

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT TO THE CHAIRS OF
THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR BODIES ON RPA
IN EDUCATION
10th OCTOBER 2007**

(Please note the paragraphs in Irish are immediately repeated in English)

**Tá lúcháir mhór orm fáilte a chur romhaibh uilig arís chuig
céad chruinniú 'gnó' an ghrúpa seo i bhfírinne.**

I am delighted to welcome you all again to what is in effect the first 'business' meeting of this group.

Our agenda today is fairly full, and we will cover a number of areas:

- The Terms of Reference for this Group
- The Convergence Programme
- Feedback from the Education Committee Meetings

- Progress on the Programme
- Comments on Progress from the Chairs
- Question and Answer Session

You should have received papers for this meeting, but there are spares available if you haven't.

There is an opportunity for Questions and Answers at the end of today's session, so if you could wait until then before raising any important issues | would be very grateful.

Following our meeting in July, I wrote to all Chief Executives, and to all staff and to schools to share with them my vision and hopes for RPA in education.

Since that meeting in July, good progress continues to be made on all of the aspects of education transformation – on legislation, finance and accountability, HR and convergence planning.

I will mention progress on each of these briefly, and my colleagues from the Department will provide more detail in their updates.

LEGISLATION

You will recall that it had been agreed that a phased approach should be adopted to introducing legislation, with 2 Bills being required – the first focusing on structural reform - setting up the new Education and Skills Authority and transferring staff and assets; and the second to cover some of the more operational aspects of the new Education and Skills Authority.

Drafting of the first Bill is proceeding well, and it is approximately 90% complete.

There have been three very productive sessions with the Assembly Education Committee on the underlying policy, with a fourth planned for 26 October.

We aim to complete our engagement with the Education Committee by the end of October, and submit a draft First Bill to the Committee for an initial view soon thereafter.

The Committee has raised a number of concerns about various aspects of the policy, and we intend to establish small informal working groups to assist in taking work forward. We have asked your Chief Executives for input to these. The areas involved include:

- Accountable autonomy;
- Ownership of the controlled estate and sectoral representation for publicly owned schools; and
- Quality assurance of the legislation.

These issues will be covered in more detail by my departmental colleagues in their respective reports.

FINANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Work continues within the Department, on the development of the necessary financial and budgetary procedures, and a Financial Planning Project Manager has been seconded to the ESAIT team from the North Eastern Education and Library Board.

HR

HR issues are extremely sensitive and need to be progressed with caution as they will mean a significant change for a large number of staff across the education sector.

HR Policies continue to be developed, and issues continue to be addressed as they arise, and within DE, work on the internal review, which was considering which functions should transfer from DE to the new organisation, is now nearing completion. Consultation on the Internal Review has commenced with TUS.

CONVERGENCE PROGRAMME

Following my request in July, Gavin Boyd has already begun work on the convergence programme.

The Convergence Programme presents a real opportunity for staff in the affected organisations to be involved in shaping the new organisation of which they will be a key part, and their participation and engagement is essential.

The next 18 months will be a challenging time for the existing organisations, as they continue to deliver 'business as usual' whilst supporting and facilitating the creation of a new organisation.

I am in no doubt that maintaining the education service at its current standards, whilst at the same time providing input to help shape the creation of the new organisation, is challenging.

However, equally, having seen at first hand the dedication and commitment of staff and teachers, I have confidence that new and improved education structures are achievable by April 2009.

The ESA Implementation Team (ESAIT) continues to develop close working relationships with colleagues in the affected organisations to ensure they can make a positive contribution to the new organisation in a way that supports business continuity during the transition period.

As outlined at the July meeting, the Convergence Programme will focus on a range of issues.

Gavin will tell you more about this in a few minutes.

ORGANISATION DESIGN

Work on the design of the new organisations continue. . It is intended that a draft senior management structure for the Education and Skills Authority will be ready by the end of the year, with the recruitment of the 2nd tier commencing in May 08, in line with the legislative timescale for the 1st Bill. The draft structure will be discussed with the Committee early in the New Year. Meanwhile within DE, a strategic workshop on the new vision for the Department has taken place.

SCHOOLS ESTATE

The physical environment in which our children are taught can have a significant impact on their learning environment. Condition and suitability surveys for the entire schools estate are on target for completion by March 2008 and independent verification of the surveys is proceeding well.

CONCLUSION

I am delighted with the work already under way, and with progress made to date, but equally I know that there is much more to be done if we are to achieve the education service in the north to which we all aspire. Every child must be valued equally and my aim is to create an excellent education service by releasing more resources for front-line services and providing better education opportunities for all.

Ní dhéanaim aon leithscéil as m'fhís a athdhearbhú daoibh – ‘córas oideachais den scoth a chuireann luach ar gach páiste go cothrom agus a imríonn ról ríthábhachtach i bhforbairt sochaí rannta, fulangaí, cuimsithí a aithníonn agus a cheiliúránn an éagsúlacht’.

I make no apology for restating to you my vision of ‘a world-class education system that values every child equally and that plays a crucial role in the development of a shared, tolerant and inclusive society that recognises and celebrates diversity’.

I remain convinced that the RPA is the means to facilitate the realisation of this vision in the interest of all learners.

Ní féidir linn seo a bhaint amach ach trí chomhoibriú go dlúth le bhur n-eagraíochtaí atá ann anois agus is ríthábhachtach go leanfaidh sibh de bheith go hiomlán rannpháirteach i dtacú agus i gcomhoibriú linn san obair thábhachtach seo.

We can only achieve this by working closely with your existing organisations and it is vital that you all continue to play a full part in supporting and co-operating with us in this important work.

I would now like to consider with you

The Terms of Reference for this Group.

