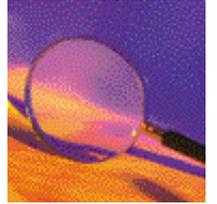


Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

RESEARCH BRANCH



Minority Ethnic Groups in Northern Ireland:

Experiences and Expectations of English Language Support in Education Settings

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The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Departments.

Executive Summary

1. This study explored the ways in which provision is currently made for supporting the acquisition and development of English language skills of members of minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. In addition, the experiences of members of these communities in accessing provision were examined and a number of issues which might be considered in the further development of provision and policy was identified.
2. The data collected by the Department of Education (DE) on pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and on the numbers receiving language support provided the basis for the examination of provision at school level. Individual semi-structured interviews with staff in the English as an Additional Language (EAL) units of the Area Education and Library Boards, teachers, other education professionals, parents and representatives of community organisations were used to examine the operation of support systems and perceptions of their effectiveness.
3. Provision at Further Education (FE) level was examined through data provided by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and individual FE colleges. The main body of data on experiences in FE came from two case studies, based in institutions which cater for a considerable number of students from minority ethnic community backgrounds. Interviews were carried out with staff and students in these colleges.
4. At school level, the data indicated that the number of school level pupils from minority ethnic communities is currently relatively small. The number receiving language support is limited. There are marked regional variations across Northern Ireland in the number of EAL pupils in schools. This is reflected in considerable differences in the nature and level of development of support structures.

5. Amongst the major 'day to day' concerns of EAL staff, teachers and other education professionals are:
 - The relative merits and effectiveness of classroom based and withdrawal approaches to the provision of support;
 - Practical difficulties of providing suitable teaching spaces in schools, ensuring appropriate levels of support, continuity in provision and liaising with pupil's families; and
 - Specific difficulties, which may occur in relation to the Transfer Procedure – as currently constituted.
6. At a more general level, the need for more co-ordination and co-operation across and between the various departments, area boards and community organisations, involved in EAL support, was identified as a major priority.
7. Community organisations and parents were anxious that they should be consulted over the provision being made for pupils whose first language is not English. They would like more information and support in order to help them to interact more easily with schools and teachers so that they do not feel isolated and marginalised.
8. In Further Education, the range and variety of needs makes effective provision difficult. There was great variation in the first language, length of residence in Northern Ireland, knowledge of English, reasons for coming to Northern Ireland, reasons for wishing to study etc. of students, making it extremely difficult to plan support programmes.
9. Amongst the major issues identified by staff and students in FE were:
 - Limited data on numbers of potential students and their needs;
 - The range of levels of support required;
 - Irregular attendance patterns linked to, for example, transport difficulties, the need to work, family/childcare responsibilities;

- Variations in levels of student motivation and commitment;
 - Recruitment and retention of suitably qualified teaching staff; and
 - Publicising the availability of classes in ways which potential students can access.
10. Experiences in other parts of the United Kingdom and in the Republic of Ireland can provide valuable insights. In particular, developments in Wales and Scotland, which share features such as relatively small and widely scattered minority ethnic communities, are significant and could provide the basis for co-operation.
11. Developing increased co-ordination of current language support provisions and the formulation of long-term strategies were the key themes stressed by all groups of interviewees.

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Needless to say, all the views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of either the funding bodies or the informants.

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1. Background

- 1.1 Although the number of minority ethnic communities resident in Northern Ireland is still relatively limited and the size of most of the communities is small, there has been significant growth over the last few years. There are now people, from various parts of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, whose mother tongue is not English, living in Northern Ireland. Their individual backgrounds in terms of geographical origins, reasons for coming to Northern Ireland and length of time they have been resident are extremely varied (T&EA, 1998; Connelly and Keenan, 2000).
- 1.2 Although accurate figures will not be available until the data from the 2001 census is released, it is estimated, by the various community organisations, that there are about 16,000 people from minority ethnic community backgrounds in Northern Ireland. The largest group is Chinese, estimated by the Multicultural Resource Centre (MCRC) in Belfast, to be about 8,000. The next largest groups are probably those from the Indian sub-continent – estimated to be up to 5,000 and those from African countries, estimated at about 3,500. There are also smaller communities of people from the Arab world and South East Asia.
- 1.3 Research relating to the needs of the minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland began in earnest after the 1994 cease-fires. A study by Seamus Dunn and Greg Irwin (Irwin and Dunn, 1997) estimated the total number of minority ethnic people resident in Northern Ireland at that time as somewhere between 6,000-8,000. This figure has, however, been the subject of some controversy, since minority ethnic community organisations, such as Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) and the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA), have suggested that it underestimated the size of the main groups, particularly the Chinese community. Research has also identified a number of problems which members of minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland experience, such as discrimination and racism in educational settings and the workplace (Irwin and Dunn, 1997; Mann-

Kler, 1997; Connolly and Keenan, 2000). Respondents in a number of studies (Irwin and Dunn, 1997; Mann-Kler, 1997; Connolly and Keenan, 2000) have also referred to verbal and physical abuse and damage to property. Based on such evidence, Keenan and Connolly (2000: 41) write that:

'As the data have demonstrated in the present report, there is ample evidence to suggest that racial prejudice is a significant problem in Northern Ireland'.

Recent research, such as the MCRC study of a 'Rural Minority Ethnic Community' (MCRC, 2000), has highlighted a number of similar areas where minority groups experience difficulties, such as racism, language, education and health and social services. Connolly states that there is,

'...a growing and fairly substantial body of research evidence on the needs and experiences of minority ethnic people in Northern Ireland.'(Connolly, 2002)

Connolly further refers to the particular needs, which research has identified, and lists them as follows: overcoming the language barrier; providing information on services and facilities; increasing staff training on racial equality; meeting the basic cultural needs of minority ethnic people; and also addressing racial prejudice and racist harassment. He also refers to two 'overarching challenges': the need for an inter-agency approach and more analysis of how organisations and agencies can best plan, deliver and monitor their provision.

- 1.4 One of the measures designed to meet these challenges has been the introduction of new equality legislation, such as the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order of 1997. In addition, other initiatives such as New TSN (Targeting Social Need) also seek to identify and address the particular needs of minority ethnic groups. The Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) element of the New TSN programme is particularly relevant in this respect. In June 1999, whilst Northern Ireland was under direct rule from Westminster, ministers initiated work in four 'priority areas': the problems facing Travellers; the problem of teenage

parenthood; the position of ethnic minority people and, finally, the ways of making government information more accessible to excluded groups (see New TSN Annual Report, 2001).¹ Working groups have been set up to analyse the key issues in these areas and the working group on minority ethnic people, consists of representatives from the Northern Ireland Office, the OFM/DFM, the Home Office, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and representatives from relevant NGO's. This working group is to draft strategy recommendations in four main areas: Travellers, Asylum-seekers, racism and language issues. The report is expected in December 2002.

- 1.5 Whilst minority ethnic communities are from cultures similar to that in Northern Ireland, others are from areas with contrasting economic, social and cultural systems. Some are members of communities which have been established in Northern Ireland for many years. In these cases, there may be families into their second or third generation in Northern Ireland whose members are proud of their distinct cultural heritage but have also integrated into Northern Irish society. At the other extreme, are new arrivals who may only have been here months or even weeks. There are people who have come alone, or with their families to work in Northern Ireland, either permanently or temporarily, those who are studying at school, college or university and, increasingly, groups of refugees and asylum seekers (T&EA, 1998; Connelly and Keenan, 2000). Thus, the problems which members of minority groups may experience are varied and complex and may include limited employment opportunities, difficulties with access to suitable housing and health care, difficulties with social and cultural adjustment and experiences of discrimination or harassment. In many situations, however, problems are more distressing and more difficult to resolve when they are compounded by language difficulties.
- 1.6 Previous research has shown that the resolution of issues linked to language is a major priority for minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland (Irwin and Dunn, 1997; Connolly and Keenan, 2000; DCAL,

¹ The report 'Consultation on the Final report of the PSI-working group on Travellers' was published in December 2000 and then distributed by OFM/DFM for public consultation. The final report has not yet been published. Boards involved have already adopted some of the good practice established in the report. The PSI Working Group on Ethnic Minorities is developing a strategy for tackling racial inequality, part of this refers to the DCAL 'Future Search project' and a section 'Improving Communication'. This makes reference to the DCAL Future Search Project. The group last met in June 2002 (info from OFMDFM).

2001). Aspects of language seem to be of great concern in a wide variety of contexts and members of all groups emphasise the need to acquire fluency in English. This immediately draws in the question of educational provision and the experiences of members of minority ethnic communities across a range of teaching and learning contexts. This study, therefore, has sought to outline current educational provision for people resident in Northern Ireland who have English as a second language and to record some of the experiences of learners in accessing this provision and of teachers in providing facilities.

- 1.7 Studies from many parts of the world have referred to the 'language barrier' which members of minority ethnic groups frequently have to overcome in areas such as education and health (DCAL, 2001). Measures such as extra support at school level and language classes for adults are clearly important in this context, but it is also necessary to consider such issues as the provision of teaching in the mother language and aspects of bilingualism (Equality Commission, 2001). For example, in many cases members of minority ethnic groups do not use English in the home and wish to preserve their own language. In this context, it is important to consider the value of bilingualism. Robson states that:

'There is now a considerable amount of research to indicate that not only can well-developed conceptual skills in the first language provide a strong foundation for the development of English academic skills, but that bilingualism can be educationally enriching and have a positive effect on intellectual performance'. Robson, (1995: 46)

She also refers to the 'unique contributions' which can be made by teaching staff who speak the pupils' first language. The potential 'advantage' which fluency in several languages can confer is also referred to in publications such as the National Curriculum for English. This is also echoed in a report by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), in an inspection report from 2001. Here an interesting point regarding bilingualism was also made:

'Overall, progress for pupils with EAL was satisfactory and there was considerable evidence that, once proficiency in English was achieved, their

progress across the curriculum was rapid and their attainment on a par with or higher than that of their monolingual peers.’(OFSTED, October 2001: 27)

In a report from the Scottish Executive on translation and interpretation (Scottish Executive, 2002: 25), the positive aspect of bilingualism is again well summarised:

‘Even within the EAL environment, there is a need to challenge the view that bilingualism is somehow bad for children and will hinder their acquisition of English.’

At the same time, encouraging the use of the ‘mother tongue’ in the home may increase the need extra support in English. This means that appropriate provision for EAL support in schools becomes even more important, as suggested in the report ‘Out of the Shadows’ (NICEM, 1997: 58):

‘Even though many ethnic minority children are born in Northern Ireland, their first language may be their mother tongue, and they are unlikely to hear much English until they start school.’

Research regarding EAL has also underlined the need for specialised support and for the EAL-child not to be equated with children with other special needs (Verma, Corrigan and Firth, 1995).

- 1.8 The actual linguistic landscape of Northern Ireland has been well summarised by the Multicultural Resource Centre (MCRRC).² They catalogue the range of minority ethnic groups now living in Northern Ireland and estimate that some 90% of the first generation Chinese community, the largest minority group in Northern Ireland, have some level of difficulty with either spoken or written English. Speakers of a wide range of other languages, including Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Hindi, Spanish, Arabic, German, French and Portuguese, sometimes require interpreters to deal with everyday concerns, such as visiting the doctor or claiming benefits.³ It is also clear that there are differences both

² See ‘Recommended Guidelines for Multilingual Materials’.

³ With reference to Bengali, in the MCRRC report the majority of Bangladeshi people are Sylheti speakers. Bengali tends to be spoken by a professional section of the society, a group also likely to have had an English language education.

between and within specific communities, usually linked to age and length of residence. Research carried out by Barnardos and the Eastern Health and Social Services Board in 1999-2000 showed that, in a sample of Chinese children, a majority had either Cantonese or Haka as first language with a small minority speaking only a Chinese language (EHSSB, 2000)⁴. Interviewees in the project referred to lack of information and advice on how the educational system worked and references were made to the need for extra English tuition and for more attention to be paid to the needs of bilingual children by the authorities. In addition, it is clear that some older members of the Chinese community have particular difficulties with English (T & EA, 1998). The impact of such problems was highlighted by the findings of a study by the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) reported in 'Speaking Out' (NICEM, 1997). This indicated that elderly members of many minority ethnic communities experience difficulties in accessing a range of social and health services due to limited fluency and comprehension (DCAL, 2001).

- 1.9 Amongst the other issues raised by the NICEM report are concerns about what is perceived to be an 'inadequate' level of support for EAL (English as an Additional Language) teaching in Northern Ireland and about the need to improve the overall provision of English teaching. A Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) report from 1998 also emphasised the importance of support in relation to English as an additional language and the need for an increased number of courses and activities (CWA, 1998). In addition to concerns over the actual provision and format of courses, there have also been suggestions that there is a need for more interaction between members of minority ethnic communities and schools or colleges. The report 'Out of the Shadows' speaks of the importance of a dialogue between 'parents and providers of education'. One area of particular interest for this research has, therefore, been evidence about the exchange of information, since it seems that minority ethnic group parents have often experienced difficulties in communicating with schools (Watson and McKnight, 1998;

⁴ In 1996, the Eastern Health and Social Services Board (EHSSB) formed the Minority Ethnic Liaison Group together with the CWA, NICEM and Barnardos Chinese Health Project. In their report from 2000 references were made to the high number of bilingual children (English and Cantonese) and the fear of alienation of parents with none or limited English. Parents also commented on the problems of finding information and extra tuition for the children. The project was carried out among children age 0-12 and is particularly mentioned in the Northern Ireland Children's Order from 1995.

Connolly and Keenan, 2000; DCAL, 2001). Another issue referred to by Connolly and Keenan is the feeling of 'frustration' amongst parents from minority ethnic communities who feel they cannot help their children, for example, with homework, because of their own difficulties with English. The Equality Commission's 'Racial Equality in Education – Good Practice Guide' also highlights some related concerns when it refers to the need to provide interpreters in a number of situations where members of minority ethnic groups interact with statutory bodies or service providers.

