



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

**REVIEW OF DEPARTMENT'S OPERATIONS,
SYSTEMS AND
STAFFING NEEDS**

REPORT

October 2000

Foreword

This review originated in an approach to me by Mr. John Dennehy, the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science, who asked me, on behalf of the Minister for Education and Science, Dr. Michael Woods, T.D., to conduct a review of the Department's operations, systems and staffing needs. The terms of reference of the review are given in Appendix 1.

To undertake the review I asked Mr. Dennehy for the assistance of a Task Force of officers from the Department. The following were nominated for this Task Force:

Mr. Pat Dowling, Principal
Mr. Liam Kilroy, Principal
Mr. Torlach O'Connor, Assistant Chief Inspector

It had initially been intended that Mr. Pat McBride, Principal, CMOD, Department of Finance, would also be a member of the Task Force but, because of pressure of other work, he had to withdraw. He was, however, able to attend some initial interviews and was also helpful to me in an advisory capacity.

Mr. Dermot Curran, Assistant Principal, was assigned to the Task Force as Secretary. On his departure on promotion to another Department, he was succeeded as Secretary by Mr. John McCullagh.

I commenced my review in mid-May 2000. I was advised that it would be most useful for the Minister and the Department if my report were available within three to four months. This relatively limited amount of time was a constraint but was valuable in ensuring that the Task Force concentrated on matters of substance. This approach was all the more justified in that the Department has had available to it a number of other consultancy reports which have examined its structures in detail. These reports were made available to me and proved very useful. I have drawn in particular on the report entitled 'Organisational Review of the Department of Education and Science,' commissioned by the previous Secretary General of the Department, Dr. Don Thornhill, and carried out by Deloitte and Touche, Management Consultants.

My approach to the work was to hold a large number of intensive interviews with management and staff of the Department. I began with a meeting with the Minister, Dr. Woods. This was followed by discussions with members of the Top Management Group of the Department. This group comprises the Secretary General, the Assistant Secretaries General, the Chief Inspector and the Director of the Strategic Policy Unit. I had the benefit of meeting the members of this Group both collectively and individually. At the meeting with the Chief Inspector he was accompanied by the two Deputy Chief Inspectors.

I am very grateful that, in spite of their very busy schedules, all the members of the Top Management Group gave so much of their time to discussing the work of the Department with me and were so positive in their approach to my review. Their useful comments are reflected in the report.

The bulk of my work consisted of meeting all the Principals of the Department in succession to discuss the operation of their sections. They were usually accompanied by their Assistant Principal colleagues, while I was assisted by the members of the Task Force. Meetings were arranged in the Department's three main locations, Dublin, Athlone and Tullamore. We also held a series of meetings with the Assistant Chief Inspectors of the Department. While visiting Tullamore we met the Managers of the Planning and Building Unit and some of their colleagues. We also had the opportunity of having discussions with representatives of the

Higher Education Authority, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the National Educational Psychological Service and the Commission on School Accommodation.

To ensure that issues were dealt with adequately, I allowed about two hours for each of these meetings. Although this constituted a burden on both the persons being interviewed and the members of the Task Force, it was invaluable in allowing plenty of time for discussion of the Department's problems and possible solutions to them.

As mentioned above, a number of reviews of the Department have been undertaken in recent years and others are continuing. One could be forgiven for expecting that officers of the Department might at times show signs of suffering from 'consultancy fatigue.' If so, they did not give any indication of this to us. I was impressed by the courteous and cooperative approach taken by everyone at these discussions, although I was conscious that we were encroaching on valuable time for the sections' everyday work. I was also impressed by the frankness with which views were expressed at the Department's shortcomings. In relation to this, I emphasised at the beginning of each meeting that all discussions were completely confidential and that no views expressed would be later attributed to any individual in this report. This freedom was taken advantage of fully.

The attached report contains many criticisms of the Department of Education and Science. These criticisms are to be read in the light of the following observations. The Department is one with great strengths. It has a distinguished tradition of presiding over the provision of an Irish education system which is the envy of many other countries. It has always insisted on maintaining the highest educational standards, a policy which has contributed to the esteem in which Irish education is widely held. It has a palpably committed staff at every level who are prepared to spend long hours at their tasks, often to the detriment of the quality of their private life.

Despite all this, there is a feeling at every level that there is something seriously amiss with the structure of the Department. In discussions with members of the top management team, I was left in no doubt of their view that the Department, in spite of improvements in recent years, still has quite some way to go before it can claim to be delivering its services with full effectiveness.

I had useful meetings with representatives of all the Department's staff associations and trade unions (see Appendix 2). They emphasised the considerable sense of frustration among the staff, despite their strong commitment to the Department. They drew attention to the volume of the work, which they considered excessive given the current staffing for many sections. They indicated that there was need for considerable extra staff and pointed to the industrial action which had been undertaken in the early months of the year to draw attention to this. Their concerns were expressed to be not just about the effect on staff but on the quality of service being delivered to the public.

Some of the pressures faced by the Department originate in the enormous volume of additional work which it has undertaken in recent years, as illustrated by the amount of new legislation passed or in hands at present. Some are caused by the increasing sophistication of the Irish public, their awareness of their entitlements in the area of education and their new preparedness to take legal action to obtain these entitlements.

In attempting to deal with the volume of work with which they are faced, management and staff are hampered by the antiquated structure of the Department, which needs urgent reform. They are also hampered by the way in which the work has traditionally been done. For perhaps historic reasons the Department has maintained a strong system of control which has led to an over-centralisation that is outdated and is out of line with policies to devolve responsibility in other parts of the civil service. This over-centralisation leads to endless pressures on the staff. The attached report attempts to deal with these issues and makes recommendations which it is hoped will be useful in helping to resolve them.

The recommendations, if accepted, will eventually result in a major reduction in the volume of detailed work in the Department. They will, however, take time to implement and in the meantime the Department will still have to continue to discharge its statutory functions. Given the nature of this review and the limited time within which a report has had to be prepared, it has been impossible to assess in detail the staffing needs of individual sections. What has been clear, however, is that staff numbers in the Department as a whole require to be strengthened if it is to meet the current and impending demands for its services. There are particular difficulties in the area of executive and clerical staff, where additional numbers are urgently needed.

In addition, there is a need for staff to be assigned specially to assist management in leading change. The changes proposed are radical and will require a significant effort to prepare for them. The involvement of specially dedicated staff would be a valuable investment since it would result in a much more efficient Department. Without such additional staff, there is a danger that, given the present pressures on the Department, change will simply not come about or come at only a slow pace.

There is a widespread feeling across the Department that corporate governance should be improved and that this needs to be done at management levels throughout the Department. This was identified by top management themselves as a weakness. I welcome their proposals to improve the effectiveness of management across the Department and make proposals, particularly in relation to new structures, which should help in this.

Action for change will need to be strongly led by top management. In this connection, it is significant that it was they who arranged for this review and participated so seriously in it.

The attached report is in two parts. Part 1 gives the general analysis and conclusions of the Task Force and may be read as an executive summary. Part 2 examines the Department section by section and gives detailed recommendations for improvement.

In conclusion, I should like to thank my colleagues on the Task Force. It is difficult to speak highly enough of the degree of commitment with which they threw themselves into the work, despite the pressure of the other duties which they had to discharge while attending the Task Force. Their extensive knowledge of the Department (and, indeed of other Government Departments) and their willingness to challenge existing practices were of inestimable benefit to me. Mr. Curran and Mr. McCullagh were excellent in their support as successive secretaries of the Task Force and deserve warm thanks.

Seán Cromien
October 2000

Part 1

General Analysis and Conclusions

1. The most obvious characteristic of the Department of Education and Science to a person coming from the outside is that it is a department which is overwhelmed with detailed day-to-day work which has to be given priority over long-term strategic thinking. It is one in which, as a member of senior management expressed it, 'the urgent drives out the important.'
2. The Deloitte and Touche study to which reference is made in the Foreword commented that: "In general the Department is involved in many details of the operation of the education system which by their sheer number tend to absorb much of the Department's time and effort in reactive activity..... The current workload is therefore skewed towards those operational activities which, although critical to the ultimate delivery of education, defer attention from longer-term and strategic activity in the sector." The study goes on to make international comparisons and points out that the range and quantity of activities performed centrally by the Department of Education and Science 'goes beyond any other system identified.'
3. Our review confirmed the conclusions expressed in the Deloitte and Touche study. It was clear to us, as we interviewed officers across the Department, that virtually every section is heavily overburdened with detailed work. Expressed simply, the problem for the Department has been that it is so centralised that this leads to a degree of dependence by its clients which is quite exceptional. The Department itself appears to encourage this dependence by its own willingness to respond to every claim on its time and attention. Consequently, disproportionate work is being generated by sections having to respond to innumerable telephone queries and written inquiries from members of the public, teachers, school management and so on.
4. This could be considered a normal part of the work of any Government department but what is wrong in this Department is that it comprises such a large part of the work that it clogs up the machinery of government and stops adequate attention being given to policy issues.

Reasons for heavy volume of work

5. One reason for the heavy volume of detailed work is the absence of a local presence for the Department around the country. This is in contrast to other service departments such as those, for example, in the areas of agriculture, health and social welfare. The proposed establishment of Regional Education Boards has been aired at length and has become a matter of some political controversy. It is not a subject which we considered we should examine in this report. We will, however, have certain proposals to make later for establishing a local presence for the Department.
6. Many of the problems come from a lack of adequate planning. Policy evolves haphazardly. Much of the Department's involvement in areas such as general educational provision, special education and social disadvantage has grown by often unrelated increments so that the Department ends up by operating a multiplicity of schemes with similar objectives, requiring multiple payments and multiple evaluations. All this throws a heavy burden on the staff, as indeed on schools. A large number of Parliamentary Questions and representations are received which absorb a significant amount of time and effort.
7. Another source of difficulties is the lack of clarity of many of the schemes which the Department operates. Even where persons or schools are notified that, under the departmental regulations, they are not considered eligible for a particular scheme, there are endless appeals to the Department for special consideration. As defined or, at least, as operated by the Department, these schemes seem to be sufficiently flexible for persons to believe that it is worth their while to appeal against them. This appeal is often accompanied

by a request to a Dáil Deputy to make representations to the Minister on their behalf or ask Parliamentary Questions.

8. The volume and nature of Parliamentary Questions addressed to the Minister for Education and Science is quite exceptional by any standards. The asking of Parliamentary Questions is an integral part of a lively democracy and vital in making the Executive accountable to the Dáil. However, one can reasonably wonder whether the purposes of democracy are really being served by the asking of questions in the national parliament which are often of as minor a nature as the repair of the windows of a particular school or arrangements for a particular child to be given school transport. Taking up the time of the Dáil on these matters suggests a failure on the part of the Department to have adequate systems and responses available to clients at appropriate administrative levels.

Problems concerning policy formulation

9. Because of day to day pressures in sections, not enough time is given to standing back from the work and assessing where the Department of Education and Science is going and what are its medium-term plans for education. This is particularly serious because of the urgent need for thinking about what is called for shorthand the 'school of the future,' namely, changes both in the nature of educational provision and in educational practice coming as a result of the rapidly developing world of new technologies. In relation to current provision, we had the sense that, in general, there is a lack of monitoring and assessment. Sections are too busy keeping up with the current workload to challenge whether what they are doing is being done properly or, indeed, whether it is worth doing at all.

10. There is a vagueness, caused by the absence of clear structures, about where in the Department policy is formulated and whose responsibility it is to formulate it. We were struck by the absence in certain line sections of any obvious thinking about policy formulation and, indeed, by their perception that they had no responsibility for such matters. The establishment of the Strategic Policy Unit, and a general vagueness about what its functions are, have contributed to this. The fact that certain policy sections which used to be in line divisions were transferred to this Unit when it was set up may have provided some excuse for this approach.

11. Because of the absence of adequate structures, new schemes, often in themselves very good ones, seem to arise haphazardly through the energy and enthusiasm of particular individuals rather than as part of a set of medium-term policy objectives, agreed for the Department as a whole and listed in order of priority.

12. This lack of clarity in policy formulation leads to educational policy often being determined elsewhere, for example, through negotiations with interest groups or under national agreements or, indeed, in the courts, through criticism of the lack of adequate provision for e.g. children and young people with special needs. This in turn has led to a certain passivity in the Department in relation to new developments.

13. It is necessary to ensure that policy formulation is undertaken in a coherent and consistent manner across the Department. It is equally important to tease out the practical implications of policy proposals. We were struck by the volume of complaints from sections concerning the introduction of initiatives without adequate prior consultation. In some cases, it appeared that sections sponsoring initiatives had been completely unaware of, or unmindful of, the implications for other sections. Public announcements of new political initiatives have also at times come as a surprise to the relevant sections of the Department.

What can be done

14. In the chapters of Part 2, we examine the Department section by section and put forward detailed proposals for improvement. At this point it is perhaps desirable to describe how we approached our task. Given the virtually unanimous view that the Department is swamped with unnecessarily detailed work, we sought ways of relieving it of this burden so

as to give it space to concentrate on its core functions, as described in its mission statement, namely,

‘The mission of the Department of Education and Science is to ensure the provision of a comprehensive, cost-effective and accessible education system of the highest quality, as measured by international standards, which will

enable individuals to develop to their full potential as persons and to participate fully as citizens in society and contribute to Ireland’s social and economic development.’

15. Our approach has been to look at sections so as to understand their work and then to see whether the volume of work can be reduced by changing the way in which it is done at present in the Department or, alternatively, by devolving it, where feasible, out of the Department. It cannot be emphasised enough that many of the practices being carried out are the result of an outdated approach of over-centralisation which is out of touch with modern thinking in the civil service.

16. We also examined the structures in the Department. We found them outdated and inefficient for a modern Department of Education and believe they contribute to its problems, particularly those of lack of coherence and overlapping of work. We later suggest substantial changes in them.

To what extent can the burden be reduced within the Department?

17. This subject is examined in detail in the chapters of Part 2. The major recommendations are summarised in the following paragraphs.

18. The incidence of appeals of staffing allocations to both first and second-level schools places a major burden on the Department. There seems to be a widely-held belief on the part of schools at both levels that formal staffing schedules in the case of first level and pupil/teacher ratios in the case of second level are amenable to adjustment if sufficient pressure is exerted on the Department, particularly where such pressure is exerted through political channels.

19. There is an urgent need for a change of approach by the Department on this. The teacher allocation process should be made more robust by developing an approach that relies much more than at present on transparent criteria to determine teaching resources. Changes to the process should remove vagueness and make resource entitlements and methods of allocation as clear and understandable as possible. To strengthen the objectivity of the process, the staffing schedule arrangements and those for pupil/teacher ratios should be given more formal status through incorporation in Statutory Instruments. Deviations could then be achieved only through an amendment of these Instruments. To cater for cases of genuine staffing difficulty, we recommend that a formal appeals procedure, independent of the Department, should be established.

20. A reduction in the burden of detailed work would allow progress to be made in harmonising the method of calculating and allocating teacher resource entitlements across all strands in the sector. Ultimately, this approach would support a move to a devolved budgetary arrangement (probably within an overall total of teacher posts) whereby local areas and/or individual schools would have greater discretion over the utilisation of their teaching resources and the Department’s role would evolve to one of policy development, monitoring and evaluation.

21. For some reason the school transport scheme is particularly subject to appeals and to the consequent use of political pressure to have decisions by the Department changed. As mentioned in paragraph 8 above, unnecessary reliance on the political system to solve what are really administrative problems represents a failure on the part of the Department and should be remedied. We recommend that decision making procedures relating to the school transport system should be made more robust by developing and promulgating

eligibility criteria through a Statutory Instrument. An appropriate independent appeals system should be established at the same time.

22. A general point may be made here about our proposals to establish independent appeals structures for the allocation of teachers to first and second-level schools, school transport and also student support at third level (see paragraph 3.23 of Part 2). The development of such structures would ensure that the Department's clients have access to a clear, transparent and independent right of appeal. In addition, ensuring the independence of these structures would free the Department from a significant and growing workload in the appeals area. An appeals mechanism is already in place in respect of State examinations. The Planning Group on a "National Support Service for Special Education" also proposes an appeals mechanism. In view of the wide range of areas involving appeals, coordination between the various structures will be important. It is not necessary that these appeals boards should be separate from each other and there may be scope for a common appeals structure for a number of areas.

23. The present system of grant payments to schools is fragmented and inefficient and is in need of a major overhaul. The work of the sections concerned with primary, secondary, community and comprehensive schools is dominated by the requirement to calculate, authorise and issue multiple payments to these schools. There are inconsistencies in the manner in which such grants are processed and an absence of coordination. Given that many of the payments to schools are made on the basis of known recurring contingencies, it should be possible to devise a system under which payments in respect of different items are rolled together and made periodically during the year.

Devolving work outside the Department

24. We have examined in a number of chapters of Part 2 the possibility of devolving work outside the Department. This would have the advantage of freeing the Department from much of the volume of individual casework and allow it to concentrate on more strategic issues. Devolution can take either of two forms. It can be devolution to an existing body or to a new body which is set up for the purpose. The first is more likely to be an option in the short-term. The second will normally require lengthier preparation, possibly including legislation, and will, therefore, in most cases be a medium-term option.

25. Having said this, it is necessary to add that any moves of work outside the Department should be undertaken only where there are adequate arrangements for proper accountability in place. Policy will remain the responsibility of the Department. To ensure this, an appropriate framework should be established within which the outside body would be required to operate, coupled with a system of regular reporting to the Department on expenditure and activities.

26. A number of our proposals would, if implemented, lead to greater autonomy and responsibility for schools. This should provide schools with more flexibility, allow more effective decision-making at local level and free the Department to focus on policy and evaluation. While proposals to rationalise grants assistance would simplify administration for schools, we recognise that, in general, our proposals to devolve responsibility to them would place on them an additional administrative and managerial burden which would need to be addressed by the Department. We also note in paragraph 1.72 of Part 2 that our proposals would require an expansion in management training at school level. The development of a local office network (chapter 8) and our proposals for clustering of schools would provide further supports to schools in their new responsibilities.

27. The following paragraphs give the main recommendations for devolving work outside the Department. The first example relates to special education. It seems to us that an early priority for the Department is to extricate Special Education Section and the Inspectorate from day to day involvement in individual special needs cases and to refocus attention on the core issue of policy development in the special needs area. This can only be achieved by developing an alternative structure for processing individual cases and providing an expert research capacity which can underpin policy development.

28. We are aware that the Planning Group on Special Education has been examining this problem and is about to submit a report to management on it. The Group has very kindly made a late draft of the report available to us. We note that it envisages the development of a national council which would be at arm's length from the Department and which would be responsible for processing individual applications for special support services. It proposes a network of local area-based offices which would deliver the service. These proposals are very much in line with our thinking and we support them. As noted earlier, there would be an independent appeals system.

29. We believe that there is considerable scope for delegation in the vocational education sector. For example, the requirement for the Minister to approve individual teacher appointments in VECs appears to be unnecessary. We note that there is no such requirement in respect of secondary schools.

30. A number of the VECs appear to be unduly dependent on the Department in respect of minor matters, a situation which is perhaps not entirely discouraged by the Department. To correct this, it may be necessary for the Department to avail of the opportunity presented by the forthcoming legislation to clarify the responsibilities of CEOs.

31. We have recommended above certain improvements to the school transport scheme. A bigger issue, however, arises, namely, whether this scheme should be operated at all by the Department. It would seem one which would be suitable for contracting out in full, as recommended by the Deloitte and Touche study. We believe that consideration should start soon on preparing the ground for action on this in the medium-term.

32. The Examinations Branch is heavily overburdened at present. As matters stand the Junior Certificate is, in effect, a mirror image of the Leaving Certificate, with virtual total reliance upon externally-conducted terminal written assessment. The Department, in a recent discussion paper on the future shape of this examination, referred to the desirability of achieving a better balance by introducing elements of school certification. Such a re-balancing of the Junior Certificate examination should, over time, result in a situation where the Junior Certificate operates more like an examination whose purpose is to report on student progress and less like the Leaving Certificate. These changes in the future shape of the Junior Certificate should also, in time, provide some efficiencies in the State examination system and in the operations of the Examinations Branch.

33. The running of examinations is not core work of the civil service and does not fit easily into it. Further outsourcing of specialist tasks, including printing and logistics management, should be actively pursued. The idea of a specialist body outside the Department to manage the State examinations has been around for some time. This arrangement, which is the practice in many other countries, was recommended in the Deloitte and Touche study. We consider that it is timely for the Department to have it examined as a longer-term objective.

34. The question arises why the Department needs to be so closely involved with in-career teacher education since it does not play a direct role in the delivery of the related area of initial teacher education (this is undertaken by the universities and Colleges of Education). It is worth considering whether it might be more efficient to devolve responsibility for in-career education programmes concerning curriculum change externally, while retaining overall responsibility for policy.

35. In this connection, it is noteworthy that most of the education and training requirements arise from curricular developments which are processed through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Because of this, the Council is ideally placed to identify and set priorities for in-career teacher education needs. It would make sense for it to take on the role of selecting providers and allocating funds to them. As this proposed role may exceed the Council's present remit under the Education Act 1998 (where it is given an advisory, review and research role) it may be necessary to introduce amending

legislation. We would envisage the Education Support Centres as the main providers of in-career education in the future.

36. The Council has also undertaken the development of special modified curricula for children with disabilities. It would be logical for it to be involved in the development of associated training needs, contracting in such specialist expertise as may be necessary.

37. Whereas, in the university sector, operational matters and policy advice are the responsibility of the Higher Education Authority, there is no equivalent system in place for the Institutes of Technology or other third-level institutions. Accordingly, the Department is deeply involved in operational matters for these institutions. We consider that its involvement should be reduced. We recommend a twin track strategy, comprising greater independence on the part of the institutions and the devolution of operational work to the Higher Education Authority.

