

RPA Chairpersons Meeting: 10 October 1715, NICVA Conference Suite

Present: Caitríona Ruane
Aodan Mac Poilin (CnaG)
Bishop MacAreavey (CCMS)
Colm Cavanagh (NICIE)
David McKee (CCEA)
Lawson McDonald (SEELB)
Councillor Jim Rodgers (BELB)
Marie Donnell (SELB)
Herbert Faulkner (YCNI)
Prof Bernard Cullen (Staff Com)
Rev Robert Heron (WELB)
Alderman Roy Beggs (NEELB)
Sally McKee (GTCNI)

Will Haire (DE)
Dr Eddie Rooney (DE)
Gavin Boyd (ESAIT)

Apologies: Geraldine Tigchelaar (IEF)
Sean Mag Uidhir (I na G)

In attendance: Dr Mark Browne(ESAIT)
Mary Cromey (RPA Programme Manager)
Fearghal O'Reilly (DE)

1. Caitríona Ruane welcomed everyone to the second meeting of Chairs of the RPA education organisations.
2. Alderman Beggs advised the Minister that he could not understand why the Chief Executives were not invited to these business meetings, noting that the DCAL minister had recently invited the Chief Executives as well as the Chairs to a business meeting. He suggested a need for consistency across government departments when organising meetings regarding the Review of Public Administration. Councillor Jim Rodgers agreed.
3. Caitríona Ruane responded that such meetings of all the organisations could become unwieldy if they involved both Chairs and Chief Executives. She noted that Will Haire and Gavin Boyd already meet frequently with the Chief Executives. These are working meetings and it would be more beneficial if the numbers are kept low and the Chairs have a key leadership role within their organisations. She advised that the meetings would continue as at present, with a review in 2-3 months.
4. Caitríona Ruane provided a high level update on progress to date on key aspects - Legislation, Finance and Accountability, organisation design and the schools estate. She also referred to negotiations currently under way with the Department of Finance and Personnel regarding the education budget.

5. Will Haire outlined what needed to be done to ensure the successful establishment of the ESA. The RPA programme in education can only be progressed with the skills, expertise and involvement of the education organisations. It was important that all were kept informed and feedback from the sector was essential. It was also important that existing organisations had the opportunity to contribute to the creation of the new organisation although he acknowledged the difficulties of trying to do this whilst maintaining existing services as a priority. Will stressed that we wanted to be as open as we could be throughout this process, and stressed the need for Chairs to hear from Caitriona Ruane about progress. Likewise it was essential that she had the opportunity to hear about and address issues of concern during this period of change.
6. Gavin Boyd had circulated a paper on the Convergence Programme in advance of the meeting. He made specific reference to 3 main areas:

ICT Governance:

A new Programme Board and structures had been agreed to monitor and approve current and future IT Projects, to ensure that they supported the successful establishment of ESA. The new arrangements should be in place in the next 2 weeks;

Vacancy Control:

ESAIT had worked with HR Managers to clarify posts to which the vacancy control policy should not be applied, and this was currently under consideration by TU Side.

Financial Planning:

The Education Committee had been particularly interested in whether or not ESA would be able to achieve efficiencies. A previous report by Deloitte, commissioned by OFMDFM in 2005, estimated the RPA could lead to a reduction of 400-700 posts and release savings across the education sector in the region of £15-24 million per annum. ESAIT had carried out further high level analysis on costs and savings and, based on the work carried out to date, Gavin reported that he was confident of achieving the cost savings target of £15m. However, he would make no comment on any implications for posts until further detailed work was completed except to re-iterate his determination to avoid compulsory redundancies.. Deloitte have been appointed to take forward preparation of the Outline Business Case for the RPA in Education and Shane McCurdy, Chief Finance Officer seconded from NEELB, will lead the ESAIT contribution to this work. Initial findings are expected by Christmas/early in the New Year.

The Education Committee had also expressed pleasant surprise at the level of communication with staff and stakeholders in the sector.

