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NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL WELFARE BOARD

PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION

2005 – YEAR FOR ACTION

1. Investing in Education

Education is hugely important in the development of young people enabling them to contribute to society - socially, economically and culturally. All the evidence suggests that high levels of investment in education lead to improved economic performance, increased social inclusion, lower crime, reduced welfare dependence and better health.

The State has made enormous investment in the education of children and young people over recent years. The benefits of this investment are tangible in Ireland at present. The total allocation for education in 2004 is €6.6 billion which covers capital and current costs at all levels from primary through to third level. Currently there are about 46,000 teachers plus many other ancillary and support staff employed directly or indirectly in primary and post primary education throughout the country.

2. Children missing out

Despite this huge growth in education expenditure, many children and young people are still missing out on their education. Thousands of children miss out on a substantial period of school and, as a result, leave school with a less than optimum educational outcome.

Recent data received from primary and post primary schools gives a complete picture concerning the levels of attendance during the 2003/04 school year.

The following is a summary of the findings:

- At primary, every student misses 11 days on average out of 183;
- At post primary, every student misses 15 days out of 167;
- 1 in 10 students is absent for 20 days or more at primary or approximately 47,000 students;
- Almost 1 in 5 students is absent for 20 days or more at post primary or approximately 37,000 students aged under 16;
- Attendance is lower in poorer areas. There is a difference of 4% in the levels of attendance at schools located in RAPID city areas and schools located in other areas. This difference is more manifest in the numbers of children who miss 20 days or more at both levels;

- There is a difference of 30% between the number of children missing 20 days or more in the most disadvantaged and the least disadvantaged post primary schools;
- The data show that non attendance is a national issue and not just confined to areas of disadvantage;
- A study of the data confirms that schools with low attendance tend to have lower student retention and students tend to do less well in examinations;

Other research findings recognise that children are encountering difficulty in attending school and its consequences:

- Each year some 13,000 children and young people leave school without sitting the Leaving Certificate, of whom some 2,400 leave before the Junior Certificate and 1,000 do not transfer from primary into post primary (NESF 2002). Early school leaving is strongly related to poor school attendance;
- The problem is especially acute for Travellers and other ethnic minorities who experience significant levels of absenteeism;
- 30% of children leaving primary school have literacy difficulties. Regular school attendance is directly related to education achievement.

More detailed findings on school attendance for 2003/04 are contained in [Appendix 1](#).

3. The National Educational Welfare Board

Set up in 2002 under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 and launched nationally in December 2003, the National Educational Welfare Board has a statutory function to ensure that every child either attends a school or otherwise receives an education. In particular, the Board has a key role to follow up on children who are not attending school regularly and where there is a concern about the child's educational welfare. Educational Welfare Officers have powers to intervene where children are not receiving their entitlement to an education.

The service also has a responsibility to children not being educated at recognised schools, for example in the home, as well as a responsibility to young people who might leave school at age 16 to take up employment.

One of the key roles of the NEWB is to act as an advocate or support for a child, parent or guardian if there is a difficulty with school attendance or educational welfare.

The NEWB has so far made an effective use of public resources and has achieved the followed:

- Established a structure of five regional offices employing 73 staff delivering educational welfare services in 18 locations;
- Resolved 3,400 (1,500 "acute" cases) in the first six months of operation;
- Distributed the first information leaflet to 340,000 homes with children of school going age;
- Established a Lo call Education Helpline and fielded 2,805 calls;
- Responded to 11,000 letters requesting intervention;

- Established a code of good practice for staff;
- Established a protocol between staff and schools;
- Received and analysed the first national survey on school attendance;
- Established a register and assessment for non-mainstream education provision.

More information on the work of the NEWB is outlined in [Appendix 2](#).

4. The challenges

There are serious challenges facing the Board on how it delivers on its obligations under the legislation and meets the demand from families and schools for its services.

At present, officers provide an intensive service in the RAPID cities and large towns to which they are assigned. Outside of these areas, only urgent cases e.g. when children are out of school can be followed up on.

