

Strategic Advisory Group

Minutes of 11th Meeting of Strategic Advisory Group

Comfort Hotel – 2 March 2006

Present:

Chairperson

Members

Secretariat

Apologies

Chairman's Introduction

1. The Chairman welcomed members to the 11th meeting of the Group, particularly , who was representing TRC at SAG for the first time.

Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

2. The minutes of the 10th meeting were agreed as an accurate representation of proceedings. explained that the 2nd set of guidance on the Entitlement Framework had not yet issued, as the Department was seeking to build in some feedback from the January 31 conference. The guidance will issue as soon as possible.

Draft Education Order

3. outlined the process whereby the legislation will be enacted and gave a brief overview of the structure of the Order. SAG members were asked to advise whether the legislation will do what is intended and/or whether there might potentially be any unintended consequences.

Members detailed comments are attached at Annex A.

DE personnel provided clarification on a number of issues raised by members:

- The areas of learning under the revised curriculum cannot be disapplied, but there will be flexibility within them as to what schools can teach.
- CCEA are conscious of the need to maintain the currency of NI qualifications, while wishing to remain distinct. Under the new arrangements, schools will have greater scope to source courses from providers other than CCEA.
- The illustrative list of vocational qualifications provided in the first set of guidance on the Entitlement Framework will be substantially expanded upon in the next set of guidance.
- It is intended that the position of Irish as a teaching medium and as a taught subject remains unchanged by the proposed legislation, however members concerns will be noted as part of the consultation.

Members concerns regarding Circular 2005/08 were also logged.

Resources

4. gave members an overview of the context of the e2s implementation budget. Early indications are that the next Spending Review will be tight and that the NI case for special treatment will not have as sympathetic a hearing at the Treasury as in the past. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to assume that Education will remain a priority area, with a strong draw on the available resources.

explained to members that the figures and pie-chart in Paper 11.3 relate to the out-running of the £24.7m provided for the implementation of the new arrangements in the last Spending Review, covering the period up to and including the 2007/08 year. also outlined what was covered by the “Delivering the Entitlement Framework” budget, including VEP, the developing of vocational qualifications and resources to the managing authorities.

clarified that the resources which are available for the implementation of the revised curriculum have not been included in the Paper 11.3 figures.

Clarification was also provided by DE on the following:

- The money being made available for implementation of the new arrangements is additional and has not been gained at the expense of another area, within education or otherwise.
- There is money within CCEA’s overall budget for the development of vocational qualifications, additional to the funding outlined in Paper 11.3.
- The money currently allocated to the Pupil Profile is primarily for development purposes.

No further information could be given to members with regard to the scope or timescale of the education review recently announced by the Secretary of State.

Details of members comments on the current allocations and on priority areas for the next round of Spending Review bids are attached at Annex B.

Future Business

5. The possible future issues in Paper 11.4 were noted. See Annex C for details

Schedule of Future Meetings

6. Members were advised that a series of meetings for the rest of the year would be organised in the near future.

Chairperson _____ Date _____

Discussion

- Clarity is required throughout the Order on who is responsible for what.
- GB legislation is moving in the direction of greater power devolved to schools; if we are moving away from this, then a local Assembly should make this decision.
- Some aspects of the Order will be over-ridden by RPA.
- Where does the definition of IM schools come from? DE should be open to redefining this.

1. Structure of Part II of the Order (The Curriculum) - Articles 3-26

2. Revised curriculum and assessment (Articles 5-11, Schedule 1)

Article 12 (8)

- Should include “and any other relevant body” to facilitate input from CnaG for example.

Article 23

- Should acknowledge the new arrangements on school development planning and CASS involvement.

3. Entitlement Framework (Articles 18-22, 25)

Article 18 (d)

- Should be amended in relation to IM schools.

Article 19

- Does there need to be one-third of applied courses? Creates too sharp a division.

Article 20

- Unclear what applied and general mean; the list DE provided in last year’s June circular was narrower than that available in GB.
- Are we separating NI GCSE/ A Levels from GB? If so, this will effect the international recognition of NI qualifications.

Article 21 and 24

- Requirements of Article 21 are appropriate, but not at KS3.
- Putting all collaborative arrangements in writing could be stifling; this could de-motivate schools
- There are large amounts of money involved; if these are written agreements, who will police them?
- If child is denied access to full EF, or a chosen course is withdrawn, what measures can be taken?
- Curricular provision is already in writing in a school's prospectus.
- Collaboration doesn't work when schools are forced in to it.
- The outcome, not the process needs to be recorded.
- Needs clarity of language to avoid confusion over responsibilities.
- Underlying the Costello proposals was the need for information to be available to aid pupil and parental choice at 11; this should be built into the legislation (and provide for more detail at age 14) to make sure that schools make these arrangements.
- There needs to be a guarantee that arrangements that are in place when a child makes a choice at 11/14 will be in place over the course of the rest of their education.
- It is logical to require schools to set out their collaborative arrangements with other schools in their statement of curricular policy.
- A guarantee like that above presupposes the sustainability of the schools involved – there are significant decisions to be made before this is possible.
- Writing this guarantee into legislation runs the risk of being unable to respond to changing circumstances and needs.

Article 24(5) (c)

- A Post-primary school could see information before pupil is accepted at 11 (contradicting Article 29?); info should only be seen after acceptance reword "to which a child has been accepted"

- The Minister has stressed that there will be no matching of pupils to schools at 11, but not explicitly at other ages.
- Comprehensives in GB get similar info if a child applies to change school.
- If a child is unhappy with Post-Primary school choice, would making pupil info available to the new school help to avoid another inappropriate choice?

