

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Convener: Rev Dr CD McCLURE

Secretary: Rev TD GRIBBEN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S REPORT

- (a) **Supporting Christians in Education and Supporting Your Local School:** Affirming and encouraging individual Presbyterians and Congregations to optimise their shared role in the education of our young people. (See Board Convener's Introduction, par 2; Appendix 1; Resolution 2)
- (b) **Church in the public square:** Affirming the right of Christians to work, in partnership with others, in the area of education for the good of society as a whole. (See Board Convener's Introduction, par 2; Resolution 3)
- (c) **Republic of Ireland:** Issues relating to the funding and maintenance of ethos of schools for Protestant pupils. (Republic of Ireland sections A and B; Appendix 2)
- (d) **School Chaplains Report:** A report of the work of the school chaplain of the Royal and Prior Comprehensive School, Raphoe. (See Republic of Ireland section C)
- (e) **Review of Public Administration (RPA):** Transferor Church Representatives provide continuity of commitment and expertise on Education and Library Boards at a time of uncertainty about the shape of governance and when difficult resourcing decisions are imminent. (See Northern Ireland section A; Resolution 4)
- (f) **N.I. Draft Education Budget 2011-15:** The Department of Education (NI) proposes savings of £300 million during the period 2011-15. (See Appendix 3)
- (g) **Shared and integrating education in Northern Ireland:** SPUD placed this matter on the Education Board's agenda prior to a speech by the incumbent First Minister on shared education in Northern Ireland's schools. (See Northern Ireland section C; Resolutions 5 and 6)
- (h) **Responding to reports and consultations focusing on educational provision in disadvantaged areas and, in particular, educational underachievement and the "Protestant Working Class".** (See Northern Ireland section D; Resolution 7)
- (i) **Religious Education:** In a context of severe financial and staffing constraints it remains a priority to provide effective support and resourcing for teachers. (See Northern Ireland section E)
- (j) **Proposed merger of the QUB School of Education and Stranmillis University College:** In a measured response to an Equality Impact Assessment the TRC Churches seek assurances to mitigate against possible adverse effects upon students from the Protestant community

and schools in the controlled sector. (See Northern Ireland section F; Appendix 4)

BOARD CONVENER'S INTRODUCTION

1. The Board has met twice since the last Assembly, on Tuesdays 12 October, 2010 and 8 March, 2011. In accordance with the policy of the General Assembly, Board officers represent and advocate for PCI in various educational bodies and structures. In the midst of political and bureaucratic complexities and minutiae the Board's primary purpose is to nurture a confident, clear and shared vision of education enlivened by the core values of the Christian faith.

2. The Board, along with colleagues in the Transferor Representatives' Council, is increasingly aware of voices being raised objecting to the involvement of Churches in the public square, and specifically in the area of education. The position of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is to join in partnership with others in the area of education to work for the good of all children, irrespective of faith commitment, if any, and that this is not only a contribution which the Church has a right to make, but is also an important contribution for the good of all society. The Board of Education upholds this fundamental right of Church members to continue to make a contribution to all aspects of common life in society and in particular the presentation of the values of the Christian faith as a vital element in the education of children and young people in schools. In Resolution 4, the Board invites the General Assembly to make this clear affirmation.

Supporting Christians in Education and Supporting Your Local School

3. The Board resolved to facilitate the building of confidence throughout PCI that faith input is valid in education – at a personal and congregational level. With the encouragement and support of SPUD a working group produced the two “seeding” discussion papers – “Supporting Christians in Education” and “Supporting Your Local School” (Appendix 1). After referring them to a representative group of educationalists, and then group and plenary discussion at the Board, Resolution 2 is offered to the Assembly for endorsement.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

(A) Secondary Education Committee (SEC)

1. The functions of the SEC are twofold. Firstly, it administers the distribution of a Block Grant provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DE&S) to ensure necessitous Protestant children may attend Protestant secondary schools; secondly it represents the interests of the member denominations in the post-primary education system.

- Enrolments for 2009/10 in the twenty-one Protestant fee-charging schools totalled 9,794 (9,863 in 2008/9). This figure does not include students in the five Protestant Comprehensive Schools.
- In the school year 2009/10 the total amount received from the DE&S was €6,381,185 (€6,555,763).

