

Strategic Advisory Group

Minutes of 9th Meeting of Strategic Advisory Group

Lagan Valley Civic Centre, 20th June 2005

Present:

Chairperson

Members

Secretariat

Apologies

Chairman's Introduction

1. The Chairman welcomed members to the 9th meeting of the Group

Minutes of previous meeting

2. The minutes were agreed.

The Proposed Education (NI) Order

3. gave a brief overview of the contents of the proposed Order. A number of concerns were raised by members, particularly in relation to the proposals for expelling bodies and appeals mechanism. As officials with the relevant expertise were not present, it was agreed that SAG was not the appropriate forum to discuss these issues in detail. It was pointed out, however, that these provisions were

currently the subject to Ministerial clearance and that the Order as a whole will be consulted on in the autumn.

Members were informed that the Department had obtained legal advice that existing legislation was sufficient to cover the possible creation of interim Boards of Governors.

Detailed comments are attached at Annex A.

Phasing of e2s implementation

4. Members were generally content with the timeline as outlined in Paper 9.3, though whether the Specialist Schools pilot is to be an integral part of the e2s programme or additional to it, was questioned.

Review of Public Administration

5. gave an outline of the RPA proposals and details of members comments are attached at Annex B

Future issues for SAG

6. The possible future issues in Paper 9.5 were noted. SAG members expressed an interest in discussing developments in the Pupil Profile and the financing of the new arrangements.

Schedule of Future Meetings

7. Members were informed that once dates for the e2s Programme Board were finalised, a schedule of SAG meetings for the rest of the year would be arranged.

Chairperson_____ Date_____

ANNEX A

Draft Education Order

Members Comments

- Are the expelling bodies in each ELB area proposed in the legislation consistent with the RPA proposals?
- A number of questions remain regarding the expelling bodies and appeal mechanism.
- Criminal/Civil Law priority needs to be clarified.
- Current GB practice is to delegate power to schools, not away from them.
- Moving powers away from schools tends to lead to more Criminal actions.
- Will the “vocational/academic” split of the Entitlement Framework appear in the Order?
- Ending academic selection has led to educationalists and others feeling that their views have been ignored.
- Will other legislative powers be required for the implementation of e2s eg on interim BoGs?
- How will the reforms be funded; additional funding for them is unlikely.
- Collective agreement needs to be rationalised.
- Should legislation define viable school size?
- A DE small schools policy is required.
- Does “encourage and facilitate” for the integrated and IM sectors compromise the Departments dealings with other sectors?
- Some small schools will need protection, possibly through legislation.

ANNEX B

Review of Public Administration

Discussion

RPA implications for e2s:

- **Administrative bodies and structures are there to deliver outcomes; the RPA proposals should fit the intended outcomes of e2s.**
- **Other aspects, eg the Pupil Profile and the new Curriculum are imperatives; RPA must not interfere in delivering these.**
- **How do collaborative arrangements (between schools and sectors) sit with RPA? This seemed clear under the existing structures, RPA doesn't give enough detail to examine how this will be done at a local level.**
- **Who will drive the e2s agenda in the absence of the School Managing Authorities (SMAs)?**
- **Splitting teacher support and assessment is illogical from the point of view of implementing the new curriculum and e2s as a whole.**
- **How does the RPA implementation schedule relate to the e2s timeline?**
- **There needs to be clarity for those directly involved in implementing e2s; they need to know what will be supporting them.**
- **Local councils will have a support role; possibly in competition with the private sector?**
- **Effective school/FE collaboration requires local level planning, including tying this to local economic needs.**
- **Anticipating trends should include future developments in Departmental structures eg DE/DEL links.**

Local Support

- **Local knowledge and enthusiasm is an existing strength and new arrangements must not lose this and should support this.**
- **Democratic oversight of education is important, but there should be limits to the influence of local government.**
- **Would local council involvement create LEA equivalents?**

- The management board of the central support body should have political representation.
- The involvement of local councillors would help ensure that schools focus on the needs of the local economy.
- Structures must facilitate democratic involvement.
- Need to recognise the spectrum of political opinion on new arrangements.
- The impact of the electoral cycle on implementation has to be considered.

RPA implications for the wider education system

- If new structures are to happen, then they should be put in place quickly.
- Over-administration costs money and time and these costs are borne by pupils.
- Existing institutions could collapse before new structures in place; the transition process needs to be managed.
- Any new structures should protect the strong existing sense of ownership by parents.
- Some of the existing structures are important in defining schools' ethos; this should be recognised.
- Looking for the common good requires an examination of what works at present; ethos is a strong driver in schools and should not be lost.
- Quality of Governance and school leadership is inconsistent; monitoring and challenge role required, though with a light touch.
- We should seek to devolve powers to the lowest practical level; should all schools become voluntary?
- Devolving decisions empowers schools and BoGs
- What will the nature of the bodies be?
- Is Education an afterthought to the wider RPA?
- The current consultation is an opportunity to "lighten" the proposed structures.
- Change is required, but existing strengths should be retained.

- **Role of ETI is changing; this should be examined.**
- **Greatest impact on pupil outcomes comes from teachers; all structures must support this.**
- **Two ways to manage transition; prepare the ground before bodies in place, or put bodies in place first?**
- **The inputs and outputs of NI education as a whole needs to be examined.**
- **Synergy between curriculum and examinations/assessment is valuable.**
- **BoGs in all sectors should be allowed more freedom.**
- **Ethos provides a rallying point to support bodies challenge function.**
- **Creating learning communities leads to positive pupil outcomes, not solely individual teachers.**
- **Marrying the ethos and other differences of the existing structures into a central body will be very challenging.**
- **A single body with a number of legs would be more useful (FE, procurement may be added in the future). Legs of the same organisation will not feel the need to compete. This will lead to a more effective and joined-up service.**
- **A single central body could work against devolving decision making to the lowest level.**