

## Editorial

One of the criticisms of the Special Education Review Committee was in relation to the non-involvement of persons with disabilities either in the Committee's deliberations or in the development of its Report.

The direct participation of individuals whose lives are intimately bound up with the issues under review, it has been argued, might have transformed the Report from one in which categories of disability were applied to determine proposed degrees of provision and resources, to one which might have asserted and reflected the dignity and rights of individuals with disabilities in the context of an appropriate education for all Irish people as we approach the 21st century.

The establishment by Mervyn Taylor, Minister for Equality and Law Reform, in December 1993 of the Commission for the Status of People with Disabilities, chaired by Mr. Justice Feergus Flood, has effectively provided a "second chance" opportunity to have some of these imbalances corrected and redressed. The scope of the Commission is much wider than the education brief of the SERC Report. Significantly, it is also a Commission in which the ownership of its work by disabled people themselves is unambiguously invited. The work of the Commission involves advising the Government on ways that people with disabilities can access their right to an education, to training, to work, and to a social, political and recreational life. The consultation process has already involved a series of public meetings throughout the country whereby people with disabilities themselves can directly address the Commission about their concerns. Out of this process, clear recommendations as to how rights can become a reality through legislation, policy, practice and structures will be formulated and costed. The Commission intends to present its report to the Government by the end of 1995.

Less publicised in education circles is the fact that a Working Group on Education, one of the sub-groups of the Commission, chaired by Dr. Sheelagh Drudy, is in the process of completing its report in January 1995. The Commission's Education Working Group was composed of people who, as teachers, parents, service providers, and those with a personal experience of disability, are directly involved with special needs education in Ireland. Progress reports of the Working Group's deliberations were made available to the Minister for Education prior to the final drafting of the Education White Paper.

One of the most heartening developments in the current focus on Irish education is the perspective that people with disabilities have brought to the debate. Educationalists from all sectors are becoming increasingly convinced by the argument that only a complete reform of our whole system will be sufficient to enable people with disabilities to possess their rights and to participate fully as citizens as they are entitled to... even if it takes another hundred years.

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Editor