- 1.10 Such problems highlight the importance of addressing the needs of the large group of adults 'outside' the remit of compulsory schooling who are attempting to improve their children's chances or advance their own career paths by learning English or improving their command of the English language. Thus, examination of the provision in further education and in a number of 'informal' or 'semi-formal' settings was a major concern of this study. Much of this takes the form of English language classes, either English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and much of this is provided by Colleges of Further Education. The term English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL) seems to be the universally accepted term in post compulsory education and is also widely used in most other English speaking countries. The report 'Breaking the Language Barriers - the Report of the Working Group on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)' (DfES, 2000) also uses this term so as to avoid confusion with the term English as an Additional Language (EAL). EFL is referred to in the report as:

'EFL is English teaching intended primarily for foreign students who wish to improve their English for recreational purposes or to improve their academic or career prospects in their home country. It is provided largely by private providers both in this country and abroad and when offered by the FE sector in the UK fees are charged' (DfES, 2000)

- 1.11 Previous research has emphasised the importance of ESOL provision (CWA, 1998; Connolly and Keenan, 2000; T & EA, 1998). Indeed, one study refers specifically to the role of such courses in supporting parents from minority communities:

'The Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment should identify and address the current needs of minority ethnic parents in relation to the provision of adult education classes in English.'
Connolly and Keenan (2000: 109)

- 1.12 Whilst the focus of this study is on the provision of support for English language acquisition and development, other related educational issues were frequently raised, particularly in the individual interviews. These included concerns about what was seen as the culture specific nature of the overall curriculum provided in schools. Similar anxieties regarding the curriculum and cultural education have also been highlighted in earlier research (NICEM, 1997). For example, some members of minority ethnic minorities were critical of the Northern Ireland curriculum and in particular the lack of a 'multicultural approach'.
- 1.13 The long-term evidence of a clear relationship between language skills and employment opportunities brings out the practical impact of all these issues. Evidence suggests that linguistic difficulties may restrict the career choices of some members of minority ethnic communities. For example, previous research (Irwin and Dunn, 1997; Connolly and Keenan, 2000) has shown that catering is still very much the basis of employment for many Chinese people in Northern Ireland and that language competence is a factor in preventing some members of the community moving into other parts of the labour market. In relation to the Chinese community, research in England (Pang, 1999), suggests that, when young people from Chinese backgrounds do move out of catering, they tend to choose areas of study which have less stringent requirements in relation to fluency in English, such as science and engineering. Although the relationship is complex, Pang's research also showed the strong 'cultural' link in the choice of career and the fact that for many Chinese people the catering industry operated as a 'safety net'.
- 1.14 In addition to influencing choice of career, linguistic difficulties can also restrict the prospects of recent migrants who wish to use qualifications gained in their home country to gain similar employment in Northern

Ireland. International recognition of qualifications is a highly technical issue but the need to display acceptable competence in English can be a factor in preventing highly qualified members of minority ethnic communities from being able to use their skills in Northern Ireland.

- 1.15 The drop out rate from ESOL courses is often a major concern. For example, in the Welsh and English context, the research carried out by the Basic Skills Agency into reasons for drop-out from ESOL classes showed that a majority of 'drop-outs' referred to personal reasons and dissatisfaction with provision and were particularly from non-intensive courses (Basic Skills Agency, 1996)⁵. The research also highlighted issues such as the problems with assigning students to the right level of English language teaching and also the differences between intensive/non-intensive courses. The Basic Skills Unit of the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) commissioned a project entitled 'Landscape of participation and provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) in Northern Ireland' in autumn 2001. The report 'ESOL: Interpreting the way forward', published in the spring of 2002, refers to issues such as limited resources and limited support and refers to ESOL provision in Northern Ireland as 'incoherent' and 'patchy'. The study highlights three particular issues which 'are impacting adversely': mixed ability classes, having to have eight people before an ESOL-class can start and the re-allocation students from ESOL to Basic Skills classes. The study therefore recommends actions, such as increased recruitment of bilingual tutors, a tutor support network, the institution of summer learning programmes, and the provision of more than 72 hours of learning per year for anyone seeking ESOL support.

⁵ Data for the research was collected in 1993/1994 and 1994/1995 and some 4,500 students and 230 tutors provided information.

2. Aims

Against this background, the study reported here aimed to:

1. Examine the ways in which provision is currently made for supporting the acquisition and development of English language skills by members of minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland;
2. Examine the experiences of members of these communities in accessing this provision; and
3. Identify issues which might be considered in the further development of provision and policy.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 In order to fulfil the first aim of examining the ways in which language support is currently provided for members of minority ethnic communities, an initial ‘fact-finding’ exercise was conducted.⁶
- a) Data on the number of pupils from minority ethnic communities in schools across Northern Ireland was obtained from the Department of Education. These statistics are based on the school returns completed in October each year, although during the school year, figures may fluctuate due to pupils moving in and out of schools;
 - b) Contacts were established with the EAL-units in each of the five Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland (ELBs). Through them, data was collected on the extent and form of language support provided in schools across the different Boards;
 - c) The most up to date information available on numbers of students taking English language classes in Colleges of Further Education was sought from the DHFETE (now Department for Employment and Learning, DEL); and
 - d) Contacts were established with FE colleges to ascertain the range and type of English language courses provided.
- 3.2 In order to examine the perceived effectiveness of the present structures and level of provision, data was collected by means of:
- a) Interviews with members of minority ethnic community associations and organisations e.g. The Chinese Welfare Association, Northern Ireland Committee for Ethnic Minorities, Multicultural Resource Centre, Antrim Chinese Association, the Craigavon Chinese Community Association (Wah Hep Chinese Community Association), the Belfast Islamic Centre and the Indian Community Centre;

⁶ It is important to note at this point that this study focuses on the language needs of members of minority groups from backgrounds where English is not their mother tongue. A number of the concerns of the Traveller community are related to those of these groups but since the emphasis here is on language, interviews discussions with Travellers and their representatives have not been included.

- b) Interviews with the EAL-advisors attached to each of the Education and Library Boards;
- c) Interviews with staff in a number of primary and secondary schools across Northern Ireland. These were chosen to give as representative a sample as possible. The sample of schools, from across Northern Ireland, was selected to cover different geographical areas, school sizes, school types and proportions of minority ethnic pupils. There were some difficulties in achieving a balanced sample since some schools felt that their commitment to other research projects meant that they were unable to participate in this study. Eventually, 14 schools took part and in all 55 members of staff were interviewed using either an individual semi-structured interview methodology or a small group interview. In both formats the same schedules of questions was used (see appendix A for details of interview schedules for primary and secondary level class teachers and principals);⁷

Table 1 Sample Schools by type

	Total number	Special features
Post primary	6	3 selective, 3 non selective
Primary	8	4 controlled, 3 maintained, 1 integrated

Table 2 Sample Schools by Area Board

Board	Total	Primary	Secondary	Details
Belfast	4	2	2	Urban
North East	2	1	1	Market town and suburban
South East	4	2	2	Suburban and Rural
Southern	1	1	0	Suburban
Western	3	2	1	Market town and Rural

⁷ It would have been helpful if it had been possible to carry out interviews with pupils in these schools. However, the time constraints of the study made this impossible. A further specific investigation focusing on pupils' experiences of learning English would be a valuable addition to this research.

Table 3 Sample schools – size and number of minority ethnic pupils 2001-2002 school year

Board	Primary/ secondary	Total number of pupils 2000-2001	EAL- pupils 2000-	Total number of pupils 2001-2002	EAL- pupils 2000- 2001
BELB	Primary	194	15	145	12
BELB	Primary	195	5	194	11
BELB	Secondary	1850	100	1820	68
BELB	Secondary	624	9	631	9
NEELB	Primary	340	17	334	19
NEELB	Secondary	1200	16	1179	10
SEELB	Primary	620	50	561	23
SEELB	Primary	600	12-20	601	17
SEELB	Secondary	1160	1-2	1157	1
SEELB	Secondary	1000	5	1047	9
SELB	Primary	363	3	367	4
WELB	Primary	225	3	187	3
WELB	Primary	222	11	198	11
WELB	Secondary	900	1	933	1

- d) Case studies based on two colleges of Further and Higher Education. The detailed case-studies, were carried out based at Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (BIFHE) and North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education. These colleges were chosen because they have considerable numbers of ESOL/EFL students and have developed a range of courses to meet their needs. In both colleges, interviews were carried out with staff who are involved in teaching minority ethnic students and with students from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. In the interviews with students, professional interpreters were used in cases where students felt that they could not express their views satisfactorily in English;
- e) Interviews and focus groups with parents from minority ethnic communities. These included parents from Chinese, Indian,

Pakistani and African backgrounds and were carried out in Belfast, L'Derry, Antrim and Craigavon. Where necessary interpreters were employed to ensure parents were able to articulate their views; and

- f) Interviews with other educational professionals e.g. educational psychologists attached to Area Boards who are involved in individual pupil assessments connected with the transfer process.⁸

⁸ All the data collection, interviews and focus groups were carried out by the full time research officer on the project. Whilst he is an experienced researcher and completely fluent in English it is not his first language. This was seen as a positive contribution to the project since he was able to contribute practical experience in relation to EAL.

4. School Level Provision

- 4.1 In ascertaining the number of pupils in schools across Northern Ireland whose first language is not English, there is a number of methodological problems. Relevant figures are collected by the Department of Education as part of the annual school data returns, which are completed during the autumn term each year. The Department of Education, in its consultation document, 'A Common Funding Formula for Grant-Aided Schools' (DE, 2001), refers to the census of October 1999 and gives the number of EAL-pupils as about 1,135, with an estimate that support is being offered in 9 different languages and that some 297 schools have EAL pupils. In October 2000, the Department estimated that there were 1,398 pupils in 306 schools. However, a number of factors make the collection of a comprehensive data set very difficult. For example, the population of pupils from minority ethnic groups is relatively fluid. Short term migrants and asylum seekers in particular are quite likely to arrive during a school year and may stay for only a few months, thus it is difficult to maintain fully accurate information and this may affect the ability of Area Boards to provide support for pupils. There are also problems of definition. Pupils are listed on the returns under the category EAL – English as an Additional Language. This, however, refers only to the fact that they come from a non-English speaking family background. The school census form refers to '...pupils from abroad who are now resident in Northern Ireland and have little or no knowledge of English.' However, some of the pupils are actually members of second or third generation families in which English may be extensively used, many of these pupils have few difficulties with English. At the other extreme, some pupils are recent arrivals in Northern Ireland and are living in homes where little or no English is spoken or understood. It is perhaps interesting to note that the return forms used in Scotland give details of both ethnic affiliation and language background, i.e. language spoken in the home and this helps to give a clearer picture of a child's linguistic background. (Scottish Executive, 2002).

Table 4 October 2000 –Returns of numbers of EAL pupils⁹

Board	Primary	Secondary	Total
BELB	273	176	449
WELB	60	97	157
NEELB	154	78	232
SEELB	202	84	286
SELB	110	98	208
Totals	799	533	1332

Table 5 October 2001 –Returns of number of EAL pupils 2001

Board	Primary	Secondary	Total
BELB	266	174	440
WELB	74	38	112
NEELB	168	65	233
SEELB	195	88	283
SELB	116	97	213
Totals	819	462	1281

4.2 Since the language needs of these children differ considerably, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a considerable difference between the figures set out above and the number of pupils reported as receiving extra language support in each Board Area. These figures refer to pupils who have been identified by their schools and reported to the relevant Board's advisory service as needing additional tuition from a member of the EAL support team in spoken and/or written English.

⁹ This data was correct at the time of collation by the Department of Education and may be subject to subsequent fluctuations.

Table 6 October 2000 – Numbers of Pupils receiving English language support

Board	Primary	Secondary	Total
NEELB	60	10	70
WELB	31	1	32
SELB	21	7	28
SEELB	53	26	79
BELB	27	7	34
Total	192	51	243

4.3 The differences between the figures in tables 5 and 6 arise from three main causes. Some pupils who are from EAL-background are judged not to need additional language support. These are often pupils from families resident in Northern Ireland for a prolonged period who have been brought up in a bilingual or even predominantly English language environment. There are also a considerable number of secondary level pupils from minority backgrounds who attend grammar schools and a smaller number of both primary and secondary age pupils in integrated schools. In such cases, the picture is complex with some schools providing language assistance 'in-house' and having no contact with the Area Board EAL support service, whilst in other instances there is a link with the Board provision. Only where teaching from Board support teams is requested are the pupils included in the figures. In addition, in some areas, such as the WELB, the formal structure of a language support service has only been very recently established and so in this case the Board was not formally supporting any pupils in autumn 2000.

5. Form of School Level Provision

- 5.1 As well as the current marked variations in the numbers of pupils receiving EAL support in different parts of Northern Ireland, there are also differences in the ways in which provision has developed in different Board areas and in structures through which they deliver their services.

Belfast Area Education and Library Board

- 5.2 With a relatively large number of minority ethnic pupils from a diverse range of cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds, the Belfast Board has been providing an English language support service for over ten years. There is no full time administrative/co-ordinating officer or teacher based in the Board headquarters but there are 4 teachers who are involved in EAL support. Their remit is to provide additional English language teaching for pupils from minority ethnic communities. Other support activities, such as advising parents, are not included in their job descriptions and so have to be undertaken in addition to their normal teaching schedule. The only description of the remit of the support service, which is currently available, dates from 1984 and was drawn up at the time when the first EAL teacher was appointed.
- 5.3 Four main tasks were identified:
- To teach small groups of children with little or no understanding of English;
 - To support the class teachers who are taking these children i.e. how best to compliment the work undertaken in the group sessions, resources which may be of help in a classroom setting, strategies to be adopted by class teachers, home/culture background information;

- To establish contact with parents and show them how to best support the work of the school; and
- To occasionally meet teachers in schools not receiving direct support and suggest possible teaching strategies, suitable resources and background information regarding various cultures’.

5.4 As indicated, the key remit is to provide English language teaching. Any additional support activities, such as advising parents, have to be undertaken outside a normal teaching schedule. The EAL support service is centred at Botanic Primary School, probably because the school has traditionally had a considerable number of pupils from minority backgrounds. As well as acting as a ‘base’ for EAL work, a ‘drop-in’ facility is provided at the school on Wednesday afternoons. This is available for pupils, teachers and parents seeking information or advice.

5.5 The Education and Training Inspectorate (1998), in their survey of Belfast ELB Peripatetic Service and Reading Centres, referred to the EAL teaching as being characterised by good relationships between teachers and pupils and noted that teachers were well prepared. The Inspectorate report also highlighted the quality of teaching and that (p 5):

‘The vast majority of the pupils benefit from the support they receive; the progress of others is further constrained by the length of some sessions, which are unacceptably short.’

The Inspectorate referred to the quality of teaching as ranging from ‘satisfactory to excellent’. Amongst areas of concern were the problems of parents not attending meetings with the staff and variations in the level of communication between EAL-staff and classroom teachers. There was also a reference in the findings of the inspection to the need for, ‘...the management of this service to be more clearly defined in order that it develops a strategic focus, and a greater consistency in the quality of its provision’.

Western Area Education and Library Board

5.6 Until recently, minority communities in the west of Northern Ireland were very small and scattered. As a result of the small numbers of pupils from minority ethnic communities, the Western Board did not develop an official EAL support programme until 2000. The official start of actual work in schools was in September 2001. Two teachers, one of who is also designated as the EAL advisor, now provide peripatetic and in-service support to schools across the Board area. However, since numbers of pupils currently remain small, they combine EAL work with other responsibilities. The WELB in their definition of the status of EAL-support teachers locate them within the CASS (Curriculum Advisory and Support Service) professional structure as part of the Board's schools advisory and support team. A number of specific targets for the service have also been identified, these include:

- Ensuring that as many EAL-children as possible gain greater access to the Curriculum by developing their English language skills;
- Developing differentiated classroom practices which teachers can use to meet the specific needs of the EAL-students;
- Involving EAL pupils more fully in the full range of learning activities;
- Monitoring the progress of the EAL-students;
- Setting targets and a medium to long term learning plan to ensure that their achievement is on a par with that of other children;
- Encouraging schools to develop social inclusion programmes to cater for the needs of the minority ethnic children and to develop positive attitudes to multiculturalism; and
- Providing high quality advice and guidance to schools.