- A total of 2,482 (2,546) grants were awarded in respect of the 2010/11 school year: 1,588 day grants (1,622) and 894 boarding grants (924).

(B) Educational Developments (see Appendix 2 for useful background information)

1. Changes to funding of schools under Protestant Patronage, introduced in the 2008 Budget, continue to impact on the Protestant community. These changes were: the withdrawal of grants for administration and caretaking, a reduction in the teacher-pupil ratio and a change in the basis for calculation of capital grants to these schools from 100% to 50% (bringing it in line with schools in the Roman Catholic fee-charging school sector).

2. It was agreed in 2010 that a dialogue should begin with the Department of Education and Skills. The first set of discussions related principally to the funding of the SEC and have been positive. However, the Department has begun all its discussions to date by restating the premise that the advice from the Attorney General's Office to the Department is that schools under Protestant Patronage which charge fees must be treated in the same manner as schools of other religious denominations in like circumstances. This imposes a considerable limitation on the scope for discussions; nonetheless dialogue has continued as representatives seek ways in which adequate funding to schools serving the Protestant community might be restored. It is hoped that the appointment of a new Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Ruairi Quinn, and the formation of a new government in March 2011 will offer the opportunity for a new direction in these negotiations.

3. Protestant schools are to be commended for the manner in which they have worked to limit the impact of the budget cuts. However, schools have, at this point, run out of scope to trim their budgets; the impact of these cuts is now being seen in classrooms. It is important to be aware that an ongoing deficit of funding in this sector will now result in Protestant families finding it increasingly difficult to exercise their constitutional parental right to choose a school for their child which reflects the ethos of their home. It is also important to note that the moratorium on public service appointments, and the proposed redeployment scheme for teachers, will likely mean that fewer young teachers from the Protestant community will be afforded the opportunity to work in schools with a Protestant ethos, further threatening the values and identity of these schools.

(C) School Chaplain's Report: Royal and Prior Comprehensive School, Raphoe

The Rev. Stanley Stewart reports:

1. It continues to be my privilege to serve as full-time school chaplain in this school within the area of the Derry and Donegal Presbytery. I am the teacher and co-ordinator of Religious Education with responsibility for faith development throughout the school, including organising school assembly. I

serve as part of the pastoral care team and am a member of the management committee of the Boarding Department.

2. Within this last year Dr Howard Welch has been appointed Headmaster. Despite the prevailing uncertainty, accompanying economic cutbacks and the consequent effects on staff morale I have been encouraged by the continuing good relationships. This can be seen in the ongoing effectiveness of the Mentoring, Transfer and Induction programme. In addition, with the assistance of Derek Roulston (PCI missionary), we developed our partnership with Bombi School in Kenya. Three teachers from that school visited us and we reciprocated by sending five teachers and seven students to Kenya.

3. In the coming year, in addition to my ongoing professional duties, I strive to communicate the relevance of the Church to teenagers and to have the Christian ethos of the school made more visible and permeate all activities. With the impetus provided by the arrival of a new principal I will seek to consolidate and develop new ways for Christian students to confidently grow in and witness to their faith.

NORTHERN IRELAND

(A) Review of Public Administration (RPA)

1. The Northern Ireland Executive did not endorse the legislation required to establish the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). Consequently the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), with a severely reduced membership, were given the burden of administering services to NI schools. The Board of Education salute the Church nominees who continue to selflessly serve and have borne a heavy load of responsibility along with their trustee and other professional colleagues at a time when, with the absence of political representatives, there was a clear democratic deficit. Some movement has been made to rectify this undesirable and unrepresentative arrangement. However the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) continues to have concerns about the situation pertaining in the South Eastern Education and Library Board, where, at the time of writing, the Minister of Education continues to refuse to reconstitute the Board. (See Resolution 4)

2. It is envisaged that within the interim ELB structure services will be converged resulting in the eventual establishment of a body comparable to the originally planned ESA. However, all political parties now recognise that the original plan for ESA, which intended to remove historic rights from the transferor Churches, would have produced a totally unacceptable inequality to the Protestant community in general and Controlled schools in particular. During this last year TRC office bearers have lobbied extensively with all political parties to find a way that retains the rights of transferor Churches to nominate members to serve on any ownership and decision-making body for Controlled schools. At the time of writing no political agreement on the way forward has been announced and the task of a solution awaits the new Assembly and new Minister of Education following the elections in May 2011.

