

## Changes and Trends in our Educational System since 1922

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This is, I think, the first talk on our educational system that has been given here and so, before the statistics of the subject can be usefully considered, a sketch of the structure and history of the system would seem to be called for.

Apart from the University institutions, which, although on the Department of Education Vote, are entirely self-administered, our education system, like Caesar's Gaul, is divided into three parts, primary, secondary and vocational.

### *The Primary System*

State administration of primary education on a nationwide or national scale (hence the terms "National education", "National school", "National teacher" and so on) began in 1831 when a Board of seven Commissioners of National Education was established by the Government.

The National Board, as it came to be called, started off with an annual Parliamentary grant of £30,000. With this it paid part of the teacher's salary in any applicant school which was considered to merit recognition. In addition it contributed not less than two-thirds of the cost of a new school building where it was satisfied that a claim for such a building was established.

During the first forty years of the Board's régime its policy of rigid undenominationalism met with strong opposition, especially from the Catholic authorities. Just a century ago things had reached such a pass in this regard that Catholic school managers were prohibited by the Hierarchy from appointing any teacher who had been trained in the Board's Model School in Marlborough Street.

The near-impasse was largely resolved by the tacit acceptance by the Government of the findings of the Powis Commission, 1868-1870, in favour of a re-orientation of the Board's policy in line with popular demand. It was then that the broad principles of the system, evolved out of the *sturm und drang* of 1831 to 1870, were crystallised.

These broad principles are:—

The school is under the management of the parish priest, or rector, as the case may be, and has a fully denominational character accordingly. The manager appoints the teacher.

The State provides not less than two-thirds of the cost of erection of the school building, which is vested in the manager and other local trustees, with the Board (nowadays the Minister) a party to the lease.

The State pays the entire salary of the teacher. (The Board started with the idea that it should contribute merely by way of increment to the salary provided locally, but the custom of a local basic salary died out completely well before the end of the nineteenth century).

In 1923 the Board of Commissioners was suspended and in 1924 the Ministers and Secretaries Act brought the administration of primary education directly under a Minister of State. By then the system which a century before had met with determined opposition had been hammered and shaped into a spirit and form that suited this country, and so the advent of independence did not bring in its train any essential change in the centralised administration and uniformity of programme bequeathed to us by the nineteenth century.

In passing it may be worthy of remark that the administration of primary or National education, alone among the three branches, does not rest on any statute, but on regulations made formerly by the Board and now by the Minister.

To come to the period which is our concern tonight, the most appropriate way to present the picture to the present company is, I take it, by means of statistics.

In the school year 1921-2 the daily average enrolment in National schools was 497,761 and in 1923-4 was 493,382. Unfortunately there are no enrolment figures available for 1924-5, but in 1925-6 there was a jump to 518,002. (These figures and all others to be given here in relation to Ireland refer to the Twenty-Six Counties area only).

To understand the sharp rise that occurred in National school enrolment in 1925-6 we must go back for a moment to the beginnings of the system. In the 1830s the Irish Christian Brothers, whose Order had been founded in the very beginning of that century, had connected some of their schools with the National Board, but had soon withdrawn them on finding the Board's religious policy to be incompatible with the principles of the Order. For nearly a century, therefore, the Irish Christian Brothers sacrificed all State grants and salaries in relation to their primary schools, and only in 1925-6 did they return to the National system, bringing with them their average enrolment of 19,574 for that year. The remaining 5,000 or so pupils that swelled the average enrolment for 1925-6 are probably to be accounted for by the School Attendance Act of 1926, which provides for compulsory education between the ages of six and fourteen and seems to have immediately caused many pupils more than before to remain on till the compulsory date of their fourteenth birthday.

The year 1926-7 is of interest statistically for the reason that it marked the highest National school average enrolment on record—518,355 souls. From that year on, however, the figure fell continuously until in 1930-1 it was 502,393. In 1931-2 and 1932-3 it rose but there was again a continuous decline from 1932-3 till 1939-40, when there was an increase of 1,582.

The fall again continued up to 1946-7, which year, with an average enrolment of 444,132, was the lowest point of the parabola. Since then, with the exception of 1948-9, when there was a slight

fall, the figure has been climbing steadily, until in 1957-8 there was an average enrolment of approximately 489,000, with a total enrolment of about 506,000 on the 30th June, 1958.