South Eastern Area Education and Library Board

5.7 This area has, for a considerable number of years, had a relatively large minority ethnic population, concentrated in the southern outskirts of Belfast. The largest group consists of people from Chinese backgrounds, but there is an increasingly wide range of cultural and linguistic groups represented in the area. The Board's EAL support service was established in 1993 and since then has developed a significant range of activities. The actual EAL-team consists of 1 full-time advisor who is at assistant education officer level (Curriculum Advisory and Support Service Officer – CASS-officer), 1 full-time home/school liaison officer for the Chinese community, 6 full-time EAL teachers and 2 permanent part-time EAL teachers. There are also a number of teachers on an EAL-register who are available to support schools whenever the need arises. The whole team is linked to the general English advisory and support team. The post at assistant education officer level was advertised and appointed in 1998 and the job description stated that:

'As a member of the English Operational Unit he/she will manage, maintain, and develop the program to provide curriculum advice, training and support for ESL for schools and colleges within the Boards' area'.

Listed under the section 'main duties' in the job description are 19 points, which include duties such as:

'to develop a more cohesive and co-ordinated structure for ESL-support in schools', 'to prepare and deliver Board-based in-service training for teachers having responsibility for ESL-pupils in order to develop their expertise in teaching English as a Second Language'.

The provision of advice and training, both for teachers and pupils through in-service training and dissemination of information is emphasised, as is the development of curriculum material. Also listed are the monitoring and evaluation of the Board's policies under the Race Relations Order of 1997 as well as support for (the then) Commission for Racial Equality, and representing the Board 'on various

groups and agencies concerned with the provision for pupils from Minority Ethnic Groups'.

- 5.8 This Board seems to have the most fully developed support structures and produces a wider range of materials than any of the other Boards. For example, a number of information-leaflets for parents have been produced in Cantonese and interpretation services are available for parents and teachers. The SEELB's structures aim to assess the needs of EAL pupils, provide language tuition, support work in communities' own languages and provide assistance to the families of EAL pupils in their interactions with the Northern Ireland education system. In carrying out these tasks, the EAL team often works with other agencies such as social services and the health service.

North Eastern Area Education and Library Board

- 5.9 The institutionalised support service here became operational in 1996. In 2000/2001 the EAL team consisted of 2 full-time teachers. They undertake both support in schools throughout the Board area and also some of the administrative work of the service. There is further administrative support from a line manager and some secretarial assistance. The EAL teachers are linked into the main English advisory team. The job-description for the support teacher in EAL, lists 5 '*main duties and responsibilities*':

- To provide advice and support to nursery, primary and secondary schools;
- To identify needs of individual pupils and provide appropriate support, including some one to one tuition;
- To work in partnership with classroom teachers responsible for EAL pupils including planning collaborative teaching strategies to meet EAL needs;
- To assist in the preparation, design and production of curriculum materials for use with EAL pupils; and

- To promote an appreciation in schools of the language and culture of EAL pupils (and their families).

Southern Area Education and Library Board

5.10 The provision in this area was formally initiated in September 2000. The team consists of 6 EAL teachers (4 part-time and 2 full-time). One of the full time teachers also acts as the 'team-leader'. This teacher works in schools 3 days per week and has 2 days allocated for completion of the administrative duties involved in the co-ordination of the service. The team is based within the parent-pupil unit of the Board. The Unit has produced fliers (in different languages) with information about their services describing the work of the '*support team for ethnic minorities*' with e-mail, fax and phone-numbers to facilitate contact. The job-description of the '*team leader – support team for minority ethnic groups (English as an additional language)*' includes details of the objectives of the service:

'The team leader and the teachers within the Support Team for Minority ethnic Groups (English as an additional language) will make a significant contribution to the education of children from these groups through providing support to primary and secondary schools in order to develop children from minority ethnic groups and in particular to enhance their facility in the use of the English language.'

5.11 The main duties of the support service are also detailed and these include:

- '*Assist principals and teachers in developing policies, schemes and programmes of work*';
- '*Work with teachers and children from minority ethnic groups in the classroom and on an individual and small group basis*';
- '*Contribute to the planning, preparation and provision of school-based and central board organised in service training*';

- *‘Conduct from time to time a needs assessment of children from Minority ethnic Groups within the board’s area’;*
- *Liaison with parents and of children from minority ethnic groups with the aim of improving children’s educational opportunity’; and*
- *‘Assist in the development and communication of the board’s policy in response to the implementation of the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and relevant parts of the board’s Equality Scheme’.*

5.12 The SELB is also involved, together with, the Southern Health and Social Services Board and the Wah Hep Community in the provision of a Chinese Interpreting Service.

6 Implementation of Support Services

- 6.1 The interviews with members of all the EAL support teams and with representatives of a range of minority ethnic organisations highlighted a number of general issues relating to the ways in which English language support services are delivered at school level.

Impact of variations in support structures

- 6.2 It is clear from the previous section that the structure of the EAL support teams and the ways in which their work is organised varies considerably across Northern Ireland. Discussions with members of the support teams indicate that the major determinant of the size of the teams and the range of services they offer is the current number of minority ethnic pupils in local schools and the related level of demand for EAL teaching assistance in the Board area. However, the units differ not just in the numbers of teaching and administrative staff involved but also in relation to their location within the overall pattern of Board services and their management structures. At the same time, there is an increasing level of co-operation and co-ordination between the various teams. Informal contacts had been going on for a number of years but a more formal '*inter-Board group*' has now been established. During 2000-2001, this group began to hold regular meetings to exchange ideas and share good practice. Initially, the Department of Education was not involved in these meetings on a regular basis but there is now active participation by the Department of Education representatives. Moves to encourage greater liaison are also being supported by a grant of 0.7 million pounds from the Northern Ireland Executive Programme Funds, under the heading 'Minority Ethnic Communities – Access to the Curriculum'. This is to be used to support a network of teachers comprising, initially, a 5 member team whose remit will be '*to provide translation and support services to pupils from minority ethnic minorities*' (BBC 2001, Executive Information Service April 2001).

Teachers' perceptions of current provision

- 6.3 When asked about their experience of interacting with their local EAL unit, almost all principals and class teachers in the sample schools reacted positively. They saw the provision of assistance for EAL pupils as important and praised the way in which support teachers helped the pupils to make appreciable gains in language skills. As one principal said *'it (EAL support) always worked very well – better than I would have thought ... support has been excellent'*. He felt that one of the factors which had been significant had been the fact that the same EAL-teachers had been coming into the school over a number of years, indeed since they had first requested EAL-support. This meant that working relationships had been built up and support teachers and class teachers were able to co-ordinate their inputs. A class teacher said that the support provided for a child in her class was working well:

'...even though it may be short, she [the child] is much more motivated to learn English, and she comes back and she copies what the other children are saying...and that really is helping her pick up [English]'.

- 6.4 There were, of course, some concerns. For example, one principal was somewhat critical of what he termed *'the field officer approach'* adopted by his Board. He felt that this meant that EAL teachers spend a lot of their time travelling and he would have preferred a school based system in which support staff spent longer periods in individual schools giving intensive help. Another primary principal backed up this concern by suggesting that his school had previously had one of their own staff (who had received appropriate training) responsible for EAL and that this had given them greater flexibility in meeting the needs of pupils with limited English. Other teachers echoed anxiety about the limited time EAL teachers were able to spend with each pupil. One teacher stated that although the EAL-support for her schools worked well, the half hour a week per child provided was *'very limited, particularly when a child has just maybe arrived and really needs a lot of one to one help'*. In several cases, they suggested that lack of time made it difficult not just for the school but also for the EAL teachers who felt dissatisfied with the service they were able to provide. School staff felt the rigid

timetable to which EAL staff had to adhere did not always meet the changing needs of schools and pupils. For one principal the ideal would be a member of staff trained to take responsibility for EAL in the school and the ability to bring in additional specialist support from the EAL team when necessary.

Preferences for classroom based or withdrawal support

- 6.5 There is a major methodological debate in relation to the provision of EAL teaching. This centres on whether support should be given to pupils in their normal classroom setting or whether they should be withdrawn from the classroom, individually or in small groups, to receive language tuition. It appears that, in Northern Ireland, most of the support provided by Board EAL units is given through the withdrawal approach, although there is awareness that pupils should remain in their class and with their peer group for as much of the school day as possible. As the SEELB policy indicates (Board Policy Guideline on Support for ESL-pupils):

'Ideally, support should be on the basis of partnership and collaboration within the mainstream class, however, it is recognised that some withdrawal might be necessary.'

OFSTED, in a report from 2001 in which 39 Local Education Authorities (LEAS) in England were studied, found that 88 % of primary schools had used withdrawal at some point and 95 % of secondary schools provided in classroom support, with all of them, on occasion also using withdrawal. It was also stated that *'inspections have judged the quality of EAL support provided through withdrawal to be less successful than that provided in class.'* (p 26).

- 6.6 The EAL teachers interviewed for this study felt that, for a number of practical reasons, the withdrawal model was preferable. They also believed that the class teachers with whom they worked preferred this method. One of the main arguments was that the classroom environment contained too many distractions, such as background noise, a range of activities and movement. In such a situation the EAL

pupil might find it hard to concentrate on listening to the pronunciation of unfamiliar English words. The presence of other pupils might also inhibit pupils, especially those who were shy or disorientated and unsure of their language skills, from trying to practise oral skills. The fact that the EAL teacher may be only one of several support staff working with the class teacher was also seen as an argument for withdrawal. As one EAL teacher noted, if assistance was given in the classroom, a situation could arise where there were *'one or more classroom assistants, the class teacher and one or more support teachers all in the room at the same time'*. Although the support teachers liked to work individually with pupils in a quiet environment they indicated that, in many schools, it was hard to find such a place. In addition, other support teachers, such as those helping pupils with specific learning difficulties, might be competing for the same small, and often unsuitable, rooms. The frustration for some EAL staff was obvious:

'one problem is to find somewhere to teach, other support services also require space, I'm constantly trying to find somewhere to teach ... carrying books about, not having things at your fingertips ... trying to produce materials out of your head'.

- 6.7 In general, the class teachers expressed similar views, seeing the withdrawal approach as the preferred option since it allowed the pupil to concentrate without distractions. A year 2 teacher said that the support for children in her class *'is working very well, and the withdrawal from the classroom on a one to one basis means that children are in the focus of the teacher's attention.'* On the other hand, both class and support teachers stressed the need for discussion and co-operation and suggested that gaining the full benefit of EAL support was only possible if the classroom teachers were involved in devising and reinforcing the language programme for each pupil. One teacher suggested that *'a simple either/or model'* was too simplistic and that something like a *'half-way house is needed before the child can enter the mainstream classroom'*. There was also the view that, when a child who is unfamiliar with the language and culture first comes to a school in Northern Ireland, withdrawal may be necessary so *'as to establish*

where they [the children] are'. The teacher who said this also felt that the children themselves would perhaps feel happy about being on their own whilst they adjusted since, within a classroom, attention would be drawn to them and they might feel embarrassed or intimidated.

Making suitable provision at classroom level

- 6.8 The question of the difficulties which pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds may experience in classroom interactions was raised more generally by a number of teachers. The initial period when a child is new to the classroom and maybe to Northern Irish society as a whole, as in the case of those from families who are refugees or asylum seekers, was seen as requiring specific consideration. One teacher suggested that at this stage intensive individual support in learning English might be necessary. This could include both periods withdrawn from the normal classroom and also support in the classroom to help the child become familiar with routines and social interactions and expectations. The intensity of support could then be gradually reduced and the forms of support modified as the child developed language skills. The anxiety teachers feel about providing appropriate support was highlighted by the specific comments of several of those interviewed. For example, one primary level teacher referred to the arrival of a new pupil, who spoke virtually no English:

'at first [the child] was not expected to say anything...but gradually become more confident and was clearly absorbing the language...but as a teacher I found it very, very difficult...sometimes I felt I was almost ignoring the child'.

- 6.9 A similar problem was highlighted by a principal who referred to the arrival of a child, in primary one, who was from a country in Africa, and who, at the age of four, *'is not even proficient in her own language never mind this new language'*. The child in this case was also *'outgoing and cheerful and bubbly'*. He felt that this had helped her to get on well with other children but the situation would probably have been a different one if she had been shy and withdrawn. As it was, she has made good progress as she mixed easily and played with the other children from the start.

- 6.10 Another teacher referred to similar situations where she felt helpless because a child did not seem to understand, but she could do little to help:

'sometimes (the child) does not really understand what I am saying. She looks back and smiles at me, but she does not really [understand]...but understands if I point at something she knows that this means you have to go there and she copies other children...but sometimes she just does not have a clue, she just does not understand what I am saying and I have to act things out and try to be expressive...her brain is working but she does not have the language to express herself...'

- 6.11 On the other hand, there were also situations where teachers felt that there was not enough flexibility in the system to allow them to respond to requests for help. One teacher expressed frustration about a particular situation, in which one parent had asked whether it was possible for a child to start school one term earlier, as the language spoken at home was not English. This was not feasible but there was no other avenue he was aware of through which help could be provided.

- 6.12 Several teachers also drew attention to difficulties associated with differences between progress in spoken and written language. They indicated that even when EAL pupils have acquired verbal fluency they sometimes have difficulty with written English and overcoming this may require long term extra help:

'orally the EAL children are doing fine, but when it comes to writing there would be gaps in the vocabulary and problems with grammatical structure as well as the use of phrases'

- 6.13 Even pupils who had been brought up in Northern Ireland and appeared to have no problems with language could need support in their written work. As one teacher commented, *'they still, in written work, came across ...like a non English speaker, there is that clumsiness about it'*. This worried a number of the teachers who felt that, as a result, some pupils from minority ethnic community

backgrounds were not reaching their full potential within the education system and this could affect their long-term career and employment prospects.

- 6.14 Another factor, which teachers felt could adversely affect the progress of these pupils, was the extent to which their families were, or were not, able to support their English language work. One infant teacher saw this as a particular problem in the early years when crucial skills are being developed:

'particularly in Key Stage 1 where parents are expected to do a lot of reading support at home...and parents who do not have English themselves simply cannot do that, so these children are further behind as a result of that'.

- 6.15 Similar points were made by several interviewees some of whom also linked differences to socio-economic background. For example, one teacher suggested:

'the main difficulty will be the support or lack of it that they [the pupils] get at home. It does depend on the parents; if the parents are professional you would usually find little or few problems in language skill'.

- 6.16 In her opinion, where the parents could not support the children particularly in English writing and reading, extra help would be required over a prolonged period but at the same time a balance was necessary. Too much time spent out of the '*normal*' classroom environment receiving language support could be to the detriment of integration and the acquisition of the social skills to be gained from interaction with peers.

- 6.17 Such comments underline the complexity of the issues involved as do teachers' references to the difficulties of:

'putting oneself in the position of an EAL child with reference to language and grammar as well as anticipating what are the problems with the English language these pupils might have'.