38. Much of the work that is currently being undertaken in the Department should be carried out by the institutions themselves. We have been given to understand that each institution has now appropriate administrative, human resource and financial expertise to enable it to resolve more issues at this level. We welcome the planned transfer of responsibility for funding of the institutions to the Authority and recommend that this transfer should be expedited and a timetable for implementation proposed.

39. The Department is heavily involved in administering schemes for providing financial support to third-level students. We recommend certain ways in which the burden of this work can be reduced but we also raise the more fundamental question why these schemes, which are income support rather than a core education function, continue to be handled by the Department. We are aware that a joint working group recommended in 1997 that the operation of the schemes, including policy aspects, should be transferred to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. Although we understand that both Ministers are favourably disposed to the transfer of the payments process, progress since 1997 has been slow. We recommend that the two Departments should immediately establish a joint implementation group to make arrangements for the transfer of the payments function and that this transfer should be completed before the beginning of the academic year 2002/03. The two departments should explore the question of transferring responsibility in the medium-term for student support policy.

40. There has been an extraordinary increase of work in the Planning and Building Unit. This increase has arisen primarily as a result of the provision of substantially greater funding for capital purposes. Staff numbers have not kept pace with the increase in work, although additional posts have been sanctioned recently. Here, as elsewhere in the Department, operational work has hampered the capacity to formulate and evaluate policy options and to monitor the quality of service provided.

41. We support the moves by the unit to reduce individual workloads by making greater use of self-certification and by more standardisation of designs. There are also possibilities for greater delegation of responsibility to schools to undertake minor capital works, thus enabling them to set their own priorities within a defined budget.

42. We note that the Department is engaged in a pilot study for the use of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the education area. We support further examination of this new concept. An attractive feature of it is that it offers schools the potential to hand over the undertaking of minor works to a private contractor.

43. This devolution of responsibility for minor works has attractions wider than under the PPP arrangements. The removal of the burden on schools for minor works would be a welcome development for them and would reduce the considerable volume of work to which present arrangements give rise in the Building Unit. We consider that the Department should examine whether there are possibilities for handling minor works in this way, perhaps on an area basis, whereby a cluster of schools would be involved together.

44. There is a need for the section dealing with the planning side of the Building Unit to be strengthened. Much of its current work seems to be reactive rather than to involve the planning of the building and improvement of schools in the medium-term. We understand that preparatory work to establish a database of accommodation in schools has begun. We recommend that this important work should be given priority. Such a database would be of great value to the Planning Section of the Building Unit in identifying aggregate resource needs, determining priorities for investment and analysing proposals for funding. It should be located in that section.

45. We consider that the Commission on School Accommodation should be retained as a separate body but its advisory role should be exercised through the Planning Section. Where necessary, the section might refer specific matters to the Commission for its views. The section's proposed remit to develop area blueprints (see paragraph 5.34 in Part 2) would dovetail neatly into the Commission's work at national level.

46. A proposal was made in the Deloitte and Touche report that the setting up of an executive agency for the construction and modification of schools should be considered. The logic of our approach to the difficulties of the Department would suggest that this proposal should be given consideration by the Department as a medium-term objective. It has its attractions because it would free the Department from the detailed operational work in this area and allow it to focus on major policy issues, monitoring and evaluation and forward planning. This could include planning for the 'school of the future' in collaboration with the Central Planning Unit we propose later (see paragraph 76). We recommend that work should commence in considering how, over a period of years, the Department could move in this direction.

47. It is difficult to decide whether the Third-Level Building Section is properly located in its present division or should be transferred to the Third-Level Division. Its work straddles both and arguments can be made for placing it in either. On balance, we consider that the section should remain where it is. Most of its work relates to building operations (public procurement, design etc.) rather than policy. However, it does contain a policy element which is closely linked to the work of the Third-Level Division and the Higher Education Authority. In effect, for third-level building policy there is a triangle linking the Building Unit, the Third-Level Division and the Authority. Because of pressures of work, there is a danger of decisions being arrived at without those at all three points of the triangle being involved. To overcome this, we believe that a more formal structure than at present is required. We recommend that a task force, with Third-Level Division in the lead role, should be established at which policy for third-level building would be decided.

Local Offices

48. As mentioned frequently already, we consider the Department to be over-centralised in its administration. While some educational services are delivered at local level, for example, through VECs and Education Support Centres, there is an absence of local structures for delivery of the Department's own administrative services, which is unusual for a Government department operating so widely throughout the country. This gives the impression to clients that the Department is remote and difficult of access and may be part of the reason why there is such a ready use of local political pressures to deal with what are often quite minor administrative problems.

49. We believe that the Department should establish a number of local offices which will provide an integrated access to services for those in a particular area. As it happens, already a number of characteristically quite unrelated initiatives are being pressed ahead in the Department to establish local offices for certain aspects of the Department's work. We understand that it is the intention of the National Educational Psychological Service to deliver a service locally. If the proposals of the Planning Group on Special Education are accepted, there will be a local presence for special education organisers throughout the country. It is likely that the new arrangements under the Education (Welfare) Act will require the establishment of local offices for the proposed educational welfare officers.

Under the recently published White Paper on Adult Education, boards will be established at local level as autonomous statutory sub-committees of the VECs.

50. If the general public is not to be left completely bewildered, it is vital that the establishment of these different sets of local offices should be coordinated with each other and with the local administrative offices which we are proposing. In the absence of coordination, the services proposed in paragraph 49 could result in a very large number of disparate offices. To the extent possible, the aim should be to have a 'one-stop shop' of educational services, with the psychologists of NEPS, the special education organisers, etc., in offices in the same building. Not alone would this make economic sense, but it would provide greater scope for exchange of information and would be more customer-friendly.

51. To start off, the local offices should be places where clients can go for information about the Department's operations but their establishment would also provide an opportunity to advance the concept of e-government, whereby easy interactive access to the Department would eventually be available to clients at local level. In the medium-term, the development of this network could provide a basis for the delegation of functions which are currently centralised in the Department to local level. Eventually, it may be opportune for management to consider the possibility of devolving decision-making authority to local level.

52. We understand that thinking is advanced on the number of local offices that will be required for NEPS and the regions in which they will operate. It is likely that ten regions will be proposed, corresponding with the ten Health Authorities. This might also be the model for the administrative offices proposed by us and, by extension, for the offices proposed for other functions of the Department as appropriate. Since planning for some of these is well-advanced, we recommend that the Department should establish a task force to coordinate the various local structures being established.

Structures of the Department

53. The Department is at present organised into six divisions. These deal with:

- (1) the Inspectorate;
- (2) first-level education;
- (3) second-level education;
- (4) third-level education;
- (5) central services such as IT, finance, personnel and change management;
- (6) school building and a range of miscellaneous services, comprising negotiations with teacher unions, social inclusion, further education and youth affairs.

In addition, there is a Strategic Policy Directorate, which works directly to the Secretary General.

The Inspectorate

54. The functions of the Inspectorate, as set out in Section 13 of the Education Act, 1998, are wide-ranging and include matters such as support and advice to schools and centres of education concerning provision of education; evaluation of quality and effectiveness of provision; research and support for policy formulation and functions in respect of the school examinations. We consider that quality assurance constitutes the core function of the Inspectorate. This core function comprises two key aspects, evaluation of provision (through, e.g., school and subject inspection and Whole School Evaluation) and policy formulation.

55. While the Inspectorate's evaluation functions have tended to focus principally on provision in schools, we believe it to be important to stress that they should also extend to issues relating to the quality of the educational system as a whole. In addition, we believe that the evaluation of schools should include all aspects of the schools' functioning and, consequently, we consider that there would be considerable merit in the medium-term in extending the remit of Whole School Evaluation to cover administrative aspects of schools. Such a development would be particularly valuable in view of the various recommendations in this report to devolve more responsibility to school management.

56. In relation to policy development, we consider that, in addition to developing policy initiatives within their own remit, the Inspectorate should be actively involved in the reconstituted Strategic Policy Unit. As explained later (paragraph 76), we propose a new title for that unit – the Central Planning Unit. At management level a member or members of the management of the Inspectorate should participate in the proposed standing committee of the Unit (described in paragraph 77). Where particular policy initiatives are being undertaken by the Unit, members of the Inspectorate with special expertise in the relevant area should be seconded to it or its task forces, as appropriate.

57. In fact, we believe that such a collaborative model of working should inform all aspects of the Inspectorate's interaction with the rest of the Department and that, in order to facilitate this, structures within the Inspectorate should be developed to reflect those elsewhere in the Department. Allied to this is the need for the Inspectorate to develop its expertise and structures in order to be in a position to contribute fully to the Department's development of the new areas of education, such as pre-school education and lifelong learning.

58. Involvement in examination work accounts for a significant proportion of the Inspectorate's resources at second level. In order to allow the Inspectorate to focus on its primary, quality assurance function, the Department should examine ways in which this involvement in examination work could be reduced.

59. Inspectors are frequently called upon to advise sections on general educational matters. While they are clearly well qualified to provide such advice, it may be more efficient

to recruit other educationalists to undertake this work. We recommend that, in order to allow inspectors to concentrate on their core functions, persons experienced in the education area should be recruited to the Inspectorate on a secondment basis to undertake either the delivery of specific tasks and projects or to act as advisors on specific areas.

60. In addition, a relatively large number of educational coordinators have been appointed over the last number of years to manage various programmes and other initiatives. In order to ensure that such initiatives develop in a way that is coherent with overall departmental policy, as well as ensuring proper monitoring and evaluation of the operation and outcomes of the initiatives, we recommend that here, also, such persons should be recruited on a secondment basis to the Inspectorate.

First, Second and Third-Level Divisions

61. The organisation of the work of the Department into the three pillars of first, second and third-level education is understandable and has its own logic. However, it is worth asking whether in modern circumstances this is the best way in which the Department might be organised. The three-pillar structure is essentially the result of historical developments. The initial State intervention in the educational sphere in Ireland was in primary education, commencing with the National School system which was introduced in 1831. When the Department of Education was established in 1924, it was inevitable that its core work would be organised in a Primary Branch and that its work dealing with secondary, endowed schools and vocational schools would be dealt with in a separate branch. As the Department became more involved in third-level education, it was, in turn, logical to establish a third-level division to deal with the work.

62. While dividing up administrative work into three divisions has in some ways worked well, it also has drawbacks, particularly for first and second level. Nowadays the division between primary and post-primary education is largely an artificial one. The great majority of children progress smoothly from first to second level (indeed, more than half of them will go on to further education). To have separate divisions dealing with first and second level, therefore, seems nowadays unnecessary. There are considerable similarities in the work being done in the two divisions. At the same time, many divergences have emerged between them. These are obvious in arrangements for paying teachers, in their conditions of service and in pension arrangements. There is a lack of continuity of schemes between the two levels. Facilities which have developed at primary level for e.g., special education are not maintained at second level.

63. In our view the first and second-level divisions should be merged. The ensuing division would be too large for effective management. We consider that it should be divided into a Schools Division, dealing with the administration and operation of schools at first and second level, and a School Support Services Division which would provide services to schools. These services would include school transport and pay and pensions of teachers. It would also be the appropriate location for the Examinations Branch.

64. The Schools Support Services Division also seems the most appropriate location for the Planning and Building Unit, which is at present in the Building and Miscellaneous Services Division. However, the additional burden on the Assistant Secretary General of the new division, already heavy under our proposals, would be greatly increased if the Unit were to be added. The Unit's workload is very large and is almost equivalent to that of a division in itself since it contains no less than seven sections, each headed by a Principal/Manager (see Chapter 5 of Part 2). There is a case, in our view, for the Unit to be headed by a Director, who would be required to work to an Assistant Secretary General only on matters of major importance. This arrangement, if sanctioned, would allow the Unit to be transferred to the Schools Support Services Division without adding unreasonably to the work of that division.

65. Because of the increasing importance of lifelong learning, we consider that the title of the present division dealing with third-level education should be changed to 'Further and Higher Education' and the present Further Education section (excluding its current

Youthreach work) should be transferred to it. While the International Relations Section does not fit closely in this division, we recommend it should remain here except that consideration might be given, as the involvement of the section with the Structural Funds diminishes, to moving its evaluation role to the reconstituted Central Planning Unit.

Central Services Division and Building and Miscellaneous Services Division

66. The other two divisions in the present Department structure, Central Services Division and Building and Miscellaneous Services Division, seem to have evolved haphazardly, with functions such as the Change Management Section and the Social Inclusion Section being added respectively to each as they were set up in the Department. The Building and Miscellaneous Services Division in particular has no logic attached to it except that it seems to contain the sections which were difficult to fit in elsewhere.

67. We recommend a different structure in place of these two divisions. In our review of the Department we were struck continually, on the one hand, by the urgent need for the Department to tackle the educational aspects of social inclusion which have been given such emphasis by the Government and the social partners in recent years and, on the other, by the scattered and diffuse response of the Department under its present organisation to this need. We recommend that the various sections of the Department dealing with social inclusion should be brought together in a new division. This division would incorporate the existing Social Inclusion Section, Special Education II and the social inclusion dimension to the Further and Adult Education Section. Youth Affairs Section should also be brought into this Division, since much of its work relates to social inclusion. However, as its remit is wider than this, we recommend that the title of the division should be the 'Social Inclusion and Youth Affairs Division.'

68. We believe that setting up a special division to deal with social inclusion will emphasise the Department's commitment to tackling this major and urgent social need. We are conscious that there are certain risks in separating this area from the general run of school activity. There is a danger that provision for social inclusion will be looked on as something that is not a part of the normal school programme and will become distanced from it because it is being dealt with in a separate division. On balance, however, we are satisfied that the advantages of setting up a new division outweigh possible disadvantages of this nature. We believe in any case that any disadvantages can be handled in another way, namely, through the arrangements we are proposing elsewhere in this report for close communication and coordination of activities across the Department through the use of cross-sectional task forces or standing committees.

69. This leaves the present Central Services Division. We recommend that this should be renamed Corporate Services Division and restructured as follows. It should contain, as at present, personnel, change management and accommodation and services, finance and IT, but should also have the legal affairs and freedom of information sections. We consider that these sections should be removed from the reconstituted Central Planning Unit, where they really will not fit in with the role which we propose for that unit. This would be in line with our view that line sections should be expected in future to handle legislation, in consultation with the Legal Services Section. In addition, the External Staff Relations Section, which is at present in the Building and Miscellaneous Services Division, should be transferred here.

70. We note that the Communications Section is at present in First-Level Division. It would appear more appropriate to the Corporate Services Division. We consider that it should be located there and should, if necessary, be strengthened to allow it to play a much greater part in improving communications within the Department. We were glad to learn that the appointment of an Information Officer to the section is planned. The need for greater communication between divisions and between management and staff was made clear to us on many occasions. Consideration should be given urgently to the publication of a monthly house magazine, perhaps on the lines of the successful magazine issued by the Revenue Commissioners, TAXNEWS. A magazine would be invaluable for improving

corporate spirit in a department as widely dispersed as the Department of Education and Science. The production of an internal phone directory, updated at regular intervals, should also be a priority for the section. The other role of the Communications Section, the presentation of the Department's corporate image to the outside world, is equally important and should also be given attention by management.

71. The structure for the Department which we recommend is, we believe, a logical one. What we have been unable to do is to assess the likely workload for each division. This will, in any case, vary, depending on the extent to which our proposals are accepted and how soon action can be taken on them. In the meantime, we appreciate that pragmatic considerations, particularly the likely workload on individual Assistant Secretaries General, may require a phased approach to the new structures. During this period, the use of standing committees (see paragraph 83) to improve cross-divisional links will be particularly important.

Strategic Policy Unit

72. At the core of the Strategic Policy Directorate is the Strategic Policy Unit. In the course of our consultations, we noted that there was a lack of awareness of the role and purpose of this Unit. In some cases sections were resistant to the idea of such a unit, stating that policy should remain in the line sections. In others they believed that policy had now migrated from their sections to the Unit. This lack of awareness arises partly from insufficient information from management about the Unit's role and partly from lack of communication between the Unit and the line sections, arising from staffing difficulties in its early stages. We welcome the Unit's recent round of consultations as a means of improving communication and understanding.

73. We believe that there is a need for a unit in the Department to deal with medium-term policy and planning. Without such a unit, it is likely that the present haphazard evolution of policy will continue. It requires, however, to have its functions clearly defined by management and understood and supported by line sections. Otherwise there is a danger that it will be ineffective and will be sidelined as a section that is looked on, at best, as irrelevant and, at worst, as an interfering nuisance.

74. The biggest difficulty arises in attempting to define how its work is to be differentiated from policy formulation in line sections. We are firmly of the view that it is neither possible nor desirable to centralise all the policy functions of the Department in such a unit. Policy should not, in general, be divorced from operational issues. Line managers should be involved in policy formulation within their own areas of competence. They should be expected by top management – and work arrangements should allow them the time – to think about the policy implications of what they are doing. They should monitor schemes under their control and assess their effectiveness. Their knowledge of operational issues will also often suggest improvements or new ways of doing things.

75. However, if there is no central thinking about policy into which line management thinking can be fitted, the likelihood is that new schemes will continue to arise haphazardly rather than as part of a set of medium-term policy objectives, agreed for the Department as a whole and listed in order of priority.

76. For effective policy formulation, it is necessary to have a departmental philosophy or direction. The mission statement sets this out in broad terms but it needs to be amplified for effective planning. This seems to us to be where the Unit can make its unique contribution. In view of the rapid pace of social and economic change, the education system must adapt if it is to remain relevant to society's needs. It is vital that the Department should develop its forward-looking role. If adequate time is given to planning for future developments, it should be possible for the Department to anticipate what is coming down the tracks and plan accordingly, rather than merely react, as tends to happen at present. Policy is particularly needed to conceptualise and put in place a strategy to anticipate the needs of the education system in an era of social and technological change for the 'school of the future.' The Policy Unit should be involved in this, in close association

with the Inspectorate. We recommend that the title of the Unit should be changed to "Central Planning Unit" to reflect what we consider its new role should be.

77. We visualise the key role of the Unit as being to define the general medium to long-term direction of the Department and the education system. Its work should then enable top management to take decisions on priorities which are consistent and informed by thorough and accurate analysis. Policy proposals coming to management from the various divisions would be expected to be in conformity with these priorities. This should ensure consistency in policy formulation across divisions. We recommend that the Unit should work with a high-level standing committee which should be established on a cross-divisional basis. This committee would set its work-programme and report regularly to the Top Management Group.

78. Many issues do not fall neatly into a specific line section's area of responsibility. In cases where the work mainly arises in a particular section but is also dealt with in other sections, the answer may be for management to identify that section as 'lead manager' or coordinator for the issue. That section would then draw on the views and expertise of other sections as required and head any task forces that may be set up. Where cross-sectional issues of strategic importance arise, the Unit could play the lead role in any task forces required.

79. It should be stressed that we are not advocating a substantial coordination role for the Unit. Were it to take on such a role, it would be swamped in matters of detail and would have little time for forward planning and other core functions.

80. The Department urgently needs a good Management Information System. A vital component of effective planning and policy is the availability of comprehensive, accurate and timely information. Such information is also essential for quality assurance and evaluation. We recommend that a task force should be established to develop a management information system, with the lead role assigned to the Central Planning Unit. The IT Section would be involved centrally in supporting the system's establishment and maintenance.

81. Besides the need for forward planning, the Department requires to evaluate its current strategies. It is not doing this at present and there is a need for a robust system of evaluation in the Department. The Unit should be given responsibility for ensuring that sections across the Department provide for a continuing and thorough evaluation of their various programmes. This would not, of course, absolve line sections from their own responsibility for evaluation. Every programme should be monitored continuously by line sections as part of their normal work. The transfer from the Structural Funds Section of its evaluation role, as suggested above, could provide the basis for this work in the Unit. As it develops, the Unit's expertise in the areas of analysis, evaluation and research should be made available to line sections as required. The Statistics Section has a key role to play in supporting the Department's policy and evaluation function and should remain in the reconstituted Unit.

82. At present, responsibility for research is spread across various areas of the Department. There is no formal mechanism for identifying priorities for it nor any means of disseminating the findings generally through the Department. Thorough, accurate research is a vital support to effective policy formulation. Accordingly, we recommend that the research role should be assigned to the Central Planning Unit. Its role should be to identify, in consultation with line sections and management, a programme of research needs, to liaise with researchers and to disseminate the results throughout the Department.

83. The Department has very recently established a new Educational Information Communications Technology Policy Section in the Strategic Policy Unit. While initial discussions within the Department of the section's work indicated some consistency with the current mission of the Unit, we consider that alternative locations may be more appropriate. There would appear to be two choices in this regard. It could be located in the proposed Corporate Services Division since this would facilitate exchange of information

and ideas with the IT Section. However, in our view it would be more appropriate, on balance, to locate it in the proposed Schools Division, as its work will be concerned largely with policy in relation to IT in the wider education sector.

84. The changes which we suggest in the Department's structure will bring their own problems of communication and coordination. To support the changed structure we recommend that management should establish departmental standing committees, with the involvement of top management through the presence of, where appropriate, the Chief Inspector and one or more Assistant Secretaries General on them, to deal with specific issues. This could help to overcome the lack of communication and coordination between the different areas of the Department. A successful example of what we have in mind has been the Examinations Management Group. This structure could be copied in other areas, for example, for the standing committee on Quality in Education we propose in paragraph 4.13 of Part 2.

85. To be effective, the standing committees will require to have adequate staff assigned to them. It will also be important that they should have formal guidelines specifically defining what they are required to do, how they are to report to top management and what arrangements top management will have for considering their reports.

