

WHITE PAPER ON EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CON POWER

Confederation of Irish Industry

1. INTRODUCTION

The Confederation of Irish Industry has made a detailed response to the "White Paper on Educational Development" which was presented by the Government before each House of the Oireachtas in December 1980.

In general terms, the Confederation has welcomed the publication of the White Paper, and the Confederation has welcomed, in particular, the statement in the Foreword to the White Paper that the education system "will undergo a continuous process of adaptation and development".

The Confederation has over the past number of years engaged in an active campaign aimed at strengthening the links between industry and the schools with a view to ensuring that the education system is at all times fully informed of the most recent developments in modern high technology industries. It is encouraging for the Confederation to see that the White Paper recognises the ever-acceleration pace of change in Irish Society, and that it recognises the role of the education system in preparing young people to meet that change.

I have been asked to focus my address upon the post-primary school curriculum presumably because I have, on many occasions, articulated a number of changes which the Confederation would like to see introduced into the curriculum at the post-primary stage.

2. POST-PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The majority of young people who leave the post-primary schools at present go directly into employment, and there is a clear obligation on the post-primary school to, in some way, prepare those young people for the transition from school to work. It is accepted, of course, that this is not the only role of the school, but the Confederation has stressed this particular role because it appears to us that the implications of the role have not always been fully appreciated within the education system. The most recent national survey of post-primary school leavers, which was undertaken by the National Manpower Service, relates to the school year 1977/78, and the results were published in Spring 1980. The survey shows that slightly over 70 per cent of the post-primary school leavers in that year either found employment directly after leaving school or were still actively seeking employment when the survey was undertaken. It is obvious from this statistic that the majority of young people must face the transition from education to work immediately after leaving the post-primary school, and the thrust of the education system must take cognisance of that fact.

3. CURRICULUM COUNCIL

The Confederation made representations to the Department of Education to the effect that there is a need to establish a Curriculum Council which will deal with the totality of

the course within the post-primary school, and the Confederation also suggested that the Council should include representatives from all relevant sectors of the community which have a legitimate interest in the post-primary school curriculum. The Confederation, therefore, welcomes the proposal in the White Paper to establish a Curriculum Council which will advise the Minister on second-level curricula and syllabi. We now recommend that this Council be established immediately so that it can be fully operational before the commencement of the school year 1981/82. The Council should be established initially on an *ad hoc* basis so that it can commence work without having to await the outcome of a lengthy legislative process, but the Council should become a statutory body after experience has been gained of the *ad hoc* operation over a period of three to five years.

4. SYLLABUS COMMITTEES

The Confederation has also recommended the involvement of persons from sectors of the economy, other than education, in the work of each of the existing Syllabus Committees. The position at present is that all members of each of the existing Syllabus Committees at post-primary level are drawn from the various groupings within the "world of education", and this effectively means that each syllabus is decided on by technical experts from within the "producer group" (and I include the Universities here) without reference to similar technical experts in the major "user group". By major "user group" I mean the employers from sectors of the economy outside of education. The Confederation has been invited by the Department of Education to make written and oral submissions to the existing Syllabus Committees. This invitation came during the course of the past year, and the Confederation has acted upon the invitation by making submissions to both the Chemistry and the Physics Syllabus Committees which are the only two Committees to contact the Confederation to date. The Confederation intends to make submissions to each of the Syllabus Committees as and when they meet. The making of written and oral submissions to Syllabus Committees does not adequately answer the case which has been put by the Confederation, because, in our view, the only way in which a meaningful involvement by industry in the work of any Syllabus Committee can come about is by involving relevant technical experts from industry in all of the deliberations of the Syllabus Committee, and this can only be done through the granting of full membership of the Committee to these experts. The Confederation notes from the White Paper that the proposed Curriculum Council will, *inter alia*, advise the Minister on the agencies which should be represented on each Syllabus Committee, and we recommend that this task should be given priority by the new Curriculum Council so that recommendations can be made to the Minister prior to the commencement of the school year 1981/82.

5. CAREER-ORIENTATED COURSES AT SENIOR CYCLE

The Confederation welcomes the proposal to introduce career-orientated courses at senior cycle. We have pointed out on many occasions that Ireland is almost unique among developed countries in not having a formal range of career-orientated options at the equivalent of the Leaving Certificate. We have urged the Department of Education to consult with all relevant interests in the community and to consider the introduction of a number of specific options as alternatives *WITHIN* the present Leaving Certificate validation structure. These alternatives should be available to those pupils who may wish to leave the formal full-time education system after post-primary education, and it seems from available statistics that these pupils will form the majority of post-primary pupils for the foreseeable future. The Confederation, in making submissions in the past, has

stressed that successful participation in one of the alternative streams within the Leaving Certificate should be acceptable as an entry qualification to those higher education courses which are related directly in content terms to the specific post-primary career-orientated option. There should also be bridging or transfer courses available for young people who subsequently wish to follow higher education options not directly related to the specific post-primary senior cycle option which they have followed.

6. LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Ireland is a small open economy which depends to a considerable extent upon international trade. Language education is an integral part of the preparation of international marketing experts. The Confederation believes that the syllabus content of each language which is used in international marketing should in some way reflect the needs of the market place. In this connection, the Confederation welcomes the introduction of the oral test in French, and notes that an oral/aural component will be included in the Leaving Certificate examination in the case of each modern European language from 1985. The Confederation also recommends that the range of choice of languages available to post-primary students should be extended, with particular reference to languages which are used in international marketing. The introduction of any additional language will, of course, be a matter for decision by the new Curriculum Council.