6.18 One teacher added that this was perhaps an area where support and information for teachers could be helpful, possibly as a part of in-service training provision. The general need for training in handling issues relating to pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds was mentioned quite frequently. One teacher saw this as vital since, *'I was never trained to teach children who [do not have English as their first language]*. Similarly a teacher, who was also special-needs co-ordinator in her school, referred to the need for help in designing or acquiring:

'concrete resources for the children...actual things to do with them, I feel that is an area that is lacking and I can see why, because you are meeting each child's individual needs and it is hard to get a whole bank of resources together...basically it's the materials for things you would be doing with that child on a daily basis'.

6.19 Teachers also referred to the need for support along the lines of *'lists of contacts'*, and *'the availability of translations of basic documents explaining aspects of the education system in various languages'*. They also wanted more information about the needs of EAL children and the problems they face in adapting to an all English-speaking environment. One teacher referred to needing *'guidelines on how to help them'* and *'language strategies'*. In some cases, when teachers were asked where they would turn for help with translation and interpretation, answers were along the lines of *'no idea'* and *'do not know'*. A differentiating factor here, and also an important factor overall, was the extent of a school's experience with minority ethnic children. Teachers in schools, which had had a significant number over several years, not unexpectedly, had more information about EAL provision and about issues which could arise with pupils from other minority ethnic backgrounds. The experience of one principal, who said he was even not aware of the existence of EAL support within the local ELB until an EAL pupil arrived in the school, illustrated this.

6.20 Interestingly, a number of class teachers and principals referred to the *'special needs approach'* as a possible basis for providing support. They were clear that they were not equating EAL with Special Needs, but

they did feel that there was some connection and that teachers with training in Special Needs often had useful ideas about how to help pupils whose difficulties with English meant that they had different needs in terms of learning strategies and levels of attention. Again, the problems were seen as particularly pressing for teachers having '*new arrivals*' in their classrooms and being faced with uncertainty about what tasks to give the child to do and how to work effectively to supplement and develop the work of the EAL teacher. Principals and, in secondary schools, year group co-ordinators were suggested by some interviewees as people who might take on some responsibility in such situations.

- 6.21 At the same time, teachers found it difficult to pinpoint exactly what would be appropriate in terms of training, either at initial or in-service level. Almost all of those interviewed said that they had not received training/information about EAL teaching or the needs of pupils from minority ethnic community backgrounds during their initial training. The only teachers with prior experience in this area were those who had taught in schools or trained as teachers in parts of the United Kingdom where there are sizeable minority ethnic communities. There was also little evidence that teachers had attended in-service courses which related directly to these issues. This was seen as a deficiency but at the same time there was awareness of the problems of cost effectiveness and balancing competing demands on in-service budgets. As one teacher pointed out, the majority of teachers in Northern Ireland are unlikely to have any EAL pupils in their classrooms and so are unlikely to face directly any of the issues discussed in this report. Also, with so many other demands on their time, they might find it hard to see this as a priority when balanced against requirements in core areas of the curriculum which are central to their work with all their pupils. She also felt that the value of courses, which provided general information, would be limited as, '*every child comes from a different background...different experiences and with different levels of English*'. She referred to her own situation of '*learning through experience*' and felt that it was '*difficult to envisage the training that would have been really useful*' and in any case teachers are '*professional enough people to realise they need help and go and find it [support and help]*'. Some of the same

views were echoed by a principal who stated that any training would have to be *'specifically targeted to individuals or groups of people'* and by the post-primary teacher, who said, *'if there were actually children in my class having problems, I would not mind going on a course to see how to overcome these problems'*. Thus, the overall impression is that teachers and principals would welcome more information and awareness, but that this had to be targeted and clearly identified as having practical relevance since there were so many other courses and training events competing for limited time and resources. There were indeed a few cases where teachers expressed anxiety about the level of resources which might be committed to this area. A post-primary teacher referred to the need for teachers to focus on children's needs, regardless of minority ethnic background, and that these children's needs should not be made a separate issue as *'the numbers do not impact to such an extent on our schools, these children come in, they are dealt with as individuals at the moment'*.

- 6.22 Another teacher brought up some of the issues around interactions between pupils from minority ethnic communities and their classmates. She suggested that in her infant class the other children in the classroom do not understand that the child from another linguistic background really cannot speak English and sometimes when the children speak in their own mother language the other children tend to think they are speaking English, *'they are too young to understand the idea of different languages basically...'*. This teacher tried to explain to the other children but felt that she had had only mixed success. More widely, language development was seen as closely linked to cultural accommodation. Initially the other members of the class might see the EAL child as *'different'* but they were usually *'accepted'*. Indeed, another teacher made the point that children from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds tended to settle very quickly and the children themselves in their interactions with classmates often do not see having English as an additional language as problematic. There were also advantages for everyone in having cultural diversity in the class, as pupils from a different cultural background can help to inform *'local'* children about different traditions and cultures and so increase their knowledge and understanding. Teachers suggested that this could take the form of

letting a child from a different religious or cultural background talk about his or her religion or country of origin. Concrete examples included discussion of the celebrations surrounding the Chinese New Year or the Hindu festival of Diwali.

- 6.23 In some schools teachers allocate another child as a 'buddy' who will be able to help a new arrival become familiar with the layout of the school and the daily routines as well as providing a basis for establishing a friendship group. One of the secondary schools in which interviews were carried had organised a 'rota' of pupils to ensure that a new pupil from an immigrant family had someone with her all day during the first period of settling into the school environment. Some teachers saw the aspect of acclimatisation as potentially more difficult for children who had attended school for a number of years in another country. They might be used to quite different teaching styles, forms of pupil/teacher interaction and academic expectations. One principal noted that, in the case of recent immigrants in particular, he often found that it was difficult to establish just what parents and pupils expected from education and they could be quite confused about 'what is going on here in the schools'.

Minority ethnic community pupils and the Transfer Procedure

- 6.24 Many elements of the procedures used in Northern Ireland to structure the move from primary to secondary level education and the choice of an appropriate secondary school for each pupil have proved controversial. A review of the current process has recently been carried out and there are proposals for a major re-structuring of the system but the discussion below relates to the transfer process as operating when the fieldwork was carried out during the 2001-2002 school year.
- 6.25 From the interviews with EAL staff principals and class teachers, there did seem to be broad agreement that the current system, in which the majority of year 7 pupils take two written tests, covering elements of the Key Stage 2 curriculum in English, mathematics and science, poses particular problems for some pupils whose first language is not English. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order from 1996, 'Code of Practice

on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs' (DENI: 1998), refers (2.15) to '*careful consideration*' regarding assessment of special educational needs and that:

'lack of competence in the language used in school must not be equated with, or allowed to mask, learning difficulties as understood in this code.'

References are also made to the use of interpreters and translations and it is stressed that '*...assessment tools should, as far as possible, be culturally neutral and applicable to children from a range of home backgrounds.*'

- 6.26 It appears that the situation is relatively complex; some children from minority ethnic community backgrounds take the standard tests and are graded in the normal way, some opt out of the testing phase of the process, and others are individually assessed by means of standardised psychological instruments. The latter group comprises pupils who have completed at least half of their primary level education outside Northern Ireland. Pupils with more than half of their primary education outside Northern Ireland are allowed to opt for individual assessment by the educational psychology service in each Area Board. The assessment takes approximately two hours, and is conducted either in the school or at the pupil's home and in some cases the parents are permitted to 'sit in'. The educational psychologists also try to time the return of the results of the tests to all partners involved so it coincides with the return of the standard 11 + Transfer results. The evidence from this assessment is then used to determine allocation of a place in a selective grammar school or a non-selective secondary school. This procedure appears to be accepted by most of the secondary schools as sufficient evidence on which to base a judgement about the pupil's suitability or otherwise for entry to a particular school. The actual number of EAL pupils requiring such individual assessments each year is currently very low. Indeed, in some Board areas, there is no record of any to date. However, this is clearly a complex and potentially difficult area and, if the process were to continue and the numbers involved were to rise significantly, there might be considerable problems.

6.27 Pupils whose first language is not English, but who have attended a school in Northern Ireland for all or the majority of their primary schooling do not normally have the option of individual assessment. Teachers suggested that what happened tended to depend on the level of proficiency the children had reached in written English by year 7. Most of those experiencing substantial language difficulties opt not to take the test and are thus very unlikely to be offered a grammar school place. Some teachers felt that this was unfair and deprived some EAL pupils of an education they were well suited to. On the other hand, some of those interviewed suggested that language was not the main determinant of opting out but that cultural factors were more significant. For example, one principal said:

'even though they (minority community pupils) were capable of doing it...language was not an issue, they opted out simply because it was not part of their parents upbringing to be selected at the age of eleven.'

6.28 Although this appears to be contradicted by the view of another principal who suggested that parents of pupils in his school were anxious that their children should take the tests because *'they value education very highly, education is seen as a major priority'*. For those who did go through the Transfer tests, the results were reported as mixed. Thus, one teacher referred to cases of children who had had very limited EAL support being expected to take the tests and when the local Area Board and the Department of Education had been approached and asked to discuss the problems they had just referred to *'the possibility of using the referral forms normally used in relation to children with learning difficulties'*. At the same time, in a school where there were a number of pupils from minority ethnic communities and the level of EAL support from the local Area Board was high, the principal stated that most of the children, who had received EAL support in his school, achieved high grades in the tests. He felt that, by year 7, language was not a problem. He referred to the situation as being *'fairly straightforward'* in his school.

6.29 In some cases, the difficulties were compounded by the fact that parents found it hard to understand the transfer process and its

implications. One teacher said how useful it would be if there were a person within the local Board, who, for example, could speak Cantonese and could inform parents from Chinese backgrounds about the procedures and how they would be involved. In one Board area, where there is a home-liaison officer responsible for work with the Chinese community, documents relating to the transfer process are translated into Cantonese and the liaison officer went into at least one school to speak to reception and P1 pupils and parents from the Chinese community. The aim was that they would become familiar with the structures of education from the outset and so to be able to understand the process at crucial stages such as the primary/secondary transfer. But, even here, it was felt that as the increasingly wide range of languages being represented in the school population meant that difficulties were multiplying and everyone could not currently be catered for.

Geographical distribution of EAL pupils

- 6.30 As indicated previously, there are difficulties in gaining accurate information about the number of pupils needing EAL support in the school system at any particular time. However, there was a clear perception, amongst almost all those interviewed, that not all those pupils currently needing assistance are receiving sufficient support and that both the number and range of children from backgrounds where English is not the first language will increase significantly over the next few years. Such observations were seen as having major implications in terms of resources, particularly staffing implications. Members of EAL support teams saw a number of '*pressure points*' in the system where resources are already stretched. For example, it was suggested that identifying pupils who needed language support as soon as they entered the school system and carrying out an assessment of their individual requirements were issues of particular importance. At present there can be considerable delays, which can affect long-term educational progress and achievement. Thus, one teacher said there could be problems at the beginning of the school year when pupils enrolled in early September but it was usually not possible to get EAL support until October. On the other hand, in another area, a principal

said that in his experience the support system was put in place '*within days*'. There was also need for a well established ongoing process which should ideally link the initial screening and assessment of a child's level of English, which is central in determining the level of support deemed appropriate, with a system to provide continuing assessment to monitor progress. All of this implies that, in many cases, a long-term programme of support will be necessary. Indeed, it was suggested that, at present, the average length of time over which EAL support needs to be provided is 5 – 7 years (see references - The New Arrival). On the other hand, it was also indicated that if more resources were available and it was possible to provide more intensive support, for example by increasing the number of hours of individual tuition which were provided each week, children might make more rapid progress.

- 6.31 Clearly the extent and form of demands on resources vary considerably across the Area Boards and from school to school. The requirements of a school with a long tradition and considerable experience in supporting minority ethnic community pupils are very different from those of the school receiving its first EAL pupils. Situations where there is a sizeable group of pupils from one minority ethnic background contrast with those where a wide range of different groups are represented. Similarly, whilst having a considerable number of such pupils each year poses one set of concerns, having a single EAL pupil only once or twice over a teacher's whole professional career creates a different set of concerns. Each of these situations requires a different response, different inputs and different resources.

Choice of schools – clustering

- 6.32 Linked to the issues above is the choice of school by members of the minority ethnic communities, since this affects the number of EAL pupils in any individual school. Whilst the ways in which choices are made and the factors which affect decisions will be considered primarily in the section on parents' views, a brief discussion seems relevant here. In selecting a school for their children, parents from the minority ethnic communities do not appear to be concerned over the religious

dimension of the Northern Ireland School system. Issues such as accessibility, closeness to home or availability of transport, level of EAL provision and traditional patterns and reputation within the community appear to be more important. The overall result does seem to be that in areas where there is a sizeable minority ethnic community they tend to favour certain schools. For example, a number of parents from the Chinese community in Belfast appear to favour certain maintained schools, based on views about the discipline and ethos provided, whilst some groups of parents frequently choose to send their children to single-sex schools, since they perceive these as better for their children and/or more in tune with their cultural or religious beliefs. As a result there are a number of schools, mainly in the Belfast area and North Down, which have considerable numbers of EAL pupils and have built up experience and skills in meeting their needs. In discussions with teachers a number of views were raised in relation to such issues. A number identified the possible benefits of 'clustering' provided for pupils from a minority ethnic background. Would it be beneficial, in areas with a sufficient concentration of minority ethnic groups, on both educational and resource grounds, to designate some schools as having expertise in the provision of EAL support and to then encourage members of minority ethnic communities to send their children to these schools, as suggested by one teacher? Or, is it better that pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds should be dispersed across a wider range of schools in an area?

Differences in provision at Primary and Secondary levels

6.33 Both primary and secondary schools have pupils needing EAL support. Some enter the system at reception level and progress right through to age 16 or 18 with support required for a variable period, which may stretch well into their secondary schooling. An increasing number, however, come to Northern Ireland during their school career and join the system at the appropriate point. Thus any school can, potentially, have a mix of pupils whose facility in English ranges from almost native speaker level to virtually no knowledge of the language. From the interview data, it appears that there are more problems related to supporting the language needs of minority ethnic pupils within

secondary education. This seems to be particularly the case where pupils with limited English enter the Northern Ireland education system at secondary level having attended primary school in their 'home' area. In general, it seems to be easier to make satisfactory provision and achieve successful outcomes where pupils come into the system at primary level and ideally at as early an age as possible. On the other hand, it is clear that provision for minority ethnic pupils is a major issue at secondary level. The Equality Commission's 1998 survey of teachers in Northern Ireland reported that a majority of grammar and secondary school teachers indicated that there were minority ethnic pupils in their schools.¹⁰ A majority of the respondents also expressed interest in receiving further training and information to help them to address the needs of these pupils.

