



## ULSTER HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

### COMMENTS ON THE HOUSEHOLD RESPONSE FORM ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

27 June 2002

It must be observed first of all that the period of time allocated for studying the Review Body's report (328 pages) and returning the completed response form, was extremely limited. The response forms were sent out by the Department of Education at the beginning of June, and the deadline to return them was arbitrarily set for 28 June 2002. A three-week period is totally inappropriate for conducting a broad consultation of pupils' parents and all others concerned, especially as it regards such an important and sensitive issue. Hence the response forms should not be used as a basis for any kind of decision which could be taken by the Department of Education.

The response form is deceitful, and some comments need to be made on (I) the questions asked in relation to the Burns Report on the first page of the form and (II) those asked about the person responding on the second page.

#### **I. COMMENTS ON THE QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE BURNS REPORT**

The Burns Report proposals, condoned by the Department of Education, aim at suppressing the form of education provided by grammar schools. This explains why the questionnaire is set out in such a way as to justify the complete transformation of the present education system and does not address the real issues which need to be dealt with.

1. Instead of asking "*Should academic selection be abolished?*" (Question 2), the Department of Education should have asked "**Should the form of education provided by grammar schools be abolished?**", since the so-called abolition of selection will result in the abolition of the form of education delivered by grammar schools.
2. According to the Review Body, the proposals put forward in the Burns Report are to be taken as a whole. Cherry picking between the different proposals and

recommendations has not been allowed for by the Review Body. The new proposed system of education revolves around the creation of 20 collegiates, which will regroup locally all types of different schools under the supervision of the Department of Education. Collegiates are the keystones of this entirely new and unproved system. Consequently, question 6 about collegiates should have been one of the first to be asked and should have been asked in such a way that parents and others concerned could understand the importance of this administrative structure within the proposed system.

3. Question 4 reinforces question 2, since its purpose is to forbid schools to introduce criteria in order to select pupils for certain forms of education.
4. The admission criteria mentioned in question 5, according to which parents can choose the secondary school they want, further demonstrates that the form of education provided by grammar schools is doomed to disappear if the Burns Report proposals are adopted. Therefore, it would have been more honest if the Department of Education had asked if only one form of education should be provided by some kind of comprehensive schools.
5. The parents should not be made to believe that the Pupil Profile (question 3) will be sufficient to help them make the right choice of secondary school. Parents should also be made aware that all the professionals will be forbidden to advise them (teachers and principals), and it should have been recalled that secondary schools will be forbidden to know the content of the Pupil's Profile until the admission process is completed.
6. The so-called admission criteria listed in question 5 are no proper criteria, since secondary schools are forbidden to refer to the merits or even the needs of the children. The admission procedure would become a purely administrative exercise which could just as well be carried out by an independent State body rather than by the schools themselves.

#### CONCLUSION:

The questions asked on the first page of the response form are misleading. They do not reflect the meaning of the recommendations of the Burns Report, which will result in the abolition of the form of education provided by grammar schools and will change the education system for an entirely new, unproven system of comprehensive schools within collegiates.

## **II. COMMENTS ON THE QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE PERSON QUESTIONED**

The questions asked on the second page of the response form will enable the Department of Education to segregate people on the grounds of residence, social origin and age. The Department of Education will also have the means of taking separately into account responses from parents and teachers, and even of distinguishing between parents who have children in grammar schools and those who do not, etc.

In doing so, the Department of Education will draw their own conclusions to suit their purpose in an attempt to carry out the reforms they want to push through as soon as possible.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The response form has been prepared so as to justify and facilitate the complete transformation of the system of education and the abolition of the form of secondary education provided by grammar schools.

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