(B) Draft Education Budget 2011-15

1. The Department published its draft budget for consultation over the new year period. Proposals have been made to save money over the next four years, beginning with £139million in 2011 rising to £300million in 2015. This scheme includes the release of £41million of capital monies to “resource” in 2011-12. This is designed to minimise the impact upon funding directly available to schools. In addition, a number of spending areas have been protected: allocations for Special Educational Needs, post-primary counselling services, Early Years and Extended Schools.

2. It is far from ideal that schools planning for capital investment to address inadequate and/or unacceptable facilities will be held back for the foreseeable future. It is also obvious that many of the savings measures will have a direct impact on “frontline” services through reductions in the Aggregated Schools Budget, school transport and curriculum support for teachers. How can schools be expected to prioritise school improvement measures, such as raising standards, closing the performance gap, and increasing access whilst managing such radical fiscal constraints? (See Appendix 3 for the TRC response.)

(C) Shared and integrating education in Northern Ireland

1. In October 2010 a speech by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson MP, MLA, unexpectedly questioned the viability and validity of our established and structurally segregated educational system. The First Minister allowed for denominational schooling – but not at the state’s expense. Accepting the historical realities, nevertheless he seemed to indicate the need for a staged process of integration.

2. SPUD, the Presbyterian Church’s Youth Assembly, has ventured into this debate and, with an objectivity unrestrained by the constraints of history, are requiring all of us to consider answers many have been apprehensive about contemplating. The Board recognised SPUD’s challenge to consider the Christian integrity and societal viability of “living together apart”. The Board transmits, for consideration by the General Assembly, a resolution from Spud on this issue (see Resolution 6), and in so doing recognises that it is in itself a timely call to lead relationally rather than merely by resolution.

3. The issue of shared education has also been debated extensively within the Transferor Representatives’ Council and at the March Education Board. Resolution 5 is a common resolution which will be before the annual meetings of each of the three main Protestant Churches.

(D) Responding to reports and consultations focusing on educational provision in disadvantaged areas and, in particular, educational underachievement and the “Protestant Working Class”

1. In conjunction with TRC colleagues thoroughgoing responses have been made to two consultation processes emanating from the Stormont Assembly. Whilst one is somewhat more focused than the other, both are urgent for young people the Church needs to be advocating for. *Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class* is a private member’s report facilitated by Ms Dawn Purvis MLA, bringing to bear various

professional and community insights in response to previously existing and compelling empirical data underlining an alarmingly inequitable situation. (See Resolution 7)

2. The NI Assembly's Committee for Education undertook an *Inquiry into Successful Post-Primary Schools Serving Disadvantaged Areas*. This sought to at least begin a process of examining and subsequently disseminating good practice.

(E) Religious Education

1. TRC representatives meet each term with the RE Advisers from the Education and Library Boards. Within the context of ongoing governance uncertainty these highly committed professionals are now fewer in number and have found their energies taken up with an ever-widening range of school improvement tasks. When the proposed budget cutbacks to professional services for teachers are added to this already prevailing context there will undoubtedly be a considerable impact on the capacity of advisers to support RE teachers in school. The Board has expressed serious concerns about the curriculum support for RE and gives high priority to the monitoring of this situation. In particular, options will be investigated to see how the probable shortcomings and inequalities can be alleviated.

2. The Board Convener chairs the RE Advisory Group in conjunction with the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). This group, representative of the full range of educational stakeholders, seeks to resource teachers to apply the NI Curriculum approaches to teaching and learning through RE. Work has already been produced on Thematic Units. These are based on an ICL (Ideas for Connected Learning) and set out a range of teaching and learning activities that fit in with the objectives of the NI Curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to make connections between Areas of Learning e.g. RE; Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU); The World Around Us. Despite organisational and budgetary uncertainties within CCEA there is a commitment at the highest level to progress and develop non-statutory guidance, further resourcing teachers in a manner they recognise and which enhances the role of RE within the curriculum.