Perhaps that is enough about National School attendance, at least for the moment. The only other National school statistic I can think of that would not involve too much detail is one that would give a general picture of school staffing. We have no figure of the kind for 1921-2, but in 1956-7 there were 768 one-teacher, 2,660 two-teacher and 1,441 schools of more than two-teachers. This distribution of teaching power is part of the European and indeed of the world pattern.

### *Secondary Schools\**

When we come to Secondary Schools statistics, it is at once evident that great changes have taken place since 1921. Of these the most spectacular is probably the enormous increase in the number of pupils. In 1921-2 the 274 recognised Secondary schools had 20,776 recognised pupils and in 1953-4 there were 447 such schools, with 54,019 recognised pupils. During that period, therefore, the average annual increase was slightly over 1,000. In 1957-8, however, the 489 schools had 66,221 recognised pupils, with thus an average annual increase of 3,000 pupils between 1953-4 and 1957-8.

These phenomena are of particular interest in relation to the future University population. As the number of University students and that of Secondary school pupils are so far in the ratio of approximately 1 : 10 and as five years is the normal range of the Secondary school course, the number of University entrants should in 1959-60 show a bulge of 200-300 instead of the usual annual 100 or so.

The great increase in the number of Secondary pupils between 1921-2 and 1957-8 is reflected in the payment to the schools of £638,907 capitation grant in 1957-8 as compared with £97,153 paid as results fees in respect of 1921-2.

Let me turn aside here for a moment to explain the meaning of the term "capitation grant". Unlike National and Vocational schools, Secondary schools are entirely independent private institutions, many of which were flourishing long before the State took cognizance of them and all of which have the right to sever at any moment their connection with the State, as the Christian Brothers were able to do in the case of their primary schools, for these had been built by the Brothers themselves without any State assistance.

This right of severance, which the State could not permit in the case of National and Vocational schools, for there it has shared directly in the cost of erection, is at once a cause and a result of there being no State grants towards the building of Secondary schools. As against that, however, Secondary schools receive since 1924 an annual capitation grant for each recognised pupil—the capitation grant is £11 per junior and £16 per senior pupil. Contrary to what is sometimes thought, the capitation grant in no way depends on the Certificate Examination results.

\* Here the term "Secondary Education" covers grammar school education only. In other countries "Secondary Education" would include a large part of what we call "Vocational Education".

In addition, Secondary schools may charge whatever fees they wish and accept or reject pupils as they think fit, whereas the National schools are free of charge and open to all and the Vocational schools, also open to all, provide, where necessary, free education.

Before 1924, Secondary schools received no capitation grant, but only a small sum based on Examination results and hence called results fees.

All this is by way of explanation and not intended as arguing the merits or otherwise of the present method of subsidising Secondary education.

The second striking feature of the period concerned is the greatly increased State expenditure on Secondary teachers' salaries. Up to 1924 those salaries were paid for the most part by the schools themselves, with the State providing certain additional sums amounting in all to £38,520 in respect of the year 1921-2. Now the regulation is that the school pays the registered recognised teacher a minimum of £200, with the State paying the rest of the salary and the other emoluments. The result is that in contrast to the £38,520 in all paid by the State for 1921-2, in the year 1957-8 it paid £1,562,740 in Secondary teachers' salaries and emoluments. The emoluments concerned comprise increments for Honour degrees and other special qualifications, children's allowances and rent allowances. (These emoluments are payable to National and Vocational teachers also.)

Another important reform in Secondary education was the introduction in 1929 of a superannuation scheme.

The increase in the number of candidates at the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate Examinations has been so steep as to outrun in proportion the increase in the number of pupils. The year 1921-2 gives us no basis of comparison in this regard, as there were then three examinations, Junior, Middle and Senior, while now there are only two. In 1925, however, the first year of the two Examination system, 2,903 sat for the Intermediate Certificate and 995 for the Leaving Certificate, as compared with 14,293 taking the Intermediate Certificate and 7,820 taking the Leaving Certificate in 1958. (Incidentally, this total of 22,113 candidates in 1958 filled over 260,000 answer books).

The increases in the number of pupils and in expenditure on secondary education during the period concerned are of course part of a world pattern, except that we had a certain amount of leeway to make up by comparison with many European countries. The feature of the increases which is peculiar to Ireland is that they occurred against a background of a general decline in population, with all that that connotes in relation to national income, actual and potential.