- Currently, there is 1 EWO for every 12,000 students who would be entitled to receive a service from the Board. The international norm is 1:3,000;
- At the end of June 2004, the Board had 10,572 cases on hand, representing an average caseload of 167 per officer. It is simply not possible for an officer to carry a practical caseload of this order.
- 84,000 primary and post primary students under 16 years of age missed 20 days or more during the 2003/2004 school year. Under the Act, any child missing 20 days or more is entitled to receive the support of an EWO. This represents a potential caseload of over 1,300 per EWO;
- 9 counties do not have an EWO;
- The quality of service being delivered is likely to suffer given the pressures now emerging;
- At present, there are limits on the capacity to respond to urgent cases;
- There is a clear dilution of the impact of the service in RAPID areas with a diminished capacity to tackle educational disadvantage;
- Work tends to be reactive and there is insufficient scope within present resources to proactively support schools in school attendance;
- The NEWB has an important co-ordination function under Section 12 of the Act. The NEWB is currently drafting a protocol for integrated services which will provide a framework for integrating the various educational disadvantage resources in local areas. This will soon be piloted.
- The demand for the Board's response is likely to increase substantially when further guidance is issued to schools about the reporting of student absences.

5. Objectives For 2005

The Board has set a number of targets for 2005 which will allow it to meet these challenges:

- Reduce the EWO: Student ratio from 1:12,000 to 1:5,000;
- Provide a service in the 9 counties that currently do not have a service (Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim, Longford, Cavan, Monaghan, Laois, Offaly and Kildare);
- Reduce the caseload of EWOs to a more manageable level;
- Appoint EWOs in areas of greatest need as identified in the recent reports received from schools;
- Appoint specialist staff to carry out education assessments for children who are being educated outside of recognised schools and young people who leave school to enter employment and who wish to be registered with the Board.
- Appoint a research officer;
- Appoint additional administrative staff to support the increased activity.

For 2005, the Board is seeking 95 additional staff:

- 67 EWOs;
- 20 senior EWOs;
- 5 senior educational welfare officers to carry out education assessments;
- 1 research officer;
- 2 administrative staff at head office.

More details on the development of the service are contained in [Appendix 3](#).

6. The Cost

The cost of these additional staff and other related expenditure is €6.1m. The total budget requested for 2005 is therefore €12.6m, representing less than 1% of the overall education budget. The additional staff will bring the total staffing of the Board to 179, of whom 165 will be involved in service delivery.

Further information on the NEWB's budget request for 2005 is outlined in [Appendix 4](#).

7. Conclusion

The Board believes that a budget of €12.6m is essential for 2005 if other expenditures in primary and post primary education are to be fully effective. This expenditure is also necessary to directly increase participation and to reduce poor school attendance.

There is clear evidence that for every child diverted from early school leaving and towards higher educational achievement there are considerable long-term social and economic benefits.

Whether one measures this as an absence of cost (savings from reduced dependency on the State in the areas of housing, social welfare, health) or one tries to anticipate projected income from higher employment rates (taxes and PRSI), investment in education provides extremely positive returns for both the individual and society as a whole.

APPENDIX 1

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AT PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Summary of findings from the Annual Attendance Reports submitted by schools for the 2003/2004 school year

Introduction

Up to now, Ireland has had no national data on the levels of student attendance in our schools. This matter has been addressed by the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, Section 21 of which requires all schools to submit a report on the levels of attendance to the NEWB. Data has been received and analysed from most schools for 2003/2004. The findings are significant and represent the first serious attempt to measure the extent of this problem and the required scale of any response.

Critically, this data ensures that, for the first time, policy on school attendance can be guided by research and data. The findings of this research and the policy recommendations emerging from it build upon the recommendations about service provision outlined in the original Rochford 2002 report.

Schools were asked for the total number of student days lost through absence, the number of students absent for 20 days or more and the number of students who were expelled.

TABLE 1

RESPONSE RATE FROM SCHOOLS

Primary	83%
Post-Primary	71%

TABLE 2

LEVELS OF ATTENDANCE NATIONALLY

	Primary	Post-Primary
Attendance	94.1% or 11 days absence on average for each student	91.3% or 15 days absence on average for each student
Percentage of students absent for 20 days or more	10.7% or 1 in 10	18.9% or 1 in 5

TABLE 3

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LEVELS OF ATTENDANCE IN THE LEAST DISADVANTAGED POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND THE MOST DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

	Least disadvantaged	Most disadvantaged
Attendance	94.6% or average absence of 9 days per student	86.1% or average absence of 23 days per student
Percentage of students absent 20 days or more	8.5% or 1 in 12	38% or 2 in 5