3. Through the Board Convener and Secretary, and in collaboration with TRC colleagues, the Board is consulted by various local and national groupings engaged in research and evaluation concerning RE. In particular the Board has engaged with a research project undertaken by the QUB School of Law and School of Education *Opting Out of Religious Education: The Views of Young People from Minority Belief Backgrounds* and a collaborative project undertaken by the Schools of Education of Glasgow University, King's College, London and QUB *Does Religious Education Work? A Three-year Investigation into the Practices and Outcomes of Religious Education*.

(F) Proposed merger of the QUB School of Education and Stranmillis University College

1. The TRC response to an Equality Impact Assessment regarding this proposal made an informed contribution to the process. The TRC Churches

consider the proposed development to hold the potential of enhanced provision for education programmes, research expertise and longer-term financial viability. However, legislative and institutional provision is required to protect ethos and mitigate against potential negative impacts on prospective students from the broadly Protestant community, with knock on detrimental effects on pupils and parents within the Controlled sector. (See Appendix 4 - Response of the TRC to the DEL Minister's Proposals for the future of Stanmillis.)

APPENDIX 1

SUPPORTING CHRISTIANS IN EDUCATION

1. We want to encourage Christian teachers, pupils, school staff and governors in their ongoing, vital, and challenging role in schools. Christians in education have an important influence for good and for God in how they teach, administrate, learn, and take part in their school's community. We want to affirm teachers, pupils, staff, governors, and PTA members and value them for who they are and the work they do. If we haven't done this enough in the past, we need to do this more in the future.

2. We recognise the opportunities that exist in education. In most Churches a significant proportion of the Congregation are involved in schools in some way or another, as a parent, pupil, governor, cleaner, administrator, principal, teacher, and so on. In many schools a high percentage of the staff, pupils, and volunteers are Christians. It is hard to think of another context that regularly involves so many Christians, and that puts those Christians in constant contact with those who do not yet know Jesus.

3. We acknowledge the huge pressures that are on everyone involved in education today – Christians are not immune – and we want to help people to face those pressures in the power and peace of God. We need to learn to listen to people's stories of what it is like to be a Christian pupil, principal or PE teacher today and we need to understand better the context in which followers of Jesus are trying to live for Him.

4. We want to envision Christians in schools as to the impact they can have in the name of Jesus. We need to see Christian cleaners, science teachers, GCSE students, primary school governors and PTA treasurers (to name but a few) as Ministers and missionaries where God has placed them. We want to help them to see that their identity in Christ is central to their administrating, teaching, and learning, and that they are called as Christ's witnesses to be salt and light in the classrooms, corridors and playgrounds of our schools.

5. We want to equip and resource children, young people, and adults for the role they play in their school. We want to help teachers to think Biblically about the subjects they teach and the challenges they face in the classroom. We want to help Principals to have the mind of Christ as they think through the direction and ethos of their school and the big issues in education today. We want to help pupils to live Jesus way amongst their classmates, to understand what the Bible says about some of the subjects they study, and to know God's strength in the difficulties that come their way. We want to help all Christians

involved in education to live in a way that demonstrates the values of God's Kingdom, and to speak in a way that commends Jesus to all who listen.

SUPPORTING OUR LOCAL SCHOOL

1. **We want to encourage** and affirm our local Schools in the essential service they provide to our children. School life contributes significantly to all aspects of development in our children and young people. We acknowledge the challenges and seek to better understand the pressures under which Schools and teachers work. We also acknowledge the additional pressures upon local Schools as a consequence of tighter budgets and limited resources, as well as a plethora of political and educational changes and controversies.

2. **We want to recognise** that Church input to our local Schools can seem defensive and aloof. Our involvement can appear superficial and rather formal, preoccupied with maintaining, protecting and asserting our rights. Whilst we believe our historic and statutory contribution remains beneficial we recognise that this should not be the defining aspect of a dynamic School-Church relationship.

3. **We want to actively and creatively engage** our Churches with our local Schools in partnership that enables us to understand more fully the work of our schools, and how to be a support in this work. We want our Churches to develop effective relationships with their local Schools that are warmly pastoral, encouraging and go well beyond merely formal business. We want our Churches to see it as an indispensable opportunity and responsibility to assist Schools in the cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual development of our children and young people.

