

**RPA Stakeholders' Group
1st Meeting
Lagan Valley Island Centre, Lisburn
17th May 2006**

Attendees:

Will Haire (DE)
 Eddie Rooney (DE)
 Chris Stewart (DE)
 Liam Barr (DE)
 Joan Cassells (DE)
 Karen McClay (DE)
 Irene Knox (SEELB)
 Helen McClenaghan (SELB)
 Barry Mulholland (WELB)
 David Cargo (BELB)
 Gordon Topping (NEELB)
 Lorna McAlpine (NICIE)
 Gavin Boyd (CCEA)
 Donal Flanagan (CCMS)
 Revd Robert Herron (TRC)
 Judith Shaw (ANIC)
 Pamela Montgomery (IEF)
 David Guilfoyle (YCNI)
 Frank Bunting (NITC)
 Sean O Coinn (CnaG)
 Liam McEntegart (Catholic Trustees)
 Finbar McCallion (GBA)
 Tom Hesketh (RTU)
 Denis Palmer (Youth Net)

No.	Description	Action
1.	Welcome and Introductions	
a.	W Haire welcomed members to the first meeting and invited everyone to introduce themselves.	
b.	W Haire outlined that a DE Programme Management Board was in place and projects had been established to take forward work on key policy areas.	
c.	W Haire outlined that the Communications Steering Group had been set up and the first meeting had taken place. The terms of reference and modus operandi for the Group had been agreed and the Group was in the process of identifying the needs of stakeholders and developing a Communication Strategy. As part of the strategy, the first edition of an RPA Newsletter had issued and had been	

	well received.	
d.	Work on the DE Internal Review has been completed and the findings are now with the Minister for decision.	
e.	The RPA Division within DE is establishing links with DEL in relation to 14-19 agenda, DCAL in relation to the free-standing library authority and DOE in relation to community planning. It is the intention to maintain close links with these departments and to inform the Group of progress in relation to these work areas.	
2.	Terms of Reference	
a.	It was agreed that the first bullet point should be amended to read <i>'new arrangements for education and youth services and the implications for the different sectors'</i> .	
b.	In relation to the last bullet point, it was agreed that, whilst it would be useful for members of the Group to put forward issues for discussion, the Secretariat would consider the agenda and make the decision on which issues should be tabled for discussion.	
3.	Modus Operandi	
a.	In relation to confidentiality, it was acknowledged that members may wish to discuss issues outside of the meetings. However, as much of the papers are work in progress it would be preferable for most of the issues to be contained within the Group meetings.	
b.	It was agreed that documents should be distributed only at a high level but that the Group could identify relevant people who should have sight of specific papers.	
c.	It was agreed that the minutes of each meeting would record high level discussion points, rather than allocate comments to individuals.	
4.	Developing the RPA Vision	
a.	Chris Stewart gave a brief presentation highlighting the main issues raised in the discussion paper. It was stressed that the paper represented very early thinking on this issue and its purpose was to facilitate discussion.	
b.	Members agreed that the paper provided a useful starting point for discussion.	
c.	Several members commented on the need for DE to set out its overall Vision to clarify what we are trying to achieve, what we want from our education system and what we are going to do for schools and children. This should also incorporate fundamental principles regarding youth provision and the interface with the youth sector. It was agreed that these points would be considered for future papers.	PMO
d.	Concern was expressed that the ESA could grow into a	

	huge organisation and could be difficult to control but it was recognised that DE could manage this partly through effective corporate governance and accountability arrangements.	
e.	There was discussion about whether the aim is to create a decentralised system with schools and colleges having as much autonomy as possible. Under this system, it is envisaged that there will be scope for all schools to get to the band of maximum autonomy if they can and wish to. However, some schools are so small that they will never be able to reach the band of maximum autonomy. It was agreed that it is logical for certain services to sit at the centre due to economies of scale and it was queried whether we need to define what these services should be.	
f.	There was also discussion about the need to provide for schools to exercise autonomy in groups or clusters, particularly in the case of smaller schools in rural areas.	
g.	Discussion on the different bands included comments that there should be more bands to provide more opportunities for the more ambitious schools. It was also queried what the criteria would be for placement in the different bands and whether it would be based on enrolment.	
h.	There were some concerns raised about what can practically be achieved by April 2008. It is unlikely that all issues will be bottomed out – it may only be possible to provide a ‘light touch’ with a view to longer term empowerment. However there may be a contradiction between having a light touch whilst at the same time having an effective challenge function.	
i.	The issue of ethos was raised and it was felt that there is a need to flesh out where the responsibility for maintaining ethos rests. There is also a need to find ways of supporting Boards of Governors and ensuring that the administrative burden is not too great. Schools are centres of learning/teaching and therefore the bureaucratic burden should be reduced.	
5.	Way Forward	
a.	Members were advised that if they had any additional points which they wished to put in writing, to forward them to the Secretariat within the next week.	
6.	Date of next meeting	
a.	The next meeting has been provisionally arranged for 26 th June (pm). The Secretariat will confirm date and venue shortly.	
	Meeting concluded at 16.15	