ireland Block Grant. INTO also notes that this is a draft budget and the Executive is attempting to raise an additional £1.6 billion. Of this £800 million has already been allocated. The Education Minister is optimistic that the draft budget for education will be enhanced arising from this process. INTO can only hope that this optimism is not misplaced. But even in circumstances where the optimism is justified, the education budget would need the entire amount of the alleged £800 million to avoid the decimation of the education service. INTO has grave doubts about whether the additional Executive resource of £800 million will be realised, as some of the proposals do not seem to generate the cash necessary or, if so, in time. The proposed Department of Education savings are unprecedented in their ferocity and highly alarming. In their present form, they will lead to hundreds of school closures and thousands of teacher redundancies, a serious increase in class size and a blight on the education of a generation of children.

1.2 INTO is reluctantly prepared - due to the enormity of the cuts proposed - to respond as requested to:

- o The proposed budget allocations for Education;
- o The proposed Savings measures;
- o Other opportunities to improve services and ensure efficiencies.

#### **2. The Proposed Budget Allocations for Education**

INTO is alarmed that the 2010/11 Budget Baseline is frozen at £1,914.8 million and then dramatically cut year on year by -3.3% (2011/12); -3% (2012/13); -2.8% (2013/14); -3.5% (2014/15). Even assuming a continuation of the modest 2.5% uplift to schools budgets for

2010/11 and bearing in mind RPI inflation currently at 4.8% - eating into schools budgets, the effect of the overall cut is extraordinary. With a 2.5% increase over 2010/15 the recurrent Education budget would be £2,658.8 million. The proposal is that this is reduced to £1,847.7 million. This represents a cut of £811.1 million over the 2011/14 four year period. A cut of this magnitude is unprecedented and totally unacceptable.

The most alarming figure in the Department's saving areas is to the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB). The cuts over 4 years are 2011/12 - £26.55 million; 2012/13 another £85.15 million; 2013/14 another £114.05 million and 2014/15 a staggering £179.85 million. The ASB is what pays teachers and front line staff salaries. It is what keeps schools solvent. Unprecedented cuts of this nature can only have catastrophic effects on the job security of thousands of teachers and front line staff.

INTO welcomes the Education Minister's assurances that she will do everything in her power to protect the job security of teachers and front line service staff. INTO supports the Department's attempt to re-classify £41 million of Capital monies to Resource in 2011/12 to minimise, as far as possible, the impact on the level of funding directly available to schools. If this re-classification is successful, it means the cut to schools budgets 2011/12 will be notionally £26.55 million (though this takes no account of the false 2010/11 baseline, inflationary or other pressures) – rather than a cut of £67.55 million to schools budgets. So while the re-classification from Capital to Resource is regrettable from a school building perspective, in the context of the dire financial projections in these Draft Allocations INTO is of the view that this re-classification will reduce the mass redundancy of teachers for a year.

INTO is alarmed at the effects of these unprecedented massive cuts to schools budgets. The question is how many teacher redundancies will there be? INTO is seeking a detailed answer to this question. However in 2010/11, regarded as a "good year" because schools budgets were increased by 2.5%, the Department of Education and Employing Authorities are planning on 250 teacher redundancies. Should schools budgets continue to be uplifted annually by 2.5%, it is not unreasonable to project 1000 teacher redundancies over the four year 2011/15 period. With the level of cuts proposed to the ASB, it is not unreasonable to assume a quadrupling of teacher redundancies, if this Resource budget was to remain in its present untenable form.

In the context of the severity of the ASB budget 2011/15 the other proposed savings areas are irritants and are mildly damaging to the education of children, which must be our most important concern. A key point INTO wants to emphasise is that the proposed cuts are

unprecedented. Teachers and classroom assistants are being offered up as the main sacrifice for the cuts. The Department has failed to take account of other beasts on the educational landscape such as CCEA and the ETI whose future in the Draft Budget remains very much 'business as usual'.

INTO makes the following observations:

- o Home to school transport costs are wildly excessive in Northern Ireland. The cut proposed, in the circumstances of the proposed budget cuts, is derisory. The time is long overdue for the jelly-like interpretation of 'parental choice' to be revisited and for the minority sectional interests defending this expensive redoubt to be challenged.
- o The proposed cuts to ICT in schools are disappointing but not life threatening.
- o The re-classification of Capital to Resource next year is useful but, in reality, taking into account the proposed enormity of the cuts, is a sticking plaster on a bleeding open wound.
- o The reorganisation of professional support to schools. 'Reorganization' is a weasel word. In reality it means a cut. There is little specificity about the nature and extent of this cut.
- o Cutting £15/£30/£30/£30m (million) over the 2011/15 period signals the destruction of the Education and Library Boards' Curriculum and Advisory Support Services which is shocking particularly in view of the fact that no adequate or acceptable alternative, or resource, is proposed.
- o INTO welcomes the cessation of the Tory government inspired Specialist School Model, divisiveness between Department of Education grant-aided schools introduced into Northern Ireland by Barry Gardiner MP and former Direct Rule Education Minister of infamous memory.
- o The cuts to the Entitlement Framework, after all the work that has been done in this area are extremely disappointing. The reference in this paragraph to the longstanding Strategic Review of LMS is amusing but not funny. This fundamental review is now overdue by about four years. Nothing much has changed with

Devolution with respect to the Department of Education. Much is promised. Little is delivered.