TABLE 4

LEVELS OF ATTENDANCE IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN RAPID* CITY AND NON-RAPID AREAS

	Rapid* Areas	Non-Rapid Areas
Attendance	87.8% or 20 days absence on average for each student	91.5% or 14 days absence on average for each student
Percentage of students absent 20 days or more	26% or approx 1 in 4	18.6% or approx 1 in 5

TABLE 5**LEVELS OF ATTENDANCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN RAPID* CITY AND NON-RAPID AREAS**

	Rapid* Areas	Non-Rapid Areas
Attendance	90.8% or average absence of 17 days per student	94.3% or average absence of 10 days per student
Percentage of students absent 20 days or more	23.7% or almost 1 in 4	9.9% or 1 in 10

TABLE 6**LEVELS OF ATTENDANCE IN URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

	least disadvantaged	most disadvantaged
Attendance	94.9% or average absence of 9 days per student	89.6% or average absence of 19 days per student
Percentage of students absent 20 days or more	7.3%	28.7%

TABLE 7**LEVELS OF ATTENDANCE IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

	least disadvantaged	most disadvantaged
Attendance	95.3% or average absence of 9 days per student	94.3% or average absence of 10 days per student
Percentage of students absent 20 days or more	6.3%	11.3%

*Large cities and towns covered under RAPID 1.

These tables are based on a report prepared by the Educational Research Centre, Dublin for the National Educational Welfare Board.

APPENDIX 2

THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL WELFARE BOARD

Education (Welfare) Act 2000

The Education (Welfare) Act (2000) provides a new framework for promoting regular school attendance, tackling the problem of absenteeism and early school leaving.

National Educational Welfare Board

Set up in 2002 under the Education (Welfare) Act and launched nationally in December 2003, the NEWB has a statutory function to ensure that every child either attends a school or otherwise receives an education. The service also has a responsibility to children not being educated at recognised schools, for example in the home, as well as a responsibility to young people who might leave school at age 16 to take up employment. The NEWB ensures that these young people receive proper training so that their careers can continue to develop. One of the key roles of the NEWB is to act as an advocate or support for a child, parent or guardian if there is a difficulty with school attendance or educational welfare.

Community Based Service

To date 84 staff members have been appointed with 73 engaged in service delivery across five regions. Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) are currently working in the RAPID* areas of the 6 major cities and 12 regional towns. Within its service delivery staff, the NEWB currently has 5 regional managers, 52 EWOs, 11 Senior EWOs and 5 clerical posts.

Under the Act, an EWO must take action when a school reports a student absence of 20 days or where the school is concerned about a student's attendance. The action taken will vary depending on the circumstances of each case. Outside of RAPID* areas, EWOs follow up on "urgent" or "acute" cases where children are absent for 60 days or more, have no school place or have been expelled, and where there is a care or court dimension.

Case Overload

At the end of June 2004, the Board had 10,572 cases on hand, representing an average caseload of 167 per officer. It is simply not possible for an officer to carry a practical caseload of this order.

The focus to date has been on delivering an intensive service in the areas of greatest need alongside follow-up in all areas for "urgent" or "acute" cases.

At present, just over half the caseload is generated by urgent cases outside the targeted areas and just under half the cases are located in RAPID* areas. The stress in trying to balance the allocation of resources across targeted areas and responding to urgent cases is now beginning to tell.

Quality and Capacity

The NEWB is challenged on a number of fronts that impact on both the quality of existing service in the disadvantaged areas and the capacity to respond to emerging demands on the service. The table below illustrates the volume and range of activities undertaken by the EWO. The degree to which the work is dominated by person-to-person visitation and travel means it is intensely time consuming; the range of activities requires substantial support and back up.

ACTIVITY REPORT FOR 6 MONTHS ENDED 30 JUNE 2004

NEWB Region	New Cases	School Visits	Home Visits	Letters to Parents	Meetings with other agencies	Case Conferences Children Act 2001	Legal Notices Issued	Court Appearances	Training Days
Dublin City	4633	970	1646	3678	293	33	0	0	23.5
Leinster North	2839	779	1447	2177	309	2	0	4	8.5
Leinster South	2241	520	1131	1926	233	15	0	0	12
Munster	2120	1549	1565	2902	457	18	0	0	33
West / North West	1987	456	521	1577	178	14	0	0	10
TOTALS	13820	4274	6310	12260	1470	82	0	4	87