4. **We want to challenge** our Churches to think creatively about how they can practically support their local Schools. For instance, Congregations often have material resources such as halls, with staging, musical equipment and so forth. There is also the vast human resource – talented and willing members who could offer their time and support to assist schools in a variety of ways. This could range from helping with outings to making input across the curriculum, not least as a resource in RE.

5. **We want to consolidate and enhance** the spiritual and pastoral support that Congregations provide to their local School. Teachers and pupils may require support in difficult times and the Church, through a variety of people, is often well placed to provide a listening ear, and offer prayer support. Regular contact with the School Principal and staff can keep us in an informed position to pray for ongoing issues within the School, its pupils and staff, in an intentional and sensitive manner.

APPENDIX 2

Mrs Eleanor Petrie, PCI representative on the SEC, reports:

SUMMARY OF FUNDING POSITION OF PROTESTANT SCHOOLS IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

1. To understand the cuts implemented by the Minister for Education and Skills to moneys previously paid to Protestant fee paying schools, it is

necessary to understand a little of the history of how these payments were first put in place.

2. In 1967 the then Minister for Education, Donnach O'Malley, made the decision that if Ireland was to have an educated workforce he needed to do something to encourage pupils to stay in education until they had completed their Leaving Certificate, and the concept of Free Secondary Education in Ireland became a reality.

3. The Government invited schools to enter the "free scheme". The vast majority of Catholic schools took this path with just a few remaining as fee paying and separate from the scheme.

4. Because the Protestant population was so widely dispersed throughout the State the majority of Protestant schools were boarding and therefore fee paying. So if Protestant parents wanted to ensure that their children were educated in a faith school that reflected the ethos of the home, many had to either board or travel long distances.

5. So how could the Department of Education ensure they treated all the children of the State equally? It was decided that it would treat Protestant fee paying schools as a part of the "free scheme", by providing money in two ways:

- (a) The Block Grant, which is calculated by multiplying the number of pupils attending the 21 Protestant schools by the amount of the per capita grant paid by the Government to Roman Catholic schools. This "Block" is given to the Education Board of the Protestant Churches (Secondary Education Committee) for distribution on a means tested basis to Protestant families to assist in paying school fees.
- (b) A contribution towards the running costs of Protestant schools, in the main to pay for the Caretaker and Secretarial support, in line with the same grants paid to Roman Catholic schools in the free scheme.

6. It is the second area of funding, removed by the 2009 Budget (a sum of €2.8 million) which has left each of our schools seriously underfunded.

7. Since this funding was provided to ensure a "level playing field" for all the children of the State, to remove it is to disadvantage the children of Protestant and minority religions.

8. Up until the 2009 Budget the Department have always provided State paid teachers to all schools on an equal basis – the pupil teacher ratio was 18/1 the revised figure is to be 19/1. However, the Minister has now increased this ratio by one pupil for **all** fee paying schools to 20/1. This entirely disregards the action of the Government in 1968, reinforced by every Government since then, to assist Protestant families to educate their children in Protestant schools. Roman Catholic families can choose to have their children educated in either "free" or fee paying schools.

9. The Government now say that advice obtained from the Attorney General does not allow them to continue giving "preferential treatment" to Protestant fee paying schools, although they say they can continue to give the Block Grant.

APPENDIX 3**SUBMISSION BY THE TRANSFEROR REPRESENTATIVES'
COUNCIL TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION****DRAFT BUDGET 2011-15: DRAFT ALLOCATIONS AND SAVINGS
PROPOSALS****INTRODUCTION**

1. The Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Education's draft proposals for the allocation and savings relevant to the Draft Budget 2011-2015 and presents this submission on behalf of the Boards of Education of the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland.

2. In addressing this issue it is important at the outset to acknowledge the economic context in which the proposals are made, namely the overall reduction in the block Northern Ireland grant brought about by the challenging fiscal environment and current policies being pursued by the Treasury at Westminster. In the light of this, it is acknowledged that the need for savings is inevitable and the need for prudent management of the funds available essential.

3. The proposals provide for savings within the sector of £139.2m in the year 11/12 rising to £303.4 in the year 14/15. However, there is a lack of clarity in the proposed savings areas and a degree of ambiguity in the format in which the information is presented. Without any detailed analysis of the planned spending it is difficult, if not impossible, to reach any appreciation of the impact the suggested saving will have. With this in mind, the TRC makes the following comments.