Some particular features of secondary education that might be thought worthy of special interest are the position formerly and now in regard to such subjects as, say, French, Greek and Science.

There are no figures available for the numbers studying a particular subject before 1931-2, but in that year the number of pupils following a course in French was 15,173 out of a total of

30,004. In 1957-58 the number following a course in French was 30,515 out of a total of 66,221.

2,985 pupils were studying Greek in 1931-2 out of a total of 30,004. In 1957-8 the number of pupils taking Greek was 4,609 out of a total of 66,221.

In 1931-2 there were 14,682 pupils studying Science subjects (other than Domestic Science) out of a total of 30,004. In 1957-8 the figure was 31,881.

Since 1931-2, therefore, there has been no significant change in the proportion of pupils taking these particular subjects. The increase in the actual numbers taking them, however, is of course very important, and the law reflected by these statistics is perhaps no bad one educationally, namely, that if we want more pupils to study, say, Science, it is for us to provide more facilities for secondary education generally.

There are many other matters concerning Secondary education which would be well worth a glance if there were time for that. It will, for instance, be observed that I have so far omitted all references to the Irish language. The reason for this is partly that the changes introduced in that direction are so far-reaching and so well-known that within the compass of this paper they could only be adequately discussed to the exclusion of all else and partly because it is a novelty to look at the general picture without reference to Irish. All that need be said to give an idea of the position is that formerly the only point at which Irish was required was the National University Matriculation Examination, while now all recognised pupils, that is, pupils on whom capitation grant is payable, must study Irish.

Before we leave Secondary education it is worth remarking that our system of independent Secondary schools was in very large part a purely native growth in response to native needs and that it was only in 1878 that the State, by way of the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, first made any attempt to assist secondary education generally.

### *The Vocational Schools*

In contrast to the Secondary schools, the Vocational schools owe their existence entirely to State action. During the second half of the last century a limited amount of technical education was being given here and there, encouraged by prizes, medals and grants from the British Science and Art authorities. In 1889 a Technical Instruction Act was passed but it was not until the establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1899 that technical instruction came to be put on any kind of systematic basis.

In 1924 Technical Instruction was assigned by the Ministers and Secretaries Act to the Minister for Education and shortly afterwards a Commission on Vocational Education was set up. The Report of this Commission was the basis of the Vocational Education Act of 1930.

The 1930 Act established thirty-eight Vocational Education

Committees, with the funds of these to be provided by the State and by the local rating authority in each Committee's area. The proportion of the State and local authority contributions varies from 1:1 in most counties to 2:1 in Dublin city and 4:1 in Cork and smaller towns. Of the total funds the State contributes about two thirds. The Vocational Education Committees are, under the sanction of the Minister for Education, local authorities in their own right. In this respect our position differs from that in Britain and some other countries, where the local rating authority is also the local education authority.

The contrast between the position in 1929-30, the year preceding the passing of the Act, and the present time is rather striking. In 1929-30 there were 67 established vocational or technical schools and in 1956-57 there were 260. In 1929-30 there were approximately 2,500 whole-time day students. In 1957-58 this 2,500 had become 23,052.

To take some particular subjects, in 1929-30 no Vocational school taught Rural Science, but in 1957-58 this subject was being taught in 106 Vocational schools, by 97 teachers. The number of students of Rural Science in that year was 3,270 full-time and 1,504 part-time.

It is sometimes thought that the Vocational schools are largely centres of instruction in shorthand and typing only, but the statistics do not show that undue weight is given to Commerce subjects. Of the 23,052 full-time students attending Vocational schools in 1956-57, just 6,693, or slightly more than one fourth, were taking the Commerce group, and of the total of 96,340 part-time students of that year, only 21,989 were taking Commerce subjects.

Incidentally, that figure of 96,340 part-time students of Vocational schools perhaps speaks as much for the influence and importance of these schools as does the figure of 23,052 for full-time students. The full-time student is generally in the age group 14-17, but the part-time student may be of any age, and so the part-time evening classes have brought further education to tens of thousands whose schooling had stopped short on their having reached the age of fourteen.

### *A Summing Up*

To sum up, it may be said that since 1922 a great deal has been done. Since that year the number of Secondary schools has doubled and the number of secondary school pupils has more than trebled. Similarly, despite the hold up during and after the war, since 1930 there are 193 new Vocational schools and the number of full-time Vocational school pupils is ten times what it was in 1929-30.