Staffing matters

86. We have noted a strong sense of frustration among members of the staff and their union representatives at what they perceive to be a failure of management to respond adequately to their frequently expressed concerns about the effects of the great increase in the volume of work in recent years. These concerns are expressed to be not just about the effect on staff but on the quality of service being delivered to the public. The difficulty for management is that, as for other line departments, staffing is determined centrally in the Department of Finance on the basis of Government decisions about controlling the growth of public expenditure and staff numbers. Management in the Department of Education and Science has, therefore, limited scope at any particular time to gain additional staff for the department. In fact, a considerable increase in staff numbers has been sanctioned in recent months and this should help to alleviate the burden of work in particular areas.

87. Nevertheless, considerable pressures on staff will still remain. Having examined the current volume of work across the Department and been briefed on developments which are likely to add considerably to it in the near future, we are satisfied that the Department will not be able to function effectively for any length of time with its existing staffing complement, even as augmented. There are particular difficulties in the area of executive and clerical staff, where additional numbers are urgently needed. Given the nature of this review and the limited time within which a report has had to be prepared, it is impossible for us to assess to what extent individual sections need more staff but it is clear to us that staff numbers in the Department as a whole require to be strengthened if it is to continue to deliver its services.

88. Our recommendations for improved work practices, taken with those for devolution to outside bodies, will, if accepted, eventually result in a major reduction in the volume of detailed work in the Department. It may, therefore, appear difficult to justify a need for extra staff. The reality is, however, that it will take a considerable amount of time to implement these recommendations in full. In the meantime, the Department will still have to continue to discharge its statutory functions.

89. Also, the changes proposed are themselves so radical and require, in the case of many of our medium-term recommendations, such detailed legislative and other preparations that they will not come about automatically as part of the everyday work of the Department. They require staff to be assigned specially to assist management in leading change. The involvement of such staff will, in our opinion, be a valuable investment since it will result in a much more efficient Department, with a workload directed to the tasks for which time had not been available earlier, particularly in the policy area. Without such

additional staff, our concern is that, given the present pressures on the Department, such change will simply not take place.

90. We recognise that proposals to devolve areas of responsibility to outside agencies may cause understandable anxiety among members of the staff. The Department's senior management will have a vital role to play in communicating with staff on these issues and convincing them of the long-term benefits of these proposals.

91. A particularly important element will be the manner in which the impact of removing operational tasks from the Department is quantified in staffing terms and the approach adopted to utilising the capacity thus released within the Department. It is very important that line staff should be fully involved throughout this process. Much work at present, including a considerable amount of policy work, has to be deferred because of the pressure of immediate tasks. The opportunity provided by devolution should be taken by management to arrange for staff who are freed from operational work to turn to dealing with the tasks for which the time had not been available earlier.

92. In addition to the above recommendations, we also consider that the Department should give immediate attention to a range of issues which are exacerbating the difficulties under which staff are required to operate at present:

There is a strong perception that the Department is placing too great a reliance on temporary staff. It has been suggested to us that, while at least some of the work is no longer of a temporary nature, the Department has been slow in dealing with this. We accept the need for temporary staff to be employed in particular circumstances but urge management, in the interests of good staff relations, to review this matter and keep staff fully informed on developments.

There is a major concern in many areas at the delays which take place in filling vacancies and a feeling that the filling of such vacancies could be treated more expeditiously. We are aware of the difficulties that exist at present in the area of recruitment throughout the economy because of the current pace of economic growth but we recommend that there should be regular contacts between the Personnel Section and the relevant sections to keep them informed about progress in filling vacancies.

Developments in relation to decentralisation have undoubtedly created serious burdens. Some officers are spending very significant amounts of their time in transit between the Athlone and Tullamore offices and head office. There is a need for the Department to give attention to reducing the current amount of travel. In this connection, we recommend that urgent consideration should be given to the development of proper video-conferencing facilities and that such facilities should be utilised to the maximum possible extent. The planning of meetings at head office should take account of the travel arrangements which will be required for those in decentralised locations. To assist Assistant Secretaries General to pay regular visits to their staff in Athlone and Tullamore the Department might consider having a dedicated office set aside in both locations for this purpose.

We are seriously concerned at the lack of proper induction training for new administrative staff entering the Department. This contrasts sharply with the intensive induction course provided for new members of the Inspectorate. Arrangements should be made urgently to remedy this deficiency. Training should not, of course, stop at entry but should continue during an officer's career. The introduction of the performance management system presents a particular challenge in this regard, as does the increasing use of information technology. A problem, as in other departments, is the release of staff by senior officers to take advantage of this training. This needs attention.

The role of Management

93. Effective management and decision-taking are vital to the success of a Government department, as they are to the activities of every successful business in the private sector. A greatly increased emphasis has been placed on this in recent years,

particularly under the Strategic Management Initiative and in the Public Service Management Act. A review of this nature, therefore, calls for comment on the role of management in the department.

94. There is a widespread feeling across the department that corporate governance should be improved and that this needs to be done at management levels throughout the Department. Because middle and senior managers are so continually busy with high-level work which needs immediate attention, they find it difficult to give enough time to bringing together the views and approaches of their sections or divisions. Top management are, collectively, particularly vulnerable to this. In addition, there is the lack of a detailed framework of strategic thinking within which the actions of individual sections and divisions should be set. These factors contribute to the haphazard development of policy to which reference has been made earlier and to a lack of coherence in policy initiatives.

95. We understand that the Top Management Group has agreed a schedule of regular meetings over the coming months. We recommend that, at these, particular attention should be paid to the development of strategic thinking on departmental issues and time set aside regularly for this topic. We have proposed the establishment of a Central Planning Unit which should provide appropriate support to management in this.

96. It is not enough that top management should develop its thinking on strategic issues. It should arrange for this thinking to be disseminated quickly through the Department. A way of doing this could be by the better use of certain structures which already exist in the Department. We have in mind, for example, the networks which top management has established for Principals, Assistant Principals and Higher Executive Officers. We have noted the widespread support among the staff for these networks. The role of the Senior Management Forum, which brings together senior administrators and senior management in the Inspectorate, could provide another opportunity.

97. We understand that top management are supportive of this approach and that they also have in mind drawing on oral briefing from senior management and other members of the staff, as appropriate, at meetings of the Top Management Group. These various proposals will not alone help communications but will also add to the sense of collegiality between middle and top management. The appointment of a new Information Officer and our proposal for a monthly house magazine, if accepted, should also assist in developing the Department's corporate spirit.

Conclusion

98. In conclusion, we believe that the recommendations we have made in this review should be implemented quickly. We appreciate that, because of the heavy volume of work already being undertaken by the Department, it will be difficult to find time to make the necessary preparations for the moves we have suggested. If the additional staff which we recommend are made available, this will help the process but a special effort will still be needed which will require strong leadership by top management. We consider that this special effort will be well worthwhile if it helps to turn the Department into an organisation which fully and effectively delivers the educational policy needed for the Ireland of the 21st century.

Part 2

Chapter 1

First-Level Division

This division comprises four sections:

- Primary Branch (incorporating School Transport)
- Special Education I (disabilities)
- Special Education II (social inclusion)
- In-Career Development Section

Primary Branch

1.1 Enrolments in the first-level sector have declined steadily since peaking at 567,000 in 1986/87. Provisional estimates for the school year 1999/00 indicate a total of 444,000 pupils enrolled in almost 3,300 schools. These figures encompass three categories of students: pupils in ordinary classes in national schools, pupils with special needs in ordinary national schools and pupils enrolled in special schools. More than 20,000 teachers are employed in the first-level sector.¹

1.2 Primary Branch, which has overall responsibility for the sector, comprises three sections – administration, payments/financial and school transport – each headed by an Assistant Principal. As will be seen from the following discussion, the sections deal with a considerable volume of operational work, which limits their scope for policy formulation and evaluation.

Primary Administration Section

1.3 This section is responsible for most issues concerning the administration and operation of first-level schools. Its functions include various grant assistance schemes, child protection policy and a wide range of matters concerned with the day to day running of schools.

1.4 As in many areas of the Department, policy on grant assistance to first-level schools has developed in an incremental fashion. From time to time, new grants schemes have been introduced to meet specific needs. The result is that schools receive a large number of specific (and in many cases, small) grants payments. In addition, grant payments to schools from the Primary Branch and the Special Education sections are currently processed largely independently of each other. Discussions with the sections involved indicate significant inconsistencies in the manner in which such grant payments are processed by the Department and an absence of adequate coordination.

1.5 We consider that the Department's current approach to grant payments is in need of a major overhaul. The excessive number of individual payments to schools places an unnecessary administrative burden on the sections involved and an equally unnecessary burden on the schools themselves.

1.6 There is a great need to put order on this multiplicity of payments. It should be possible to plan a system whereby payments in respect of different items are rolled together and paid at intervals during the year. Any fears that either the school or Department might have regarding possible blurring of categories of income or expenditure could be overcome by ensuring that each payment is accompanied by a comprehensive explanatory schedule breaking down the total amount into its constituent elements. While it is not suggested that such periodic payments would, in all cases, be able to capture the full range of payments made to schools, there would appear to be considerable scope for rationalisation.

¹ All figures concern schools aided by the Department.

Whatever procedure is put in place, it will be important that it does not lead to cash flow difficulties for schools and in that context, the possibility of front-loading payments may need to be considered.

1.7 As part of this approach, there is a need to coordinate payments from the Primary Branch with those from the Special Education sections. It is noted that, arising from the study by Prospectus Management Consultants of this area, proposals have been made for the development of a centralised section to handle all such payments. We recommend that the procedures recommended by Prospectus should be implemented as speedily as possible. The centralised payments section should be responsible for all grant payments to first and second-level schools and should be located in the proposed Schools Support Services Division (see paragraph 63, Part 1). It should also be responsible for ensuring compliance with the terms and conditions set by the Department regarding financial procedures and the use of funding.

1.8 While the payments functions should transfer to the centralised section, decision-making on grants policy should remain in the relevant administration section.

1.9 In the longer-term, efforts should be made to move towards rationalising the allocation of funding on the basis of generally applicable criteria which take account of the various factors influencing schools' funding needs. The development of funding criteria is required by section 12 of the Education Act 1998. As section 12 also provides that these criteria shall take account of the level of educational disadvantage of students in the schools, the relevant administration section should seek to incorporate such factors into a unified funding model.

Payments 1 & 2, Financial Section

1.10 This section's main functions include the allocation of teaching resources to schools, payment of teacher salaries and negotiations with the education partners on conditions of employment for teachers.

Allocation of Teaching Resources

1.11 Most teaching staff are allocated to schools on the basis of enrolments as on 30 September in the previous school year. Allocations are determined by using appointment and retention schedules. These schedules set out enrolment thresholds which schools must reach in order to secure an additional teacher or to retain an existing member of staff. At lower levels of enrolments, the retention threshold is generally set a few pupils below the appointment threshold to minimise the impact of minor annual fluctuations in enrolments. Different schedules are used for various categories of schools such as ordinary national schools, Gaelscoileanna and Gaeltacht schools. The determination of the staffing schedules is reviewed annually by the Primary Branch in consultation with the education partners.

1.12 The application of the schedules is qualified in two respects. Firstly, schools may apply for an exemption as "developing schools." In such cases, they may argue that their projected enrolments for the coming school year will exceed the figure on the previous 30 September by specified amounts. The section may decide to allocate an additional post to such schools on a provisional basis, subject to later verification of projected enrolments. If the projected figures are not met, the post will be withdrawn. The second qualifier to the schedules concerns maximum class size for schools in disadvantaged areas. However, it is understood that the schedules are designed to ensure compliance in most cases with these conditions.

1.13 In addition to the main volume of appointments, supplementary posts of remedial teachers and concessionary teacher posts for schools with disadvantaged status are allocated by the Special Education section. These arrangements are discussed in later paragraphs.

1.14 Despite the fact that ordinary staffing allocations to first-level schools are based on an agreed staffing schedule which takes full account of demographic and other factors, the reality is that necessary staffing adjustments arising from such factors are regularly challenged by schools and become the subject of time-consuming appeals.

1.15 The arguments advanced by schools to justify appeals can be many and varied. In many instances, schools will cite particular special needs in support of retaining a staffing level which is no longer justified on the basis of pupil numbers or in support of obtaining additional teaching resources. The problem is exacerbated by the tendency on the part of many schools to engage the support of local political representatives to advance their cases.

1.16 It would appear that the continuing growth in the number of such appeals reflects a widely-held belief on the part of schools that the formal staffing schedule arrangements are amenable to adjustment if sufficient pressure is exerted on the Department, particularly where such pressure is exerted through political channels. The result is that the limited resources of the Primary Branch are being deflected from core duties to process large numbers of appeals of staffing allocations, notwithstanding the fact that the allocations in question are entirely in accordance with arrangements already agreed.

1.17 There is an urgent need for a more robust approach on the part of the Department in relation to this issue. Specifically, there is a need to discourage the perception among schools that allocations based on the staffing schedule are amenable to adjustment through forceful representations at political or other levels.

1.18 As a first step in addressing this issue, it is recommended that the existing staffing schedule arrangements should be given more formal status through incorporation in a Statutory Instrument under section 33 of the Education Act, 1998. Such a mechanism would protect the integrity of the staffing arrangements since deviations from the agreed schedule could only be achieved through an amendment to the Statutory Instrument. The Statutory Instrument could be amended as required to facilitate changes to the schedules.

1.19 At the same time, in order to cater for cases of genuine staffing difficulty, it is recommended that a formal appeals procedure should be established. Such a procedure should operate independently of the Department so as to avoid any conflict of interest. It could consider any special factors advanced by a school in support of its appeal.

1.20 We note that the Planning Group on a "National Support Service for Special Education" is likely to propose the establishment of an independent appeals structure in respect of educational provision for children with disabilities. We consider that, where disability is cited by a school, the appeal should be referred to the appeals structure recommended by the Planning Group. All other aspects of appeals would be handled directly by the main appeals structure in respect of first-level education issues.

1.21 In the longer-term, we recommend that consideration should be given to the adoption of a more integrated approach to the staffing of first-level schools.

1.22 Under present structures, the Primary Branch allocates ordinary teaching staff in accordance with the staffing schedules. It is also responsible for staffing allocations relating to the maximum class size arrangements which apply to schools with disadvantaged status. At the same time, Special Education Section has responsibility for allocating remedial teacher support to all first-level schools and for allocating concessionary teacher posts to schools with disadvantaged status.

1.23 This situation has become more fragmented in recent years with the introduction of the Breaking the Cycle initiative, which is operated by Special Education Section and delivers additional staffing to the junior classes of selected first-level schools in disadvantaged areas. The problem is likely to become even more complex with the

introduction of a package of measures which will result in Special Education Section delivering further staffing allocations to particular first-level schools.

1.24 We are concerned at this fragmented approach to staffing allocations in the first-level sector. The dispersed nature of responsibilities in this area deprives the Department of the necessary overview of staffing allocations to schools. The current arrangement represents a weakness in the system and would seem to encourage unnecessary appeals.

1.25 In order to overcome this problem we recommend that, in the medium-term, consideration should be given to the introduction of a more broadly-based staffing schedule arrangement which addresses the “whole school” situation, i.e., in addition to meeting ordinary staffing requirements, delivers an automatic staffing response to cover remedial needs and needs arising from educational disadvantage. Under such an approach, an automatic staffing schedule would incorporate a weighting factor which would reflect an assumed incidence of remedial need among the group of pupils attending the school. Equally, such a schedule would incorporate an automatic staffing allocation reflecting agreed levels of support for pupils in disadvantaged areas. Work undertaken by the Educational Research Centre on criteria for designating schools as disadvantaged could provide a useful basis for developing a system of automatic allocation. When developed, these arrangements should be included in the Statutory Instrument referred to earlier.

1.26 We believe that the Department cannot continue its involvement with schools on staffing matters at the current level of detail as traditional willingness to engage at this level has contributed to a culture in which appeals of provision are increasingly becoming the norm. The measures recommended above are viewed as essential if the Department is to extricate itself from its current detailed involvement with individual schools and free itself to concentrate on its core activities of policy formulation and evaluation. In addition, such an approach would provide greater autonomy for school management.

1.27 The need for, and benefits of, a Management Information System are discussed in Part 1 of this report. We consider that such a system would be valuable in facilitating an automatic response in the teacher and grants allocation process.

Teachers' Payroll

1.28 This section is responsible for payment of approximately 22,000 permanent and temporary teachers on a fortnightly basis and the payment of approximately 900 substitute teachers (employed on a daily basis) through a weekly payroll. This function also encompasses the input of data relating to teachers, received from the managerial authorities of schools.

1.29 Similar functions are also carried out at second level by the post-primary teachers section. The close similarity of the work of the payroll sections at first and second level lends itself to consideration of the idea of a single payroll section operating under a Principal. Such an arrangement would be likely to yield efficiencies, initially at Assistant Principal level and upwards. Further efficiencies as well as gains in quality of service might be achieved over time if, for example, the section was organised into small teams serving teachers at both levels, based on geographical clusters of schools. One advantage of this approach might be the creation of an impetus to harmonise the differences which exist at present in the treatment of certain allowances and entitlements.

1.30 We note and support the second-level section's restructuring of its work with a view to separating its payroll and personnel functions. This should allow for greater specialisation within the section and should facilitate improved links (and consistency of policy) with the teacher pay side of the Primary Branch.

1.31 We are aware of concerns that the scale of a combined payroll function – covering more than 40,000 teachers – would give rise to particular difficulties. However, we do not consider that scale would pose an insuperable obstacle and take the view that much could be learned from an analysis of the administration of equally large payroll operations

undertaken elsewhere. In the longer-term, we consider that there may also be scope to transfer the payment of pensions to a combined payroll and pensions section.

1.32 We note that the idea of the payroll function evolving into an executive agency has been raised in the past, most recently in the report of Deloitte and Touche Management Consultants. The work of the payroll function seems suitable for such an agency. There would appear to be certain advantages in the medium-term in such a development in that, for example, an agency could develop and retain specialised knowledge and expertise and would be free to develop and support its own IT systems to maximum effect. An issue requiring consideration is whether the administration of the payroll of VEC teachers should transfer to the agency.

1.33 In the longer-term, the Department might consider including as part of schools' general grant funding an amount to cover substitution costs. The allocation could be based on historical funding in this area, by allocating a flat percentage of its salary costs to each school. This percentage might be calculated having regard to the proportion of salary costs generally accounted for by substitution payments. Such a move would remove a considerable burden on the Department and would provide schools with greater flexibility to recruit substitutes as required. However, it is also recognised that it may entail an administrative burden for schools. This issue is discussed in paragraph 26 of Part 1 of the report.

School Transport

1.34 This section deals with the administration of the first and second-level school transport schemes which were established in 1967 to ensure that pupils who might otherwise have difficulty in attending school regularly had a reasonable transport service. Mainstream services are operated by Bus Éireann, on behalf of the Department. New bus routes and extensions to, or withdrawal of, existing routes require approval by the section. The section also administers the grant schemes under which payments are made to families to enable them to make private transport arrangements in the absence of a suitable school transport service. We understand that the Chief Executive Officers of VECs carry out certain functions in respect of the system at second level. The role of CEOs extends to all second-level schools and they are paid an allowance (based on the workload) by the Department.

1.35 There are considerable difficulties with the operation of the school transport system. It appears to be particularly vulnerable to appeals and to the consequent use of political pressure to have decisions by the Department changed. In his annual report for 1998, the Ombudsman repeats a request first made to the Department in 1996 "to bring forward proposals to put the school transport scheme, and other non-statutory schemes which it administers, on a statutory basis." He also suggested the establishment of a formal appeals system. He considered that "these measures are necessary to safeguard against future instances of unfair discrimination and to reduce the level of misinformation which... is undermining public trust and confidence in the Department's decision-making processes." These comments are in line with our findings and we recommend that the school transport system should be made more robust by developing and promulgating objective criteria through a Statutory Instrument. If this is not feasible under existing legislation, it may be necessary to introduce amending legislation. Variations in the schemes would be possible only by amending the Statutory Instrument. An appropriate independent appeals system should be established at the same time.

1.36 A bigger issue is whether this scheme should be operated at all by the Department. It would seem to be one which would be suitable for contracting out in full, as recommended by the Deloitte and Touche study. We believe that consideration should start soon on preparing the ground for action on this in the medium-term.

1.37 We note that under present arrangements, the Special Education (Disabilities) section is also involved in providing a special education transport service and in specialist issues arising, including the provision of harnesses and escorts. It would be logical that the

School Transport section should be responsible for all issues relating to transport of children to and from schools, including issues concerning children with disabilities. The Special Education (Disabilities) section should retain responsibility for identifying appropriate providers of education for children with disabilities and should pass this information to the School Transport section. The section should then work out the logistics of getting children to the specified locations. We are aware that the report of Prospectus Management Consultants has made a similar recommendation.

Primary Sector Structures

1.38 Recommendations concerning the structure of the Department are outlined in Part 1 of this report. As indicated there, we consider that it would be appropriate to re-assign primary sector functions and sections as follows.

- primary policy and administration matters should be assigned to a unified Schools Division which would incorporate the equivalent functions at second level. The Schools Division should also include the Special Needs (Disability) section and policy on in-career development
- school transport, teacher payroll and non-pay funding for all schools should be located in the proposed Schools Support Services Division
- the functions of Special Education II should be transferred to the proposed Social Inclusion and Youth Affairs Division.

Special Education (Disabilities) Section

1.39 The Department's Special Education section has had responsibility for a wide brief embracing (inter alia) education services for children with disabilities; Traveller children; children placed in juvenile offender centres; children who are educationally disadvantaged; children who are at risk and matters relating to school attendance and the old Industrial and Reformatory Schools. In general, the section's remit concerns children within the primary education system. However, this includes the special school sector which caters for children from 4 to 18 years. The section is also responsible for a number of pilot initiatives in the pre-school area.