- 6.34 Primary - secondary differences are also complicated by a lack of uniformity in the structures for providing EAL support. This is because voluntary grammar schools and integrated schools are not always linked to Area Board support and advisory services. Whether there is this link appears to vary from area to area, thus the EAL teams in the SEELB, BELB and WELB do work with pupils in these schools on request, whereas in the NEELB support is provided for pupils in integrated schools but not those in voluntary grammar schools. The SELB supports pupils in integrated schools and day pupils in voluntary grammar schools, but not in those in boarding schools. The latter distinction may be significant since a small number of voluntary grammar schools still have a boarding department and these attract a significant number of pupils from non European minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly minority ethnic Chinese from Hong Kong and Malaysia. These schools usually take responsibility for their own language support programmes.
- 6.35 Overall, grammar school teachers stated that, apart from the special case of boarders, EAL was currently not a major problem. Most of their pupils from minority ethnic communities had attended primary school in Northern Ireland and by the time they reached post-primary level their English had developed sufficiently for them to be able to participate in 'normal' class activities successfully.

¹⁰ 477 teachers participated and 242 forms were returned.

6.36 In talks with teachers in post-primary education, differences between subjects as well as similarities were noted. One English teacher said that,

'the EAL-factor does not impinge...her [the pupil's work] is very good, but the grammar always has to be given back [to her] to have that fixed, but she is bright...it (language issue) also comes in [her] oral assessment, talking and listening, and she does not have the confidence...that the others would have...'

6.37 Again, written work was seen as the source of more difficulty than oral interactions '*...her written work goes back so that she can correct the grammar before I put a mark on it...so she is actually working harder than the rest'*. Although the subjects which require large amounts of reading and essay type assessment, such as English and history, might be expected to pose most difficulties, teachers suggested subjects such as chemistry, technology and mathematics could present specific problems. One teacher referred to the problems of using '*technological terms*', explaining that difficulties over these meant that he had to spend extra time with a pupil from a minority ethnic background. One post-primary teacher referred to the particular problem of pupils having to face:

'...a range of vocabulary in different subject areas, subject specific vocabulary which would then cause them more difficulties. I mean a lot of our children would have difficulties with that anyway but they (minority background pupils) are going to have greater difficulties because not only are they learning the basic language they are being expected to almost assume the specialised language that they need to develop in a subject area and I think that is where they will have problems, not just in the English area.'

6.38 This teacher also referred to areas such as science where the teachers:

'might not spend as much time explaining the meaning and use of that language, they (teachers) are under pressure to get through a great deal of information therefore those words could be simply almost like reading a completely different language all the time to those children'.

- 6.39 One science-teacher referred to the frequency of '*complex words*' in areas like chemistry and physics and also the fact that the concepts referred to in these subjects are '*extremely abstract*'.

Informal and after school support for English language acquisition

- 6.40 In addition to English language teaching within the formal school setting there is, in some parts of Northern Ireland, a number of other forms of provision for minority ethnic group children, which were seen as important by interviewees. In south Belfast, Craigavon and Antrim there are '*after-school groups*' for pupils from the Chinese community. These provide care/supervision for children whose parents are working, often in the catering trade, and a supportive environment in which they can do homework and receive help, for example with reading. The Chinese Welfare Association runs the group in Belfast and the Craigavon Chinese Community Association runs the one in Craigavon, with assistance from the SELB. The Belfast group currently provides support for between 16 and 22 children and is open between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. with the club in Craigavon open between Mondays and Thursdays at similar times. The establishment of the club in Craigavon was seen, in research conducted in 1998, as '*very important*', especially taken in conjunction with the provision of English classes for adults and interpreting services in the area (A Brighter Future 1998). The after-school club in Antrim started during the 2001/2002 school year, providing support for about 24 pupils on five days a week-basis.

Mother tongue support

- 6.41 In addition to the provision of support for the acquisition or improvement of English language skills there are also needs in relation to minority ethnic pupils' mother tongues. As well as the need for interpretation and translation services, which has been touched on in a previous section and will also feature in the analysis of parental interaction with school, there was also concern about the need to provide support for pupils in their 'first language'. For example, parents stressed the need for recognition of the importance of a child's 'first

language', including the possibility of providing the opportunity to gain GCSE qualifications in minority languages. Some parents were aware that it was possible to take GCSE and A-level examinations, through certain examination boards, in their community language, but did not know how to go about making the appropriate arrangements. There was also a feeling that it should be possible to make special provision for non-native speaking pupils to take examinations in some other subjects through the medium of their 'first language'. This was seen as a possible approach to providing a 'fair' system in addition to the possibility of extra time allowances and access to dictionaries in externally assessed examinations such as GCSE and A level. It was recognised that these are complex areas where it is vital to take account of nationally recognised standards and procedures. At present the Joint Council for General Qualifications (CGE, VCE, GCSE, GNVQ) has a set of 'Regulations and Guidance relating to 'Candidates with Particular Requirements'. Candidates can apply for special arrangements under these regulations and in relation to the section on the language needs of pupils from minority ethnic communities, the most recent version of this states that:

'For candidates whose first language is not English, Irish or Welsh, the use of a bilingual dictionary is the only special arrangement for candidates, where their reason for the application is solely on the grounds that their first language is not English, Irish or Welsh. Additional time is not permitted for the use of a bilingual dictionary. Electronic dictionaries or translators may not be used'.

- 6.42 At present, much of the mother language support is outside the formal education structures and is provided through community organisations. Thus, the Chinese Welfare Association in Belfast offers classes in Cantonese and Mandarin, which about 100 children currently attend each week. Similarly, the Indian Community Centre provides Hindi classes at weekends for about 20 – 30 children and through the Islamic Society, children learn Arabic. In the case of the Islamic Community, however, the teaching of the Koran is increasingly through the medium of English, as many of the children are not Arabic-speakers.

6.43 A particular problem arises for members of minority ethnic communities living outside the greater Belfast area. For example, Chinese parents living in the north–west said that, at present, they had to travel all the way to Belfast if they wanted to enrol their children in Cantonese or Mandarin classes. Making the round trip to Belfast every Sunday for the classes was not feasible for many families and one of their main hopes was that classes could be established in Londonderry/Derry. The importance of maintaining this linguistic link with the ‘motherland’ and enabling children to communicate with family members who are still living there, was made clear by many parents and indeed many were making great efforts to ensure that their children did become fluent in their mother language. For example, a Chinese parent from the Craigavon area took her children to classes both in Craigavon and in Belfast every week.

Community and parental contact, support and involvement

6.44 All those interviewed stressed the importance of interaction and liaison between all the groups involved in provision for the language needs of pupils from minority ethnic communities. Whilst these issues were discussed extensively with teachers and other education professionals, the views of minority ethnic community organisations and individual parents regarding their children’s education were seen as vital. Interviews were conducted with representatives of community organisations and with individual parents from a range of community backgrounds and in a number of locations across Northern Ireland.

6.45 Information and awareness on the part of education professionals, for example, in relation to cultural issues, which may affect pupils’ integration into the school community, were recognised as central. Thus the various EAL units in the ELBs include, amongst their concerns, helping teachers and parents develop awareness and understanding of one another’s perspectives and expectations. This includes, among other things, the provision of information sheets and booklets on teaching English as an additional language and on the links between learning and cultural issues. The SEELB has a liaison officer whose work focuses on such issues and links are also being established

between the EAL units and teachers and various community organisations, such as the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA), the Indian Centre, the Multicultural Resource Centre (MCRC) and the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) as well as the Department of Education's Equality Rights and Social Inclusion Unit.

- 6.46 At a policy level, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, in conjunction with the Department of Education, is working on a 'draft action plan' regarding racism in schools, which includes strategies for developing links with parents and community groups (see Good Practice Guide and Racial Equality in Education – Conference Report, 2002).¹¹ The plan states under 'Language provision' that the Department will work closely with all ELB's in order to: *'ensure an effective and efficient provision for children/young people for whom English is not their first language'*.
- 6.47 In order to be able to establish links with parents, and to ensure that they are able to discuss their children's progress and any concerns they have about educational issues, the provision of interpretation and translation services is often essential. In order to facilitate this, efforts are being made to standardise interpretation and translation services. NICEM is heavily involved in this process and, for example, provides the training course for interpreters outlined in an earlier section of this report. In addition, both NICEM and MCRC produce a range of brochures in a number of languages aimed at providing information about government services and structures, including education. At present, when interpretation or translation is required the individual, group or institution requiring the service has to book through an agency or make personal contact with an interpreter and negotiate a fee, which is currently about £25 per hour. Where interpretation is needed in order to enable parents and teachers to have a discussion, the arrangements vary as sometimes the relevant ELB pays for the service to be provided by a qualified interpreter. In other cases schools believe that they would have to pay from their own budgets and this means they are anxious about setting precedents. As a result relatives, friends or even the children themselves quite often act as interpreters. In one case, a teacher referred to a situation where the older sister, who had herself

¹¹ A conference was held on November 8 at Rosspark Hotel, Ballymena and with the report of the proceedings being published in February 2002.

attended the school, acted as an interpreter between the teachers and her parents, in parent-teacher meetings.

- 6.48 The whole area of effective communication between parents and school staff was seen as potentially problematic by both teachers and parents. Incidents and issues where difficulties had arisen were brought up in many interviews, an indication of the widespread and high level of concern. One frequently quoted effect was that some parents of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds seemed reluctant to attend parent-teacher interviews. One teacher who expressed concern about this said that she felt unsure about what to do since she was not even sure about why they were not coming,

'it may be down to the fact that it is beyond them to cope with language problems or that they were happy with their children's progress, or that they did not want to try to communicate with staff'.

- 6.49 On the other hand, many of the parents said that they were anxious to attend meetings and have the opportunity to discuss their children's progress. Sometimes only one parent might feel confident enough to speak or they might appear 'quiet' but this did not mean that they were not interested. Some said that they found it helpful if teachers spoke more slowly than normal. They found that many teachers did this and generally were supportive.

- 6.50 Teachers and parents found it frustrating that, when a child was starting school in Northern Ireland, it was sometimes difficult to have the basic introductory conversation and discussion of things which might well affect the child's ability to settle into the school environment. For example, situations where recent immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers had no English at all were extremely difficult to cope with. One principal described it as '*clutching at straws*'. He cited a case where a Portuguese family arrived in the area and brought their children to school. No one in the local community spoke Portuguese and no one in the family had any English. In this instance another pupil, already in the school, who was also Portuguese and had learnt a little English was asked to try to explain things, both to the child and to his parents and to translate for the child in class. The Principal said that:

'it was terrible to place a child in that position, but I was so helpless...but it was a real nightmare scenario in the school...how you actually could combat this...I don't know...as the Education and Library board does not have people who are fluent in a number of languages'.

6.51 This was echoed by another teacher in a primary school who referred to a case where a mother brought her child to school and their language was *'an African tribal language - needless to say, not spoken by many people in Northern Ireland'.*

6.52 Clearly this initial phase of interaction with parents and children caused considerable concern and although teachers tried to ensure that they explained things clearly, the language difficulties could result in misunderstandings. One primary school principal described his initial meeting with newly arrived immigrant parents:

'it was a way to communicate the bare necessities to the parents...they were not too bad, they had a little English...but then afterwards the children arrived in school with money for uniform and there were other things that I thought I had explained to the parents and I thought they had understood.'

This principal referred to his sense of frustration that he was not able to communicate clearly.

6.53 In another primary school, the principal referred to occasions where the child had to interpret for his or her parents. This could be particularly difficult and sensitive during parent-teacher meetings over progress or discipline. The principal in this instance stated that it:

'is unsatisfactory for the child to translate because you are talking about the child's progress and they are translating and you hope it's accurate ...and you have no idea what to say to the parents...and we have used older brothers and sisters as well'.

6.54 One principal underlined the usefulness of contacts within the Area Board or the Department of Education. They had been able to help in providing advice and assisting in finding interpreters/translations.

Previously he *'had not thought of asking for a translator, I just thought that would be an impossible request...'*. As in other cases this principal referred to situations where letters were sent out from the school and the parents did not fully understand the context of letters and so did not respond. He cited instances as a result where children did not turn up for important after school events and:

'therefore missed out on many extracurricular activities, evening activities...because the parents did not understand that the child had to be back in school again for six o clock...it was very frustrating, those children would have benefited in the long term from taking part'.

- 6.55 This principal also referred to *'ways around'* such problems, for instance using *'trustworthy people'* in the community or in the workplace of the parents to explain what was happening. A person who had worked as a classroom assistant and could speak to one set of parents in their own language had been very valuable, but such arrangements were very dependent on informal contacts. Similarly, a teacher referred to the use of another child's mother who acted as an interpreter and helped with translation and to inform other parents about the school activities. Another teacher, who also worked as a special needs co-ordinator, said that in cases where the parents have limited English, or

'...where they simply could not communicate, then we would refer it to our educational welfare officer who usually deals with that and would find someone to translate or to help'.

In many cases, she felt that the problem was that parents understood quite a lot but could not articulate and express what they wanted to say. The danger then was that because of concerns about having to try to express themselves in English, parents would just not turn up for parent-teacher meetings or interviews.

- 6.56 Some parents also cited situations in which they had found the initial phases of interaction with the education system difficult and stressful. Often understanding the structure of the education system was a problem, especially for those who had only just arrived in the country.

Even beginning the process of seeking help could be difficult. Some interviewees reported that they often found it hard to get information about how to establish contact with the education authorities in order to find out what services are available. For example, some of those interviewed did not know about the EAL provision in their area and were unaware of the availability of interpretation and support services. Others were aware that their children were receiving additional language support but were not very clear about how this was structured. They would have valued an input into deciding what type of help their children should receive, for example an opportunity to talk about whether EAL provision outside the normal classroom or support within the classroom was the more appropriate approach.

- 6.57 The whole question of rights in relation to choosing a school and the criteria of choice led to considerable confusion. The most common way of '*conducting research*', about what is available and what to do, seemed to be to speak to friends and relatives. A school, which already had a number of pupils from their own minority ethnic community, was often the preferred choice. The transition from primary to secondary schooling was also cited as another potentially confusing and worrying situation. Grammar schools were clearly regarded as '*better schools*' and factors such as the '*reputation of the school*', '*the name of the school*' or observations as to which school prominent members of the established community, such as the mayor or well known business and professional people, sent their children clearly influenced choices. In this context the outcome of the 11+ [Transfer Procedure] was frequently seen in terms of '*pass/fail*' and a number of the parents who were interviewed felt that they would have to get a private tutor to help their children prepare for the examination.
- 6.58 Other areas where more discussion was seen as necessary related to cultural and working patterns, such as the impact of holidays taken by some families for celebrations such as the Chinese New Year. Where the family returned to their home country for these events, it could mean that the children were absent from school for several weeks. Although schools were sympathetic to the idea of 'family holidays' there was anxiety about the effect on the child's progress. Both teachers and

parents stressed the need to involve parents early on and to explain aspects of the school's organisation and expectations,

'to give parents the opportunity to come in and for teachers to be available for them ... be receptive to them...the culture is new for them and lots of things are unfamiliar ...the actual school itself is new to them...but where do you find it [an interpreter]'

6.59 Whilst most of these concerns have been illustrated by quotations from teachers, the same issues were raised by parents who expressed anxiety about situations in which they were not able to communicate their views and/or not able to understand aspects of school organisation or requirements. One parent, from Pakistan, emphasised the importance of making provision for children from an EAL background to attend nurseries so as to '*pick up*' English and to get used to the language as early as possible as this was often not the language used at home. The effect of limited English among parents was highlighted also by examples cited by parents, such as two cases where parents said that the children wrote the notes explaining absence but the mothers signed them. Parents with limited fluency or skill in written English felt that they were at a disadvantage in trying to exert '*parental pressure*' over difficulties with a school or an ELB. They compared this with other instances where parents have been able to actively pursue an interest in their children's welfare. The fact that there are various subject-teachers in post-primary setting could also be confusing. Often parents were rarely able to meet the subject teachers and had to rely on interactions with the form or year tutor who might not be able to address specific problems.