Best, however, we begin to feel complacent, it may be salutary, as a conclusion, to have a look at the figures for some comparable European States. The following table gives the latest available figures of school population (omitting "pre-school education") in eleven such States:

	Population	School Year	Full-time enrolment figures		
			Primary School	Secondary School	Vocational School*
Luxembourg ..	306,000	1954-5	29,402	4,287	2,236
Northern Ireland (6 Counties) ..	1,387,000	1955-6	211,148	39,342	5,319
Ireland (26 Counties)	2,909,000	1954-5	496,149	61,925	17,073
Norway .. ..	3,392,000	1954-5	426,286	46,505	47,534
Finland .. ..	4,240,000	1955-6	591,682	134,075	35,491
Denmark .. ..	4,369,000	1954-5	519,931	133,489	56,226
Switzerland ..	4,978,000	1953-4	511,405	98,605	7,867
Scotland .. ..	5,133,000	1955-6	600,170	232,112	—
Austria .. ..	6,983,000		729,478	80,316	43,939
Greece .. ..	7,901,000	1954-5	943,722	196,207	36,197
Belgium .. ..	8,924,000	1954-5	898,369	148,706	135,122

The approximate population of each State is given for convenience.

The number enrolled in primary schools is of little help for comparative purposes, since primary education is compulsory in all these cases. A test, however, of the several placings in post-primary education is a comparison of the figures of secondary and vocational with those of primary enrolment. Such a comparison shows Norway, for example, to be somewhat behind us on the secondary side but well ahead of us in vocational enrolment. Denmark and Finland, on the other hand, are very much ahead of us on both fronts, while Belgium is not too far ahead, relatively, in secondary school enrolment but far beyond us in the vocational field. The Scottish figure is a comprehensive one, since there the post-primary school is the comprehensive type. Scotland, it will be observed, is one of the leaders in post-primary education.

The general impression one receives is that, considering our resources and the substantially rural nature of our country, we are not doing too badly in secondary education but that, despite great strides since 1930, we have still a long way to travel in the provision of facilities, and the using of these, for vocational education. In this matter, however, due regard should be had to the fact that we are the least industrialised of the areas tabled and that it is much easier and more economic to provide vocational or technical facilities for an urban than for a rural population.

It is of course scarcely necessary for me to warn against a too ready acceptance of statistics at their face value. For example, the table given does not reveal the fact that 5,367 of those enrolled in our primary schools were in fact receiving a full secondary top". Similarly, Switzerland, although behind us in full-time post-primary enrolment, has in fact more than 7,867 full-time technical students. The 7,867 full-time technical students returned are students at Commerce schools, the other Swiss technical students presumably coming under the heading of general secondary education. Again Ireland, where pupils generally remain in the

\* In countries other than Ireland the term Vocational Education is restricted for the most part to mean part-time industrial education.

primary school up to 13 or so, is not open to comparison in relation to secondary enrolment, with countries where "secondary" schooling begins at eleven plus.

One last point. With the greatest respect to statistics, I should wish to stress that perhaps nowhere more than in education may statistics be one thing and quality another.

I thank you all sincerely for listening patiently to an account that it is to be feared gives a very inadequate idea indeed of the adventure it has been for the last quarter of a century to have been, as the saying goes, "in education".

## DISCUSSION

*Dr. M. D. McCarthy* said that he felt that it might be of advantage for the records of the Society to supplement the material given in the paper by some data relating to University education. This relates to the three constituent Colleges of the National University and Trinity College, Dublin. University students in these institutions numbered 2,254 in 1909-10 and, after an initial increase, fell during the first world war and again rose sharply to a peak of 3,658 in 1920-21. The next few years showed a decline the low level being reached in 1926-27 at 3,037 and since that period they have grown in almost unbroken sequence to the number of 8,393 in 1957-58. The 1,977 men students in 1909-10 increased only to 2,126 in 1926-27 but last year they numbered 6,230. The women students, who were only 277 in the early year, rose to 911 in 1926-27 and now number 2,163. Thus, up to 1926 the main increase was in the number of women students and since then both men and women students have grown very substantially, the numbers of women increasing at a slightly faster rate. Over this period the students in the recognised College of St. Patrick's in Maynooth have been fairly constant at between about 500 and 600.