1.40 Because of the increasing workload, a second Principal was appointed to this section with effect from June 2000. This has allowed a division of the work into its two very different components, disability and disadvantage. This section of the chapter deals with Special Education (Disabilities) section and focuses on issues concerning children with disabilities and Traveller children. Matters dealt with by the newly assigned Principal – these could be described as relating to issues of social inclusion – are discussed in paragraphs 1.49 et seq. Both areas at present remain within the Primary Division.

1.41 A major factor which has contributed to the growth in work in the disabilities area is an increasing insistence on the part of parents – which is reflected in a growth in recourse to the Courts – that their children receive an appropriate, often more tailored or specialised educational response. This growth in legal actions is expanding the State's involvement in special needs provision. A further significant contributor has been the Government decision of October 1998, which introduced the concept of a right to an automatic response to all children with disabilities in the primary system.

1.42 The impact of these factors is reflected in the very significant growth in special support services across the primary system. In particular, numbers of remedial and special resource teachers, special needs assistants and special classes have grown significantly in recent years. All the indications are that the growth in demand for special education services is likely to continue.

1.43 Because of the increased demand and sophistication in this area, the section is bogged down in the detail of day to day operations and overwhelmed by the volume of individual cases. A great deal of time is spent on Parliamentary Questions, written representations and telephone queries. The inability to deal with the volume of cases

exacerbates this problem. The section is constrained by the volume of detail in planning actively or evaluating the impact and value of the services which it oversees. It also needs to keep pace with continuing advances in knowledge concerning the nature of – and appropriate responses to – learning disabilities.

1.44 The reality is that the section has neither the expertise nor the resources to meet the emerging demands of the system. Its involvement in the day to day delivery of services continues to be such that critical policy issues have remained unattended to. Accordingly, there is a need to extricate the section and, indeed, the Inspectorate from involvement in individual special needs cases and to re-focus their attention on the core issue of policy development in the special needs area. This can be achieved only by both developing an alternative structure for processing individual cases and providing an expert research capacity to underpin policy development.

1.45 We are aware that the Planning Group on Special Education has been considering these issues and is about to submit a report to management. We understand that the Group's proposals envisage the establishment of a national council which would be at arm's length from the Department and which would be responsible for processing individual applications for special support services. The Group proposes a network of local area-based offices which would deliver the service. These proposals are very much in line with our thinking and we support them. Implementation would relieve the Department of its day to day involvement in processing individual special needs cases and enable it to focus on its core role of policy formulation and development.

1.46 The Planning Group's report also envisages the creation of an independent appeals mechanism. This would not only bring greater transparency to resource allocations but would relieve the Department of its current workload in this area and also allow it to focus more on policy issues.

1.47 The Minister would continue to have ultimate responsibility for special education services. Accordingly, suitable monitoring and reporting structures should be put in place so that the Department will remain aware of, and in control of, general developments in special needs provision. Suitably robust guidelines will be needed, coupled with a system of regular reporting on expenditures and activities.

1.48 One of the tasks of this section relates to Travellers. We consider that this is inappropriate to a section which is now dealing exclusively with disability issues. We believe that this work is more appropriate to the following section and examine it there.

Special Education II

1.49 The work of the second half of the former Special Education section concerns matters which may be broadly classified under the heading of educational disadvantage. In addition, the section has responsibility for Young Offender Schools and matters relating to the Children Bill, 1999 and the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. Although the section has yet to be given a title, this report will (for ease of reference) describe it as Special Education II.

1.50 The Department's workload relating to social inclusion has increased significantly. This reflects the Government's commitment to the area of social inclusion, a general increase in social and family problems, increased pressure from the Courts, parents and schools for suitable educational responses and enquiries concerning the old Industrial and Reformatory School sector.

1.51 The impact of these factors is reflected in the very significant growth in special support services such as Breaking the Cycle, the 8-to-15-year-old Early School Leavers programme, the package of measures concerning educational disadvantage and the Home/School/ Community/Liaison Scheme.

1.52 The term “educational disadvantage” is defined in section 32(9) of the Education Act, 1998, as “the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools”.

1.53 Current structures and approaches to educational disadvantage in Special Education II, and more generally in the Department, are characterised by the existence of a multiplicity of schemes across a range of sections with similar objectives and problems of coordination between the activities of various sections and the need for better policy appraisal, evaluation and review

1.54 Within the Department there is a pressing need to improve the coordination and consistency of policy on educational disadvantage. In Part 1 (paragraph 67) we recommend that a division for social inclusion should be set up. In Chapter 5 of Part 2 (paragraph 5.64 et seq.) we explain at greater length why we consider such a division should be established. The assignment of matters relating to disadvantage to a Principal in Special Education II effectively means that an embryonic form of this division has been created.

1.55 The Department has, for historical reasons, been responsible for the Young Offender Schools.

1.56 We note that responsibility for residential accommodation for children in all other areas, including children at risk, rests with the relevant health authorities. We suggest that the question of the Department’s involvement in accommodating juvenile offenders should be kept under review in the context of developments under the Children Bill 1999 and in particular in the context of developments in relation to the Special Residential Services Board being established under that legislation.

In-Career Development Section

1.57 The In-Career Development Section, which was established in 1994, is responsible for education and training programmes for serving teachers, tutors and management at first level and second level and in further education and for parents involved at first and second levels. Its brief involves planning, developing, funding, management and evaluation of provision. Generally, the section is not involved in the detailed organisation and delivery of the programmes. In the majority of cases this is undertaken by a network of Education Support Centres and other organisations such as teachers’ unions, subject associations etc. However, the section is responsible for the activities of the centres and the review and approval of proposals submitted by them for funding of education and training programmes. It is also involved in the delivery of courses by Department Inspectors on certain issues.

1.58 The section’s workload has grown significantly in recent years. The main factors contributing to this increase include:

- additional resources for education and training programmes, leading to increased operational and reporting requirements
- a growing diversity in types of programmes required
- the impact of new curricula, particularly the revised primary curriculum.

Where should In-Career Development be Located?

1.59 A fundamental question which arises concerns whether the Department needs to be so closely involved in the area of in-career development. The allocation of responsibility for management of in-career development matters to a section within the Department appears to have taken place for historical and accounting purposes. There is no particular reason why such activities must take place within the Department. It does not play a direct role in the delivery of the related area of initial teacher education (this is undertaken by the universities and Colleges of Education) and it is not clear why it should be so centrally involved in respect of in-career education. In our view, it would be more efficient to devolve

responsibility for organising the delivery of this education outside the Department, to the extent that this is practicable, while retaining responsibility for policy within the Department.

Education Programmes concerning Curriculum Change

1.60 As stated previously, development, organisation and delivery of most programmes is undertaken by the Education Support Centres. Generally speaking, the Department's role is to set priorities for and develop broad guidelines, examine proposals for and allocate funding, monitor provision and ensure compliance with reporting requirements.

1.61 Most of the education and training requirements for serving teachers arise from curricular developments which are processed through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. As a result, the Council appears to us to be ideally placed to identify and set priorities for in-career teacher education. Essentially, the purpose of in-career education is to support curriculum development. In-career development should therefore, in our view, be seen as a core part of the Council's process of curriculum development.

1.62 The Education Act provides that the Council shall advise the Minister on matters relating to the curriculum for early childhood education and first and second-level schools. Specifically, it shall from time to time "review the inservice training needs of teachers... and to advise the Minister in relation to those needs". It also shall "...conduct or commission... research and development [in education] where appropriate to its objects and functions".

1.63 Since the Council is best placed to identify training needs and the programmes required to address them, it would make sense for it to take on the role of selecting providers and allocating funding to them. This would involve payment of block grants to specific institutions to design and deliver a range of training programmes in particular areas. The Council would be responsible for financial and other reporting requirements. As this proposed role may exceed its remit under the Education Act 1998 (very much an advisory, review and research remit), it may be necessary to introduce amending legislation.

1.64 The Council has also undertaken the development of special modified curricula for children with disabilities. It would be logical that it should be involved in the development of associated training needs, contracting in such specialist expertise as may be necessary.

1.65 It would be important that the Department should maintain communications with the Council on these matters. A difficulty in this respect is the lack of clarity as to which area of the Department has responsibility for the Council. Various sections have links with it for specific matters (Central Services deal with NCCA staffing and budget, first and second-level sections liaise with it on curriculum review, as does the Inspectorate; the Strategic Policy Directorate is responsible for implementation of elements of the relevant provisions in the Education Act) but there is no single section designated as liaison section.

1.66 We have proposed the establishment of a unified Schools Division for first and second-level policy and administration elsewhere in this report. A single section in that Division is likely to deal, among other things, with curriculum matters at both levels. Such a section would be the logical choice to liaise with the Council.

Education Support Centres

1.67 We see the Education Support Centres as the main providers of in-career education in the future. We recommend that, in the short-term, the Department should use the centres to undertake initial appraisal, selection and coordination of in-career proposals from within their catchment areas. The centres should continue to undertake this role for the NCCA following devolution of responsibility to it from the Department.

1.68 The In-Career Development Section currently has responsibility for the various activities of the centres. Some of the centres oversee the development of national in-career programmes while all are deeply involved in delivery of programmes at local level. Section 37 of the Education Act, 1998, defines "education support centre" and sets out a role for the

Minister concerning their recognition and registration. The Minister is also empowered to make regulations on a number of matters.

1.69 It is necessary that some section should be assigned responsibility for this role. The logical choice (in view of the common subject matter) would be the section in the unified Schools Division responsible for liaison with the NCCA.

1.70 There is a need for greater clarity in the Department's policy generally concerning the purpose and activities of Education Support Centres. In common with other areas of the education system, the centres' roles have evolved incrementally. Initially, they were managed on a voluntary basis. Over time, their role has grown and they are managed by directors (generally, teachers on secondment). The Department also funds one administrative support post per centre, while additional recruitment of administrative staff is undertaken by centres for the duration of specific programmes. Funding for this is built into the budget allocation for programmes.

1.71 Accordingly, we recommend that the Department should undertake a review of the aims and activities of the Education Support Centre network. Such a review would inform the Minister's role (under section 37 of the Education Act) concerning the recognition and registration of centres and the development of regulations as to their operation and procedures. In particular, the review should have regard to a number of specific matters including:

- the long-term role of the centres
- appropriate management structures and financial procedures
- geographical distribution
- capacity utilisation of premises.

School Management Training

1.72 Training programmes for management development, funded by the section, are prepared and delivered by the management bodies, teacher unions and other groups. An expanded programme in this area is being proposed by the section. The need for training is likely to expand significantly, given the provisions of the Education Act 1998 regarding the roles of boards of management and the proposals made elsewhere in this report to increase devolution of responsibility to, and expand, the boards' roles. We consider that it would not be appropriate for the NCCA to oversee provision in this area since it does not relate to curriculum change, so an alternative approach is required.

1.73 It would seem logical that the Department should, in consultation with the education partners, retain the decision-making role concerning training needs in this area. However, this role should not involve detailed management of the training. It would be sufficient for a section within the Schools Division to determine broad training needs and then to allocate a block of funding to providers of such courses. Providers would be responsible for a range of provision within an agreed budget and the Department would retain responsibility for ensuring that funds are spent for the purposes for which they are agreed.

Post-devolution Role for Department

1.74 Implementation of the recommendations outlined in previous paragraphs would devolve responsibility for most of the section's current activities to external bodies. However, there will still be a need in the Department for policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation. We envisage that a section in the Schools Division should be charged with responsibility for:

- broad policy priorities (particularly in the medium and long-term) concerning in-career education needs
- liaison with the NCCA and monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of its role
- Education Support Centres

- overseeing education programmes for school management.

Chapter 2

Second-Level Division

2.1 The second-level sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. There are more than 350,000 students in this sector, attending a total of 752 publicly-aided schools. 424 of these schools are secondary, 245 are vocational and 83 are community or comprehensive.

2.2 Secondary schools, educating 57% of second-level students, are privately owned and managed. The majority are conducted by religious communities and the remainder by Boards of Governors or by individuals. Over 95% of the cost of teachers' salaries is met by the State.

2.3 This chapter deals with the four different sections of the Second-Level Division as follows:

- Post-Primary Financial and Administration
- Post-Primary Teachers
- Pensions Section
- Examinations Branch

Post-Primary Financial and Administration

2.4 This section deals with a wide range of issues concerning recurrent funding of second-level schools, non-teaching staff support for schools and VECs, curriculum and programme support and development (for example the Leaving Certificate Applied, Transition Year) and a range of policy and operational issues such as retention and pupil placements and expulsions. Whereas the section deals directly with secondary, community and comprehensive schools, responsibility for management of the vocational sector generally lies with the VECs and these are the point of contact for the schools in their sector.

Recurrent Funding of Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools

2.5 Funding arrangements for secondary schools differ from those for community and comprehensive schools. A capitation grant, based on enrolments, constitutes the main source of funding for secondary schools. In addition, specific grants are also paid in respect of a wide range of matters including support for non-teaching staff, special subject grants, ingredients for Home Economics and grants for choirs and orchestras. Secondary schools in designated areas receive supplementary funding based on their enrolments.

2.6 Funding for community and comprehensive schools is determined on a case by case analysis of submissions made by each school. In determining funding, the section has regard to enrolment numbers and to any special circumstances which apply in the schools concerned. Payment is made in four instalments in the year.

2.7 Separate arrangements also apply to Protestant schools, involving the allocation by the Secondary Education Committee of a block grant to offset the payment of fees for pupils enrolled in schools in that sector.

2.8 In addition to these arrangements, a wide range of recurrent payments is made to all second-level schools. These include funding for the Home/School/Community/ Liaison scheme, assistance towards the cost of school books, various payments in respect of pupils with a disability and a range of grants concerning specific programmes, including Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Transition Year. The

Department has also recently introduced the Schools Support Fund which involves the payment of £20 per pupil (subject to a minimum grant of £4,000) to all second-level schools to cover costs in a wide range of areas.

2.9 Over time, specific grants have been introduced incrementally to deal with particular needs, leading to the development of a very complex funding system. There are inconsistencies between the sectors in terms of the level and nature of support. The section and schools are required to deal with the administrative workload arising from a multiplicity of specific grant payments. Control and administration of the present system for secondary, community and comprehensive schools are heavily centralised in the Department. Budgets are set on a case by case basis in the community and comprehensive sector.

2.10 We note that second-level funding arrangements have been reviewed by two groups chaired by Mr. Edward Blackstock. The reviews set out a blueprint for the development of new arrangements which emphasise greater transparency and consistency across and within the three sectors. In particular, the review recommendations are designed to simplify and make more automatic the funding system and (where possible) to incorporate minor grants payments into a single block grant. The recommendations also seek to facilitate more local decision-making by schools within an aggregate budget.

2.11 As in the case of first-level schools, we support this approach. We recommend that payments in respect of different items should be rolled together and paid at intervals throughout the year. We consider that the present degree of centralised control is outdated and contrasts strongly with the efforts being made, in both the public and private sectors, to delegate financial control and accountability as close as possible to the point of service delivery. The findings of a recent PriceWaterhouseCooper study on accountability in secondary schools will be relevant in this regard. We appreciate that there may be capacity constraints, particularly in the case of small schools.

2.12 The long-term objective of the Department should be to devolve as much financial control, responsibility and accountability as possible to schools. In doing so, the Department should take account of the recommendations in the two Blackstock reviews. The introduction of the Schools Support Fund is a first step in this direction.

Post-Primary Administration Issues

2.13 It is noted that the section currently has a role in seeking to obtain school places for certain children, usually in difficult situations. This is a time-consuming task which is likely to increase both at this level and at first level. We note that section 29 of the Education Act, 1998, provides for the appeal of certain decisions of a Board of Management (or a person acting on its behalf) to the Secretary General. Appeals are to be heard by appeals committees appointed by the Minister. Decisions which may be appealed include permanent exclusion of a student from a school, suspension from attendance for a period to be prescribed, refusals to enrol a student and other decisions which may be defined by the Minister.

2.14 We expect that the establishment of this appeals mechanism will lead to a significant increase in appeals in the short-term. It is doubtful whether a Government department which is at a remove from the particular circumstances of individual cases is best suited to carry out this work. When the proposed National Educational Welfare Board is fully in operation, consideration should be given to examining whether this work should be undertaken by the Board.

Vocational Education Committees

2.15 At present there are 33 Vocational Education Committees (VECs). These have responsibility for the provision of second-level education in vocational schools and for a wide range of increasingly important functions in other areas of education. Funding for these schools is channelled through the VECs, which then take decisions, based on local

needs, about the allocation of resources between their schools. Similarly, each VEC is provided with funding to cover a defined quota of teaching resources, which it then allocates between schools in its area.

2.16 We consider that there is scope for the Department to maximise its use of the administrative resources and expertise available at VEC level. In particular, the Department should consider ways of facilitating greater independence and autonomy in decision-making by the VECs. There appears to be an undue dependence by a number of the VECs on the Department in respect of minor matters, a situation which is perhaps not entirely discouraged by the Department. In order to correct this, it may be necessary for the Department to avail of the opportunities presented by forthcoming legislation to clarify the responsibilities of CEOs. The aim should be to reduce the need for recourse to the Department on issues which one would normally expect to be within the remit of the chief officer of an organisation.

2.17 We believe that there is considerable scope for delegation in the vocational education sector. For example, the requirement for the Minister to approve individual teacher appointments in VECs appears to be unnecessary. We note that there is no such requirement in respect of secondary schools.

2.18 In the medium-term, the practice of approving overall teacher numbers for each VEC should be replaced by a system which requires VECs to apply the pupil-teacher ratio (and other appropriate criteria) directly and to employ teachers from within an overall financial allocation. Such a move would mean a change in emphasis within the section from allocation to monitoring and evaluation.

2.19 We note that, under current arrangements, eligibility for appointment as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is confined to candidates who are qualified teachers. This, although understandable for historical reasons, seems to us to be unnecessarily restrictive. The impact of rapid economic and social change on the education system has been noted elsewhere in this review. The skills required of senior managers in the education system (including CEOs) are becoming increasingly diverse. This trend is likely to accelerate, particularly as a result of the changed remit of CEOs which we understand will be proposed in the draft VEC legislation. Accordingly, in order to broaden access to a wide range of skills, the Department should consider re-defining in the new legislation the requirements for eligibility of appointment as CEO.

2.20 By ensuring greater autonomy for the VECs, the post-primary section should have greater capacity to consider medium and long-term policy issues. One such issue requiring consideration concerns the implications of the changing profile of education in the vocational sector. In particular, attention is required to be given to the transition which has occurred in certain VECs (notably those operating in urban areas) from second-level education towards a greater focus on adult and further education.

2.21 The Department should retain general responsibility for policy in the vocational sector. Its role should encompass approving VEC educational plans, providing block funding, monitoring and evaluation and ensuring accountability of the VECs.

Post-Primary Teachers Section

2.22 The principal functions of this section concern the allocation of teaching resources to schools and VECs, matters relating to conditions of service for teachers and the payment of teacher salaries in the secondary, community and comprehensive sectors.

2.23 As in the case of first-level schools, most teaching resources are allocated on the basis of enrolments, with pupil-teacher ratios being used in place of the staffing schedules used for first-level schools. Additional posts are provided in a number of areas: school principal, guidance counsellor, provision of a remedial service, disadvantaged schools, Home/School/Community/Liaison etc. Schools may also apply for concessionary posts for

specific circumstances. These might relate to ensuring adequate curricular provision where a subject specialist has departed (even where a school is already over quota). Generally, additional posts are dealt with on a case-by-case basis. As with funding arrangements (outlined in previous paragraphs), different approaches to teacher allocation operate in the various school types.

2.24 The problems identified in respect of the first-level teacher allocation process are also present in respect of second-level allocations. As in the case of the first-level system, we consider that, as a first step, the process should be given more formal status through incorporation in a Statutory Instrument. In addition, a similar appeals mechanism as that recommended for first-level teacher allocations should also cover appeals of allocations at second level.

2.25 In the medium-term, a reduction in the section's workload relating to appeals of staffing allocations should allow progress to be made in harmonising the method of calculating and allocating teaching resource entitlements across the entire second-level system. This should involve the use of a common approach to entitlements across the second-level sector, either in terms of teaching hours or whole-time teacher equivalents. Allocations should, as far as possible, be determined automatically, using objective criteria. It is understood that work on a system for allocations is being undertaken by the Expert Group on Teacher Allocations at Second Level, chaired by Dr. Séamus McGuinness.

2.26 A longer-term objective should be to streamline the approach to teacher allocation by having a block allocation of whole-time teacher equivalent posts within which schools would be allowed discretion. The Department's role would evolve, more properly, to one of monitoring and evaluation. Increased discretion for second-level schools would be consistent with greater emphasis on school planning. In addition, it would be particularly advantageous in providing schools with the flexibility to deal with recruitment difficulties which may arise in connection with recruitment of subject specialists.

2.27 The introduction of a block allocation would have significant implications in the longer-term for the processing of teachers' payroll and the issues involved would require careful advance consideration by the Department.

2.28 The close similarity of the work of the payroll sections at first level and second level (and to some extent the pensions section) lends itself to consideration of the idea of a single payroll section. We examine this in paragraph 1.29.

2.29 We understand that discussions have taken place between the Post-Primary Payroll Section, the IT Section and the Change Management Section concerning the updating of systems in the post-primary area. We would expect that this process would assist in enhancing the efficiency of the existing section.

Pensions Section

2.30 The Pensions Section was established by the Department in 1997. It is responsible for the regulation and payment of pensions for first-level and second-level teachers (other than those in vocational schools). The section also has a regulatory, but not operational, role in respect of pensions for vocational teachers. We understand that its remit will shortly be extended to other VEC staff, to all staff of the Institutes of Technology and Colleges of Education and for the operation of a range of smaller schemes located elsewhere in the Department.