6.60 Other areas discussed and raised by parents were cultural concerns about food, religious education and physical education. One parent stated that he had to explain to teachers '*all the time*' why his children could not take part in Physical Education classes. On the other hand there was a diversity of response to some cultural and religious events. For example one parent objected strongly to his children taking part in the Christmas play, '*before they were old enough to have a clear idea about their own religion*'. On the other hand, a Muslim parent said that

he did not mind his children taking part and saw it as an important event, which helped children and parents to interact with the school.

- 6.61 From discussions with parents and teachers about these cultural and religious issues, it seems that there are no established policies in schools, for example, in relation to religious education. Schools and parents negotiate the arrangements, which they find mutually acceptable. One principal, regarding the issue of participation in religious education, referred to a school policy of asking the parents when registering the child, if they wished their child to participate in religious education-classes and events with a religious element, or not. In some cases, the children stayed in the classroom during religious education classes but did not take part in the proceedings. In other situations, the children left the classroom or stayed out of school assemblies during the religious element. There was an issue, however, about providing a suitable alternative, *'you do need the facilities for those pupils so they are not feeling that they are somehow stuck [away] somewhere'*.
- 6.62 A group of Chinese parents referred to practical problems which can make the situation more difficult when they are speaking to teachers/principals. These included the fact that some teachers tended to speak very fast and that they sometimes used difficult or technical vocabulary. It was also stated that parents themselves could not always find someone to help with interpretation and translation and wanted the school to be more *'pro-active'* in this area. In situations such as parent-teacher meetings where there are time constraints and brief appointments are the norm, it was suggested that parents for whom English is a second language, should be given consideration and allocated a longer slot. Overall, parents felt that it would be useful if teachers had more training on how to teach children whose first language is not English and those from different cultural backgrounds. This should include training to increase sensitivity to the differences between the minority ethnic cultures and the need to assess and respond to the specific needs of each individual child.

- 6.63 Although, in general, the Chinese parents interviewed expressed support for the EAL provision in their area and felt that it worked well and had helped their children considerably, they did see a clear difference between schools. The primary /secondary distinction in particular was seen as significant. They felt that more time was given to their children's language needs in the primary school. In one mother's opinion, teachers in primary schools spent time with each child, something which happened less and less the further up the secondary school they went. In choosing a secondary school the factors which were important were '*good reputation*', '*near home*' and '*if there are minority ethnic pupils already in the school*'.
- 6.64 One thing, which many of the parents stressed, was how important it was for the children to keep in touch with their cultural background and to have an idea '*of where they were coming from*'. For example the continuing use of Cantonese at home was regarded as vital from this perspective. The '*Sunday school*' classes in Mandarin and Cantonese, which are available in Belfast, were also rated as very valuable. Another 'informal' initiative, the '*After School Clubs*', was enthusiastically endorsed since it provided a context in which children could get help with homework and also have extra opportunities to use English. However, some of the parents would have liked more support for '*first languages*', for instance facilities for pupils to take examinations such as GCSE in their first language. Although this might be technically possible, at present, there was little encouragement or help with making arrangements to enter for such examinations.
- 6.65 It has sometimes been suggested that asking pupils to talk about the cultural events their community celebrates and traditional customs, food, dress etc. can be viewed as '*using*' the children. The parents interviewed for this study, however, felt that it was a useful way of raising awareness of their culture in the wider community. As long as children were comfortable with talking about their background and did not see it as threatening – something they might be laughed at for – it could be a positive experience for everyone.

7 Further Education

Overall Picture

- 7.1 Whilst schools have a central role in assisting young people from minority ethnic communities to acquire fluency in spoken and written English, there are also many adult members of these communities who require language support. The core providers of this form of language teaching are the Colleges of Further and Higher Education. Some of the issues and problems identified in relation to school level provision are also relevant in the FE sector, but the picture is complicated by the range of levels of need, the varying aspirations of students and the fluidity of the client group.
- 7.2 Against this background, we decided to attempt to gain a broad overall picture of the range and scale of provision in the FE sector and to carry out two case studies based in colleges which have considerable numbers of students enrolled on relevant courses.
- 7.3 Statistics regarding minority ethnic students and ESOL are relatively limited. The most up to date statistics, at the time of carrying out this study, for full time enrolments indicate a very low number relative to overall enrolments into the sector. The figure for 2000/01 (actually a snapshot of enrolments on 1 November 2000) gives a total of 30 full time students classified as 'Vocational enrolments aged 19 and over at NI Further Education Colleges' (4 Black African, 3 Black other, 2 Pakistani, 1 Bangladeshi, 20 Chinese). However, the database also includes 1,202 students for whom ethnic origin is unknown. On part time courses in 2000/01, there were 222 recorded ethnic minority students (6 Black Caribbean, 17 Black African, 8 Black other, 42 Indian, 33 Pakistani, 13 Bangladeshi, 101 Chinese). For 'information not known' the number was 9,331. A total of 204 students enrolled on courses described as 'English for Speakers of Other languages'. (31 White, 6 Indian, 14 Pakistani, 4 Bangladeshi, 18 Chinese and 131 Other) (DEL, 2001). These figures can be compared with the data quoted by Farren who refers to a figure of 'almost one hundred' and

suggests that the figure for ESL 'would probably not exceed two to three hundred' (Farren, 1991).

7.4 With regard to the total number of NI domiciled students enrolled on undergraduate courses at higher education institutions in all parts of the UK, the number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds on full-time courses in 2000/01 was 376, comprising: 8 Black Caribbean, 19 Black African, 14 Black other, 69 Indian, 17 Pakistani, 3 Bangladeshi, 113 Chinese and 133 other. The total number of full-time NI domiciled students of white ethnic origin in that year was 32,106, with information not known on a further 2,216 students. The number of minority ethnic students enrolled on part-time undergraduate courses at higher education institutions in the UK in 2000/01 was 85 comprising: 1 Black Caribbean, 13 Black African, 9 Black other, 9 Indian, 1 Pakistani, 12 Chinese and 40 other. The total number of part-time NI domiciled students of white ethnic origin in this year was 6,841, with information not known on a further 4,893 students. These statistics cover students domiciled in Northern Ireland attending UK universities, colleges of education and NI FE colleges.

7.5 A result of a postal survey of colleges across Northern Ireland and contact with DEL, to access their most recent data in this area, gives a partial picture of numbers of students from minority ethnic backgrounds in English language classes in a number of FE colleges:

- North-East Institute 22 students on two campuses (Ballymena and Magherafelt) enrolled in two classes;
- Armagh college: a limited number - efforts are being made to respond to requests from migrant workers;
- East Down Institute, Downpatrick: 14 students (3 classes); and
- East-Antrim Institute: Approximately 25 students.

7.6 Numbers on comparable courses in the rest of the United Kingdom are not surprisingly considerably higher. The report 'Breaking the Language

Barriers – the Report of the Working Group on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)' (DfES, 2000) refers to four main groups of ESOL students within the UK context; those from settled communities; refugees (settled and asylum seekers); migrant workers; and partners and spouses of students from all parts of the world. According to the report, there were in, 1997/1998, some 95,000 people attending ESOL courses.

- 7.7 The Adult ESOL Core Curriculum was established in 2001 (DfES, 2001) and is based on the national standards for adult literacy and numeracy developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). The curriculum was established after the publication of two reports, 'A Fresh Start – Improving Literacy and Numeracy' (DfEE, 1999) and 'Breaking the Language Barriers – the Report of the Working Group on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)' (DfES, 2000). These reports focus on the particular needs of learners for proficiency in literacy and numeracy and the strategies, which might be adopted to meet these needs. The curriculum which has been put in place will be evaluated over a period of three years and this review will form part of a wider assessment of standards and curricula in literacy and numeracy which will take place in 2003/2004. The Curriculum involves extensive reading and is an attempt to incorporate speaking, listening, reading and writing and also acknowledging the diverse background of ESOL-learners. Thus the Curriculum refers to the diverse backgrounds among ESOL-learners and suggests that the teaching of ESOL needs to take into consideration things such as culture shock, local community context and educational and employment aspirations. In developing the Essential Skills for Living Strategy, DEL has asked the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) to provide specific advice on the standards and curriculum currently under development for learners whose first language is not English. Research has also been commissioned to identify the key issues for individuals in Northern Ireland whose first language is not English in regard to levels of participation in ESOL classes.
- 7.8 The Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit (ABSSU) at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is funding a national training and

development project to support ESOL-practitioners in implementing the new national ESOL curriculum (DfES, 2001). This project aims, amongst other things, at establishing screening and assessment tools for the ESOL sector and a range of ESOL qualifications which take into account national basic skills standards and the ESOL curriculum. The project also involves investigation of the support systems and training available for ESOL tutors.¹²

¹² The project is supported by DfES together with the following associations/organisations; London Language and Literacy (LLLU) – a development centre and consultancy unit for staff working in the areas of literacy, numeracy and ESOL; the Basic Skills Agency – which is the national development agency for literacy and numeracy in England and Wales and which has also developed the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum which parallels the National Core Curriculum for literacy and numeracy; the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA); the national Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA), which offers support and training for teachers of ESOL; the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE).

8 Further Education Case Studies

- 8.1 The two colleges examined in the cases studies, Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (BIFHE) and North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education in Bangor, were selected since they both have a relatively large number of ESOL-students. In each case contact was made with the college and the teachers responsible for the language courses were interviewed. The week before the interviews with students were to take place, the researcher met the whole class to explain the study and how he hoped to carry out interviews the following week. Some of the interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter and some EFL students were able to provide written comments. In both BIFHE and North Down and Ards Institute, the co-operation and help provided by staff and students were crucial to the study and allowed us to gain a range of valuable insights into the complex problems they face. A total of 40 interviews were conducted with students and 5 with staff, on 8 occasions – 4 in BIFHE (including one at NICEM) and 4 in Bangor.

Forms of provision

- 8.2 At North Down and Ards Institute during the 2000-2001 academic year, two classes were provided, basic and post-basic ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages). In the Belfast Institute, there were 14 ESOL classes. These ranged from basic courses for people with little or no knowledge of English to advanced courses for students seeking to improve spoken and written fluency. In addition to courses taught in the college, BIFHE is also involved in the provision of courses linked to the needs of specific groups and operated in collaboration with community organisations. For example, they work with the CWA to provide 12 hours of classes per week based in the CWA premises at Eblana Street, with the Islamic Centre providing 4 hours of classes a week and with the Windsor Women's Centre, providing 2 hours per week. BIFHE also works with the government's New Deal initiative and the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) to provide a weekly ESOL-class at the NICEM office.

8.3 ESOL classes form the basis of language support in both the North Down Institute and BIFHE. Until September 2001, both Institutes located their ESOL work within their departments of Adult Basic Education (ABE). From September 2001, the Belfast Institute's ESOL work is organised through the Department of Modern Languages. Students who have progressed through ESOL courses and wish to proceed further usually enrol on EFL (English as a Foreign Language) courses, which can lead to a formal qualification – normally the Cambridge Examination Preparation Courses (UCLES), International English Language Testing System (IELTS Exams) and Pitman Qualifications.

Irregular attendance

8.4 Both staff and students indicated that maintaining regular attendance at classes created considerable difficulties. Various reasons were given for lack of continuity, such as work commitments, attempts to find a job, transport difficulties, family problems or visits to the 'home-land'

'class is good but time-table sometimes collide with work',

'transport could sometimes be a problem – don't drive',

'classes on Fridays collides with praying in the mosque'

'long distance to class',

8.5 Such lack of continuity poses great difficulties for teachers as they try to plan lessons and keep a class, with students spread across a wide range of levels of proficiency, together. As one teacher explained, *'It is difficult to know from week to week who will turn up'*.

8.6 Attempts are made by the institutes to facilitate student attendance, for example time-tabling classes to accommodate students working in the catering-industry.

Childcare facilities

8.7 Problems with childcare provision were often reported as restricting student's attendance. There have been cases where children have

'participated' in the class because their parents could not find any other facilities. Some students reported that they can only attend during the periods when their children are in school. Evening classes are, therefore, frequently out of the question, as are classes during school holidays. This can make the available times very restricted. For example, one student referred to problems attending classes in the afternoon as her children came home from school quite early. In some cases other family members can provide help, as in the case of the student who said that she could only attend classes because her mother in law was able to look after her baby. The classes based at the Windsor Women's Centre have been able to overcome this difficulty since the Centre is able to provide a crèche.

Initial assessment

8.8 Staff in the colleges reported that initial assessment of student's fluency in English is very important in deciding what level of support will be most beneficial. However, this can be very difficult, particularly where the students speak very little English and may be anxious and distressed, as with many refugees and asylum seekers. Assessment in general and the progression of students moving from one level of ESOL to another level or from ESOL to EFL courses can cause teachers and students concern. Some students see progression as automatic, whilst teachers stress the need for application and motivation.

Motivation

8.9 Participants' reasons for doing the courses also seem to vary considerably, as do their expectations about what they are likely to achieve over a given period of time. At the North Down and Ards Institute, for example, several teachers referred to '*almost unrealistic*' expectations among some of the students. They suggested that some students appeared to think that just attending classes for a certain number of hours a week would automatically lead to fluency, without the need for individual study or practice. It was felt that this was an area where cultural issues and attitudes may come into the picture as well as the individual level of determination/motivation.

- 8.10 The reasons students give for wishing to learn English, or improve their competence, ranged from needing 'survival English' to wanting to gain the level of proficiency which will enable them get a formal qualification, to move on to other areas of study or to apply to university. Some students are happy to stay on basic level courses year after year and not to move up to a higher level of ESOL courses or on to EFL.

'I like to study English with the same teacher'.

- 8.11 Others are very anxious to progress as rapidly as possible, often because they need language skills for a specific reason. For example, the case of the student who was doing an Open University Computing course and felt he needed better English if he was to do well on the course.