In 1923-24 there were in the constituent Colleges of the N.U.I. and T.C.D. 969 primary degrees awarded—a number which fell to 840 in 1926-27 and rose to 1,680 in 1956-57. Thus, there were about 28 graduates per annum per 100 students in 1926-7 but only about 20 in 1956-57. This means either that the standard for graduating is getting more severe, the standard of entrants is lower or that the average length of course has increased. This latter factor if it exists may be due to changes in regulations for courses of instruction or changes in choice of courses of different lengths. In Maynooth there have been about 100 graduates per year.

The extraordinary thing is that the number of people getting higher degrees has not increased. It was 134 in 1923-4, 177 in 1926-27 and only 133 in 1956-57 in the Colleges of the N.U.I. and T.C.D. This, I feel, is the statistical expression of the weakness of the Irish university system, whereas thirty years ago about one primary graduate in five did a higher degree now only about one in thirteen does it.

As regards staff in 1909-10 in the N.U.I. and T.C.D. there were 137 professors and fellows and 95 lecturers, demonstrators and assistants. In 1956-57 the numbers were 199 and 497 respectively,



a growth of about one-half in the higher posts and one of over four in the lower. Whether this is adequate enough or not it is difficult to say.

In 1938-9 the four colleges spent between them £443,000, in 1955-56 they spent £1,228,000. Now, while I do not know what the relevant price rise in the interval was, it must have been somewhere about from 1 to 2½. If this is so the expenditure of the colleges has changed little in real terms over the period despite the growth in student numbers from 5,400 to over 8,000. It might be inappropriate for me to say more than that on the subject. As regards sources of income, the central government which before the war contributed over two-thirds of the income of the colleges of the N.U.I. now provides as much or more and, while its pre-war contribution to the income of T.C.D. was negligible, it now provides about one-third of the income of that institution. In this connection it may be mentioned that about one-tenth of the student body of the N.U.I. colleges come from outside the State while the proportion is almost 50 per cent in T.C.D.

A re-reading of Vaizey's book on the Cost of Education in Britain suggested that some student should produce a study like that for this country. One point that emerged from that study was that the State expenditure on Education in this country constitutes just about the same proportion of Gross National Product as in Britain. Now per head of the population their National Product is about twice that here so that absolutely education is much better provided for there. It would, he thought, be admitted in this context that, in view of the necessity for development here, we should be spending a higher proportion of our product on this activity which of all the social expenditures is most likely to pay economic dividends in the future.

*Mr. Arnold Marsh*, seconding the vote of thanks, referred to the very difficult position in which those secondary schools not managed by religious orders were placed when they needed funds for development. This was not a sectarian question. One of the most remarkable developments since the 1920's was the coming into existence of over fifty Catholic lay schools. These had to pay their teachers and provide funds for buildings in the same way as the Protestant schools, but they were in anything in a worse position, for some Protestant schools still had endowments and the Catholic lay schools had not. The State provided very substantial help in building elementary and technical schools, but none for secondary. It did however pay most of the salaries of teachers and also gave grants, based on the numbers of pupils, and further grants for teaching science and other special subjects. In the schools of the religious orders a large proportion of the salaries was not paid to the teachers, but retained by the order. It could then borrow money for building and use much of its grant income for interest and sinking fund. Thus, by not using the moneys for the purpose for which they had been intended it was able to finance extensions in a way that no lay school could do.

He held that it was wrong to argue that the provision of capital by the State would undermine the "independence" of secondary schools. They were not publicly owned but they were not indepen-

dent. They had to follow set courses and comply with the Department's regulations. In Northern Ireland the "independent" secondary schools could get up to 65 per cent. of their capital needs free of charge provided that they continued to be secondary schools following Ministry's courses for thirty years. The practice then was to borrow the other 35 per cent. and put an extra charge on the fees to finance this. Most of this increase in fees was then paid by the local authority, which provided scholarships for most of the secondary pupils. Control of the management of the schools was almost unaffected.

He presumed that when the pressing needs for new buildings for national and technical schools had been met the secondary schools here would receive more consideration, and it would then be interesting to observe what arrangements would be made to avoid duplication of assistance to religious orders.

In commenting on the discussion, *Mr. Ó Raifeartaigh* drew attention to the fact that the grant to secondary schools and the incremental salaries, which are paid to the teachers individually, are not ear-marked for any specific purpose.