NEWB Region	Cases @ start of January	New Cases	Closed Cases	Cases @ end of June	Welfare Officers
Dublin City	223	4633	1049	3807	20
Leinster North	234	2839	1416	1657	12
Leinster South	29	2241	335	1935	11
Munster	211	2120	1008	1323	14
West / North West	1	1987	138	1850	6
TOTALS	698	13820	3946	10572	63

***Large cities and towns covered under RAPID 1.**

APPENDIX 3

DEVELOPING THE SERVICE

In order to reduce EWO: Student ratios to 1:5,000 in 2005 and to provide the service outlined in the Education Welfare Act 2000, the NEWB requires a total of 95 additional staff, of whom 87 will be involved in direct service delivery. They are:

- 67 Additional Educational Welfare Officers
- 20 Additional senior Educational Welfare Officers
- 05 Additional senior Educational Welfare Officers with educationalist brief
- 01 New Principal Officer (research manager)
- 02 Additional clerical staff.

These would be deployed according to the following rationale:

All counties with need should have coverage.

Nine counties do not have an EWO at present and it is clear that rural areas do not have a significant level of service at present. The number of cases arising outside of RAPID areas is diluting the impact of service in the RAPID areas. In addition, there are significant efficiency costs involved in travel time and related matters.

It should be a target to ensure that each county with a clear need and significant population of young people has a service. Analysis of the data shows that all counties except Leitrim have sufficient numbers of primary and post primary absences to justify a countywide EWO purely to deal with urgent cases.

County	Leitrim	Kildare	Laois	Mayo	Roscommon	Cavan	Monaghan	Longford	Offaly
EWOs	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Areas with lowest attendance rates should have cover.

At the moment there is a service in the following cities; Dublin, Cork, Galway, Waterford, Limerick, Kilkenny and in the following towns; Letterkenny, Sligo, Galway, Ennis, Tralee, Waterford, Carlow, Bray, Drogheda, Dundalk, Athlone and Navan. Additional staff needs to be allocated to reduce existing caseload per officer in some of these RAPID areas, which remain the areas with most intense need.

However there is also a need to provide an intensive service in towns and rural areas outside of RAPID cities but where attendance is sufficiently low to require a specific targeted intervention. This approach offers preventative intervention at primary level.

The areas that fall need attention are: Dublin (non Rapid areas), Dublin Fingal, Dun Laoghaire, South County, Cork, Limerick, Carlow and Wexford (outside towns), Clare, Donegal, Kerry, Galway, Louth, non city areas of Kilkenny and Waterford, Wicklow (outside Bray), Meath, Westmeath (outside Athlone), Sligo (including Leitrim), North Tipperary and counties Cork and Donegal. In practice, it will be logistically efficient to have some cross county coverage but the above list indicates the main bases for location of additional EWOs.

Children outside the formal school system should have cover.

The NEWB has a statutory obligation to ensure that all children aged 6 to 16 receive a minimum education. To do so, it must monitor standards of education where children receive home based education.

Currently, the persons who carry out education assessments are employed on a 'fee per job' basis and are not staff of the Board. We are not able to meet the demand for assessments and there is insufficient build up of expertise in the NEWB. It would be more efficient and effective, therefore, to directly employ a qualified person per region to carry out these assessments. This would require five EWOs who would have an additional role as educational specialists to service the needs of young people who leave school to enter employment:

Number of 16's/17's in employment	3,500 (Rochford* estimate)
Numbers educated at home	500 (66 awaiting assessment)
Total to be serviced	4,000

Where education is outside of recognised schools (in private fee paying primary or Montessori schools) the NEWB must assess and monitor the standard of that education. The Department of Education and Science currently allocates inspectors to the NEWB to cover this function which covers up to 35 schools and 5,000 pupils. It is our desire to regularise and mainstream this service within the NEWB.

* Report on the Organisation and Staffing needs of the National Education Welfare Board by Dermot Rochford, Staff Relations Services – April 2002

Good research is required for good policy and practice

Good research is the basis for good, workable and realistic policy. Section 10 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 means that the NEWB has a clear statutory obligation to comment on legislation, advise on policy and supply information.

There is a clear need for a research unit with data and policy analysis skills. There are numerous further data requirements to facilitate - and this requires a data management strategy working in tandem with a research function. If the right systems are put in place to monitor attendance and report absences, a rich bank of data can be built up.