- 8.12 At both BIFHE and North-Down the students are asked, when enrolling, to specify their 'reasons' for doing the course they have chosen. Amongst the responses at BIFHE were:

'improve all aspects of English',

'improve reading and writing',

'husband speaks English',

'learn survival English',

'want to speak better',

'to speak and write and to listen to English',

'to learn English and to listen and talk English',

'improve writing and speaking so as to be able to speak to everyone',

'writing difficult',

'want the class to be every day and want to speak more so as to improve pronunciation',

'want to understand better',

'teacher is nice',

'enjoyed the class',

'everybody speaks English – no bad things',

'colloquial expressions'

- 8.13 The responses in North Down were very similar, with students stating that English was *'fundamental'*, for example when filling in applications for benefits or job applications. Some students were particularly anxious to obtain a formal certificate since they felt this would 'prove' to potential employers that they were competent in English. Individual responses to questions about reasons for enrolling included:

'to get to know local people better and to improve work quality',

'class is good, but would like better listening class',

'classes good, but not enough and I need to work at home',

'improve speaking English – no English at home',

'would like to attend higher level',

'I need to speak more English',

'classes OK – like to go to classes',

'to have a better job – computer language is English'.

Educational background, age and length of stay

- 8.14 The range here is enormous. Some of the students have obtained college-level education in their country of origin, some even university degrees. In these cases they are likely to have some knowledge of English. Others possess a basic level education with schooling for only a few years and no English. Other important variables are the age of the student and the length of time they have been resident in Northern Ireland. The interviews in both Bangor and Belfast underlined the diversity in most of the ESOL classrooms. The youngest students interviewed tended to be in their late teens or early twenties, the oldest in their early sixties. A majority of students were in the age range 20 and 30. Regarding length of stay, there was a variation from a few months (particularly in the clearing-class at BIFHE) to, in one case, 22 years. The largest number seemed to have a length of residence of 1-2 years. Regarding nationalities, the largest number of students was Chinese, either from Hong-Kong or China, but there were also students from countries such as Kazakstan and Sierra Leone.

Facilities, Staffing levels and the use of Volunteers

- 8.15 The provision of English Language courses has to compete with a wider range of other demands on the physical and human resources of FE colleges. This clearly creates strains of various kinds and means that the colleges are not able to meet all demands and students experience frustrations, for example:

*'I would like class to be every day',
'difficult when so many people share a class-room'
'too noisy and too many pupils and one teacher is not enough',
'would like to work one to one easier than with to many students',
'teacher is good, but too busy and would like more individual tutoring',*

- 8.16 In North Down and Ards almost all the ESOL classes take place in a special classroom, which also serves as a resource-room, where teachers can store materials, visual aids etc. In BIFHE it has not been possible to provide a fixed base where resources can be kept, although most of the actual classes make use of the same classroom in the building at College Square. The venue does seem to be important to at least some of the students. For example, some of the Chinese students who attend the classes based in the Chinese Chamber of Commerce's offices at Eblana Street and linked to the Chinese Welfare Association report that they prefer this location and feel that it is a less '*hostile*' environment than BIFHE.
- 8.17 Providing qualified and experienced teachers is another area which places a strain on resources. Many of the students need help and practice in oral English, and in order to try to provide more intensive support in this area, volunteer teachers are sometimes recruited. The experiences at North Down and Ards Institute suggest that volunteers find the work difficult and demanding. Lack of facilities and having a very wide range of levels of proficiency in a single class were amongst the problems most frequently cited. As a result, it is difficult both to recruit and retain volunteer teachers. Attempts have been made to interest retired people, especially retired teachers, but the numbers coming forward remains a problem.

Publicising the availability of classes

- 8.18 Reaching out to the members of the various minority ethnic communities and establishing contact with relevant representative bodies and agencies in order to ensure that people know what is available is an important concern. At present, this is mainly done along informal lines. For example, articles are written in the local paper in Bangor about courses available in North Down and posters and letters are sent to all schools in the area. Leaflets are also given to students finishing courses and letters are posted to 'old students', once in September and once in January. However, both in North Down and Belfast information passed through 'word of mouth' seems to be a major recruitment route. Students in Bangor referred to hearing about courses or having them recommended by '*my sister*', '*friend at work*', '*my husband who suggested the class*', '*a cousin*', '*my sister attended before and passed on information*', '*my younger sister been before*', '*I heard people talk about it*'. Printed material had reached some students, for example, there were reports of '*a leaflet in the shop where I work*', '*information in the newspaper*'. Many members of minority ethnic communities work in the catering industry and some restaurant-owners tell staff about courses and encourage them to attend. The colleges also establish links with community organisations to publicise courses and BIFHE co-operates with the New Deal and National Asylum Support Service (NASS) to make people aware of what is available and to encourage them to enrol.
- 8.19 Many students cannot hope to achieve fluency after attending a single course but the issues of continuity which affect week-to-week attendance also influence progress from year to year. The ESOL programme at North Down and Ards has a re-enrolment rate estimated at around 30 %.
- 8.20 Both teaching staff and minority ethnic group organisations suggested that some form of central structure, such as in an '*ESOL-network*', could play a valuable co-ordinating role. There had been a loose, informal co-ordinating structure some time ago but this seemed to have ceased to operate. In the case of BIFHE there are discussions with

community groups, such as CWA and the Islamic Women's Centre, to co-ordinate provision. North Down and Ards Institute has had some contact with the Chinese Women's group and the CWA, but most of this has been informal. In discussions with representatives from the CWA, the need to liaise with the colleges was seen as important. Contacts could be valuable over such questions as the preference '*for learning within the community*' and the suggestion that for some participants places like BIFHE can seem '*threatening*'. There was also the perception that learning a new language was easier in a context where all the learners have the same '*mother tongue*'. This is a suggestion that would clearly have implications for the number of classes which would have to be provided

- 8.21 The CWA felt that much had been learnt from experience gained during the language education project based within CWA, which ran between 1986-1999. This provided courses for some 40 students and was staffed by a team of 3 tutors with the support of an educational officer. Valuable characteristics of this project included the use of 'home-tutors' and 'out-centre' teaching, and the fact that the courses ranged from 'survival English' to more advanced levels. The CWA underlined the importance of an 'ESOL-forum' to allow such experience to be disseminated and also the value of developing policy in collaboration with the Department of Education and the colleges.

Other providers of courses for adults

- 8.22 In addition to programmes offered by or in co-operation with the FE Colleges, there are a number of other initiatives aimed at supporting the acquisition of language skills. For example the MCRC has been assisting in setting up an 'informal class' for women on Wednesdays at the North Belfast Open Learning Centre and some 10 women have been attending. The class mixes English language teaching and other practical skills in a workshop environment. There are also some opportunities for speakers of languages other than English to attend the University of Ulster and Queens University, both of which have courses geared to learning English as a second language.

8.23 Another project has been initiated as a result of co-operation between the Antrim Chinese Community and the Antrim Borough Council. This caters for a group of about 15 students across a wide age range. The group was divided into three separate subgroups (Basic, pre-intermediate and intermediate). The Islamic Centre in Belfast arranges courses for Islamic women and the Craigavon Chinese Community Association arranges English-classes.

Non-linguistic support through language classes

8.24 In addition to the formal language instruction, it is clear that there are important 'social aspects' involved in many courses. The ESOL-teacher may be the only 'native' English-speaking individual some students see on a regular personal basis and the teacher, therefore, is often called upon to act as a 'social interface'. The colleges have procedures to address the needs of minority ethnic groups in interfacing with official bodies and government agencies, providing information about who to pass students with particular problems on to, who to speak to about particular issues, etc. However, some beginners have very limited English and are insecure and anxious about trying to interact with 'officials' in formal contexts. The language teachers can become, on occasion, the only person to whom questions regarding a variety of matters can be confidently directed.

9 Policy Context and Regional Comparisons

Northern Ireland

- 9.1 The overall picture in relation to language provision for pupils from non English speaking backgrounds within the Northern Ireland education system is currently complex and it is clear that in many respects the system is in a state of transition. Many of the Education and Library Boards are in the process of establishing or refining their structures, and links between the Boards, the Department of Education and other relevant agencies are being developed. During 2002 the Equality Impact Assessment for EAL was initiated by the Department of Education.
- 9.2 The importance of having an effective and coherent system is becoming increasingly recognised as the new governmental structures in Northern Ireland attempt to implement the equality and human rights requirements of local and European legislation, and adapt to the needs of an increasingly multi-cultural society. A number of studies and reports have highlighted the key issues, such as a recent study by the Staff Commission for the Education and Library Boards – ‘Report of Screening of Policies’ (HMSO, 2002). This report examined the implementation of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the impact of government policies on ensuring equality for all sections of the population. Specifically, in relation to curriculum support for pupils from minority ethnic communities, the report recommends that *‘multi-cultural awareness and anti-racism training be a compulsory part of all teacher training courses’*. It also suggests that children from minority ethnic backgrounds may be disadvantaged by the unconscious ‘cultural bias’ in the curriculum, citing such apparently innocuous examples as a question which asked children to *‘name three items in an Ulster fry’*.
- 9.3 Regarding language provision for non-native speakers, the report refers to the need for improved translation services for both parents and teachers so as to *‘increase understanding of education and curriculum matters’*. As part of an analysis of needs for *‘Exceptional Provision’*, a

number of the issues which have figured prominently in this study are highlighted, such as the current disparity between the Education and Library Boards in the form and level of provision, and the difficulties some minority ethnic children face when sitting examinations without allowances of extra time and/or the provision of translation/ interpretation facilities. Amongst the recommendations are:

- Increased INSET training for teachers to include equality/human rights;
- Teacher training at universities in Northern Ireland to deal with issues such as religious education for pupils from other faiths, inter-cultural textbooks;
- 'English as an Additional Language' to be considered as part of the Equality Impact Assessment;
- The E&L Boards and the Staff Commission should join with the Department of Education in an Equality Impact Assessment of the policy 'English as an Additional Language' (ongoing); and
- Consideration should be given to specific issues such as discussions with the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum and Examinations about the allocation of extra reading time during GCSE examination.

England

- 9.4 Whilst it is important that policy developments are geared to the particular situation in Northern Ireland, evidence from other areas is also relevant and potentially valuable. In England, where the total number of pupils for whom English is an additional language is estimated at just over half a million pupils in maintained schools, about 7.5 % of the school population are regarded as needing EAL support (DfES 1997). According to statistics from 1999, there were 301,800 pupils in Primary education in England who need EAL support and 244,684 pupils in Secondary education. (DfEE 1999). Overall it has

been estimated that 12 % of pupils in state maintained schools in England are from minority ethnic backgrounds and some 555,000 pupils are registered as having a mother tongue other than English. In some parts of London the percentage of children requiring EAL support is 43 % and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) estimates that in the homes of London school-children, over 200 languages are spoken (info from DFES).

- 9.5 Whilst the form of the actual EAL provision is the responsibility of the Local Education Authorities in England (which number about 175) and some decisions are made at individual school level, general guidelines relating to equality issues and EAL are included in a number of government documents. For example the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and the publications from the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) refer to the need to provide 'equality of opportunity for all pupils'. Similarly the white paper 'Excellence in Schools' (DFEE, 1997) includes requirements aimed at raising achievement among minority ethnic pupils. These include detailed monitoring of their performance, whilst at the same time combating racial harassment and stereotyping. Another report 'Removing the Barriers - Raising the Achievement Level of Minority Ethnic Pupils, Key Points for Schools' (HMSO, 2000) focuses in particular on the achievement of pupils from minority ethnic communities and uses school based studies to provide examples of good practice and successful strategies. The report also referred to ethnic monitoring and the rise in the attainment levels for minority ethnic pupils – through, among other things – mentoring, an inclusive curriculum and parental involvement. There are also references to the importance of culture and ethos within the schools and structured learning and support mechanisms, which can be provided through measures such as home work clubs and structured learning.
- 9.6 The fact that problems remain was highlighted by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED, 1999) in a report in which it was stated that some schools were not as effective as they needed to be in reversing under-achievement among pupils from minority ethnic groups. The report referred to the existence of a considerable volume of written

policies and guidance materials regarding race relations and racial harassment, which highlight a variety of initiatives to improve provision and raise the attainment of all pupils. At the same time the report suggested that there were considerable variations in the level and effectiveness of implementation and monitoring. For example some schools had limited procedures for monitoring equal opportunities policies in general and ethnic equality in particular. The need for schools to maintain an '*open and vigilant ethos*' was stressed. In relation to EAL, references were made to the value of strong partnerships between EAL-staff and mainstream teachers.

- 9.7 In the 2001 report 'Managing Support for the Attainment of pupils from Minority Ethnic Groups October 2001' (OFSTED, 2001) the introduction of the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant was highlighted. This was introduced by the Department for Education and Skills in April 1999 and was targeted at improving the educational attainment of all minority ethnic groups, including pupils for whom English is not their first language. The report indicates that levels and forms of support have developed but the overall picture is, '*still too variable, but it is improving*' (p 3). To finance the grant programme for the academic year 2001/2002 some 154 million pounds were allocated to LEAs. The way in which money is allocated is decided by individual head teachers who can use it to, for example to fund additional teachers or employ bilingual support workers.
- 9.8 The QCA (2000) has produced an assessment guide for EAL. This links the standards reached by EAL pupils to the levels of achievement in the national curriculum in English. The Department of Education and Skills (DfES) sees the suggestions in this guide as a possible basis for 'national consistency' in monitoring EAL provision. The QCA report also refers to the need for pupil profiles, which will make it easier to assess progress and will provide a '*qualitative record*' of individual achievement and also assist in establishing more general '*targets for progress*'. Such measures would also enable a school to unify its support for EAL-pupils as the different teachers, not just EAL-staff, would be able to access and share important information.

9.9 OFSTED also has role in monitoring EAL provision in England. It has responsibility for carrying out inspections of the LEAs under Section 38 of the Education Act of 1997 and 'The Framework for the Inspection of Local Education Authorities' of July 1999. This enables OFSTED to monitor the effectiveness of the programmes which LEAs introduce to support school improvement in their areas. Amongst suggestions from OFSTED have been the need for EAL-teaching to be seen as a distinct specialism and a related need for a more recognised training programme for EAL-staff. However, with regard to the impact of OFSTED inspections, Osler and Morrison (2000) suggest that specialised areas such as EAL are sometimes completely overlooked whilst in other cases EAL has been included in sections of reports dealing with provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Concerns over such problems and evidence that the 'Framework for Inspection' (OFSTED, 1999) did not deal with systematic monitoring of pupil achievement by ethnicity has led DfES to launch a consultation document aimed at improving techniques for monitoring of the achievement of minority ethnic pupils.

Scotland

9.10 Whilst evidence from England is valuable, examination of the situation in relation to EAL needs and provision in Scotland may be particularly useful since there are considerable similarities between Scotland and Northern Ireland in this area. The largest numbers of minority ethnic pupils are to be found in the 'Central Belt', especially in the Glasgow conurbation and, to a lesser extent, the Edinburgh area. Throughout the rest of Scotland the various groups are scattered and numbers in a particular area are often very small. Overall figures for the different regions, equivalent to those for the Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland, are, however, not available. The statistics, which have been collected for the Scottish Executive by the Education Department, are limited and confidential.

