

NORTHERN IRELAND DRAFT PRIORITIES AND BUDGET 2006-2008

INTO welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Government's priorities for public expenditure in Northern Ireland over the next two financial years.

INTO wishes to make the following points:

- INTO welcomes the fact that the Department of Education's budget has not been subject to cuts beyond the efficiency savings. However the DE remains subject to severe cost pressures which inhibit its ability to achieve its PSA targets. The uplift to the last DE budget, once allowance is taken for teacher pay, job evaluation settlements for support staff and revised arrangements increasing dramatically employer superannuation contributions for both teaching and non-teaching staff ensured an effective cut to many school budgets. This undermined teaching and learning in schools.
- INTO argues that it is essential for teachers' workload and bureaucracy levels to be cut and the key recommendations of the Curran Enquiry into Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service to be implemented to ensure that the key objectives of the Department of Education for pupils' education can be met. There is no provision for this in the Priority and Budget Proposals for 2006-08. This represents a ghastly prospect for teaching principals whose health and welfare is already under serious threat arising from them doing two jobs simultaneously. It also denies all teachers in Northern Ireland planning, Preparation and Assessment Time [PPA] which is now a statutory right for all teachers in the rest of the United Kingdom. In addition to the hardship experienced by teachers arising there from, this represents a major breach of parity with teachers in England and Wales. INTO calls for additional funding to guarantee PPA for Northern Ireland teachers at the earliest opportunity.
- INTO welcomes the Government's priorities, as outlined, for Northern Ireland education.
The introduction of a revised modern curriculum is essential but needs adequate resources to ensure its effective implementation. The proposed Entitlement Framework is overly fixed and bureaucratically inflexible and in its present form will undermine attempts to implement post primary reorganisation in a manner that is not hazardous to the welfare of teachers and undermining of pupils' learning.
The proposed ending of academic selection in 2008 is long overdue and in the interests of effective teaching and learning.
- INTO particularly welcomes the additional allocation of £5 million and £15 million to assist pupils with Special Educational Needs. This goes a considerable way towards meeting the growing cost pressures in this area.
- INTO supports the Department's PSA targets to promote improvement and reduce differentials in educational attainment. INTO questions, however, whether the appropriate resource is available [due to the

prevailing cost pressures within the DE budget] to ensure the achievement of these targets particularly for pupils from disadvantaged primary and secondary schools.

- INTO welcomes the Government's proposed determination for a major restructuring of educational administration on Northern Ireland. INTO contends that the policies and recommendations of the Government's "A Shared Future" should inform this process and seeks a commitment that any savings be redirected to frontline services enhancing pupils' teaching and learning opportunities.
- INTO welcomes the specific proposals in the budget to reduce underachievement and improve the life chances of children and young people. INTO endorses the proposed provision of high quality structured learning from 8.00am to 6.00pm in schools, youth settings, preschool settings, Sure Start and Children's centres. INTO also endorses the development of innovative approaches to delivery that build capacity and ensure that children from disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds can benefit freely from early years' and after school activities. INTO further welcomes the granting of additional funding to the Department of Education as, lead department, of £25million in 2006/07 and £25million in 2007/08 to help achieve the above objectives.
- INTO welcomes the strengthening of Child Protection arrangements and education provision for Looked after Children and vulnerable young people. Whilst sharing the government's view of the necessity to build on the extensive level of North South co-operation, INTO calls for child protection arrangements to be strengthened and harmonised on a North South basis.
- INTO abhors the continuation of school funding distributed through the LMS funding formula and repeats its demand that the teachers' salaries component be removed from LMS formula.
- INTO notes the severe funding pressures under which the Department of Education currently works. INTO appreciates the actions of Education Minister Angela Smith, MP in implementing recently parity salary arrangements for teachers in Northern Ireland with their colleagues in England and Wales. INTO calls for the education budget to be increased to take realistic account of these pressures and the need to introduce parity conditions of service improvements such as Planning, Preparation and Assessment Time (PPA) which is already a statutory right for all teachers in Britain. INTO has a particular concern for the plight of teaching principals in small schools in Northern Ireland and urges urgent action to deliver for them the recommendation of the Curran Independent Enquiry Report limiting their teaching to three days per week to enable them to perform their role and duties as principal and secretary to the Board of Governors.

- INTO is of the view greater efficiencies can be achieved by the Department of Education than is currently the practice in relation to the management of teacher sickness absence. INTO recommends:
 - (a) The establishment of a fit for purpose independent Teacher Welfare Service that will assist teachers in crisis or need, which is likely to increase with the multitude of educational initiatives being introduced at a time of rapid and far reaching change to education administration and Post-primary Review.;
 - (b) The introduction of a zero tolerance approach towards bullying school managers and the growing practice of punctilious managerialism; and
 - (c) An industrial relations audit of those schools with high levels of teachers' sickness absence reflective of an unhealthy and/or dangerous working environment.

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