2.31 We note that this section is one of many in the Department which has experienced an increase in the volume and complexity of work as a result of changes within the education sector (for example, new pensions schemes have been introduced for Institutes of Technology) and in the wider environment (such as developments in marital law). The total number of retirements in first and second-level (excluding VEC) schools more than doubled between 1990 and 1999.

2.32 A number of factors will increase the section's workload further in coming years. These include the ageing of the teaching force, an increase in early retirement, increased longevity of pensioners and the introduction of compulsory membership of the secondary teachers' superannuation scheme with effect from March 1996. Further new schemes are likely to be introduced, while EU directives will eventually require transferability of pensions between member states.

2.33 In the light of the future increase in the volume of work in the pensions area, the question of the appropriate level of staffing for the section and the balance between permanent and temporary staff require consideration by the Department. Furthermore, the complexity of the work and the continual introduction of new schemes and legal requirements means that it is vital for staff to receive adequate training for their work.

2.34 The work of the section necessitates access to up to 40 years of paper records for each individual case. The fragmented and poor quality of this information available to the section is such that routine assessment of pension entitlements is made unduly complex and time-consuming. In many cases, records are incomplete and there tend to be difficulties tracking the movement of teachers between schools. A significant proportion of the section's time is taken up with clearing a backlog of such cases.

2.35 We consider that an efficient record maintenance and retrieval system should be developed by the Department. Consideration should be given to the creation of computerised records, using scanning techniques and databank creation programmes which will replace what appear to be mainly manual records at present. There is a precedent for this in the Special Education Section. The development of a computerised history of each teacher's career will be of significant benefit in the medium to long-term.

2.36 The establishment of an efficient maintenance and retrieval system should be a priority. Consideration should be given to contracting out the work if this speeded up matters.

2.37 The issue of having a section to pay all teachers' salaries is discussed in paragraph 1.29. We recommend there that consideration should be given in the medium-term to amalgamating salaries and pensions in the one section and raise the question of contracting the function eventually outside the Department.

Examinations Branch

2.38 Two factors have combined to generate a substantial increase in the Examinations Branch workload. Firstly, the total number of exam candidates stands at 135,000, representing an increase of 14% over 1990. This growth has been driven by increased enrolments and retention rates, although demographic change will mean that there will be some reduction in candidate numbers in coming years. However, the reduction in workload for the Examinations Branch arising from this decline is likely to be offset by the second growth factor, the increasing complexity in the examinations system. Whereas the number of candidates has increased by 14% since 1990, the number of scripts (two million in 2000) has doubled over the same period.

2.39 Organisation of the State examinations is a huge task and it is a reflection of the quality of the work of the Examinations Branch that there have been no substantial problems in recent years and that public confidence in the system is high. We were particularly impressed by the Branch's capacity to deliver in the face of growing constraints on the recruitment of superintendents and examiners. The Branch's forward planning is also impressive and efforts to enhance the transparency of the process and to maximise the use of technology, where possible, have proved most worthwhile.

2.40 We are aware that the Examinations Branch is heavily overburdened at present and some amelioration of the volume of work is urgently needed. There are a number of

ways in which this might be done. The Branch has successfully drawn on new technology to enhance the efficiency and transparency of the system. Additional benefits may arise from further outsourcing of specialist tasks, including printing and logistics management. We recommend that this option should be actively pursued.

2.41 As matters stand the Junior Certificate is, in effect, a mirror image of the Leaving Certificate, with virtual total reliance upon externally-conducted terminal written assessment. The Department, in a recent discussion paper on the future shape of this examination, referred to the desirability of achieving a better balance by introducing elements of school certification. Such a re-balancing of the Junior Certificate examination should, over time, result in a situation where the Junior Certificate operates more like an examination whose purpose is to report on student progress and less like the Leaving Certificate. These changes in the future shape of the Junior Certificate should also, in time, provide some efficiencies in the State examination system and in the operations of the Examinations Branch.

2.42 There is a need to allow the Branch to give more time to examinations policy and forward planning. This will be vital in view of the increasing complexity of the system. A greater range of alternative forms of examinations will be required in the future to take account of developing areas.

2.43 A more radical solution still, and one which was proposed in the Deloitte and Touche report, would be to establish a specialist body outside the Department to manage the State examinations, as is the practice in many other countries. We believe that the running of examinations is not core work of the civil service and does not fit easily into it. We consider, therefore, that as a longer-term objective, the Department should consider this option. In this regard, we note the provisions of section 54 of the Education Act, 1998, concerning the establishment of bodies to provide support services. In pursuing this option, it would be vital to ensure that clear benefits would accrue in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. Most importantly, it would be essential to maintain public confidence in the integrity of the examinations system in the event of any change.

Chapter 3

Third-Level Division

3.1 This chapter deals with the sections currently located in the Third-Level Division:

- Higher Education (Universities)
- Colleges Section
- Student Support
- International, North/South, Structural Funds

3.2 The work in this Division is likely to increase significantly in the future because of demands for promoting equity of access and increased reporting and monitoring arrangements for public expenditure, including, in particular, under the National Development Plan.

Higher Education (Universities) Section

3.3 This section has a wide range of responsibilities in relation to the Higher Education Authority and its designated institutions and a number of other institutions. These include funding, monitoring, pensions, staffing and general policy. The section is also responsible for general third-level policy development, including research policy and the monitoring and development of policy responses to emerging skills needs. We were informed that while the spread of the work in the section was quite wide, a disproportionate amount of management time up to recently had to be given to the student support schemes, which were then part of the work of the section. This severely constrained its activities in more policy-oriented areas. Since April 2000, this work has passed to a new section (see paragraph 3.21).

3.4 There seems to be a lack of clarity as to the boundaries between the roles of the section and of the Authority. While the Authority allocates and reports on funding of the universities and institutions under its remit, its role in policy matters historically has been less clear. The Higher Education Authority Act, 1971, states that its functions shall include furthering the development of higher education and assisting in coordinating and preparing proposals for State investment. It also has an advisory role in respect of the establishment of new institutions and on the overall provision of student places. Additional functions are assigned to the Authority in the Universities Act, 1997. Some of these concern policy matters such as the development of guidelines on numbers of employees and allocation of funding for various purposes within a university's budget.

3.5 It appears to us that there is a need to map out more clearly and precisely the respective roles of the Department and the Authority concerning policy issues. This will require a process of dialogue between the two bodies. While meetings between both sides take place regularly on a range of issues, there is a need for regular, more formal links at senior level. This would assist in clarifying respective roles and ensuring coordination of effort.

3.6 It has also been represented to us that the Authority has not been in a position to take an active role on policy or, indeed on a number of operational issues. Staffing constraints and a rapid increase in third-level enrolments and funding have limited its capacity in this regard. However, we understand that recently-increased staffing will ameliorate this position.

3.7 We welcome this development. As a general conclusion, we take the view that the Authority should be more active in providing advice on policy issues to the Minister, highlighting issues and undertaking and publishing more research. In particular, it should become more involved in evaluating outcomes generally across the third-level system. The

timely publication of its annual report in this respect is recommended and this report should be expanded.

3.8 The section is responsible for matters concerning a number of bodies other than those designated under the Authority. We recommend that consideration should be given to addressing the anomalous position of these bodies. In particular, the possibility should be investigated of designating institutions such as the National College of Ireland, the Pontifical University of Maynooth and the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies as institutions of higher education within the meaning of the Higher Education Authority Act 1971. In making this recommendation, we note the commitment in the White Paper “Charting Our Education Future” to extend the Authority’s remit to all publicly-funded third-level colleges. The position of the Institúid Teangólaíochta Éireann is under examination and the position of the Dental School at the Dublin Dental Hospital also needs to be reviewed.

3.9 Consideration should be given to the transfer of certain non-core functions undertaken by the section. The Department should examine the possible transfer to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands of the administration of grants to a number of cultural bodies. The position of the Royal Irish Academy of Music and the Advisory Council on English Language Schools should be considered. There is a question as to whether the Department itself needs to be so involved in this latter area. We recommend that responsibility for the International Education Board Ireland should be transferred to the Department’s International Section.

3.10 The re-assignment of responsibility for certain bodies and a more active Higher Education Authority will enable the section to focus more closely on core activities. In particular, these will include liaison with the Authority and evaluation of its advice, the formulation of policy on third-level education generally and liaison with the private sector and other State agencies concerning the economy’s skills needs and partnership between education and industry

3.11 In the next section we recommend the transfer of responsibility to the Authority for Institutes of Technology. The reasons for this recommendation are given in that section. It and the implementation of various recommendations made in this chapter will have significant implications for the Authority’s role, staffing and composition. It should be adequately resourced in terms of staffing and expertise to undertake its enhanced role.

Colleges Section

3.12 This section is responsible for operational and policy issues concerning third-level institutions in the technological sector (mainly Institutes of Technology) and for the Colleges of Education. It is much more heavily involved in detail than the preceding section which, in tandem with the Higher Education Authority, oversees the university sector. Current structures and practices are the legacy of history. In particular, the change in the status and governance of the former Regional Technical Colleges has placed a heavy workload on the section in putting in place a framework for the sector.

3.13 Colleges Section is deeply involved in operational matters. It determines and allocates funding for each institution in its remit, advises the Minister on staffing numbers and grades and approves recruitment procedures. Up to recently, it would have been involved in recruiting staff for the institutions. The section approves the educational programmes offered by each institution. It also works closely with the External Staff Relations Section in addressing the various industrial relations issues that arise in the sector.

3.14 Whereas in the university sector operational matters and policy advice are the responsibility of the Higher Education Authority, there is no equivalent system in place for the technological sector. We consider that this section should also be enabled to focus more on policy issues and that this can only be facilitated by relieving it of some of its

involvement in operational matters. A twin-track strategy is required, namely, greater independence on the part of the institutions and the devolution of operational work to the Authority.

3.15 We consider that the Department should seek to extricate itself from detailed operational work and to encourage the institutions to carry out these functions themselves. We have been given to understand that each institution has appropriate administrative, human resource and financial expertise to enable it to resolve more issues at local level. In particular, such work includes industrial relations matters and routine spending within defined budgets. Institutions should also take on more responsibility in the area of capital works (see paragraph 5.45).

3.16 In addition, there would seem to be significant scope for involvement of the Higher Education Authority in operational and some policy matters. We note that the extension of the Authority's remit to all publicly funded third-level colleges was envisaged by the White Paper "Charting Our Education Future". According to the White Paper, this would take place on a phased basis following the completion of the development phase in the then Regional Technical Colleges and the Dublin Institute of Technology, including the implementation of new financial and administrative systems. We understand that planning for the transfer of responsibility for the Institutes of Technology is at a preliminary stage and that the Authority will be preparing an action plan shortly. Work on the development of a unit cost approach is under way, completion of which would permit the Authority to allocate block grants to the Institutes. Planning for the transfer of other institutions, including the Colleges of Education, will be undertaken following the completion of the initial stage. We welcome the planned transfer of responsibility for funding of the Institutes of Technology to the Authority and recommend that this transfer should be expedited and an implementation timetable prepared. The same should be done for the Colleges of Education.

3.17 When responsibility for the technological sector is transferred, adequate representation will be required for it on the Authority in order to ensure a balance. We note the statement in the White Paper referred to above that the composition of the Authority will be broadened through amending legislation to include such representation.

3.18 In the medium-term, the Authority should take on responsibility for policy advice to the Minister regarding the technological sector, along the lines we propose for the universities. The possibility of designating, under existing legislation, technological institutions as bodies within the Authority's remit should be examined. In the context of the planned transfer of responsibility for recurrent funding of the Institutes of Technology to the Authority, we recommend that the position on capital funding for the technological sector should be brought into line with the university sector (paragraph 5.47).

3.19 The Department sets intake quotas for teacher education courses in various institutions. In this respect, we acknowledge that the State has particular obligations to ensure an adequate supply of teachers. We consider that analyses of the future need for teachers are of significant strategic importance to the Department and this division should therefore involve the Central Planning Unit in them.

3.20 Implementation of our proposals will allow the development of improved links between the various sections dealing with higher education. This will allow a greater concentration on policy and ensure greater consistency in policy-making for the sector as a whole. Our recommendation to establish a task force, involving the Third-Level Division, the Higher Education Authority and the Third-Level Building Section, to coordinate policy on capital investment in the sector, will be important in this regard (see paragraph 5.51). We also propose the assignment of part of the Further and Adult Education section to a newly titled 'Further and Higher Education Division.'

Student Support Section

3.21 This area, which, as explained above, had formed part of the remit of the Higher Education section, has been allocated to a new Principal with effect from April 2000. The section's work spans two broad areas: financial support for students and issues concerning access to third level (disadvantage and disability). It is also understood that the Principal has been given responsibility for certain aspects of the work carried out in the Structural Funds area.

Financial Support for Students

3.22 The section is responsible for administering four schemes of financial support for third-level students. Calculation and payment of grants are undertaken by Local Authorities and VECs. Interpretation of the schemes (in terms of determining eligibility for assistance) should also be a matter for these bodies. However, in practice, many of these queries are referred to the section as the schemes provide for the Minister to determine every question or dispute which arises in relation to the interpretation of the schemes. These queries also generate a substantial quantity of Parliamentary Questions and representations.

3.23 Although there are four separate schemes (of which one has a statutory basis), a common application form and means test applies in each case. The section reviews the terms of the schemes annually to address anomalies and to ensure that the schemes reflect changing social and economic circumstances. In an effort to ensure greater clarity, it takes account of frequently-asked questions which have arisen throughout the year. We support these efforts and consider that clearer and more detailed guidelines would help to reduce the volume of work of the section. We also support moves towards a unified scheme which would have a statutory basis. As in other areas, an independent appeals mechanism should be introduced. This would help to reduce the Department's involvement at individual case level where appeals are currently directed to the Minister.

3.24 A reduction in the number of operational queries would enable the section to focus on its core role concerning student support. This would involve continuing review of the schemes, development of guidelines, interpretation of significant matters of principle and policy formulation and review.

3.25 The question arises as to whether the Department of Education and Science should be involved at all in an area which effectively concerns income support rather than a core educational matter. We note that a joint working group recommended in 1997 that the operation of the schemes, including policy aspects, should be transferred to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA). It also recommended the establishment of a project team to prepare the ground for transfer. We understand that both Ministers are favourably disposed towards the transfer of the payments process to the DSCFA but that the position concerning the transfer of other matters, including policy, is less advanced. Progress generally towards implementation of the joint working group's recommendations has been slow.

3.26 We consider that it would be logical to transfer responsibility for the means testing and payments functions to the DSCFA. The income support schemes operated by that Department include the Back to Education Allowance and it has particular expertise in the area of means testing. Locating the student support function in that Department would ensure improved coordination of income supports for education.

3.27 We recommend that the two Departments should immediately establish a joint implementation group to make arrangements for the transfer. The implementation group should be given the target that transfer of the payments function should be completed before the beginning of the academic year 2002/03.

3.28 The transfer of the payments function to the DSCFA is a logical first step. Whilst in the short-term policy matters will remain in the Department, it should explore with the DSCFA the question of transferring responsibility in the medium-term for student support policy. Even if responsibility for such issues is transferred, residual elements of the section's work concerning financial support will remain in the Third-Level Division. These

include the responsibility for the free fees initiative, the designation of courses and institutions for grant eligibility and, similarly, their recognition for the purposes of tax relief on fees.

Policy on Access

3.29 The section is responsible for the formulation of policy and operation of a variety of schemes concerning access to third-level education of persons with disabilities and of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Funding for these schemes has increased significantly in recent years and it is likely that the area will continue to grow in importance.

3.30 We recommend that responsibility for policy concerning third-level access for persons with disabilities should remain in the Third-Level Division. The role of the Higher Education Authority in relation to operational matters in this area should be clarified. We considered recommending the assignment of responsibility for policy to the section dealing with special needs (disability) in the proposed Schools Division but took the view that this would be less effective, since that division deals only with school-related issues. However, to ensure continuity of policy and service, strong links should be established on these issues between the relevant sections.

3.31 The rationale for the establishment of a division on social inclusion has been set out in Part 1. That rationale would suggest that the appropriate location for policy on third-level access for disadvantaged students should be the proposed Social Inclusion and Youth Affairs Division. However, an argument can be made that allowing it to remain in the Third-Level Division would encourage its acceptance as part of mainstream policy at third level. On balance, we believe that the interests of disadvantaged students would best be served by locating it in the proposed Social Inclusion and Youth Affairs Division, with, however, very close links being maintained with the Third-Level Division and the Higher Education Authority.

3.32 It is noted that an Access Group has been established to oversee and coordinate policy on access for persons with disabilities, mature students and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds. The section currently has responsibility for the Group. In view of the very broad remit of the Group, we recommend that responsibility for it and for its recommendations should be assigned to the proposed Social Inclusion and Youth Affairs Division.

International, North/South And Structural Funds Sections

3.33 These sections cover a broad range of activities. The work of the International Section and the North/South Section has grown significantly in recent times. This has been particularly noticeable in the North/South area, where bilateral contacts between both parts of the island have increased dramatically. At the multilateral level, there appears to be a growing consensus among EU member states in favour of increased cooperation in the field of education. This is occurring as a result of common political will, despite the limited formal EU competence in the education area.

3.34 A broad range of areas has been identified for North/South cooperation. These include educational disadvantage, special needs (disability), teacher qualifications and exchange programmes. Further areas identified for future cooperation include Information Communications Technologies in education, research and development and further and higher education.

3.35 Although structural funding has fallen significantly and is projected to fall further, reporting requirements have become more detailed and complex, offsetting the fall in work as a result of lower funding. Any aggregate reduction in workload will be more than outweighed by the substantial increase in activity on the North/South and international fronts.

3.36 The question arises as to whether this division is an appropriate home for these sections. There is no particular reason why the current location must be retained. Equally, however, there is no apparent natural home in the existing or recommended divisional structure for the sections. The Corporate Services Division is a possible location for these areas, as is the proposed Central Planning Unit. However, as there is no compelling reason to move the sections, it is recommended that they should remain in the new Further and Higher Education Division. More generally, in view of the broad range of areas involved, it will be necessary for these sections to develop further their links with most areas of the Department.

3.37 The Exchequer's reliance on EU funding is likely to diminish significantly in the coming years. A valuable by-product of EU scrutiny of spending has been the evaluation and reporting work which is based in this section. We understand that under the National Development Plan this evaluation and reporting will also cover national funding.

3.38 Elsewhere in this report we emphasise the need for a robust system of evaluation in the Department and recommend that the proposed Central Planning Unit should have an evaluation role. The evaluation function of this section should in due course transfer to the Unit.

3.39 As indicated earlier in the chapter, we recommend that responsibility for the International Education Board Ireland should be transferred to the International Section.

3.40 The implementation of the various strands of the Good Friday Agreement, with cooperation in education being identified as one of the priority areas in Strands 2 and 3, will involve a larger volume of work, not just in the North/South Section but in those line sections and the Inspectorate which will be concerned with the specific items for action agreed by the North/South Ministerial Council and/or the British/Irish Council, as appropriate. We have also noted the impact on the International Section, relevant line sections and the Inspectorate of the increased degree of international bilateral cooperation which is likely to arise, for example, under the recent Memorandum of Understanding with the United States, while there is increasing evidence at EU level of the recognition of the role of education in the economic and social development of Europe, resulting in increased demands on national administrations.

Chapter 4

The Inspectorate

Background

4.1 The management of the Department's Inspectorate comprises a Chief Inspector, two Deputy Chief Inspectors and ten Assistant Chief Inspectors. Most inspectors belong to either the Primary or Post-primary streams of the Inspectorate and are located throughout the country. Eight of the ten Assistant Chief Inspectors have, inter alia, managerial responsibility for regional groupings of both primary and post-primary inspectors. Although most inspectors are based in one of the Department's central or regional offices, some work from home and are relatively isolated from the Department.

4.2 Section 13 of the Education Act, 1998, sets out the functions of an Inspector. These are wide-ranging and include matters such as support and advice to schools and centres of education concerning provision of education; evaluation of quality and effectiveness of provision; research and support for policy formulation and functions in respect of the school examinations. In addition, section 13(2) provides for the appointment of Inspectors who hold qualifications as psychologists or have other expertise, including in the area of education of students with special educational needs. Specific additional functions for such staff are set out in section 13(4).

4.3 We consider that quality assurance constitutes the core function of the Inspectorate. This core function comprises two key aspects, evaluation of provision (e.g. inspection and Whole School Evaluation) and policy formulation. However, there is a general view that the Inspectorate's capacity to focus on these core objectives is hampered by its involvement in a wide range of other activities.

4.4 This chapter first sets out the core functions of the Inspectorate and then suggests ways in which its responsibility in other non-core areas may be devolved.

Policy Formulation

4.5 As noted above, the primary involvement of the Inspectorate in the policy development and planning process is to ensure quality assurance and its monitoring within the Department. In addition, the Inspectorate has a valuable contribution to make to policy development in terms of its general educational expertise, though such expertise is not the sole prerogative of the Inspectorate and, in some cases, could be obtained in other ways.

4.6 While the existing management structure is designed to facilitate the work currently undertaken by the Inspectorate, it is not clear that it offers a suitable framework for the revised structure which we recommend for the Department. We consider that the Inspectorate may need to review its structure to ensure that it is fully involved in general policy issues, particularly in the light of our recommendations. Our proposals concerning educational advisors (discussed later in the chapter) would also have implications for the structure of the Inspectorate.