9.11 Scottish legislation places responsibilities on education authorities to make provision for minority ethnic groups. For example, the 'Standards in Scotland's Schools Act (2000)', under the section dealing with

national priorities, states that one of the priorities is, *'to promote and help every pupil benefit from education, with particular regard paid to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, and to Gaelic and other lesser used languages'*. The Act also puts a duty on LEA's to promote equal opportunities. The Scottish Executive also adopted the Race Relations (Amendment) Act in 2000 (RRAA) in which the importance of proactive work combating racism and inequality is underlined. In addition meeting the requirements of the RRAA is likely to make the collection of data on the achievement of pupils from minority groups a priority. The Pupil Support and Inclusion Division of the Scottish Executive also allocated £300,000 to Local Education Authorities to support this.

- 9.12 School inspections in Scotland are carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and include assessment of EAL provision. Related work is supported by the Scottish Executive Education Department, which recently commissioned research into minority ethnic pupil's experiences in schools in Scotland. Important work is also carried out by the Race Equality Advisory Forum (REAF), which was established in 1999 to provide the Scottish Executive with advice and information on a broad range of race equality issues.
- 9.13 The actual responsibility for providing EAL support devolves onto the 32 local education authorities although they receive designated funds from the Scottish Executive. Representatives from the 32 local EAL units meet about 5 times a year for a 'forum' where ideas can be exchanged and new developments or requirements can be discussed or explained.
- 9.14 The largest concentration of minority ethnic pupils is in the Glasgow area. The Glasgow education authority estimates that there are 6000 primary level pupils from backgrounds where English is not the first language in its schools. Indeed a small number of schools have almost 100% bilingual pupils. The support system is divided into three sections designed to support pupils in nursery, primary and secondary level education respectively. This age specific approach seems to be common several aspects of educational provision in Scotland as a

whole. Overall the Glasgow education authority employs 80 EAL-teachers, of whom about 8 are themselves bi-lingual. This means that the student teacher ratio for language support is something around 1 to 75. There are also 3 bilingual SEN-teachers who provide support for pupils with special needs from Urdu, Cantonese and Hindi backgrounds. Relevant INSET training, relating to the needs of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, for 'mainstream' teachers takes places each year and it is felt that this has now become an established part of in service provision for all teachers (interview with EAL staff Dowanhill Primary School, Glasgow, 2002-03-13).

- 9.15 It is also worth noting that there is also considerable 'informal' provision for 'first language' education in Scotland. There are some 12 Chinese 'weekend schools' operating in Scotland and informal 'schools' teaching Urdu and Arabic. In addition Arabic classes are provided in a number of Mosques. Some education authorities in the West of Scotland teach Urdu in mainstream schools (Education and training in Scotland, National Dossier 2001).

Wales

- 9.16 There are considerable similarities between the way in which the Welsh Education Department operates, in relation to EAL provision, and its Scottish counterpart. Several documents have been produced by the Welsh Assembly to guide EAL work, for example 'Equal Opportunities and Diversity in the School Curriculum in Wales' (Qualification, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales 2001). However, each of the 22 Welsh counties operates as a local education authority and they have the primary responsibility for policy development and implementation.
- 9.17 The distribution of pupils from minority ethnic groups is again highly uneven, with about 6,000 pupils in the Cardiff area and 1,500 around Swansea, but very small numbers in the rural areas of north and mid Wales. The number of refugees and asylum seekers in Wales has increased markedly in recent years. An interesting approach has been adopted in Swansea, where in-service training for schools with EAL

pupils involves not just the teachers who work directly with these pupils but the whole staff. The aim is to increase the awareness of the needs of EAL pupils amongst teaching staff in general (information provided by the Ethnic Minority language and Achievement Service, Swansea, 2002-03-11).

- 9.18 In Wales, as in most parts of Scotland and England, most of the language support teaching takes place in the classroom rather than through a 'withdrawal' approach. Most commonly a classroom based assistant works with the child and there is a collaborative approach between the class teacher and the EAL teacher to devise the best programme for each child. Where numbers justify, EAL specialists are based in a single school and this is seen as the preferred approach.
- 9.19 The cost of EAL services is paid through the LEAs who receive grants from the Welsh assembly. This contrasts with England where money is allocated directly to schools.

10 Conclusions

- 10.1 This study has highlighted the complexity of many of the issues surrounding the provision of support for pupils and students whose first language is not English within the Northern Ireland education system. It is clear that some of these will require considerable discussion before clear decisions about suitable structures can be taken. At this point rather than making definite recommendations it seems more appropriate to identify key issues and make tentative suggestions about possible strategies.
- 10.2 The number both of pupils and of 'first' languages varies markedly across Northern Ireland. As a consequence it is not surprising that the approaches taken and structures developed by the Boards vary considerably. At the same time, some of the materials and strategies developed by the SEELB might be adopted or used in a modified form in other areas.
- 10.3 Whilst more co-ordination between Boards and individual schools would be valuable, it will remain important to encourage flexibility given the dispersed population and generally small numbers of EAL pupils. General guidelines from the Department of Education and further development of the inter-board group meetings can provide a basis for sharing good practice. Establishing closer links with those working in related fields in England, Wales, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland could also allow a wider range of strategies to be accessed. Events such as conferences focusing on provision for minority ethnic pupils provide a good basis for initiating such links.
- 10.4 Many teachers feel that they have limited expertise and experience of working with EAL pupils, however they feel that this is likely to become an increasingly common need. To assist them in meeting this, a two-pronged strategy may be valuable. This could involve both dissemination of information about the EAL units in the Boards and the services they can provide and also the provision of training for class teachers both in initial training programmes and through in-service courses.

- 10.5 The classroom teacher plays a crucial role in making the initial identification of a pupil's needs and in providing on-going support and monitoring. Teachers need easy access to clear information about how to get outside help, sufficient training to be able to handle day-to-day classroom situations and on-going involvement in decisions about the type and extent of specialist support individual pupils need. In schools where a number of EAL pupils are enrolled on a regular basis, it may be sensible to have a staff member with additional training who is able to liaise with the Board EAL unit and also provide some of the necessary specialist support.
- 10.6 The issue of the balance between provision of support within the classroom and withdrawal for individual or small groups teaching is complex and needs further analysis. In many areas of England, Scotland and Wales, classroom based support is the most usual model and it may be valuable to investigate the perceived benefits of this approach further.
- 10.7 Communication and interaction between teachers and parents is very important. Both groups would value more contact and information. In some cases there are real problems in transmitting information and a wider range of documents in translation would be useful. For personal contacts, interpretation services are sometimes necessary and clear guidelines and structures through which these can be provided would be very useful.
- 10.8 The provision of English courses for post school age students is also currently very variable. Given the range of geographical areas people are coming from and the differences in the levels of familiarity with English which they display, initial assessment of individual needs is very important. Many colleges currently find it difficult to provide the resources to carry out such assessments and subsequently to match provision to need.
- 10.9 Again links between colleges and co-operation in sharing good practice or providing different courses in different locations so that numbers can be concentrated might be valuable strategies.

- 10.10 At present the formal mechanisms through which adults become aware of courses do not seem to function very effectively. Many students 'hear from friends' and wider dissemination of information and the involvement of minority ethnic community organisations might make it easier to reach target groups.
- 10.11 In order to inform decision-making, the availability of reliable and up-to-date statistics is vital. Whilst the Department of Education collects information via the annual school census it would be valuable if more detailed information could be collected to assist in planning and encouraging co-operation and sharing of resources and expertise.

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A. Outline for semi-structured interviews with Parents

Parents questionnaire

1. What are your general feelings about the N-I educational system?
What are your expectations?
What do you want for your children?
2. What factors helped you to decide which school to send your children to?
Are you satisfied with the choice?
3. Is it easy to communication with the school?
Have you had any particular difficulties?
Have you received any help with translation or interpretation?
4. How have your children experienced any difficulties in school?
Have they had any academically difficulties?
Have they had any social difficulties?
If there have been any difficulties how have these been dealt?
Do you think they have been dealt with in a positive way by the school?
5. What language is used at most frequently home?
Do you find that bi-lingualism is supported in the school?
6. Do you have any comments on the after-school club?
What are the main benefits of the after-school club?

B. Outline for semi-structured interviews with Class Teachers' and Principals'

Primary Education

a. Principals questionnaire:

1. How many pupils are there in the school?
2. How many minority ethnic pupils are there in the school?
How many pupils receive EAL support?
3. For how many years have you worked in the teaching profession?
4. Did you receive any training on issues relating to EAL/Minority ethnic pupils during your initial teacher training?
Have you received any subsequent training/information?
5. Could you comment on the current support system operating in your area for EAL-pupils?
Is it effective?
Are there any problems e.g. with resources?
6. Are there any problems in interacting with parents of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds?
Are translation and or interpretation facilities available?
Have there been any problems regarding these matters, such as difficulty finding an interpreter?
Can you get appropriate support if problems arise?
Does your Board have policies and support material?
7. Does the transfer procedure present problems for pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds?
8. Is there a clear policy, in the school/in the Board relating to the needs of minority ethnic pupils and the provision of EAL?
9. Any there any other comments, criticisms or experiences you would like to add?

b. Primary Class Teachers questionnaire:

1. For how many years have you worked in the teaching profession?
2. What age range do you teach?
3. Did you receive any training on issues relating to EAL/Minority ethnic pupils during your initial teacher training?
Have you received any subsequent training/information?
4. What are the main problems you have come across, relating to EAL and the wider needs of minority ethnic pupils?
How do you identify and assess their needs?
Is there a clear procedure?
Do you receive support in assessing needs and monitoring progress?
5. Have there been instances where language difficulties have been particularly significant?
6. What are the procedures in operation in the school relating to support for EAL-pupils?
Are you aware of the EAL-support structure within the board?
How do you perceive the quality of the support the children are given?
Do you prefer 'withdrawal' or 'class-room based' support?
7. Any other comments, criticisms or experiences you would like to add?

Secondary Education

a. Principals questionnaire:

1. How many pupils are there in the school?
2. How many minority ethnic pupils are there in the school?
How many pupils receive EAL support?
3. For how many years have you worked in the teaching profession?
7. Did you receive any training on issues relating to EAL/Minority ethnic pupils during your initial teacher training?
Have you received any subsequent training/information?
8. Could you comment on the current support system operating in your area for EAL-pupils?
Is it effective?
Are there any problems e.g. with resources?
9. Are there any problems in interacting with parents of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds?
Are translation and or interpretation facilities available?
Have there been any problems regarding these matters, such as difficulty finding an interpreter?
Can you get appropriate support if problems arise?
Does your Board have policies and support material?
7. Is there a clear policy, in the school/in the Board relating to the needs of minority ethnic pupils and the provision of EAL?
8. Has there been any demand for provision of examinations in 'first languages'?
9. Any there any other comments, criticisms or experiences you would like to add?

b. Post-primary Class Teachers questionnaire:

1. What subject area or areas do you teach?
2. What age range do you teach?
3. For how many years have you worked in the teaching profession?
4. Did you receive any training on issues relating to EAL/Minority ethnic pupils during your initial teacher training?
Have you received any subsequent training/information?
5. What are the main problems you have come across, relating to EAL and the wider needs of minority ethnic pupils?
How do you identify and assess their needs?
Is there a clear procedure?
Do you receive support in assessing needs and monitoring progress?
6. Have there been instances where language difficulties have been particularly significant?
7. What are the procedures in operation in the school relating to support for EAL-pupils?
Are you aware of the EAL-support structure within the board?
How do you perceive the quality of the support the children are given?
Do you prefer 'withdrawal' or 'class-room based' support?
8. Any other comments, criticisms or experiences you would like to add?

C. Outline for semi-structured interviews with ESOL/EFL students

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Nationality
4. Length of residence in Northern Ireland?
5. Place of birth?
6. Level and type of education to date:
Qualifications?
7. How did you find out about this course?
8. Why do you do attend this English language course?
9. If you already have a reasonable/good level of English why are you seeking to develop your language skills?
10. Do you hope to attend a higher-level of English language training after finishing this course?
11. Do you hope to attend any other classes/courses where English is the language of instruction e.g. at the Institute/at a University?
12. How helpful do you find the English classes?
Have they met your expectations?
Have you had any problems with content/level/teaching style?
13. Have you had any problems attending the classes? E.g. Transport problems, fitting in with work, child minding?

Contact letter to inform Teachers and organisations about the project

Coleraine 2001-05-23

To whom it may concern,

Re project - Ethnic Minority Groups in the Northern Ireland Education System

We would like to inform you about the above project, based in the School of History, Philosophy and Politics at the University of Ulster, which is funded by the Equality Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Professor Valerie Morgan and Professor Seamus Dunn direct the project.

Although there have been many studies of aspects of the Northern Ireland education system and its impact on young people there has to date been limited work on the experiences of young people from minority communities. This lack of detailed information makes it more difficult for policy makers and service providers to design strategies and structures, which will meet the needs and concerns of ethnic groups.

This project is seeking to begin to fill the gaps in our knowledge by carrying out a study of the experiences of members of the ethnic communities in Northern Ireland in relation to education. This will involve the project Research Officer, Mr. Ulf Hansson, contacting members of the ethnic communities, community groups, education authorities, colleges of further education and schools to discuss what they see as the main issues affecting the education of children and young people from different ethnic backgrounds. As part of this process

we would like to arrange to discussions with relevant members in the community to access their experiences and insights. We are particularly interested in any projects or examples of good practice, which may help to inform future developments.

If you would like any further details about the project or have any information, which you think would be valuable, please contact the Research Officer.

Yours sincerely,

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Details of meetings and interviews

Meeting	Date
Craigavon After School Club	March 2002
After School Club Belfast	2002-02-21
CWA Community project, Clooney Hall, Waterside Londonderry	2002-02-25
Belfast Islamic Centre	2001-12-02
Indian Community Centre	2002-03-06 and telephone interviews with parents in Londonderry and Coleraine
SEELB, Dundonald	2002-03-12

In total, some 30-40 parents were interviewed from across Northern Ireland, as well as community representatives, some of the parents themselves.

Interviews/meetings with representatives/members from:

- Multicultural Resource Centre, Belfast;
- Chinese Welfare Association, Belfast;
- Islamic Centre, Belfast;
- Indian Community Centre, Belfast;
- Department of Education;
- Department for Education and Learning (DEL);
- North West Ethnic Communities Association, Londonderry/Derry;
- Antrim Chinese Community;
- Craigavon Chinese Community Association;
- Playboard, Belfast;
- Staff at After Schools Clubs in Craigavon and Belfast;
- EAL-units at the ELB's;
- Staff at BIFHE, Down and Ards Institute and East Antrim Institute; and
- Sai Pak Chinese Community Association.

Teachers - Primary:

At primary school interview with 23 teachers, 8 principals and 1 EAL-teacher took place. This is broken down into classes as follows:

Primary 1	1
Primary 2	4
Primary 3	4
Primary 4	1
Primary 5	3
Primary 6	5
Primary 7	3

Teachers - Post-primary:

Interviews with 21 teachers and 6 principals/vice-principals were held. Subjects taught were as follows (1 vice principal also taught):

Languages (French/Spanish)	3
Geography	1
History	2
Chemistry/Science/Biology/Maths	7
English	6
Art/Design	3

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