7. Eddie Rooney updated the group on progress on other areas including more detailed progress on Legislation. He also mentioned work on the accountability of ESA, the relationship it will have with Government and the effect it will have on frontline education services. In relation to his visit to the

Education Committee, Eddie noted that they had a number of concerns over the detail in some of the policy areas including:

- Maximised supported autonomy;
- Ownership of controlled schools;
- The role of the Education and Skills Authority;
- Children's services;
- Area-based planning; and
- The role of and support for Governors.

8. The Chairs were then asked for comments and questions. The following points were made:

- The redirection of potential savings to front-line services mentioned by Gavin was welcomed and it was emphasised that the benefits should be apparent in the classroom.
- There was concern that there was a lack of support for schools arising from the loss of experienced staff in the ELBs which was causing apprehension in some areas, particularly from new teachers and principals. In other areas, some ELBs found that by working together, they could ensure principals and staff were adequately supported despite staff losses. However it was agreed that flexibility in vacancy control was vital in key areas.
- There was a need for youth worker vacancies to be filled
- The demographic decline was in danger of becoming a mantra, and indeed there was evidence of growth in some areas, notably SELB
- The policy on Integrated Schools was welcomed
- The shared future document was important
- The future for staff across the Education Sector needed to be resolved quickly
- The importance of area-based planning shouldn't be underestimated
- There was a need to address the cross-sectoral nature of the schools estate
- A graphical representation of where we are, where we're going and how we get there is essential
- There's a need to resolve the question re the transfer procedure as there is uncertainty around going ahead with the revised curriculum. The Minister was confident that teachers should carry on teaching the revised curriculum
- This forum is important as Chairs have different responsibilities from CEOs.
- The Irish language sector is a growing sector in a system where there is demographic decline. The North of Ireland has a bilingual education system and both these elements need to be taken into account in regards to planning. It is necessary to integrate planning for the Irish language sector at a very early stage in planning for the entire education system. There is a tendency to treat it as an afterthought.

9. In response to the request that GTCNI should have a more substantive role on the group, Will advised that membership was intended to be for those organisations directly affected by the creation of ESA. Sally advised that as a group teachers would be significantly affected. Will undertook to consider this for future meetings.

10. The following questions were asked, and answers given:

Are there plans to restore the SEELB?

- Caitríona Ruane has arranged to meet with colleagues in the various parties to consider the position on possible restoration as soon as possible.

Do savings include the cost of redundancies?

- Gavin advised that the initial figures produced by Deloitte for OFMDFM for the wider public sector included these costs, but that a broad brush approach had been taken. The overall figures were therefore likely to be an over-estimate given that education sector costs would have been significantly lower than the costs for the health sector.

Can the Minister provide an assurance that funding will be made available for the changes?

- Caitríona Ruane advised that we were currently in the midst of financial negotiations. She noted that education in the North needed to have comparable levels of funding to the South, and to England.

Can the Minister provide an assurance that the new PPP build programme in BELB will go ahead?

- Caitríona Ruane reiterated the concerns already raised in relation to the value for money aspects of PPP, and the recent PAC interest the previous week, and noted the importance of value for money.

11. There followed some discussion on the importance of decisions on school rationalisation and the importance of the best use of ELB staff. The example was given of SELB and WELB working together and that model might be worth consideration by others.

12. The Chairs were encouraged by the sense of urgency, and the progress made to date. The Department and ESAIT have a responsibility to keep staff motivated across the sector through this period of substantial change was a major concern, and this was particularly important in ensuring standards of services continued to be maintained.

13. In response to a request on location and timing of future meetings, the Minister said that the meetings would be moved around the North of Ireland

and where possible held in the premises of voluntary organisations. The Minister said that the next meeting will be held in Armagh, the January meeting in Newry and the following one will be in Omagh.

14. There were no outstanding questions or answers to be provided and the meeting drew to a close at 18.40 pm
15. The next meeting is scheduled for 15 November in Armagh.