7. COMPUTER STUDIES

The computer industry is one of the most rapidly growing branches of modern technology. It has expanded very quickly in the past two decades, and Ireland is fast becoming a European, if not a world, leader in this industry. The Confederation welcomes the commitment in the White Paper that courses in computer studies will be introduced over and above the module which has already been introduced into senior cycle classes in 1980/81. We look forward to the publication at an early date of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee which was established by the Minister for Education.

8. MATHEMATICS

The Confederation concurs with the statement that it is disturbing to note the falling off in the number of candidates taking higher level mathematics at the Leaving Certificate examination. We are particularly concerned about the implications which this has for the recruitment of pupils to higher level courses in engineering and in applied sciences. We welcome the proposal that the syllabus in mathematics will be critically examined in relation to aims, content, methods, and course structure. We have sought a firm commitment from the Minister for Education in relation to the examination of the mathematics syllabus. In line with our overall comment on membership of each Syllabus Committee, we have suggested that this examination of the mathematics syllabus should be made by an expanded Mathematics Syllabus Committee which will include relevant experts from sectors of the economy outside of education. We have also recommended to the Department of Education that the Mathematics Syllabus Committee should, among other studies, take into account work relating to post-primary mathematics which is being undertaken by the Thomond College of Education in co-operation with the North Tipperary Vocational Education Committee.

9. EXPERIMENTAL/PRACTICAL WORK

We welcome the proposal made in the White Paper to introduce a scheme for giving credit for experimental work in Leaving Certificate Physics on a pilot basis in 1983. We recommend that consideration should be given by the Department of Education to the introduction of similar schemes for giving credit for experimental/practical/project work in all other relevant subjects of an engineering, applied science, and business nature in the Leaving Certificate examination.

10. VISUAL EDUCATION

No reference to the curriculum at post-primary level can be complete without a reference to visual education although this is not included in the sections of the White Paper which relate to the curriculum. The only place in the White Paper in which any reference is made which is relevant to visual education is in the Chapter relating to "The Arts". The Confederation has expressed concern that this particular Chapter ends with only one proposal which is for the establishment of a Committee to examine the extent to which artistic and creative activities are being catered for in second-level schools. We welcomed the statement in the body of the Chapter that "competition in the market-place puts premium on the element of design commercial products" but this statement was not elaborated upon in the White Paper, and no proposals were made to follow through the practical implications of an acceptance of the place of the element of design in the industrial development. We believe that visual education in the widest sense of the word, and at all levels of education, has an important role to play in the development of a good design sense in the community, and that without this broadly based community visual education it will be impossible for Irish society to produce the product designers who are now urgently needed. We believe that there is a direct relationship between the creation of a good design sense in the community, on the one hand, and industrial development, on the other hand. We feel that there must be a strengthening of the emphasis placed upon the production of products with good design, high quality and a high standard of finish, and a high standard of presentation. We recommend that the Committee which has been proposed in the White Paper should include persons who have expertise in product design, advertising, media relations, the production of technical trade literature, the production of packaging, the making of industrial films, and in other areas which are related to good design, quality, finish, and presentation of products, so that the ethos of the market-place will be introduced into any consideration of the place of artistic and creative activities in the post-primary schools.

11. INSERVICE COURSES FOR TEACHERS

We concur with the statement in this Chapter that the emphasis which is now to be placed upon oral competence in Irish and in modern continental languages requires special provision by way of inservice courses for teachers. We believe, however, that a similar type of approach must be taken in relation to the English language where the emphasis should be more upon communications than upon literature.

We recommended in our response to the White Paper that due emphasis be given by the "Committee in Inservice Training of Teachers" to the inservice requirements of Guidance Counsellors. We also noted in our response that this particular Committee is representative of only teaching organisations and of teacher-training institutions, and we consider that there should be an involvement of people from sectors of the economy outside of education. Much of the need for the continuous up-dating of teaching skills arises

through developments in industry, agriculture, commerce, services, and in the professions.

12. CONCLUSIONS

The education system has an important role to play in the preparation of a young person for life and for work. The system must give some emphasis to the preparation of the young person in at least three major aspects:

- (a) As an individual who must be given every opportunity to develop his/her own potential, not only in terms of numeracy, literacy, and manipulative skills, but also in terms of being equipped with a balanced range of social and cultural accomplishments.
- (b) As a citizen or a member of a group who must play an inter-dependent role in harmony with all members of the group. This means that the young person must learn how to work with other people, and how to communicate with other people both in formal and in informal situations. The preparation must be towards equipping the young person with all of the skills necessary to live as a citizen in a democratic state which by definition is a participative community in which the individual citizen has both rights and duties.
- (c) As a worker who must contribute either directly or indirectly to the production of those goods and services which go to make up the living standards of every member of the community.

The school curriculum should reflect the need to cater for the young person as an individual, as a citizen, and as a worker. The education system does not exist as a closed system, and educational planning must go hand-in-hand with the planning of all other developments in society. In particular, the inter-linking of educational planning with planning for economic development should aim at ensuring that the educational qualifications of young people when they leave the post-primary school will best equip them to make a significant contribution to the development of themselves and of the community either by going directly into employment or by continuing their education to a higher level.