

## **Minutes of 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of Strategic Advisory Group**

**9:00am 18-19 August 2004 at the Dunadry Hotel**

### **Present:**

Chairperson  
Members

DEL Observer

Secretariat

Apologies

### **Chairman's Introduction**

1. The Chairperson welcomed members to the 2nd meeting of the Strategic Advisory Group, in particular, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ who were attending for the first time and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ who were substituting for others. He emphasised that the purpose of the group is to provide advice to the Minister/DE on issues referred to it and that the process would be driven by the Minister's timetable and the legislative timetable. He confirmed that the Secretariat will bring forward issues in as logical a sequence as possible but the sequencing may be affected by other factors. He reassured members that where there were diverse views on any issue, all views would be reflected to the Minister in the advice going forward.

### **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

2. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

### **Matters Arising**

3. There were no matters arising.

### **Entitlement Framework**

4. There was a wide-ranging and detailed discussion about the philosophy and the practical implications of implementing the Costello recommendation of providing access for all young people to 24 subjects at KS4, 27 subjects at Post-16 and that one third should be vocational and one third academic. The main points made by members, including implementation issues which will need to be resolved, are listed in Appendix 1. The balance of opinion was:-

**KS4**

- Schools should aspire to provide access for all pupils to 24 courses as soon as possible but must do so by the target date of 2009/10;
- typically these courses should be at level 2; and
- a course available at more than one level should count as one course.

**Post 16**

- Schools should aspire to provide access for all pupils to 27 courses as soon as possible but must do so by the target date of 2009/10; and
- typically these courses should be at level 3 but could include others at level 2.

**Mix of subjects**

- A minimum of one third of courses should be general, a minimum of one third should be applied and the remainder either general or applied at the discretion of the school;
- DE should produce a list of general and applied subjects; and
- Schools will select courses to which they provide access from the DE list, in line with the one third rule above.

**Implementation**

5. The group discussed the relative merits of voluntary and mandatory approaches to the delivery of the Entitlement Framework. supported the concept of the Entitlement Framework but were concerned that a mandatory approach could have a negative impact in schools and preferred schools to adopt the Entitlement Framework on a voluntary basis. The other members considered that a mandatory approach is required if the Entitlement Framework is to have the impact of providing for the needs of young people but that the necessary legislation should be light touch involving a phased approach to total compliance by 2009.

6. requested that the minutes record that he cannot support the implementation of new post-primary arrangements without first assessing the financial implications with the view to protecting the public purse.

**Specialist Schools**

7. made a presentation to the group on "Specialist Schools in England and USA". Following this, there was a frank and wide ranging discussion on the Costello recommendation for the introduction of "Specialist Schools" in Northern Ireland. The group considered this in the context of Barry Gardiner's speech on 23 June and the introduction of the new revised curriculum. The main points made by members within each of the 3 sessions are recorded in Appendix 2.

8. The balance of opinion was:

- the wholesale acceptance of the "English Specialist School" model would not be appropriate for Northern Ireland;
- any development of "specialisms" should be an integral part of the overall implementation of the Costello recommendation;
- the main aim for the development of "specialisms" should be to enrich the educational opportunities for young people; to raise standards through the effective

delivery of the new curriculum and the Entitlement Framework; and for schools to work in a collaborative environment.

9. A definition of the Northern Ireland approach to encouraging the development of “specialisms” in the context of Costello is detailed in Appendix 2 (session 2).

10. The Department should consider how best to pilot the development of “specialisms” and this should be planned as soon as possible.

### **Future Work Programme**

11. The Chairperson indicated that the Minister had made a commitment to publish details of the new transfer arrangements, including the list of admissions arrangements, at the end of this year. He sought the agreement of the group to rearrange the previously agreed schedule of meetings to bring the discussion on admissions arrangements forward. The group agreed to the revised timetable below.

Date in 2004	Issue	Duration	Location
24 June	Inaugural meeting	0.5 day	Belfast Castle
17-18 August	Entitlement Framework & Specialist Schools	2 day	Dunadry Hotel
8-9 September	Transitional arrangements	1.5 day	Seagoe Hotel starting 4pm
21 September	Operation of area and local arrangements	1 day	
18-19 October	Admissions arrangements and pupil profile	1.5 days	Starting pm
23 November		1 day	
7-8 December		2 days	

12. The meeting closed at 4.30pm and the Chairperson thanked the members for their contributions over the 2 days.

Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Advice sought**

The number of courses that should be specified, for Key Stage 4 and post-16, and what should constitute a 'course' in this context;

