

*The Council for Catholic Maintained
Schools*



**Response to the Northern Ireland Statistics and
Research Agency's Consultation Document on the**

**NORTHERN IRELAND MULTIPLE
DEPRIVATION MEASURE 2004**

(July 2004)

October 2004

1 Background

1.1 The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) were invited to a consultation meeting held by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to discuss providing new measures of Deprivation for Northern Ireland and to update the existing Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2001. In total 3 members of CCMS attended the meeting and found it very well organised, presented and of great value. This written response is in addition to the contribution made to the consultation meetings.

2 Introduction

2.1 In responding to the NI deprivation consultation document, the CCMS broadly accepts the views of the Social Disadvantage Research Centre (Oxford), and would like to make a number of comments, which will be restricted to the issues of geography, education, weighting and other general points.

3 Super Output Areas (SOA's)

3.1 The council feels that the inclusion of these new super output areas (SOA's) are a step in the right direction and should be used for this and subsequent years. They are the most realistic and user-friendly figure and when we consider that comparison with the rest of the UK and Ireland is essential to the effectiveness of the deprivation measure are they are the best unit to use. Since these output areas are confined within the ward sectors, they enable comparisons with past census data and so historical analysis can take place. The output areas are considered by the council to be small enough to identify smaller areas of deprivation which may have been otherwise lost due to the size of wards.

- 3.2 Council would however ask to what extent will these SOA's match or be mapped against other area definitions e.g. local government or ELB's. The council supports the view that there should be a preference to those measures of SOA's and OA's which link into administrative geographies.

4 Education – Free School Meals

- 4.1 The council feel that free school meals is of particular importance especially in education as it is used as an indicator of deprivation throughout the sector. While council accepts that this indicator is already captured within the income domain as the eligibility criteria includes those in receipt of Income Support or Income Based Job Seekers allowance, it takes the view that for the education domain to be free-standing and facilitate other education analysis and research, FSM should be included. FSM data is easily accessed and up to date and so measurability would be very easily achieved. Research has shown that a child in a school with a low level of FSM has a more positive outlook on life than a child in a school with a high percentage of FSM. By emphasizing outputs in terms of attainment the education domain is ignoring many other social factors that influence these outcomes.

5 Education – Primary

- 5.1 Overall the council feels that the domain is unbalanced as it does not include figures from the primary sector. The domain is supposed to capture the extent of education deprivation in an area it seems unrealistic to ignore primary schools altogether and the council feel this should be explored to include data on primary school performance. Both the English and Welsh measures of deprivation include “Key stage 2 primary school performance data” so why can't NI use the same measure? The consultation document states that they are not used because they are based on teacher assessments and basically that they are unreliable, however it could be argued that teacher assessments are often more reliable than external test results. The council does not accept this as a valid argument to exclude primary

data as the measure is supposed to include all education and by leaving out those pupils aged up to 11 there is clearly an unbalanced view.

6 Education - Absenteeism

- 6.1 There is concern over the fact that only absenteeism at a secondary level was captured and that all absences, including authorized absentees, were being included. Absenteeism at primary level is used as an indicator in the English measure of deprivation and so should be included in the NI measure. We propose that the committee considers including primary school absenteeism as a factor as otherwise the measure is biased to the post primary fields. However council does accept that absenteeism in primary schools is higher than in secondary schools (due to higher incidences of childhood illness, for example) and proposes that a threshold of say 5% (10 days per year) is used.
- 6.2 Council would suggest that absenteeism be categorised by type (for example authorised and unauthorised) and year group. There may be fewer pupils absent in year 8, for example, than in year 12, as older pupils are more likely to play truant.
- 6.3 Within absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions should be taken into account on the grounds that they are an indicator of social deprivation. This data should be easy to access as ELB's should have data on this.

7 Education – Special Needs

- 7.1 The council accepts that the number of those pupils with special educational needs is very small but it is felt that there should still be a measure taken as it is associated with social deprivation. Poorer households are more likely to have problems with special needs compared to more affluent households who can provide alternative education for those who have severe special needs. The special needs spectrum ranges from level 1 – 5 with pupils in level 1 needing no external

help to level 5 which means that the pupil is severely affected. All schools have information on the special needs of their pupils so would be easily measured and council feels that it is a significant indicator and should be included.

8 Education – General

- 8.1 The council have queried why the indicator proportion of years 11 and 12 pupils not in a grammar school, in particular why only grammar schools have been used and why secondary or integrated schools are not included. There needs to be more clarification on this indicator.
- 8.2 As part of the Costello working group's proposal regarding Post Primary arrangements an increase in the number of vocational subjects was recommended and these should be reflected in the indicators. Also, as the domain is meant to include education, skills and training there seems to be a concentration on education factors; perhaps this is because it is the easiest to measure and the data are readily available. However, to be more indicative of the population it should be expanded to include other routes to employment such as training programmes and vocational routes. Consideration should be given in the future to numbers of pupils who have taken up Jobskills, New Deal or apprenticeships.
- 8.3 The council is concerned that there seems to be an age gap between 18 – 25. There is a statement that says that the population is set to 25 years as a minimum to avoid student concentrations. This definition of working age adult needs more explanation, as it leaves out a significant amount of the population who are in work or out of work but not claiming benefits.
- 8.4 The council also has the view that a number of pupils simply fall through the “net” of education and there is no measure for these pupils. Perhaps if we look at the

number of pupils who are in alternative education such as Open Doors, Colin Glen or Pathways.

9 Other Domains – General

- 9.1 There are some indicators that have been left out of the measures and council feels that the level of people in debt within an area is a good indicator of deprivation and should be included.
- 9.2 To have a clear picture of deprivation the council feel that the whole situation/person should be considered. Especially within the education domain, so many other factors affect a person's attainment in education such as their health and environment that by looking at all their circumstances would give a much more accurate idea of the level of deprivation
- 9.3 Council is concerned that the crime domain, as it only includes figures from the PSNI, neglects those crimes that may be reported through alternative routes such as the local assembly member. There should be some investigation into other indicators as people in deprived areas may be unwilling to report crime to the PSNI.

10 Weightings

- 10.1 The council would lean more towards recommending the weightings given in Weights A than B. The principle concern with Weighting B is that the data on indicators included in the proposed Crime domain are not yet robust enough to allow this domain the same weighting as Education and Health. A similar concern would be expressed in relation to the indicators included for the Living Environment.