4.7 As stated elsewhere in this report, there will be a continuing need for the education system to adapt to rapid economic and social change. Recent years have seen substantially increased investment in some areas of the system (e.g. provision for pupils with special needs, disadvantage and early leaving). In order to ensure quality of provision, the Department and its Inspectorate (and their structures) must rapidly adapt and develop competence to deal with issues arising in new and developing areas. This is particularly important because support and monitoring from the Inspectorate will be especially valuable in the early stages of new developments.

4.8 The need for teamwork, cross-sectional task forces and standing committees is highlighted in Part 1 of the review. In view of the central importance of the Inspectorate's contribution across a range of areas, we consider that particular efforts are required to ensure closer communication and cooperation between administrative and Inspectorate staff. Implementation of our proposals should, in time, free inspectors to focus more closely on policy and evaluation and this should of itself help to encourage and facilitate greater communication and cooperation on policy matters. Management will also have a role to play in ensuring that all relevant parties on the administrative and Inspectorate sides have been consulted in respect of significant policy initiatives.

4.9 We consider that the Inspectorate should be closely involved with the proposed Central Planning Unit. They should participate in the standing committee which we recommend should oversee the work of the Unit. Where particular policy initiatives are being undertaken by the Unit, members of the Inspectorate with special expertise in the relevant area should be seconded to it or its task forces, as appropriate.

Evaluation

4.10 Part I of this report has highlighted the need for the Department to focus more closely on evaluating the effectiveness of its existing strategies. Although the allocation of an evaluation role to the proposed Central Planning Unit will strengthen the Department's capacity in this regard, other sections must be involved.

4.11 Inspectors' evaluation functions as defined in section 13 of the Education Act, 1998, although focused principally on provision in schools and centres for education, also extend to reporting on the quality of the educational system generally. In respect of schools, the recently-introduced system of Whole School Evaluation (WSE) constitutes the principal evaluation tool. The focus of this system is on the planning and provision of education at school level. However, we consider that there would be considerable merit in the medium-term in extending the WSE remit to cover administrative aspects of schools' activities. Such a development would be particularly valuable in view of the various recommendations in this report to devolve more responsibility to school management.

4.12 While WSE provides a valuable resource for individual schools concerning specific issues, it also offers potential as a source of information more generally. We consider that there is a need for analyses of WSE reports with a view to identifying emerging local or national trends or common difficulties. Responsibility in this area should lie jointly with the Inspectorate and relevant sections in the Schools Division. In the medium-term, as the remit of WSE is expanded, the role of the administrative sections in this regard should grow in importance. Macro-level analyses of school plans will also be important.

4.13 More generally, in order to address the issue of quality assurance of the education system, we recommend that the Department should establish a standing committee on Quality in Education. Membership of the committee should include the Chief Inspector and other appropriate members of top management. In addition to considering key themes arising from WSE, the committee should be responsible for organising evaluation of other aspects of educational provision.

Role of the Evaluation, Support & Research Unit (ESRU)

4.14 We understand that the ESRU's role is to support the Inspectorate's evaluation activities by assisting to raise skills and disseminate best practice and techniques among Inspectors. This role will be particularly important in the developing WSE area. In addition, the unit may also undertake some small-scale evaluations concerning issues at school level.

4.15 We welcome the enhancement of evaluation skills and expertise in the Inspectorate. However, there appears to be a lack of clarity generally in the Department as to the unit's purpose and a possibility of its work overlapping with that of the Central

Planning Unit. The units' respective roles need to be clarified and mechanisms established to bring about close cooperation between them.

Examinations

4.16 Section 13(3)(h) of the Education Act, 1998, provides a statutory basis for involvement by the Inspectorate in examinations. The section states that an Inspector shall "perform such functions relating to the preparation and marking of the school examinations... as the Chief Inspector shall determine, the monitoring and evaluation of the content and standards of those examinations and to report thereon to the Minister".

4.17 Involvement in examinations accounts for a significant proportion of the Inspectorate's resources. We understand that some 40% of second-level Inspectors' time is occupied by examination-related matters. Such a heavy examinations workload significantly constrains the extent to which these Inspectors may become involved in school inspection and other aspects of quality assurance.

4.18 In paragraphs 2.41 to 2.43, we have considered some options which in the medium- to long-term would reduce the examinations workload of the Department. These would also reduce the extent to which the Inspectorate should be involved in the process. In the meantime there would seem to be some scope for scaling down the involvement of the Inspectorate in existing tasks, which might be undertaken more appropriately at another level.

Educational Advisors

4.19 Inspectors are frequently called upon to advise sections on general educational matters. Although such work is clearly valuable, it may not concern evaluation or quality assurance issues which are at the core of the Inspectorate's remit. What sections require in many cases is the advice of an educationalist. While Inspectors are clearly well qualified to provide such advice, it may be more efficient to obtain assistance from an alternative source, thereby freeing inspectors to concentrate on their core functions. Accordingly, it is worth considering the development of an appropriate resource which would be available to the Department to deal with such matters.

4.20 One route which should be explored would involve securing the services, on secondment to the Department, of persons experienced in the education area to undertake either the delivery of specific tasks and projects or to act as advisors on specific areas. A mechanism which allows the secondment of teachers to the Inspectorate is provided in section 13(6) of the Education Act, 1998. The section permits seconded teachers "to carry out any or all of the functions conferred on an Inspector". This strategy would help to free Inspectors for core tasks while the rotation of teachers from varying backgrounds and with varying experience and expertise should enrich the Inspectorate.

4.21 Some sections have members of the Inspectorate attached to them on a more or less full-time basis while several others suggested that they would wish for a similar provision. In general, the role envisaged for such inspectors is that of providing educational advice, usually of a specialised nature, to the sections, rather than being directly involved in either policy development or quality assurance. We consider that, in view of the need to allow the Inspectorate to focus on core functions, consideration should be given to making expertise available to sections through the secondment of persons to the Inspectorate as outlined above. Exceptions may be necessary where an inspector's task in working with a particular section would relate to core policy work or cases where individual inspectors have exceptional expertise in particular areas of education.

4.22 A case was made to us for the need for greater involvement by the Inspectorate in industrial relations matters. In particular, it was argued that the education partners have access to a significant quantity of professional educational expertise and that the Department's negotiating team may lack the specific expertise required to assess the validity of, or rebut (where necessary), assertions put in negotiations.

4.23 We consider that there is a need to strengthen the Department's capacity in this regard. This might best be achieved through developing links between the Inspectorate and the External Staff Relations Section, so that the latter can have speedy access to expertise on relevant matters as the need arises. In our view, this would be more effective than the assignment of a specific Inspector to the section since any one individual could not possibly have the range of knowledge required for the work of this section.

4.24 The Department has, in recent years, been developing the approach of recruiting coordinators to manage various innovative programmes where it has not had the capacity to undertake the work itself. In many of these cases, the work would otherwise have fallen, by default, on inspectors and thereby added to their workload. These areas include:

- coordinators on initiatives such as the Stay in School Programme
- programmes such as the Home/School/Community/Liaison (HSCL) programme where coordinators effectively undertake an inspectorial type function in respect of HSCL staff in schools
- a national education officer for Travellers
- a small number of programmes such as Youthreach, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and Senior Traveller Training Centres, where there is no direct supervision by inspectors
- support teams for the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Transition Year

4.25 We are conscious of the risk that existing and proposed secondment arrangements may lead to a fragmented and uncoordinated approach to educational issues. This arises through the recruitment and assignment of specific individuals with responsibility for specific programmes and the apparent absence of coordination and regular linkages. We consider that a better approach to resolving this problem would be, through the use of the mechanism proposed above, to recruit persons to undertake these coordination roles. Locating the coordinators within the Inspectorate should ensure that initiatives are developed in a way that is coherent with overall Department policy, as well as ensuring proper monitoring and evaluation of the operation and outcomes of the initiatives. As in the case of other advisors, secondments should be for a limited period only, at the end of which advisors should be returned to their parent institutions.

Involvement At Local Level

4.26 A substantial proportion of Inspectorate resources is absorbed by requests from sections of the Department relating to individual pupils or specific schools and areas. Because they have constituted the Department's local presence, Inspectors have also been expected to take on a heavy workload in respect of participation in local or regional groups and committees. Increasing emphasis on community development and area-based partnership will mean more work of this nature. The development of a local office network (chapter 8) might relieve Inspectors of some of this workload.

Chapter 5

Building And Miscellaneous Services Division

5.1 This Division comprises the Planning and Building Unit and four sections – External Staff Relations, Further & Adult Education, Social Inclusion and Youth Affairs. As is evident from their titles, there appears to be little common ground between the latter four sections and they seem to be grouped together for historical reasons and for administrative convenience.

Planning And Building Unit

5.2 The current Planning and Building Unit comprises four administrative sections – Primary, Second Level, Planning Section, Third Level – as well as a corps of professional and technical support staff. In this chapter, the first and second-level sections are taken together while the other areas are discussed separately. We also consider the role of Public Private Partnerships and of the Commission on School Accommodation.

5.3 At the outset, it is worth noting that there has been an extraordinary increase in the volume of work in the various sections because of a number of factors. These include substantially increased funding which has been made available for capital investment and the generation of additional work through the introduction of policy changes such as the decision to fund the purchase of primary and secondary school sites.

5.4 Staffing allocations to the various areas of the unit have not kept pace with the increased workload, generating severe pressures on existing staff. Higher productivity and some administrative changes (such as devolving more work externally) have helped to alleviate the pressure somewhat but it is clear that the urgent filling of the additional posts which have been approved for the sections is now vital. Finally, as in other areas of the Department, the increasing volume of operational work hampers the unit's capacity to formulate and evaluate policy options and to monitor the quality of service provided and the value for money of investment.

First And Second-Level (Building) Sections

5.5 These sections deal with capital investment in sectors which encompass almost 4,000 schools. Current procedures in the Department generate a considerable amount of correspondence and the sections are inundated with matters of detail concerning individual cases.

Short-term Strategies

5.6 Efforts are being made by the sections to reduce involvement in individual cases through greater use of self-certification, more standardisation of designs, delegation of responsibility to schools and through Public Private Partnerships (PPPs).

5.7 Self-certification involves schools and design teams taking responsibility for "signing-off" on the various stages of planning and construction. In the event of a breach by the contractor or consultant of the terms of such a contract, the school may have recourse to legal action. Approximately 75% of design work is undertaken by external consultants.

5.8 We support the use of self-certification and recommend that the Department should consider its extension to a higher proportion of projects. We note that plans are in train to extend self-certification to second level. The effectiveness of this approach will depend on the development, in consultation with schools, of very good initial design specifications and a readiness, in the event of default, to use legal action as necessary.

5.9 The use of standard 'off the peg' designs ensures that each project will meet defined minimum standards and enables the Department and individual architects to predict more accurately the costs and duration of construction. It also reduces the amount of the sections' time spent on individual design of schools. We support increased use of standardised designs as this would reduce the amount of the sections' time spent on individual cases. It has been suggested to us that flexibility could be built in to a standard funding package associated with each design type. This would allow architects to incorporate individualised, aesthetic features to the design as appropriate.

5.10 The introduction of the Minor Works Grants Scheme at first level allows schools to take more decisions at local level on minor capital works. Grants, linked to enrolments, are paid to each school which can then carry out minor works without reference to the Department. Funds may only be spent for specific purposes but, if unspent, may be carried forward to the following financial year.

5.11 We understand that the First-Level Section of the Building Unit is considering the expansion of the scheme to cater for the needs of older schools which require renovation. This would involve allocating a higher level of grant aid to such schools to allow them to engage contractors for more extensive works. Such works might include the provision of additional accommodation. We support this development and favour the delegation of more authority to schools, empowering them to set their own priorities within a defined budget. Consideration could be given to extending this to second-level schools also, as appropriate.

5.12 As well as providing a mechanism to generate funds for school construction, Public Private Partnerships offer schools the potential to hand over the minor works to a private contractor, thereby reducing the Planning and Building Unit's involvement in such matters. The removal of this burden on schools which could result from this would be in line with our recommendations for increased devolved responsibility to schools on other matters. This applies in particular to small first-level schools.

5.13 The devolution of responsibility for minor works has attractions wider than under the PPP arrangements. We consider that the Department should examine whether there are possibilities for handling these works through the clustering of schools. The Department could, following consultation with the education partners, introduce a system of competitive tendering in respect of various minor works for defined groups of schools (for example, first-level schools might be grouped on a county basis). This arrangement would be particularly appropriate for small first-level schools where contractors may not consider the small scale of tasks involved in individual schools as financially attractive. In addition to freeing schools from the burden of this work, this could further reduce the Department's involvement in individual casework. The benefits obtained from economies of scale should ensure better value for money.

5.14 As in other areas of the Department, the Planning and Building Unit needs to devolve activity in individual cases and focus on forward planning, monitoring and policy formulation. This would involve relinquishing immediate control of projects, a real devolution of responsibility for certain functions and a readiness to encourage the use of compliance mechanisms, including financial penalties, withholding of payment and legal action as required.

5.15 Extension of the mechanisms outlined above would free professional and technical staff from detailed work and enable them to focus on policy. In particular, it would facilitate greater attention to areas which have, because of the pressures described earlier, tended to be neglected. These might include developmental work on the 'school of the future' and on experimental design. Safeguards could be introduced by the Department through the use of random monitoring and quality control and periodic evaluation of the approach.

5.16 As in other areas, devolution will add to the burden of work of schools, in particular, at primary level. As indicated in paragraph 26 of Part 1, this burden would need to be addressed by the Department.

Accommodation and Property Database

5.17 It is understood that preparatory work has been undertaken to establish a database of accommodation in schools. This will cover not just the quantity of accommodation but also qualitative matters such as age, type and condition and the capacity of schools to cater for special needs.

5.18 We consider that such a database would be of great value to the Planning and Building Unit and the Department in terms of identifying aggregate resource needs, determining priorities for investment and analysing proposals for funding. It could be used as a basis for evaluation of particular initiatives and to facilitate measuring the effectiveness of the Department's capital investment programme generally. We therefore recommend that the development of the database should be accorded priority by the Department. It would also be vital to put in place effective mechanisms to ensure that it would be updated on a regular basis.

5.19 In the light of the recent decision to purchase primary and secondary school sites, urgent consideration should also be given to developing a register of all land and buildings owned by the State for educational purposes. The Department owns a substantial amount of property. However, we understand that it currently lacks the capacity to identify readily all of the property and that this has led to difficulties in compiling an Asset Register. In addition, the lack of an accessible database on existing property hampers the effectiveness of the Department's property management. As a result, the Department is unable to maximise the use of its existing assets. The lack of a database also acts as a significant constraint to effective forward planning.

5.20 In planning for the development of the property database, consideration should be given to incorporating it into, or at least ensuring compatibility with, the schools accommodation database. Ultimately, all these databases should be aligned to the proposed Management Information System in the Department (paragraphs 7.15 and 7.16).

Medium-term Options

5.21 The question arises whether operational aspects of the Planning and Building Unit's work are appropriately located in the Department. An alternative approach considered in the Deloitte & Touche report was the devolution of this area from the Department. One possibility in this regard would be to establish an executive agency.

5.22 We believe that the Department should consider, as a medium-term option, the establishment of an Executive Agency with a national remit for the construction and modification of schools. The respective roles of the Department and the Agency would have to be clarified in advance. Devolution of responsibility might be undertaken on a phased basis, with the Agency gradually taking responsibility for the analysis of schools' proposals, allocation of funding and reporting requirements.

5.23 This option is attractive and offers scope for a more efficient service for several reasons. The Department would be relieved of its involvement in detailed, operational work, allowing it to focus on monitoring, evaluation, forward planning and major policy issues. Devolving funding to a statutory agency would allow more flexibility on funding, particularly in terms of carry forward of unspent moneys. This is important given the irregular cash flow of construction projects. The recommendations outlined in previous paragraphs should enhance the effectiveness of the Department's operations, leading to a reduction in Parliamentary Questions and representations.

5.24 In devolving this work it would be necessary for the Department to develop guidelines and criteria against which proposals could be evaluated. National priorities should also be set by the Department. These might relate to matters such as setting aside a defined proportion of funding for schools in disadvantaged areas, or the relative funding to

be allocated to first and second-level schools each year. The Minister would retain responsibility for ensuring that national objectives and priorities were adhered to.

Key Objectives and Location of Sections

5.25 The recommendations outlined in previous paragraphs should be implemented on a phased basis. In the short-term, priority should be given to extending further the strategies designed to devolve more responsibility to schools and to establishing the accommodation database. Freed from the operational workload, the Department would have greater capacity to focus on core areas including policy, monitoring and evaluation, standardised designs and forward planning, including the 'school of the future.'

5.26 Forward planning is of key importance as the pace of technological and social change continues to accelerate. Schools, and the education system itself, must adapt to these changes in order to remain relevant and effective. Although it is very difficult to envisage what the school of the future will look like, it is fair to say that it will be radically different from existing schools. The professional and technical staff of the Department (both in the Planning and Building Unit and the Inspectorate) will have a central role to play in the work being carried out by the Central Planning Unit for this forward planning process.

5.27 In the medium to longer-term, the reduction in the operational workload together with demographic factors should allow the merging of the first and second-level sections into a single section. We note that the two sections are effectively engaged in very similar work, with differences arising mainly in respect of the scale of the projects involved (and the involvement of specific curriculum-related aspects to second-level schools). A merger would also complement our proposals on the administrative side, where we recommend the establishment of a unified Schools Division.

5.28 The question of divisional structures has been discussed in Part 1 of this report. At present, the entire Planning and Building Unit is located in a single division, along with several other sections (External Staff Relations, Further and Adult Education, Social Inclusion and Youth Affairs). We recommend that all Planning and Building Unit sections should be located in the proposed Schools Support Services Division.

Planning Section

5.29 The main roles of the Planning Section concern:
advice to the first and second-level sections of the Planning and Building Unit as to the overall number of places to be provided, where proposals are made to provide additional or replacement accommodation
processing applications for the recognition of new schools.
securing agreement between relevant parties concerning reorganisation, rationalisation or closure of schools

5.30 As in the case of other sections in the unit, the Planning Section has had to cope with a significantly greater workload arising from increased funding. This has led to delays in processing of proposals and a further consequence of the increased pressures is that the section does not have the capacity to undertake an active planning role. Such a role is particularly important, for example, in respect of identifying possible candidates for amalgamations. Nevertheless, the resource constraints on the section are, we understand, such that its operations are primarily reactive.

5.31 In the short-term, some expansion of the staffing of the section is required to clear the existing backlog of referrals from the first and second-level sections. In addition, there will be a continuing need for the Department to evaluate proposals from schools for capital investment. Planning Section has the benefit of acquired expertise and access to data sources and is best placed to advise on the viability of proposals. We understand that an additional 12 staff are to be allocated for the Planning and Building Unit as a whole. We

consider that in allocating these staff there should be particular emphasis on the needs of the Planning Section.

5.32 In the medium-term, the Department requires a more comprehensive and integrated approach to planning provision of services across the education spectrum. Demographic change has led to a substantial decline in numbers at first level and the impact of change is being felt at second and third levels. At the same time, provision in other areas such as early childhood, special needs and second chance education is likely to increase in coming years.

5.33 The Department needs to be able to take a more all-encompassing approach to planning for these reductions and increases in demand. It should be able to identify the extent and condition of any surplus accommodation in a catchment area which has the potential to be converted to alternative uses (such as those mentioned above). For example, falling enrolments in a first-level school may free accommodation which could be adapted for use for other purposes. The development of the accommodation database will be vital in this regard. In the medium-term, this should include alternative uses of school accommodation. Consideration should also be given to extending the database beyond first and second-level schools to log the extent, condition and utilisation of accommodation for other educational services.

5.34 Each local area will have a unique demographic profile which will generate specific educational needs. There is a case for the development of area blueprints which will take account of these needs. We recognise that the development of such blueprints would involve the acquisition and analysis of data on a wide range of variables. However, while blueprints may be approximate, some effort to forecast and plan for local needs is essential. The development of the blueprints will require progress in a number of areas. Firstly, it is assumed that the accommodation database referred to above will be put in place and that, in the medium-term, it may extend across the education sector. Secondly, the Statistics Section will be involved in producing enrolment projections by catchment area. Thirdly, the development of a Management Information System will provide key information for the compilation of local area blueprints. Finally, local offices (chapter 8) and inspectors have the benefit of local knowledge and contacts and should be closely involved in the preparation of blueprints for their catchment areas.

5.35 Initially, the priorities for blueprints will be driven by requests for new schools and substantial extensions. As the process becomes established, and as the backlog in other areas is cleared, the Planning Section may be more active in selecting areas for analysis. It is recognised that the development of capacity to plan for local area needs will be a gradual process.

5.36 The Planning Section should continue to oversee developments in respect of school amalgamations. Its involvement in this area is considerable, extending beyond issues of accommodation to include facilitating negotiations and discussions between the various interests on diverse matters such as school ethos, staffing arrangements and curriculum provision. The development of area blueprints as outlined in previous paragraphs will assist the section's work in this area.

Commission on School Accommodation

5.37 We understand that there is a clear distinction between the role of Planning Section and that of the Commission on School Accommodation. Planning Section has executive responsibility for the planning of school provision at first and second level. In practice, this has (as stated earlier) involved reacting to accommodation demands from individual schools and promoting rationalisation in appropriate circumstances. Implementation of our proposals should enable the section to adopt a more active role, particularly in anticipating and quantifying accommodation needs.

5.38 Under its terms of reference, the Commission on School Accommodation is charged with reviewing policy and conducting research for the planning of school provision

at first and second level. Its work - in relation to criteria for the recognition of new primary schools and studies of specific areas - is consistent with this remit.

5.39 Although there appears to be some overlap in the broad objectives of the Planning Section and the Commission, we consider that the Commission should be retained as a separate body. Its representative structure permits input from interest groups into the planning process and enables the Department to draw on their expertise. However, an important aspect of its role should be to advise the Planning Section on key issues concerning planning at local level. Where necessary, the Planning Section might refer specific matters to the Commission for its views. The section's proposed remit concerning the development of area blueprints would dovetail neatly into the Commission's work on analysis of issues.