### **Key Stage 4**

- Double award science – 1 or 2 courses?
- Differentiation in levels at KS4 – entry level to GCSE – what constitutes a course?
- Does size or level make a difference to provision by school?
- Other data for non GCSE qualifications – may need to state that it is entry to a recognised qualifications
- Some schools with limited courses on offer may be offering subjects on several levels
- Must be similar access across Northern Ireland
- Choice is about motivating children
- Has DE any statistics on disapplication?
- FE provision – availability v accessibility
- Formal school sector must recognise the value of vocational education
- Need to adapt the mind set of parents to the value of vocational courses
- Partnership with FE – is it implied?
- Schools fear legislation as the level of provision may be challenged by parents
- Parental attitude to particular subjects
- Equity and accessibility must be considered for specialist schools as well
- If Entitlement Framework is not “backed up” will it be delivered?
- Need guidance/lead from DE to ensure the child’s rights to the entitlement is protected
- Don’t want to scare schools – need to sell this to schools 88% very close
- 24 will require schools to collaborate – is this what we want for majority of schools?
- 24 may kill new school development
- Do we set a lower target for rural schools or a longer lead in time
- Entitlement Framework must apply to all children equally
- Small school v big school
- Resources will be important – advice to Minister must reflect the constraints schools are working under
- Should set target and timeframe
- LMS will impact
- Need for change v fear of change – need to recognise where people (schools) are at present
- Setting target will inform schools – set vision for future – set clarity
- Make change manageable for schools

### **KS4 – what is a course?**

- Courses leading to a recognised qualification – typically level 2 (Govt target for 16yrs olds)
- Where appropriate - entry level or level 1
- Should also ensure that children with special needs can achieve
- Difficulty with 24 – over a period of time
- 24 is entitlement to an individual therefore if can do level 2 then would not be doing level 1
- Must remember that institutions have an “entitlement” too
- Do we need to determine the course by the subject and not the level for assessment?
- Are we creating large institutions?
- What is the theoretical maximum a school could be asked to provide?

### **Post –16**

- With 24 at KS4 developing 27 should not be too much more demanding

### **Post-16 - what is a course**

- Typically at level 3 but not excluding level 2 –can level 2 be counted in 27?
- 14-19 should be seen as a continuum
- Coherence and career choice should be taken into account
- Year 10 menu and year 12 menu for pupils
- Do we need to free up the age limits? To allow pupils to develop at own pace
- Coherence between 24 and 27 – pupils should be able to continue with a subject
- Where do we put apprenticeships in – 14? 16?
- Independent career guidance service needed working alongside school careers advice
- Should allow for pupils to make the wrong choice and survive
- Should not stifle creativity – at post-16 there should be breadth beyond than NQF qualifications
- Courses on offer should enable young people to do more practical and applied courses and not just prepare them for university
- Risk that “enrichment” courses will be sidelined – those that are not part of the NQF
- Can subjects be gathered together and given currency under the NQF?

## **Mix of Subjects**

**Within that total, the proportion that should be required to be ‘vocational’ in nature;**

**The means by which academic and vocational (or ‘general’ and ‘applied’) should be defined or exemplified;**

- How would we propose to “grow” a culture where the non traditional courses are followed
- Resources will be required to develop these courses
- Need to give acceptability to a number of different forms of learning
- Schools should provide genuine choice – should be 1/3 of timetable available for applied
- DE needs to paint picture of the Entitlement Framework for the future – exemplars
- Framework needs to be robust

## **Compliance with the requirements of the Entitlement Framework**

**The means by which schools’ compliance with the Entitlement Framework should be assessed;**

- Need to check that schools are, in reality, actually offering 24/27 and the timetable can accommodate this
- Technology will play a crucial part in timetabling
- Schools collaborating will have to get together to mock up timetables
- Need to pilot some of this to identify issues for timetabling
- Why do schools end at 3.30pm – can we explore the option of extending the school day? (with the full cooperation of teachers)
- Manageable post-16 but different KS4 – greater difficulties when matching the timetables of 2 or more schools
- Issues around pastoral care, teacher contracts and travel etc
- Issues around the lengthening of the school day, family working patterns and transport
- Lot of learning around the options – pilots and exemplars can help to solve the problems
- Should consider option of placing the onus for the delivery of the Entitlement Framework on a larger body eg local grouping rather than single school
- Resources will be essential and need some idea of costings
- While there will be additional costs there may also be benefits which will impact not only on the school but the wider community
- Should keep list of cost implications on an ongoing basis
- Are we going to make the system more inefficient by having to support small schools to a greater extent?
- There is already many examples of good practice in collaboration
- Need to inform the public that this is already in operation albeit on a smaller scale