End of Year Funding (EYF)

4. The issue of the removal of "End of Year Flexibility" (EYF) continues to be a matter of concern. Transferors acknowledge subsequent Ministerial statements of assurance to schools on the safeguarding of accumulated funds from previous years. However, there would appear to be continued lack of clarity as to arrangements for future years. It is important that such clarification is provided at an early date to minimise the effects the removal of EYF will have on the overall budgetary situation.

Budgetary setting and presumptions

5. It is noted that the budget allocations have been fixed within the overarching vision of the Department of Education; founded upon the Strategic Priorities for Education outlined in the Executive's Programme for Government. These five principles: raising standards for all, closing the Performance Gap, development of the Education Workforce, an improved learning environment and Transformed Education Management, are laudable objectives. Likewise the TRC welcomes the Minister's undertaking to protect the allocations to Special Educational Needs, Extended Schools, Post-Primary School Counselling Service and the boosting of funding for Early Years. However, it is difficult to

see how these worthy objectives can be attained, bearing in mind the scope of the reduction of funds available. Particular mention must be made to the references in respect of the provision of Special Educational Needs in regard to which some of the proposals would appear to be predicated on a policy which has yet to be published.

6. The reference for the need to reduce bureaucracy in the system is noted. Few would contest the argument that the current system is economically inefficient. However, savings in this area cannot be made without political agreement on the future structure of the administrative system. The TRC is of the opinion that progress on this is possible under proposals that will safeguard the rights of all stakeholders and would encourage our politicians to come to a resolution that will break the logjam of the past years.

Savings Areas

7. The TRC offers the following comments on some of the specific proposals on allocations:

(a) **Professional Support for Schools:**

There is an urgent need for clarification of the term “Professional Support for Schools.” Transferors would be concerned that this is a term not previously used within the system and that it is open to wide interpretation. The TRC seeks further clarification: Does this refer to the CASS system? Does it include “Educational Welfare” or the Psychology Service? Does it include CEA, CCMS, the RTU? All of these provide valuable professional support for schools and the reduction of the budget to any of these services will present major challenges to the delivery of the strategic principles.

(b) **The position of Religious Education:**

In the absence of clarity it would be important that the transferring Churches voice their concern for the delivery of Religious Education in schools in a situation in which support services are already limited. Any further diminution of support in this area would reduce the capacity of schools to deliver on the legal requirement in respect of this subject. Steps must be taken to insure its continued support role within schools.

(c) **Entitlement Framework:**

The proposals in respect of the “Entitlement Framework” in the context of a revised formula for the distribution of resources to post-primary schools are noted. It is essential that detailed proposals are made available at an early date for consultation with the schools concerned.

(d) **Teacher Substitution:**

The TRC expresses concern regarding the proposals on Teacher Substitution for Sickness Absence. These would seem to be predicated on the assumption that a proportion of the current absences are not genuine illnesses or that they fail to take into account long term illness. Information from Transferor Representatives on the ELBs would suggest that the former is not the case. It would therefore seem to be difficult to sustain these savings.

(e) Aggregated Schools Budget:

Concern is expressed regarding reductions to the Aggregated Schools Budget. Section 5.24 refers to the rationalisation of the schools estate and the sustainable schools policy. Transferors believe that rationalisation, undertaken as a purely financial exercise, could have the potential to have serious social and community consequences. This could also have serious implications for the achievement of the five strategic principles.

Such a rationalisation would also have knock on implications for other budgetary areas, primarily “Home to School Transport.” Given the current pressures upon this service, the aim of the proposed £5m saving per year in this draft budget may prove unattainable under current policies. This cutback may also prove unjust given the potential effect on those from poorer backgrounds who depend upon this service.

(f) Capital Budget:

The TRC would question rationalisation in the context of the Capital budget proposals. The cap on new builds when there is currently a huge maintenance backlog and some of the estate not fit-for-purpose, will present major challenges to the provision of modern 21st century accommodation. The conversion of £41m from capital to resource for this year should help to lessen the human impact of the budgetary proposals. However, this is unsustainable year on year. Some of the key structural changes proposed, e.g. area based planning, will also be unsustainable without adequate capital funding.