5.40 The Planning Section (particularly in respect of its role in amalgamations) is involved in the provision of a service to schools. We consider that, along with the other sections of the Planning and Building Unit, it should be assigned to the proposed Schools Services Support Division.

5.41 The section is involved in the administration and payment of grant aid to more than 200 schools in respect of rental of temporary accommodation. We consider that its role should primarily concern forward planning and analysis rather than operational matters. Since capital payments in respect of construction work are currently made by the first and second-level building sections, it would seem appropriate that they should also administer the grant aid in respect of temporary accommodation.

5.42 The section also has responsibility for organising the establishment of boards of management in community schools. It is recommended that this function should be assigned to the proposed Schools Division.

Third-Level Building Section

5.43 There are differences between the work of this section and its counterparts at first and second level. Although the number of institutions involved is far lower, the scale of individual projects tends to be significantly greater than in the other sectors. The increase in funding generally, and the associated administrative problems referred to earlier, have also arisen at third level. More challenging for the section has been the need to adjust to its transfer to Tullamore in 1999. This transfer has resulted in a 100% staff turnover.

5.44 The rationale for State involvement in the sector is the high proportion of funding which it provides. Accordingly, the State has a responsibility on behalf of the taxpayer to ensure value for money. The amount of involvement of the section in specific projects depends on the type of institution. Projects in the university sector are overseen by the Higher Education Authority, while the section takes a more direct role in respect of the Institutes of Technology.

5.45 We consider that the degree of involvement by the section in detailed assessment of funding proposals, especially in the non-university sector, is excessive. There would appear to be scope to devolve considerably more responsibility to the institutions. We are advised that, in general, they are well equipped with support staff and specific expertise in construction matters (they have professionally qualified buildings officers), financial control and administration.

5.46 There is a need for a shift in focus in the section from control towards monitoring, policy and planning of accommodation. In particular, it is recommended that systems should be put in place to (a) facilitate the setting of a national policy framework within which proposals may be prioritised and (b) evaluate the effectiveness of investment across institutions and disciplines. To support this process, we recommend that priority should be given to establishing a robust database (similar to the database for schools) which would facilitate analysis of third-level accommodation and facilities by institution and disciplines.

5.47 At present, the Higher Education Authority deals with much of the detail of capital works in the university sector, while the section handles equivalent matters in respect of the Institutes of Technology and other institutions. We note that it is planned to bring the position of the recurrent funding of Institutes of Technology (and subsequently of other institutions) into line with the university sector and recommend that this process should extend to capital funding of institutions. This would help to ensure greater efficiency and uniformity of treatment of all third-level institutions. Moreover, the Authority already has cross-sector involvement in capital projects arising under the research and development programme.

5.48 In the longer-term, we consider that more responsibility should devolve to the Authority for the accommodation needs of all third-level institutions. This would be consistent with its role under section 10 of the Higher Education Authority Act, 1971, which states that the Authority shall assess State capital and current financial provision for higher education. Section 10 further provides that, in making these assessments, the Authority shall have regard to the accommodation capacity for students of each institution and to the maintenance of a reasonable balance in the distribution of the total number of students as between institutions.

Section's Location

5.49 It is difficult to decide whether this section is properly located in its present division or should be transferred to the Third-Level Division. Its work straddles both and arguments can be made for placing it in either. The case for its retention where it is at present is that it has close affinities with the work of the other sections of the Building Unit and the existing structure allows ready access to advice of the Unit's professional and technical staff.

5.50 However, a case can also be made for assigning its policy role to the Third-Level Division. The Higher Education and Colleges sections are responsible for third-level policy and will, in collaboration with the Higher Education Authority, oversee future development of the sector. The third-level building section is essentially a service provider for these sections in that it must ensure that the accommodation provided is consistent with the sector's needs.

5.51 On balance, we consider that the section should remain where it is. Most of its work relates to building operations (public procurement, design etc.) rather than policy. However, it does contain a policy element which is closely linked to the work of the Third-Level Division and the Higher Education Authority. In effect, for third-level building policy there is a triangle linking the Building Unit, the Third-Level Division and the Authority. Because of pressures of work, there is a danger of decisions being arrived at without those at all three points of the triangle being involved. To overcome this, we believe that a more formal structure than at present is required. We recommend that a task force, with the Third-Level Division in the lead role, should be established at which policy for third-level building would be decided.

Professional And Technical Staff

5.52 Professional and technical staff play a vital role in providing expert, professional advice to the administrative side of the Planning and Building Unit. Two Managers (Principal equivalent) are responsible for the organisation of the staff's work. As in the case of the rest of the unit, the professional and technical staff have had to cope with a substantially increased workload directly related to increased funding.

5.53 Under current arrangements, professional and technical staff are very much involved in the detail of individual projects at each level. Implementation of the recommendations earlier in the chapter for more devolution of authority to local level will free them to focus on core activities. These include work on standardised 'off the peg' designs, monitoring of standards and costings generally and participation in forward planning work.

5.54 If the Department decides to proceed in the medium-term with the establishment of an executive agency, much of the operational work would transfer out of the Department. However, the Department would still require a corps of technical expertise. The focus of work for these staff would shift from analysis of specific proposals or projects to more of a forward planning and strategic role. As mentioned earlier, there would be an emphasis on areas such as designing the 'school of the future', experimental school design, standardisation of design for projects on hand and technical input into value for money evaluation.

Public Private Partnerships

5.55 As indicated earlier, this relatively new, experimental development offers potential in the area of minor works in schools and it is recommended that the Department explore the possibilities and options in this regard. The section should be located, along with other Planning and Building Unit sections, in the proposed Schools Support Services Division.

Sections Dealing With Miscellaneous Services

External Staff Relations

5.56 The External Staff Relations Section acts on behalf of the Department in negotiations with trade unions in the education sector. It takes the lead role in relation to negotiations on pay and increasingly has become involved in matters relating to terms and conditions of service. The section has recently been assigned responsibility for the development of Partnership in the education sector. In common with other areas, its workload has increased in quantity and complexity in recent years, particularly in the light of the impact of EU law and national legislation in the fields of equality and employment.

5.57 To reduce at least part of this workload, we recommend that the Department should devolve more responsibility for industrial relations matters to third-level institutions and to the Higher Education Authority. We understand that these organisations have access to comprehensive administrative and human resource management support and are aware of the background to, and facts of, the various problems arising. Rather than brief the section about the various issues involved, the institutions should seek, in collaboration where necessary with the Higher Education Authority, to resolve matters at local level.

5.58 The section's core role should concern negotiations and conflict resolution. In our view, Partnership in the wider education sector is not a core element of its work and should be assigned elsewhere in the Department.

5.59 There appears to be some confusion among sections in the Department as to the section's remit and functions. In particular, the respective roles of External Staff Relations and client sections are not always clear-cut, while linkages need to be improved. Whereas the section operates as a specialist negotiating section, knowledge on the detail of educational policy and issues involved in negotiations resides in the sections. Accordingly, representation by these sections at negotiations is vital. We welcome the circulation by the section of a discussion document to all Principals in the Department on the role and responsibility of External Staff Relations Section and that of other sections in the area of industrial relations. We hope that this will help to clarify responsibilities.

5.60 As indicated in paragraphs 4.22 and 4.23, we recommend that links should be developed between the section and the Inspectorate, so that it can have speedy access to expertise on relevant matters as the need arises.

5.61 Many of the issues encountered by the section in the wider education sector also arise internally in the Department and are dealt with by the Personnel Section. In addition, both sections are involved in the provision of a service to other sections in the Department. Accordingly, it would be logical to locate them in the same division – Corporate Services. This would be particularly important as the human resources area grows increasingly complex and demands specialist knowledge.

Further And Adult Education Section

5.62 This section's work straddles two broad areas – programmes to assist social inclusion (for example Youthreach, Traveller Centres, adult literacy) and post-compulsory education and training (including Post Leaving Certificate courses, adult education, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme). Its remit spans one of the fastest developing areas of the Department. Significant change has occurred in recent years with expansion in PLC course provision, while the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and (under its aegis) the Further Education and Training Awards Council will raise the profile of, and strengthen, PLC provision. Increasing emphasis is being given to second chance education and the concept of lifelong learning is now firmly rooted in the education system. The publication of Green and White Papers on Adult Education and Lifelong Learning will bring about further change in coming years.

5.63 The section's remit is neither exclusively second level nor third level and there is no apparent natural home for it in the Department's divisional structure. We consider that elements of its work concerning social inclusion are more appropriate to the proposed Social Inclusion Division. The balance of the work involves a certain natural progression from second to third levels and, in particular, the section has links with Colleges Section concerning progression arrangements for students into Institutes of Technology. We therefore recommend that the section should be assigned to the Third-Level Division. Locating the two sections in the same division could strengthen these links and the effectiveness of policy in the area. The title of the division should be changed to "The Further and Higher Education Division" in order to reflect more accurately its proposed composition.

Social Inclusion Section

5.64 The Department has been aware for some time of the need for greater coordination and consistency of policy in matters relating to social inclusion. There is also a lack of continuity between levels in the provision of supports. At the same time, the growing importance of the area in public policy generally (reflected in the establishment of a Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion) creates an increased demand on the Department to participate in interdepartmental groups and other external fora. The Department's response to these developments has been to establish the Social Inclusion Section.

5.65 The volume of work generated from external sources in the social inclusion area is significant and growing and the Department needs the capacity to respond to that increase in volume. However, we consider that the establishment of a single section is insufficient to tackle the problems of the Department in the area of social inclusion. There is a need for a more fundamental review of how the Department does its business in the area and of the structures which facilitate this business. This raises a larger issue, namely, where should social inclusion be dealt with in the Department.

5.66 As indicated in Part 1, we recommend that various sections of the Department dealing with social inclusion should be grouped into a new Social Inclusion Division. This Division would incorporate the existing Social Inclusion Section, Special Education II (which deals with social inclusion matters at pre-school and primary school level, as well as Young Offenders) and the social inclusion dimension to the Further & Adult Education section (for example, Youthreach, Traveller Centres, adult literacy). We also recommend that the

division should include the Youth Affairs Section and that, in order to reflect its composition, it should be titled “The Social Inclusion and Youth Affairs Division.”

5.67 Certain specific schemes which are dealt with in other divisions concern matters which could be classified under the umbrella of social inclusion. These matters include, for example, the Stay in School Programme, the Home/School/Community/Liaison programme, the Free Books schemes and various programmes concerning access to third-level education. In some cases, it may be desirable to assign such work to the proposed new division. In other cases it may be more appropriate for it to remain where it is.

5.68 The establishment of the division would serve to emphasise the importance of social inclusion as a core objective of the Department. It should not be seen as stigmatising the area but as a means of according a higher priority to the issues involved. By dealing with elements of the social inclusion strategy in a single division, rather than in diverse sections concerned with the delivery of services generally, the Department minimises the risk that social inclusion issues will be overshadowed by other core work. However, it is also important to state that the establishment of the division does not absolve other sections of the Department of responsibility for matters which do not fall neatly within their ambit.

5.69 In addition, the proposed new division should facilitate improved coordination of, and consistency in, social inclusion policy and greater seamlessness and continuity of support across levels for those who are socially excluded. We consider that it would enhance the effectiveness of the Department’s approach to cross-sector problems (such as dropout between first and second-level education) and would permit greater coherence in respect of emerging issues in the social inclusion area. These might include issues such as policy on asylum seekers and refugees and liaison with the planned National Educational Welfare Board and the proposed Early Childhood Education Agency. Finally, the new division should permit the development of stronger links between those currently representing the Department at external fora (the Social Inclusion Section) and sections which are involved in service delivery.

5.70 The existing Social Inclusion Section should, as indicated, be merged into the new division as there will be a growing need to link with local voluntary and community groups and to service the educational disadvantage committee to be established under section 32 of the Education Act, 1998. In view of the wide remit of the division, the composition of that committee is important and it should include representatives of the non-formal education sector.

5.71 The division should have the capacity to manage delivery and operational work, to coordinate policy and to develop and maintain external linkages. The growing demands for representation of the Department on local and voluntary bodies may be addressed, to some extent, through the development of a local office network (discussed in chapter 8). Strong links between that network and the division will be required. Links with other areas of the Department, and in particular with the Inspectorate, will be vital to ensure that the division’s work is consistent with the Department’s general policy priorities and that its work is informed by best educational practice. Links with the proposed Central Planning Unit will be necessary to ensure that social inclusion concerns remain prominent among the Department’s policy priorities.

Youth Affairs Section

5.72 This section deals with the non-formal education of young people and provides financial and other support to providers of youth work programmes and services. Youth work concerns a planned programme of education designed to enhance the personal and social development of young persons. Such programmes are seen as complementary to formal academic or vocational education and training. Much of the section’s work has a social inclusion dimension. Its efforts in this area should be seen as complementary to other strategies undertaken by the Department of Education and Science and elsewhere

and highlights the fact that education represents but one aspect of the multifaceted strategy that is required to strengthen social inclusion.

5.73 The question arises as to an appropriate location for the section. It does not have strong links with other areas of the Department, as its operations are relatively self-contained. As there is a significant social inclusion dimension to its work, we consider that it would be appropriate to assign it to the Social Inclusion Division. However, since the section's remit extends beyond social inclusion, we recommend that the name of the division should be "The Social Inclusion and Youth Affairs Division." Assigning the section to that division would assist in strengthening linkages and communications with related sections and in facilitating greater coordination of effort by the Department.

Chapter 6

Central Services Division

6.1 This chapter deals with the five sections of the existing Central Services Division: Personnel, Change Management (including Accommodation and Services), Finance, IT and Internal Audit. We recommend that the name of this division should be changed to "The Corporate Services Division."

Personnel Section

6.2 This section is responsible for a range of functions including the provision and deployment of staff, activities concerning conditions of service, staff welfare and industrial relations within the Department. It oversees the provision of staff training and has recently taken on responsibility for the development of a Performance Management and Development System in the Department. We consider that this section represents a core component of the proposed Corporate Services Division and should remain there.

6.3 As part of its remit in the area of training, the section is responsible for supporting internal staff networks. As indicated in Part 1, we consider that these networks have a key role to play in dissemination of information, exchange of views and sources of advice for top management and as a means of improving the sense of collegiality of middle and top management. There is a particular need to revive the Senior Management Forum. Its representation should continue to include top management and both Principals and senior officers in the management of the Inspectorate. The Forum should focus in particular on strategic issues, including the issues raised in this report. The key to the success of the Forum and other networks is that they should be seen to be effective. Otherwise, they will be looked on as a waste of valuable management time and attendance will fall.

6.4 A key role of the section is to ensure that appropriate staffing is provided in the Department. This is particularly important where new initiatives are being proposed. Where such initiatives have staffing implications, line sections should liaise with Personnel Section to determine these. In view of difficulties which have arisen previously, we recommend that all proposals on public expenditure should include staffing implications and should be costed. Personnel Section, in consultation with relevant line sections, would have a key role in this.

6.5 As indicated earlier, the section is responsible for staff training. We acknowledge that the effective management of change will necessarily involve a significant training component, raising the question as to whether training should be assigned to the Change Management Section. However, we consider that the current reporting arrangement for staff training should continue as this is in keeping with theory on effective human resource management. Our concern at the lack of proper induction training for new administrative staff entering the Department is expressed in Part 1. We believe that arrangements should be made urgently to remedy this deficiency. Training should not, of course, stop at entry but should continue during an officer's career. The introduction of the performance management and development system presents a particular challenge in this regard, as does the increasing use of information technology. A problem, as in other departments, is the release of staff by senior officers to take advantage of this training. This needs attention.

6.6 As noted elsewhere in the report (paragraph 7.22) responsibility for some educational research and development lies in the Central Services Division. Administration of the Department's Equality Committee, which we understand primarily funds research, has also been overseen in this division. We consider that these arrangements are inappropriate and that primary responsibility for such matters should be assigned to the proposed Central Planning Unit.

6.7 We understand that consideration is being given to the establishment of an Equality Section. This would be responsible for coordinating and monitoring the process of incorporating a gender perspective into all areas of the education system (i.e., not just within the Department). Management needs to give some thought to the most appropriate location in the Department for the section. We consider that equality represents a horizontal issue which might be best dealt with under the aegis of a standing committee, linked to the proposed Central Planning Unit.

Change Management And Accommodation & Services Section

6.9 This section was established in 1998 and incorporates the former Organisation Section, accommodation and services work (formerly in Personnel Section) and a new function concerning the management of change.

6.10 The section's change management remit includes facilitating the development of a strategic approach within the Department. We understand that consideration is being given to transferring responsibility for preparing the Department's Strategy Statement to the Strategic Policy Unit, where we believe it would be more appropriately located. The section continues to oversee the development and coordination of the Business Planning process. It facilitates reviews of existing work organisation and systems, in cooperation with line sections. The promotion of quality customer service, which is one of the principal themes of the Strategic Management Initiative, also falls within its remit. The section's other main role is to provide and manage accommodation and services for the Department, including responsibility for compliance with health and safety requirements.

6.11 We consider that the section has an important role to play in managing significant change in the Department. However, in the course of our consultation it became clear that there is confusion among sections as to its role and functions. In particular, its role and responsibilities vis-à-vis those of the Personnel Section are unclear. While we are given to understand that the two sections have had detailed discussions as to their respective roles, we consider that there is a need to ensure greater clarity in the Department generally on this issue. We recommend that the Department should review the work of the two sections and should focus, in particular, on the following issues, taking into account that, in broad terms, Personnel should deal with people and Change Management should deal with systems.

6.12 Confusion arises in particular in the area of staffing matters. We understand that in the course of its reviews of systems in the Department, the Change Management Section may identify particular staffing needs of sections. However, while the section may advise Personnel of the identified needs, it is the function of that section to establish priorities in allocating staff.

6.13 We understand that Change Management Section, in cooperation with Personnel Section, is in the process of developing a Human Resource Management strategy which will deal with the respective roles of Personnel Section and line managers. We welcome the preparation of the strategy and recommend that it should be encouraged and expedited. This matter might be more appropriate to the Personnel Section and we understand that it is intended that it should take responsibility for the strategy.

6.14 The Accommodation and Services role was attached to Personnel Section prior to its transfer to the Change Management Section. Although this decision may have been influenced by various factors, including an assessment of workload at Principal level, we recommend that the Department consider reverting to the former arrangement. Accommodation needs are inextricably linked to staff numbers and recruitment. While there may be some systems dimension to the work (in terms of physical location of related functions and sections), we consider that this is of relatively minor importance.

6.15 The redistribution of work between Change Management and Personnel Sections should enable the former section to focus more closely on its primary role. This will be particularly important in that the recommendations in this report, if accepted, will generate a significant volume of work for the section.

Finance Section

6.16 The role of this section is to provide an accounting framework and financial management and control system for the Department. In addition, it is involved in the preparation of Estimates for the Education Votes and deals with the Department of Finance in relation to these. It also has responsibility for the provision of a general payment system for the Department and for a range of services such as staff payroll and travel and subsistence payments. Little change is proposed for this section apart from a number of specific recommendations made below.

6.17 Non-pay accounts for a significant amount of duplication of work in the Finance Section. Although its system is financially sound, it operates on a largely manual basis, and extraction of information is time-consuming. It should be possible to address this difficulty through increased computerisation. The development (led by the Department of Finance) of a generic financial model across Departments will assist in this regard.

6.18 Information technology may also help to reduce the operational workload of transferring funds to schools. Rationalisation of the payments process is recommended elsewhere in this report. In the medium-term, there should be fewer, but more comprehensive, payments to schools. This reduction in the number and frequency of payments should facilitate the automation, through electronic transfer, of the process, yielding substantial gains in efficiency. We note that a pilot project involving the electronic transfer of funds to first-level schools will be put into effect shortly and we recommend that, if the pilot phase is successful, its extension to other areas should be a priority for the Department.

6.19 A case was made to us concerning the benefits which would result from a consolidation of the number of subheads operated by the Department. It was also argued that increased delegated sanction for the Department would lead to greater efficiency in providing services. We recommend that these issues should be explored jointly by the Departments of Education & Science and Finance.

Information Technology Section

6.20 This section's role is to provide the IT support required to enable the Department to achieve its objectives. It involves developing an IT strategy for the Department; maintaining, supporting and enhancing IT systems in it and implementing new computer systems. We understand that the section has also been involved in the development of IT in schools.

6.21 The development of an up to date IT system within the Department of Education and Science is vital to its effective operation. We recommend that this work should continue to be given priority and that such activity should be regarded as the section's core function. Development of information technology in schools, including implementation of the Schools IT 2000 projects, should continue to be the responsibility of the National Centre for Technology in Education, but it should report to the new IT section which is currently located in the Strategic Policy Unit.

6.22 As noted elsewhere (paragraph 7.34), we consider that the new section should be located in the proposed Schools Division. However, we also note that it could be located in the proposed Corporate Services Division. If this option were preferred by the Department, care would be required to ensure that the section retained a separate identity. The main purpose of the IT Section is to oversee the development of an efficient IT system in the

Department and it would be essential that it should not be distracted from this objective by becoming involved in IT issues in the wider education sector.

6.23 There may be circumstances, because of constraints in respect of staffing or expertise, where it may be more efficient or effective to have specialist work undertaken by personnel outside the Department. The option of outsourcing specialist work should be considered. Examples of such work might include self-contained projects such as the development of new databases. The proposed development of a local office network (chapter 8) is likely to generate additional work for the section.