4. Admissions to post-primary schools (Articles 27-29)

Article 28

- BoGs should be required to consult other interested bodies/parties (eg CnaG, NICIE or parents representatives).
- Is the above replicating our current system? Could it take power away from BoGs? Does it run contrary to RPA?
- Abolishing academic selection is wrong; we will still be selecting pupils and this will be made more difficult

5. Suspension and expulsion (Articles 30-33)

- There will be difficulties with additional workload.
- These proposals contradict the RPA and current informal approaches.
- Accept that BoGs require support and advice.
- There is a need to be logical and pragmatic; these proposals are not essential at this time.
- There will need to be an informal investigative period before formal suspension.
- Suspension/expulsions are often an emergency situation for pupil and staff safety.
- Teachers need assurance that there are measures to protect them.
- If appealed there needs to be a shorter time leading to decision and an early look at particular circumstances.
- Boards are not always advised of suspensions at present.

- What is needed is a better, standardised process put in place, not ELB control.
 - There needs to be a sense of consistency with GB.
 - Dual role as advocate could have positive impact.
 - Formal documentation will inevitably make its way into the public domain; this is not in the interests of the pupils, teachers or BoGs
 - The outcome of the proposals will be unofficial suspensions.
 - There are a range of approaches across schools.
6. General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (Articles 34-36)
- To be welcomed
 - Will end unqualified teachers in NI.
 - GTCNI should have an approval role on teacher training and qualifications.
7. Baseline assessment (Article 39)
8. Removal of requirement for annual parents' meeting (Article 40)
- To be welcomed.
 - Are there other methods to ensure parental involvement/input in the coming period of change?
 - Will there be an opportunity for parents to call other bodies to account?
9. Minor and consequential amendments (Article 43(1) and Schedule 2) and repeals (Article 43(2) and Schedule 3)
10. Provisions carried for other Departments (Articles 37, 38 and 41)
- Concerns regarding the payment of members of FE governing bodies.

Discussion

Proposed allocations for 2005/6-2007/8

- It is hard to know what the money will buy.
- Other issues need considered, eg sustainable schools. Is there an invest/save fund? What's put in place must not run counter to future arrangements.
- Assessment (and the costs of the Pupil Profile in particular including training) are of concern at the present.
- We don't know what the infrastructural requirements will be for the Pupil Profile, is what's available sufficient?
- Is this all of the money that will be available for the development of vocational courses?
- We aren't starting from scratch on the development of vocational courses.
- This is far short of a financial model on which considered decisions can be made.
- What will the financial impacts of RPA be?
- There should be clear link between the money and outputs
- This is money to facilitate change; is it being used in the best way? Hard to judge this without the detail
- Schools here are under-funded in comparison to GB
- Info and communication strategy to teachers and the public as a whole is vitally important; this will build confidence
- This does not have to involve large amounts of money
- What is the timescale of the review announced by the Secretary of State and how does it impact on this?
- New arrangements will involve rationalisation as well as collaboration.
- Is there funding for managing authorities to consult and involve schools in drawing up new arrangements, eg local conferences?
- Schools are currently strapped for cash; need to be careful what messages are being sent out.

Specialist Schools

- **Schools should be free to develop their own specialisms to meet local needs, including possible vocational foci.**
- **Specialist schools policy needs to be tied to collaboration/ Entitlement Framework.**
- **Specialist schools are also about raising status; this in itself encourages collaboration. Why only 10 schools this year? Why not 20 as this will be a key driver of collaboration.**
- **Why not designate all of the schools involved in a collaborative application as specialist?**
- **Collaborative arrangements are a feature of the NI and GB specialist models; this is a model of collaboration that schools will want to sign up to; we should increase the funding available.**
- **Model of specialist schools envisaged by Costello group is not equivalent to the DfES model; this is too restrictive focussed on school improvement.**
- **The purpose of the reforms is school improvement.**
- **The reforms, including the new curriculum are about opening up potential and the specialist model should be built in to this.**
- **Emphasis should be on putting money into the schools and bringing about substantive change at that level; this is a feature of the specialist schools model.**

Priority areas for expenditure over the 2008/9 - 2010/11 period

- **There should be a greater proportion of the available funding spent on the specialist programme**
- **We need to examine how schools are funded in general**
- **Per capita funding will decline with demography**
- **Do we know what it costs to send a teacher to another school to teach? What about the costs of transporting pupils?**

Annex B

- **We can learn from existing models including GB**
- **Paying for this will require economies of scale or pooling teacher resources**
- **Collaboration will place welfare demands etc on pupils**
- **Why do parents place their children in schools with few courses on offer?**
- **This is not about implementing the new arrangements within the limits of the current system; we need to look at what other models are possible**
- **We need to look at the cultures that exist within education**
- **We should look at freeing up the rigidity of age cohort transfer**
- **Some schools hitting unviable numbers during implementation will need to be protected, are there funds for this?**

Strategic Advisory Group

SAG Business in 2006 (provisional dates indicated where possible)

- Entitlement Framework – facilitating, developing and supporting collaboration (Including conference outcomes) (April/May).
- Communications (June).
- Policy development on admissions criteria menu (Autumn).
- Pupil Profile update (tbc)
- Curriculum Implementation: training etc (tbc)
- ICT and new post-primary arrangements (tbc)
- Strategic Planning for the Schools Estate (tbc)
- Capital Programme - Procurement and delivery (tbc)

Members' Comments

Discussion

- **We need more detailed models on viability**