



General Teaching Council
for Northern Ireland

CONSULTATION ON THE NORTHERN IRELAND MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION MEASURE 2004

Officer's Response

October 2004

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Introduction

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2004: Consultation Document. Any attempt to refine and operationalise reliable and valid measures of multiple deprivation, along specific dimensions, will facilitate the development and dissemination of a shared understanding of the concept. It will provide an essential set of tools to inform policy making, commensurate with strategies to alleviate multiple deprivation in its various forms and the consequences of these.

The Council is particularly concerned with the impact of multiple deprivation on educational achievement and feels that any additional sophistication in targeting social need can only be helpful.

The reality is that education, and the impact it has on economic status and well-being, has never been more important. Northern Ireland, perched on the periphery of an expanding European Union, faces renewed challenges. Historically over-dependent on Public Sector employment, faced with a shrinking manufacturing base, increased volatility in the agro-economy and the pressures of a globalised economy, Northern Ireland must position itself to compete in the new knowledge-based economic arena.

This reality was clearly recognised in the March 1999 Report of the Northern Ireland Economic Development Strategy Review Group, "Strategy 2010". Citing the World Bank, the report noted:

“...the balance between knowledge and resources has shifted so far towards the former that knowledge has become perhaps the most important factor determining the standard of living. Today’s most technologically advanced economics are truly knowledge based.

(Strategy 2010: 3.137)

This last observation is particularly relevant when addressing a proposed instrument to identify multiple deprivation. Poverty and deprivation impact profoundly on educational achievement in Northern Ireland. It has long been recognised that there is a positive correlation between socio-economic status and academic success. Indeed, Gallagher et al, in a paper prepared for the Northern Ireland Economic Council, "Educational Achievement in Northern Ireland: Patterns and Prospects" noted that:

“...there is a marked spatial concentration of educational and social disadvantage which restricts the life chances of young people resident in 25% of the most socially deprived areas.”

(Educational Achievement in Northern Ireland, Research Monograph No. 4, p. 70)

The greater technical sophistication provided by the new Super Output Areas, it is hoped, will provide greater specificity of targeting and hopefully address the issue of poverty generally and hidden poverty pockets in relatively affluent wards.

Moreover, proposed changes to educational policy, including Costello, the new curriculum proposals and the common funding formula, will need to take account of the outworkings of the new multiple deprivation measures, thus ensuring that targeting social need strategies are compatible with future educational policy development, and that no unintended consequences emerge.

COMMENTS

Section 4: Domains

1. Are there any additional domains which should be included?

Yes. Intercommunity tensions which could be measured by recording incidents of sectarian and/or racial violence.

2. Are there any domains proposed which should be excluded?

No.

3. Comment on the proposed crime domain.

This is acceptable providing that it takes into consideration specific victimisation studies and does not rely solely on official reported crime.

4. Comment on the proposed Living Environment domain.

The proposed Living Environment domain could usefully consider areas such as community relations, sectarianism and racialism as indicators of deprivation. It would be very difficult to measure a weak community, rather community malaise might be a more useful domain with specific indicators.

Section 5.4: Education, Skills and Training Deprivation

1. Comment on the proposals to create two separate sub-domains.

The decision to separate adult skills and those of young people of school age is a positive development (i.e. into sub-domain Children/Young People and sub-domain Working Age Adults).

Proposed indicators – sub-domain: Children/Young People

- **GCSE/GNVQ points score – this will need to be revised in the light of the new curriculum to take account of new vocational studies programmes and their relevant points score.**

- **Key Stage 3 data – again this will need to be revised in light of the statutory assessment at KS3.**
- **Proportion of those leaving school aged 16 and not entering Further Education – this is an appropriate indicator.**
- **Absenteeism at secondary level (all absences) – this should be extended to include absenteeism at primary level.**
- **Proportion of 17 – 20 year olds who have not successfully applied for Higher Education – this is appropriate but should be extended to include Further Education.**
- **Proportion of Year 11 – 12 pupils not in a grammar school – this will need to be refined in light of Costello report and subsequent developments. Proportions of Year 11 and 12 pupils not in a grammar school can be influenced by factors other than deprivation, e.g. location, proximity, availability of grammar schools. This indicator will become a more blunt measure of deprivation in the coming years.**

2. Are there any indicators not included which should be included?

Other possible measures could be availability and take up of nursery education places.

Proportion of pupils receiving free school meals or the recent education maintenance allowance as an indicator.

3. Are there any indicators proposed which should not be included?

No comment.

4. Comment on the proposed method of combination.

No comment.

5. Comment on the proposed weights for combining the sub-domains.

Sub-domain: Working Age Adults – no further comments.

Equal weight for each sub-domain is appropriate.

The Methodology

The proposed methodology to achieve indicators which are as reliable as possible is fit-for-purpose, although the aim must be to achieve measures of high reliability given the policy implications which flow from the use of these indicators.

Weighting the domains: The weighting domains should be empirically driven. This is important to keep the weights as “value neutral” as possible in order that policy can be empirically informed.

Conclusion

Teachers as a profession have always been committed to excellence in and for all. As a profession, they are committed to the notion of service and to ensuring that, as far as is possible, all the young people entrusted to their care receive the best education possible. However, neither schools nor teachers can of themselves address the multiplicity of issues arising for those who have suffered from personal, contextual or ecological deprivation. It is important that any new formulation of measures of multiple deprivation and any reworking of TSN results in a holistic programme designed to address poverty on a systemic level.

What must be recognised is that, if the profession is to play its part in addressing the educational implications of social inequality, then it follows that:

- (a) a sufficiency of resources is made available;
- (b) there is recognition of the need for a multi-disciplinary approach;
- (c) appropriate training is made available for all staff working in areas of intense deprivation; and
- (d) a holistic approach is taken regarding addressing the cultural deficit within families at risk.

The new multiple measure must be capable of directing scarce resources to areas where poverty exists to enable the educational system to respond in a coherent and meaningful way, commensurate to criteria a, b, c and d above.

Moreover, the Programme for Government issued by the last Northern Ireland Executive set priorities on which departments and agencies will work together to tackle the fundamental problems of our society, including poverty and social disadvantage. Indeed, the Executive Committee set out in the Programme for Government its mission for the coming years.

“...to make a difference to the lives of our people, enabling them to grow as a peaceful, fair and inclusive community. We will, in particular, seek to work together to combat poverty and social exclusion and to improve health; to uncap the creative potential of our community by investing in the education and skills of all our people; and through renewed infrastructure and innovative policies, secure the basis for a competitive sustainable economy...”

If the new Multiple Deprivation Measures 2004 provide greater sophistication in combating social need, exclusion and poverty, then the revised instruments will become an important part of the policy infrastructure.