6.24 Pressure of work on the IT Section and the presence of expertise within line sections has led to some development of independent systems in certain areas of the Department. We note that the section has established a support service to assist other sections in this regard. However, we would be concerned that, where possible, the development of systems should be centralised (in consultation with sections) to ensure that there is no risk of developing multiple incompatible systems both internally and between the Department and the wider education sector.

6.25 We consider that responsibility for the content of the Department's website should lie with the Communications Section. The role of the IT Section should be to provide technical support.

6.26 As indicated at various points in this report, there is a pressing need for the development of a Management Information System. We recommend elsewhere that a task force should be established to develop the system, with the lead role assigned to the Central Planning Unit. The IT Section would be involved centrally in supporting the system's establishment and maintenance. We would anticipate that existing databases would feed into the proposed system. In the course of our consultations with line sections, it appeared to us that extracting information from these databases is complicated and that the IT Section is excessively involved in information retrieval on behalf of line sections. Accordingly, the design of the system should be sufficiently user-friendly to enable sections to have independent access to information. Furthermore, the composition and operation of the task force should facilitate maximum input from line sections.

Internal Audit

6.27 The Department's Internal Audit Section is located in this division for personnel purposes. We propose no change to this arrangement. The section, which reports directly to the Secretary General, undertakes a valuable role, particularly in respect of accountability and monitoring of systems, and this work is likely to increase.

Chapter 7

Strategic Policy Directorate

Origin

7.1 The post of Director of Strategic Policy was created by the Department in early 1999. The decision was taken following discussions and consultations held with managers across the Department. Arising out of the discussions a consensus emerged that there was a need to strengthen the Department's policy development function and to underpin it by research, strategic policy analysis and evaluation. However, there was concern that policy development should also as far as possible be carried out by relevant line sections. The need for coordination of policy within the Department and between Departments was also highlighted.

7.2 A priority of the post concerned the "development of a strategic framework within which the Department's capacity to formulate effective and innovative policy options in relation to major social, demographic and economic trends will be developed and strengthened".

7.3 The Directorate comprises four sections:

- Policy Unit
- Statistics
- Freedom of Information
- Legal Services

7.4 In addition, the Department has very recently established an IT policy section in the Directorate.

Policy Unit

7.5 As indicated in Part 1, we noted in the course of our consultations that there was a general lack of awareness of the role and purpose of the Strategic Policy Unit. In some cases sections were resistant to the idea of such a section, stating that policy should remain in the line sections. In others they believed that policy had now migrated from their sections to the Unit. This lack of awareness arose partly from lack of information from management about the Unit's role and partly from lack of communication between the Unit and line sections, itself a reflection of staffing difficulties in the early stages of the Unit. The Group welcomes the Unit's recent round of consultations as a means of improving communication and understanding.

7.6 Part of the difficulty arises from an absence of clarity about the respective roles of the line sections and the Unit in policy formulation. We are firmly of the view that it is neither possible nor desirable to centralise all the policy functions of the Department in such a Unit, nor has this been the intention. Policy should not, in general, be divorced from operational issues. Line managers should be involved in policy formulation within their own areas of competence. They should be expected by top management – and work arrangements should allow them the time – to think about the policy implications of what they are doing. They should monitor schemes under their control and assess their effectiveness. Their knowledge of operational issues will also often suggest improvements or new ways of doing things.

7.7 However, this will not be sufficient in itself to ensure effective policy formulation in the Department. There is a need for central thinking about policy which will set the general medium-term direction in which the Department and the education system should go. Into this, line management thinking can then be fitted. Otherwise, there will continue to be the

likelihood that new schemes will arise haphazardly rather than as part of a set of medium-term policy objectives, agreed for the Department as a whole and listed in order of priority.

7.8 This line of thinking argues for the continuation of the Strategic Policy Unit but for its role to be strictly defined as the development of medium-term strategy and planning for the Department. We suggest that its title should be the Central Planning Unit, to reflect what we consider is its key role. The unit should assist management in ensuring that there is a consistency in policy formulation across the divisions and that policy proposals from the divisions are set in order of priority. The work of the unit should be supported by substantial research and evaluation.

Medium-term Strategy and Planning

7.9 Much of the policy work undertaken in the Department is in response to developments which might have been foreseen if adequate time had been available at the planning stages. In view of the rapid pace of social and economic change, the education system must adapt if it is to remain relevant to society's needs. Accordingly, it is vital that the Department should develop and enhance its forward-looking role. A forward planning process should identify broad strategic principles, policy goals, priorities and targets.

7.10 Forward planning would be valuable in identifying and preparing for the effects of the significant changes which are likely to arise in the future. A particular example in the area of forward planning concerns the 'school of the future.' The Central Planning Unit should take a lead role in conceptualising and putting in place a strategy to anticipate the education system's needs. Key roles in this regard will also be undertaken by the Inspectorate, the IT Section and the Planning and Building Unit. The Central Planning Unit will also have an important role to play in planning for the effects of 'lifelong learning', which, if implemented as proposed, is likely to have a major impact across the education system. The continuing withdrawal of the religious in education will necessitate planning by the Central Planning Unit in relation to the State's future role and obligations.

7.11 It is vital that policy formulation should be undertaken in a consistent and coherent manner across the Department. The Unit should be required to assist in this. It should, for example, help to ensure that policy proposals being put forward by line sections are in conformity with the priorities set for departmental action in the medium-term. Once the Minister and management have accepted these priorities, proposals coming from line divisions should be expected to fit into them. Equally, where the Unit is developing policies under its medium and long-term planning remit, these should be informed by the views of relevant line sections.

7.12 A second aspect of this role concerns the expertise which the Central Planning Unit may contribute to the development of proposals being promoted by line sections. In particular, expertise in the areas of analysis, evaluation and research would prove to be a valuable resource for sections considering policy innovations. This will help to ensure the high quality of policy proposals submitted to top management.

Task Forces and Standing Committees

7.13 Many issues arise which do not fall neatly into a specific line section's area of responsibility. In respect of largely sectional issues, the answer may be for management to identify the relevant section as lead manager or coordinator for the issue. That section would then draw on the views and expertise of other sections, heading a task force as required. Where cross-sectional issues of strategic importance arise, the Central Planning Unit could take the lead role in cross-sectional task forces, including administrative and technical support. In the case of the standing committees referred to in Part 1, we would again envisage that the Unit would provide technical and administrative support.

7.14 We do not consider that a separate coordination section should be established in the Department. It should be stressed that we are not advocating a substantial coordination role for the Central Planning Unit. Were it to take on such a role, it is likely that it could be

swamped in matters of detail, leaving little time for forward planning and other core functions.

Management Information System

7.15 A vital component for effective planning and policy generally in the Department is the availability of comprehensive, accurate and timely information for top management. Such information is also essential for quality assurance and evaluation purposes. We consider that the absence of such a system in the Department severely constrains both its capacity to plan effectively and to evaluate the effectiveness of its activities and strategies.

7.16 The development and maintenance of a system should be a priority. This would require input from many sections in the Department. While the IT Section would be involved centrally in supporting the system's establishment and maintenance, it is not equipped to take on the development or coordination of this system. In view of the issue's strategic importance, we recommend that a task force should be established to develop the system. The lead role should be assigned to the Central Planning Unit, which should have overall responsibility for the updating and maintenance of the system when it is established.

Evaluation

7.17 Previous paragraphs have highlighted the absence of capacity in the Department for forward planning to anticipate the needs of the education system (and consequent implications for policy) in the short to medium-term. However, its capacity to evaluate the effectiveness of its current strategies is equally limited and there is a clear need for a robust system of evaluation.

7.18 We consider that every programme should be monitored continuously by line sections as part of their work. In particular, sections should develop indicators and data collection mechanisms as supports to the evaluation process. We consider that the Central Planning Unit should also have an evaluation role. This would involve responsibility for ensuring that sections across the Department provide for a continuing and thorough evaluation of their various programmes.

7.19 The Unit should be responsible for enhancing the Department's capacity to evaluate the effectiveness of its activities and strategies. This would involve the promotion of best practice across the Department and providing advice and assistance to sections, as required, on evaluation approaches. The Statistics Section (which should remain part of the Unit) would have a key role to play in supporting the Department's policy and evaluation function. Its contribution will be particularly valuable in respect of collection and analysis of information from various areas of the Department.

7.20 We consider that evaluations should have regard to a programme's objectives, the extent to which those objectives are being met, the efficiency of a programme and whether there are any alternative options which may be more efficient or effective. In carrying out evaluations, there will also be a need to ensure adequate emphasis on qualitative issues. In view of the key role and expertise of the Inspectorate in the area of quality and evaluation noted elsewhere in this report (paragraph 4.10 et seq.), it will be important to develop strong links between it and the Central Planning Unit. Whereas the Unit's focus should be mainly on value for money, the Inspectorate's focus will mainly concern quality in education. At the same time, we consider that it would not be desirable to divorce these two areas entirely and that there will be a need for both the Inspectorate and the Central Planning Unit to take account of each other's activities.

Research Policy

7.21 At present, responsibility for research is spread across various areas of the Department. The Director for Strategic Policy has nominal responsibility for supporting and commissioning educational research, while a cross-sectional committee, chaired by the Inspectorate, is responsible for a research budget.

7.22 Responsibility for the Department's involvement with the Economic and Social Research Institute lies with the Central Services Division while funding for research activities of the Educational Research Centre is incorporated in the aggregate grant to St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra (with decisions effectively taken by the Inspectorate). In addition, various sections may commission research for specific purposes from time to time, while all sections have access to a consultancy budget.

7.23 There is no formal mechanism for identifying priority areas requiring research nor any means of disseminating the findings generally in the Department. Thorough, accurate research is a vital support to effective policy formulation and informed thinking in the Central Planning Unit and in the management of the Department. Accordingly, we recommend that the commissioning of research across the Department should be assigned to the Unit. Its role should be (in consultation with line sections and management) to identify a programme of research needs, manage the research budget, liaise with researchers and disseminate the results within the Department. Responsibility for, and funding of, the various activities referred to in the previous paragraph, with the exception of sections' consultancy budgets, should be assigned to the Unit.

General Matters

7.24 A mechanism is required to identify the tasks and priorities of the Central Planning Unit. We consider that a standing committee reporting to the Top Management Group should be responsible for this. This committee would be responsible for recommending a programme of work for the unit, taking account of issues which may be highlighted at line section and divisional level.

7.25 We recommend that management should take account of the extent and importance of the proposed remit for the Central Planning Unit in determining appropriate expertise and competences. The Unit's need for particular skills, including evaluation and analytical techniques, should be addressed. We consider that the work of the unit would be enhanced by the rotation of operational staff through it. In addition, this would assist dissemination of skills throughout the Department generally. Short-term assignments of individuals for specific tasks may also be necessary. Where particular policy initiatives are being undertaken by the Unit, members of the Inspectorate with special expertise in the relevant area should be seconded to the unit as appropriate.

7.26 It is clear that there is a significant difference between the intended remit of the Unit and its activities since establishment. A significant proportion of the Unit's time has been spent on implementation of policy (for example in respect of the National Reading Initiative). We consider that it is inappropriate for the unit to become excessively involved in operational matters.

7.27 The Unit's links with other sections will be vital to its effective functioning. The provision of up to date information to sections on its work programme and outcomes (including evaluations, research projects and policy papers) should be a core function. At all stages of its work, it must have full consultation with line sections. This would be facilitated by the establishment of the standing committee as recommended above. Strong linkages will be required, in particular, with the Inspectorate (including the Evaluation Support and Research Unit), Finance Section and the Planning Section of the Building Unit.

Statistics Section

7.28 Timely, accurate information is a vital support to the Department's policy and evaluation function. The Statistics Section plays a particularly important role in this regard and will therefore be a key section in the proposed Central Planning Unit. In particular, the section should be centrally involved in:

- the proposed task force to develop a Management Information System

- research and development activities
- statistical and analytical support for evaluation work
- development of forecasting models (this would be an extension of its current activities in the area of enrolment projections)

7.29 It is acknowledged that, despite its limited resources, the section plays a useful role in drawing the attention of sections to emerging statistical trends. We recommend that it should assist the Central Planning Unit to produce occasional short papers on emerging national and international trends.

7.30 The Department collects and holds large quantities of data and it has become clear to us that there is scope for rationalisation in this respect. Moreover, there is a need to ensure, as far as possible, consistency in the methodologies and time references (for example – calendar or academic year basis) in collecting data. The exercise being undertaken by the Statistics Section to identify data sources is welcomed as a first step in this process.

Educational ICT Policy Section

7.31 The Department has very recently established this section in the Strategic Policy Unit. Its objective will be to develop and coordinate policy on Information Communications Technology in education. This will involve overseeing integration of Information Communications Technology into teaching and learning at all levels of education, including matters such as teacher skills and educational content development. Within the Department, it is proposed that the section will develop linkages and coordinate policy on the area across all sections.

7.32 In addition, the section will be responsible for the response of the Department and the education sector to the development of the “Information Society.” It will also oversee the development of related strategies for e-government and web-based delivery of services. This will involve a wide range of activities including allocation of resources; development and management of partnership arrangements with external partners and coordinating departmental responses to, and involvement in, international activities in the area. It will also be involved in the development of the Department’s Education and Training Online plan, and will establish necessary linkages to enable responsibility for implementation to be handed over to an appropriate section or organisation.

7.33 In addition to the responsibilities outlined in previous paragraphs, the section has (for the present) been given responsibility (in conjunction with the National Council for Technology in Education) for processing and paying any grants specifically for Information Communications Technology which may issue to schools in the future. We consider that the issuing of grants to schools by a section with a specific policy remit and located in the Strategic Policy Unit is inappropriate. We are informed that the proposed review and evaluation of Schools IT 2000 and of the operation of the National Council for Technology in Education may lead to a significant change in payment arrangements and supervision.

7.34 While initial discussions within the Department of the section’s work indicate some consistency with the current mission of the Policy Unit, we consider that alternative locations may be more appropriate. There would appear to be two choices in this regard. It could be located in the proposed Corporate Services Division since this would facilitate exchange of information and ideas with the IT Section. However, in our view it would be more appropriate, on balance, to locate it in the proposed Schools Division, as its work will be concerned largely with policy in relation to IT in the wider education sector.

Freedom Of Information Section

7.35 This section provides the liaison between persons and organisations requesting information and the relevant sections in the Department. In addition, it provides advice to sections on the interpretation of the Act and on areas such as the imposition of charges.

7.36 We understand that the attachment of the section to Legal Services arose out of concerns about the complexity of the freedom of information legislation. As the legislation has been in place since 1997, such problems should largely have been eliminated. As in the case of any section in the Department, the section may have occasion to seek legal advice. However, we do not consider that it is necessary to link the two sections.

7.37 The section's role is to provide a service to sections in the Department and there is little strategic policy dimension to its work. We recommend that the section should be located in the Corporate Services Division, perhaps in the Change Management Section.

Legal Services

7.38 The Legal Services Section has a dual role, the provision of general legal advice to the Minister and the Department and the development of legislation. In respect of the former, it became apparent in the course of the consultation process that there is some confusion among sections as to its role vis-à-vis the Chief State Solicitor's Office and the Office of the Attorney General. We recommend that management should clarify its role.

7.39 We understand that it was never envisaged that the section would offer a full range of legal advice. Such a development would require a substantial increase in its staffing complement. Accordingly, it must seek to dovetail with the services provided by the State's law offices.

7.40 In view of the litigious nature of society and the particular growth in litigation concerning education, we consider that the section has an important function in the Department. It can help to:

- accelerate decisions by the State's law offices through assisting in the advance preparation of material and suggested options. Its involvement is particularly valuable in view of the increasing delays occurring in certain areas such as conveyancing
- provide on the spot advice where a response is urgently required
- provide general guidance on legal aspects of particular proposals

7.41 Although centralising the preparation of legislation in the Policy Unit allows the development of a core expertise, we consider that it would be preferable, as in most other Government departments, to prepare legislation in the relevant line section. This approach ensures that line sections have ownership of the legislation and are fully involved at all stages of the process. Line sections are best equipped to relate draft legislation to the substantive issues which it is designed to address. Concerns about a lack of knowledge in line sections of legislative procedures may be addressed through appropriate training and preparation of guidelines for sections.

7.42 Re-assigning legislation to line sections removes the link between the Central Planning Unit and the Legal Section. The question then arises as to whether the section is appropriately located in the Policy Unit. Its legal functions do not fit in well with the role of the Central Planning Unit as described in this chapter. We consider that there are strong arguments for its assignment to the Corporate Services Division. As in other sections in that Division, its remit concerns the provision of a service to client sections within the Department.

Chapter 8

Local Office Network

8.1 As a consequence of the Government's decentralisation programme, the principal offices of the Department are spread over three locations, Dublin, Athlone and Tullamore. In addition, offices of the Inspectorate are located in four centres, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Sligo. These offices provide administrative support for inspectors but do not provide a general advice service to the public. Individual inspectors, a number of whom work from home, are based in other locations nation-wide.

8.2 As noted elsewhere in the report, 33 Vocational Education Committees act as an intermediate administrative tier and oversee a wide range of educational services in the vocational sector. Every county has at least one VEC. Larger cities also have separate committees – Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

8.3 A separate network of 20 full-time education support centres and 10 part-time centres provides, in consultation with the Department's In-Career Development Section, a range of in-service training for teachers, school management and parents. (See Chapter 1 of Part 2).

8.4 This existing network is likely to develop further when decisions are taken in the near future following the establishment of a number of bodies at arm's length from the Department. We note elsewhere in this report (Chapter 1) that the Planning Group on Special Education is likely to propose the establishment of a national council which would be responsible for processing individual applications for special support services. The Group's draft report proposes a network of local area-based offices to deliver the service. In addition, there will be local offices of the National Educational Psychological Service. We understand that a network of approximately 24 local offices (in 10 regions) is planned.

8.5 A further addition to the local network is proposed in the area of adult education. The recently published White Paper on Adult Education "Learning for Life" recommends the establishment of a network of 33 Local Adult Learning Boards. These will be statutory sub-committees of the VECs which will be enabled to act as autonomous sub-committees. The Boards will undertake a range of functions involving coordination and development of adult education at local level.

8.6 In addition to these definite plans, further local offices may be established in the near future. In accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, the establishment of a National Educational Welfare Board is planned. Under previous school attendance arrangements, school attendance officers (who will transfer to the Board as Educational Welfare Officers) are currently located in Dublin, Dún Laoghaire, Cork and Waterford. It is very likely that some local presence will be retained in these areas and that additional local offices will be established for this service, also.

8.7 Previous paragraphs show that there is a growing presence at local level of bodies directly or indirectly involved in the provision of educational services by the State. This growth has been ad hoc and uncoordinated, leading to a risk of inefficiency and duplication of effort by various bodies. In particular, some bodies may be involved in related areas. For example, there would appear to be scope for close collaboration between the National Educational Psychological Service and the proposed special needs organisers.

8.8 We consider that it is vital that the establishment of these different sets of local offices should be coordinated with each other and with the local administrative offices which we are proposing in Part 1. To the extent possible the aim should be to have a 'one-stop shop' of educational services, with the psychologists of the National Education Psychological Service, the special needs organisers, etc., in offices in the same building.

Not alone would this make economic sense, but it would provide greater scope for exchange of information and would be more customer-friendly.

8.9 We understand that thinking is advanced on the location of the local offices that will be required for the National Educational Psychological Service and the regions in which they will operate. It is likely that ten regions will be proposed, corresponding with the ten Health Authorities. This might also be the model for the administrative offices proposed in Part 1 and, by extension, for the offices proposed for other functions of the Department. We recommend that the Department should establish a task force to coordinate the various local structures being established.

8.10 In the short-term, the primary function of the Department's administrative offices at local level should concern information provision and retrieval and access. As technology and e-Government develops, we would envisage that these offices would be equipped with "intelligent terminals" which could allow interactive access to the Department by clients. Essentially, this would lead to a system of "Education on Line."

8.11 In the medium-term, the development of this network could provide a basis for the delegation of functions which are currently centralised in the Department to local level. Eventually, it may be opportune for management to consider the possibility of devolving decision-making authority to local level.

8.12 The numbers of staff in the local offices and the competences which they would require would depend on the nature and extent of the tasks assigned by the Department. Close involvement of the local Inspectorate will be vital to the effectiveness of the network.

8.13 In recommending a local office network, we are conscious of the risk of isolating staff from the department's headquarters. Such a development would be damaging to the morale of officers concerned and would hamper their effectiveness in responding to the wide variety of queries and issues likely to be raised at local level. Accordingly, it would be necessary to ensure clear lines of communication between central and local levels about new initiatives and developments. The contribution of IT in this regard will be important. In addition, regular briefings and networks for local office staff should be organised centrally to support corporate identity and to reassure local staff that they remain an integral part of the Department. Where possible, mobility of local office staff between locations should be encouraged.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Terms Of Reference

Review of Department's Operations, Systems and Staffing Needs

1. To analyse existing reports and studies of the organisational, administrative and staffing needs of the Department including studies currently in progress in Special Education Section, Post-Primary Teachers Section and the Planning and Building Unit on processes and systems, operations and procedures.
2. To review the key processes and activities, which are essential for the achievement of the Department's objectives as stated in its Strategy Statement and Business Plans.
3. To identify the deficiencies in existing organisational structures, systems and processes as highlighted in these reports and studies and in discussions with managers and staff.
4. To identify the immediate, short-term and long-term measures required to remedy these deficiencies, including the use of staff resources, skills and competencies and to make recommendations.
5. To meet with the staff associations to ascertain their views on these matters.
6. To submit a report and recommendations to the Department within three months of commencement of the task.

Appendix 2

Meetings with Staff Associations and Trade Unions

Meetings were held with representatives of the following staff associations and trade unions:

Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants

Civil and Public Services Union

Federated Union of Government Employees

IMPACT

Public Service Executive Union