- o Transferring the cost of the AccessNI pre-employment vetting check to the person offered the job would be more satisfactory if there were jobs on offer rather than the massive job cuts being proposed in this draft document.
- o Delaying the programme of capacity building in support for barriers to learning is a miserly cut that will have a profoundly negative impact on children's education.
- o Teacher substitution; INTO is concerned at the expectation of the Department of Education that teacher sickness absence will reduce to producing savings of £7.2 million. The increasingly stressed school environments created by these proposed cuts, are likely to wreak havoc on the health and well being of teachers and front line staff. It seems more an issue of Department of Education wish fulfillment. The proposals may well impact negatively on school budgets without addressing the problem under concern.
- o The imposition of the GTC fee on teachers will be a highly unpopular move amongst teachers. The emoluments agreed by the GTC and the Department of Education for GTC members, including the swathe of so-called stakeholder members on the Council, GTC Chair, the neutered role of the Council, will now be viewed from a different prism, now that teachers are being expected to pay upfront for the service provided. INTO proposes that a review of the role of the GTC in the light of this change of circumstances should be undertaken.
- o INTO notes the proposal on Primary Principal Transfer Interviews. However the workload on Teaching Principals is long-standing, unaddressed and increasing. There is absolutely no merit in withdrawing substitute cover from teaching principals in schools. INTO strongly opposes this proposal.

### **3. Other Opportunities to Secure Services and Ensure Efficiencies**

It has taken countless generations to build the current Northern Ireland schools system. Yes, it is not ideal and change is necessary. However, at Primary and Post Primary Level a first class education is available currently for all Northern Ireland children.

INTO is of the view that the savagery and drastic nature of the proposed Savings, particularly to the ASB Budget, will lay waste to the Northern Ireland schools system. INTO does not regard this view as alarmist or scare mongering. The reality is across Northern Ireland hundreds and thousands of teachers will lose their jobs and will find it extremely difficult to access other teaching positions.

In view of the above, INTO laments the bickering between Northern Ireland political parties which has led to the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) being put on ice. The establishment of ESA would have given the opportunity for the Department of Education to adopt a more strategic approach to the excessive cuts being imposed on Northern Ireland budgets by the Conservative government of millionaires. That opportunity has now been lost, the forthcoming General Election in the Republic of Ireland will be followed by the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections in May and it is highly unlikely that legislation establishing the ESA will be in place before 2012. The result is that in the first year of drastic cuts each of Northern Ireland's 1200 schools will have to face the unacceptability of cuts across the board and little strategic approach will be possible.

When considering cuts of such magnitude the Department of Education would do well to look around at other major cost centres and evaluate their effectiveness, in an equal and equivalent manner to the magnitude of the cuts being proposed for school budgets. Rather than sacrifice thousands of teachers' jobs and drastically impair the teaching and learning of children in our schools it would be much more sensible to consider the roles of bodies like the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). The value for money of both organisations, in the context of the loss of so many teaching jobs, requires a fundamental review of them both.

ETI costs £5 million pounds per year. How many forms of accountability should schools be subject to? The proposed interface between the ESA and ETI is blurred and requires clarification. In the context of this funding crisis, Department of Education proposals to fund additional administrative bodies, which were strange, are now totally unrealistic.

INTO questions, whether in the context of these extraordinary proposals for cuts to the schools' budget, whether Northern Ireland, with a relatively small number of 1200 schools, actually needs a CCEA. Apart from being a factory of self-serving complexity, there would be considerable merit in a greater North/South approach within this area and using the NCCA, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, as one curriculum and assessment body for the Island.

INTO is critical of the fact that not enough attention has been given by the Department to developing education administrative and curriculum and assessment arrangements which are fit for purpose for Northern Ireland. INTO urges a more strategic response to the Education Budget which does not concentrate on the decimation of teaching and front-line service jobs to the immediate disadvantage to children's education. INTO also urges that all educational special interest groups such as the Transferors' Council, the Northern Ireland Council for Catholic Education, if they are keen to set up separate education administrative bodies, should ensure they are self-funding and receive no money from the education budget. Whatever resources are available should go to frontline services and children's education. Separateness and sectionalism should be discouraged and not "pump primed" with public money.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

Greater attention needs to be given to the removal of the bureaucratic burden on teachers and principals. Given the current status quo, any change in this direction is highly unlikely. There are far too many administrators, gate keepers, and persons desperate not to return to classroom teaching or others who have visited classrooms fleetingly much as some visit the carbon fibre plant in Bombardier Belfast. Most if not all are expensive and in over supply. The false divide between Department of Education (policy) and ESA (operations) is a typical policy gonk piece of false fancy. Education administration should be seamless in situations where the interests of pupils, teachers and schools come first.