A body of qualitative learning also needs to be documented and analysed. There are clearly high levels of absence across all classes of schools and social strata. The reasons for absence from school need to be investigated much more thoroughly and at an early date. Identifying the different reasons for absence and the potential range of policy responses to the different drivers of absence is a core part of the work of the NEWB. This needs to be done sooner rather than later in order to realise the considerable savings from early diagnosis of effective policy intervention.

Staff need to be supported.

Two administrative persons will be required to support the additional service delivery staff so that their time in the field is maximised.

APPENDIX 4

BUDGETING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The 95 additional staff requested by the NEWB will bring total staffing levels to 179, of whom 165 will be involved in service delivery. The total cost of the full budget proposal is €12,640,148, which represents an increase of €6,126,148 over the 2004 Budget of €6,514,000.

The costing below presents the total running cost of the organisation assuming the following extra staffing resources are sanctioned in the 2005 budget.

2005 Budget Requirements

Budget Heading	2005 Cost €
Total staff costs	9,543, 148
Training and Development	235,000
Travel and Subsistence	977,000
Legal and professional	95,000
Accommodation	550,000
Research	175,000
Communications	265,000
IT	500,000
Management and Consultancy	175,000
Insurance	125,000
Total 2005	12,640, 148
Total 2004	6, 514,000
Additional Budget	6,126,148
% increase	94%

Projected Expenditure required 2006 – 2009

2006 Projected Expenditure / Staffing

Head Office Staff	20
Service Staff	230
Total Staff	250
Pay	13.5 m
Non Pay	5.95 m
2006 Total Expenditure	19.45m

2007 Projected Expenditure / Staffing

Head Office Staff	25
Service Staff	270
Total Staff	295
Pay	16.33 m
Non Pay	7.2 m
2007 Total Expenditure	23.53m

2008 Projected Expenditure / Staffing

Head Office Staff	30
Service Staff	300
Total Staff	330
Pay	18.73 m
Non Pay	8.4m
2008 Total Expenditure	27.13m

2009 Projected Expenditure / Staffing

Head Office Staff	30
Service Staff	330
Total Staff	360
Pay	21.05 m
Non Pay	9.8 m
2009 Total Expenditure	30.85m

Investing in the Future

While this € million represents almost a doubling of the NEWB budget it must be seen in the context of the degree to which the NEWB is under-resourced at present and the need to expand the service.

With its structures now well established and with the need for its services well documented, it is now in a stage of its development where it requires considerable investment. Within the wider context, € million can be usefully understood and evaluated as representing less than 1% of overall education expenditure. It should also be considered as an investment that will reap longer term savings.

Immediate benefits

The short term benefits of spending this money are substantial and quantifiable, including:

- Full coverage in all areas where there is data to prove intensive need;
- Follow up in all cases where a child is out of school;
- Comprehensive monitoring of all non mainstream education;
- Direct and immediate drop in non attendance rates;
- Reduction in early school leaving;
- Drop in the number of non transfers from primary to secondary.
- Early intervention
- Reduction in juvenile delinquency

Long term benefits

Forecasting of long-term benefits is difficult but it is clear that for every child diverted from early school leaving and towards higher educational achievement there are considerable long-term social and economic benefits. Whether one measures this as an absence of cost (savings from reduced prison population, savings from reduced long term unemployment) or one tries to anticipate projected income from higher employment rates (taxes and PRSI) there are clear longer-term benefits from this initial outlay.

Realising other investments

The NEWB has a substantial, but as yet unrealised contribution, to make to increase the synergy from other educational investments in disadvantaged areas. The NEWB has a role to play in networking and collaboration with home school liaison officers, stay in school projects and local area based partnership educational initiatives. Extra resources would allow the NEWB to accelerate the development of an integrated approach to tackling educational disadvantage.

Unleashing Potential

The true potential of the NEWB lies in its as yet inactivated capacity to prevent absenteeism. Without adequate resources the service is in danger of developing only as a reactive, fire fighting service rather than as the proactive, structured service as envisaged in the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

- The NEWB has an unrealised role to play as an advocate for school attendance.
- The NEWB can act as a bridge to bring parents and children to better understand and value the role of education.
- The NEWB can provide practical advice and support to parents and work with them to ensure that, from a welfare perspective, the child's participation in education is optimised.

Funding the expansion of the National Educational Welfare Board in this budget will unleash this potential.

Ends