## Implementation

### The arrangements for implementation – eg phasing.

- Deferring the requirement until 2008/9 to allow schools time to reach the targets of 24/27
- Deferral will allow time to ensure other elements are in place
- 2006 not feasible but we could have a mid point
- Second option would start the process moving towards the ability to deliver the Entitlement Framework
- Incremental move towards the target date through school development plan and monitored by the ETI
- Need funding mechanism to develop the additional courses to deliver the Framework
- Legislation could allow DE to set the pace of change through specifying the Entitlement Framework on an rolling (annual?) basis and to determine the pace towards the next target
- Mixed model to allow for local circumstances
- Fear that one sector will move faster than another
- Must be guarantees that we can control the system and ensure the resources will be available
- Can display sensitivity to the fact that the political situation may change and the advice could be flexible enough to ensure that the Govt intentions for the principle for the Entitlement Framework is not undermined (sound educational principle)
- Dissemination of information to parents is critical
- Manageable chunks and demonstrating that it can work
- Difficult to agree to a process without firstly identifying the costs involved – in the interest of protecting the public purse.

## Specialist Schools: Session 1

### Issues from discussion

- Need to note Costello's view of specialist schools
- Influence of business on the curriculum in schools – if schools required to get sponsorship
- Concern over importing from England – NI context is different
- Are the findings in England convincing? Would it encourage us to add another tier/type of school
- Languages – should all schools not be delivering these
- What additional benefits will specialist schools bring?
- Need to be careful that we do not introduce too many new things at once
- Do we need specialist schools – are we going to introduce something we do not need
- We should offer schools the choice
- Principles of specialist schools already exist within our system – can we bring out best practice without introducing specialist schools?
- Raising standards – uniform praise but cannot identify why they are successful
- Schools in England that got into scheme early have reaped benefits
- The English model and its process provide a focus for the school; it creates a sense of direction and pride in the school; it empowers pupils and parents; it increases motivation among teachers and builds practical relationships. It creates a win/win situation – no evidence of losers
- Intakes are managed
- Special educational needs – emerging issue in England
- Schools in England perceived as being more equal
- Rivalry needs to be managed
- There is political will for the introduction of specialist schools in England
- Where will we be in 10 years – need a strategy
- Similar to ETI self evaluation scheme – learn the lessons and transfer to other areas of the curriculum
- Community links should be emphasised – in 2 areas with other schools and (associated specialism - networks) and links with the community
- Need to ensure that specialist schools do not become divisive both externally and internally
- “Centres of Excellence” or “Development Centres” – resource for the community
- Should foster collaboration
- Key issue is the motivation to learn – can deal with a demotivating curriculum
- English system is very bureaucratic
- Need to involve the community and employers in the establishment of these schools
- Age at which specialist approach applied is a concern – will it be 11+ or 14+ or 16+?
- Minister needs to consider the introduction of specialist schools in view of the revised NI curriculum
- Needs to be a strategic overview of the development of specialist schools
- Specialisms should be linked to the needs of a particular area
- Massive potential to include specialism under Costello without the Specialist schools badge
- Community dimension in a NI context is different from England
- Putting structures first won't raise standards. Leadership will raise standards and structures will follow

- Self audit is an important part of the process
- Communication with the public is essential – they must have information – badge it differently – need to make connections with curriculum
- Entitlement Framework and specialist schools – interconnections are essential – timelines for 5-6 years
- Business sponsorship in Northern Ireland will be more difficult than in England.

## **Specialist Schools – Session 2**

This approach aims to enrich educational opportunities and raise standards for all pupils by:

- Delivering the new school curriculum with its emphasis on relevance to life and work and the acquisition of appropriate skills;
- Securing the Entitlement Framework and facilitating the collaboration at local level necessary to achieve this; and
- Maximising the complementarity of provision at local level by supporting schools in providing a lead role in areas of curricular strengths and sharing such expertise with their neighbours.

Consider including statements about:-

- Community development
- Professional development
- Equity and access

## **Specialist Schools – Session 3**

### **Suggestions for the focus of Piloting arrangements**

- Test of collaboration?
- Enhanced delivery in particular curricular area?
- Motivational effects on young people?
- Cross sectoral issues?

What form?

- Where things are already happening?
- Where there is peer recognition among schools?
- Natural groups – geographically?
- Grow Limavady?
- Situation where schools would not naturally come together?
- 4-5 areas - difficult and easier scenarios?
- Lead school within a group application?
- Self nomination?
- Set criteria?

When?

- Start planning soon

Some focus on vocational courses?

- Yes