In Conclusion:

8. Recognising the serious economic situation, the TRC acknowledges the need for prudence in the use of limited funds available. However, in view of the magnitude of the proposed cuts the TRC is of the opinion that the implementation of the ‘proposed savings’ will adversely affect core educational services, be detrimental to the attainment of the Five Strategic Principles and will have far-reaching social consequences for local communities.

APPENDIX 4**RESPONSE OF THE TRC TO THE DEL MINISTER’S PROPOSALS
FOR THE FUTURE OF STANMILLIS**

1. The Transferor Representatives’ Council (TRC) welcomes the statement by Minister of Employment and Learning Danny Kennedy MLA outlining the terms under which it is proposed to merge Stranmillis University College with Queen’s University, Belfast.

2. We believe that the proposed merger with Queen’s University has potential to bring many educational and other advantages to Stranmillis including economic sustainability, the enhancement and increased breadth of learning opportunities for students and the development of a strong research programme.

3. We are encouraged that the Minister's statement has addressed three major concerns of the TRC that: the ethos of Stranmillis will be protected; the necessary training for teachers of RE will be continued; and there will be a creative partnership with the Churches and other appropriate stakeholders through institutional involvement.

4. The TRC believes it is vital that all that is best of the traditions and ethos of Stranmillis is both respected and given expression after the merger and that students in the new arrangement are given an introduction to the distinctive history, ethos and values present in Controlled schools. The Minister makes clear his intention that this will be the case, stating that such elements would *"add value to the educational experience, enhance educational outcomes and contribute positively to a shared future for all in Northern Ireland."*

5. The TRC also firmly believes that, as teachers appointed to Controlled primary schools in particular are expected to deliver religious education, it is essential that such teachers are given the necessary training in appropriate methods to teach undenominational RE with a distinctively Christian and biblical basis. Therefore we welcome the assurance from Queen's University, contained in the Minister's statement, that *"there will be no change to the teaching of the agreed RE curriculum should the proposed merger take place."* The Minister's clear statement, that the legislation to enable such a merger will also require Queen's University to continue, *"to prepare a sufficient number of RE teachers to deliver the agreed curriculum in any school in Northern Ireland"*, is also reassuring.

6. Finally the proposal to establish a 'Strategic Stakeholders Forum' that will "provide for relevant key stakeholders, including the Transferors and the wider Controlled sector, to have a direct advisory role," is very welcome. We believe that such a body will enable the Transferring Churches to continue their long standing interest in teacher education and further develop the TRC's affinity with Stranmillis as the main provider of teachers for schools within the Controlled sector in which Transferring Churches are the major stakeholders at governance level.

7. The TRC note that what is being launched today is a public consultation on the Minister's proposals. It is recognized that, following the consultation period, appropriate enabling legislation will come before the Northern Ireland Assembly. It will be important that the various assurances contained in the Minister's proposals will be fully reflected in this legislation.

NOTE: The Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) represents the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and Methodist Church in Ireland in matters of educational policy in Northern Ireland.

RESOLUTIONS

1. That the Report be received.
2. That the General Assembly welcome the reports on 'Supporting Christians in Education' and 'Supporting our Local School' and encourage the Board of Education to progress this work.
3. That the General Assembly uphold the fundamental right of church members to continue to make a contribution to all aspects of our common life in

society and in particular the presentation of the values of the Christian faith as a vital element in the education of children and young people in schools.

4. That the General Assembly express thanks to those who serve as Transferor representatives on Education and Library Boards in the current difficult transitional period and again express deep regret that the legal right of representation continues to be denied for Transferors on the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

5. That the General Assembly welcome a public debate on the potential for shared education in NI and encourages dialogue between schools and educational sectors with the aim of developing closer relationships through opportunities for collaboration and sharing.

Spud Resolution

6. That the General Assembly encourage the Board of Education to take steps to promote enhanced educational opportunities that will enable young people from across the different school sectors in Northern Ireland to integrate together through contact, collaboration and sharing.

7. That the General Assembly strongly support recent efforts to identify factors contributing to educational underachievement particularly among disadvantaged Protestant communities and call for the identification of policy and practical measures to help address these issues.

8. That the Board of Education be appointed in accordance with Par 284 of the Code as follows: