

Strategic Advisory Group

Minutes of 3rd Meeting of Strategic Advisory Group

4:00pm on 8-9 September 2004 at the Seagoe Hotel, Portadown

Present:

Chairperson

Members

DEL Observer

Secretariat

Apologies

Chairman's Introduction

1. The Chairman welcomed members to the 3rd meeting, in particular and who are substituting for others. The Chairman commented that all the issues raised by members would be taken into account as part of the consideration of policy and included in papers to the Minister. The minutes recorded the "raw" comments made by members and these would be included in the advice going to the Minister.

Minutes of the previous meeting

2. Members asked that the minutes be amended to:
- Delete the word "must" in relation to schools offering the 24/27 courses by 2009/10 and amend to refer to pupils having access to 24/27 courses by that date.
 - Reflect the overall view that Members had expressed strong reservations about the wholesale introduction of specialist schools in NI, but taking account of the Minister's statements, they agreed that the principles of developing curricular specialisms to benefit pupils could be adapted to NI circumstances.

Revised paragraphs for the minutes are attached.

Matters arising

3. There were no matters arising.

Papers

4. expressed concern about the papers presented to the Group. He suggested that the papers required significantly more background information to better inform discussions. Other members expressed their appreciation of the papers and considered that they provided a good catalyst for discussion. There were also suggestions that they might be less structured and that they should be more provocative. The Chairman emphasised that the Group was established to provide advice on the key implementation issues and that it was important that the Department did not appear to lead the Group in particular directions. He agreed, however, that within those constraints the Secretariat would seek to draft papers in a way to enable members to challenge proposals or concepts and also to provide more background information.

Pilot/Pathfinder activities

5. outlined the background to, and the content of, the Vocational Enhancement Programme, the plans to expand the pilot programme in the next school year and explained that this is the Group's opportunity to influence the shape of the pilot projects and to consider related practical issues. explained some of the detailed operational arrangements, including the evaluation arrangements.

6. Members supported the concept of continuing and expanding the existing pathfinder projects and identified a wide range of issues that the pilot projects should address which are set out in Appendix 1. Members also advised that the pilots should safeguard the education of the children involved, that they should be extended to include shadow local arrangements and that there should be a focus on the needs of the area.

7. Members advised that the identification of schools and colleges to take part in the next phase should not be restricted to one method. The method could involve a bidding process as well as a role for managing authorities in identifying suitable examples. DE and DEL will consider jointly and prepare proposals for the next phase incorporating the points raised by Members. Comments are set out in Appendix 1.

Post-16 provision

8. Following a wide-ranging discussion, members were of the view that steps should be taken to restrict the establishment of small 6th forms, that all new proposals should be made subject to development proposal procedure, that criteria for approval (Costello proofing) should be issued and that schools should be encouraged to look towards area planning of 6th form provision. Members detailed comments are set out in Appendix 2.

School Development Planning

9. The overall view of members was that proposals for new schools and reconfigurations of existing schools should demonstrate how they would conform to Costello requirements in terms of the viability of the school to deliver the entitlement framework, including the role of collaborative arrangements.

Measures To Encourage And Facilitate New Arrangements

10. The papers circulated set out the areas identified by the Costello report as requiring additional resources. Members agreed that all areas listed in the Costello Report should be considered for additional resources. Additional priority issues were suggested to facilitate implementation and are set out in Appendix 3.

Developing proposals

11. Members identified a number of additional areas for action and took the view that all were priority issues. Members considered that the areas identified were concerned with different issues, they would be required at different times and that delivery could be achieved by grouping some together and refocusing existing resources eg CASS and RTU. It was also noted that a number of the elements would be time-bounded.

Delivering the Entitlement Framework

12. Members noted that much was already being done.

Implementing new arrangements

13. Members noted that the VEP pathfinder/pilot activities will help to confirm the resource requirements.

Capital Investment

14. Members overall views were that all capital schemes should be “Costello proofed” as should proposals to increase long-term enrolments.

Raising Local Awareness of New Arrangements

15. Members were agreed about the need to ensure that all stakeholders are kept apprised of developments and noted that DE was considering issuing a newsletter to the education sector for this purpose.

16. Members raised the issue of the importance of keeping their relevant constituencies and the wider educational sector apprised about the work of the Group and to show that the implementation process was moving forward. It was agreed that the Department would suggest to the Minister that from time to time he might issue a communiqué to the education sector to indicate that he had received advice on specific issues and providing an indicative timescale for when decisions would be announced.

Dates of Future Meetings

17. Members were advised that other urgent business meant that the meetings scheduled for 21 September and 18 October would have to be rescheduled.

18. Operation of area and local partnerships will now be considered on 19 October and the Secretariat will ask Members to indicate availability for a meeting at a later date to consider Admissions Arrangements and the Pupil Profile.

The meeting closed at 4:30pm. The Chairman thanked Members for their contributions over the 2 days.

Chairperson _____ Date _____

Members' departure times on 9 September:
and _____ left at 3:00pm
and _____ left at 4:00pm

Amendments to minutes of SAG meeting on 18 and 19 August 2004

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

- All pupils should have access to 24 courses 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

- All pupils should have access to 27 courses by the target date of 2009/10; and
 - typically these courses should be at level 3 but could include others at level 2.
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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 overall view was:

- 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;
- the wholesale acceptance of the “English Specialist School” model would not be appropriate for Northern Ireland.

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.

Appendix 1

Notes from initial discussions on Pathfinders/Pilots

What shape should the pilots take?

- The school should take the lead
- The pilots should have appropriate safety net to protect the education of the pupils
- A range of different types should be established to include multi-school/FE collaboration
- Pilots covering single subject and others covering multi-subject should be included
- Pilots should cover different locations – urban/rural
- Pilots should be wide ranging and contribute to an evolving framework for delivery of the Entitlement Framework
- Reflect local partnerships even if done in shadow mode
- Pilots should not constrain imaginative projects
- Special needs should be included
- Resource free as possible

What areas should we expect the pathfinders to explore?

- **Curriculum Issues**
 - Courses must lead to a recognised qualification
 - Can schools deliver 24/27 courses through collaboration for every pupil
 - Where must a school currently be in terms of number of courses offered to make it possible to deliver the Entitlement Framework by target date
 - What is a vocational subject?
 - Is it possible to combine elements of traditional academic and vocational courses in the same subject area to deliver a hybrid course?
 - How can schools contribute to increasing choice and flexibility within a local area
 - Use of different teaching and learning styles
 - Equality of access across Northern Ireland with tangible benefits for pupils
 - Use of peripatetic teachers to enable schools to deliver the Entitlement Framework
- **Size related issues**
 - Is there an optimum size of school for effective delivery of the Entitlement Framework?
 - How many courses can be delivered by other providers while allowing the school to remain logically viable?
 - What is the optimum size for an effective collaborative arrangement

- **Practical issues**

- Timetabling – can CLASS run a model timetable?
- Transport
- Pastoral care and disciplinary issues– including lines of responsibility for pupils
- Use of ICT – video conferencing
- Differences between pre-16 and post-16 in terms of all practical issues above
- Actual costs – links with LMS formula funding
- Careers guidance to inform choice
- Leadership and management skills
- Insurance
- Finance arrangements between FE and schools
- Quality assurance

How do we get schools and FE Colleges involved?

- Schools should be encouraged to bring forward proposals based on local information and knowledge.
- Managing Authorities should provide “light touch” guidance
- Incentives should be offered to those willing to become involved in the pilot
- It should be open to all schools
- Arrangements should be voluntary
- Arrangements should be capable of change over time
- Criteria for approval should include reference to the pilot objectives

Appendix 2

Post-16 Provision in Northern Ireland

Impact of Entitlement Framework

- Schools may feel that they need to offer 6th form provision to remain a “Player” in future arrangements
- 27 will mean that we will have fewer but larger 6th forms
- Collaboration will ensure greater choice
- Entitlement of the pupil must be the key focus
- Need to offer stability and choice – these are related to size and funding
- Should we be talking about 14-19 rather than 6th forms
- Need to prepare pupils for life and work in 21st century – need to broaden their outlook
- Regardless of Costello the same issues will be arising
- Robust advice to schools may reduce the need to “police” 6th forms
- DE should be able to state that new 6th forms can only be established if they have been “Costello” proofed

Local Partnerships

- Local partnerships may have a strategic role to play in the development of 6th form provision

Role of Parents

- Need to educate parents on the issue of 6th forms
- Pastoral care is very important – parents like security
- Pastoral care – other sectors moving to shared accountability
- Progression for pupils is an issue that parents raise
- No desire to return to 1983 but need to take account of what parents want
- Parents focus on their child and rarely have a strategic view
- We need to inform parents with professional guidance

Impact on school and community

- May need to consider other factor other than just choice –eg self esteem, leadership and impact on whole school and local community
- Need to take account of impact of small 6th forms on younger pupils
- Will be difficult to remove present system/practice without a clearly defined future vision
- Need to address competition, bring stability and increase choice – this may suggest a collectivist approach
- Stop further proliferation of small 6th forms as a first step
- Opportunity to reconfigure the schools estate for the benefit of pupils

Appendix 2 cont.

Transitional Arrangements 6th Form Provision

Approval process for all new 6th forms and non curricular changes to existing 6th forms

- For new schools and existing schools approval for 6th forms should meet criteria
- New 6th forms should
 - be long term viable
 - reflect potential to deliver 27 courses
 - reflect local needs and impact on neighbouring schools
 - encourage more pupils to remain in education/training
- If proposal meets the vision for the future then capital should be available
- **Criteria for approval**
- Potential to deliver, in a collaborative environment, 27 courses by given date
- Curriculum based
- Reasonable class sizes

Whole School Development

- Should be in line with development of 6th forms
- Need to inform all sectors of the facts in relation to the schools estate, demography and available future funds – information deficit
- Putting a stop to all school development is not an option
- Educational framework needs to be sorted out before the economic reality takes over and drives the change
- Quality and appropriateness of the schools estate - is it fit for purpose
- DE needs to identify where future provision will be needed

Practical steps in the interim

- How does proposal contribute to the provision in a local area?
- Need some modelling on size to determine how best to deliver 24/27
- School handbook is an issue as it is based on NI curriculum
- Buildings will have to be more flexible
- New schools should be able to fit in with vision of the future

Appendix 3

Measures to Encourage and Facilitate New Arrangements

Members agreed that all those areas identified by the Costello Report were important and should be given consideration when the Department is seeking additional funding to implement new Post-Primary Arrangements. Listed below are additional areas in each of the main categories that should also be considered.

Developing Proposals

- Ongoing evaluation of the process
- Modelling
- Support for Managing Authorities
- CASS – provide support for schools/teachers/senior management teams

NB - Many of the appointments will be short term

Delivering the Entitlement Framework

- Progression Routes

Implementing New Arrangements

- Governors – continuation of training in 1
- Change in LMS formula to incorporate some of these
- Many of these arrangements will be of a short term nature

Capital Investment

- Current approvals need to be looked at to ensure they are “Costello Proofed”
- Assessment of the Schools Estate
- Explore potential for community involvement
- Location of schools - access

Raising Local Awareness of New Arrangements

- Take account of this in the Information and Communication Strategy
- Re-brand
- Get info out about the pilots
- Publish the agenda of the group to highlight the issues that are being considered by SAG