

Minister's Introduction

- Welcome to the fourth working meeting of this group and thank you all for attending.
- I understand you had a very productive session back in November. My apologies for not being able to attend but I am sure you understand the tragic circumstances in Omagh.

Speaking Note:

- At our previous meetings we have discussed the need for a clear vision for RPA reform and the need to generate momentum in establishing ESA. This is necessary to ensure ESA is established successfully and to give the system as a whole – and particularly the staff in our respective organisations – clarity on the nature of change and on the steps we will be taking to achieve this.
- It is vital that we work together to ensure that the implementation of the RPA progresses rapidly. This has to be a collective effort from all the organisations represented around this table.
- For my part, I will be bringing the new legislation to the Assembly at the earliest possible opportunity.
- I want to emphasise how important it is that you and your organisations continue to work closely with Gavin and his team and engage fully in the change management process.
- I am encouraged to hear that staff from across the education sector organisations are already actively involved in the important work to establish ESA, in areas such as ICT, Finance and Human Resources.

- It is important that we can build further on your support and cooperation to ensure we establish ESA successfully and create together an education service that delivers the best results for every child.
- There are two key areas which I want to mention, as I believe these are critical to the success of this strategy, and are central to reforming education.
- **Education Quality** is what the RPA is all about. We need to ensure that children receive the best education, suitable to their needs, to enable them to reach their full potential. This will be a key role for the new Education and Skills Authority.
- We have developed important new policies including the new school improvement policy 'Every School a Good School', the revised curriculum and Entitlement Framework, and new assessment arrangements. Implementing these policies will represent a key challenge for all of those involved in delivering education: teachers, principals, governors, and administrators.
- We need to ensure that ESA develops the high quality support and challenge functions necessary to ensure these policies are implemented successfully in schools and standards are raised. Gavin, in consultation with Will, will be setting up an Expert Working Group in the next few weeks to examine how ESA should address this issue, drawing on expertise from within the sector and on best practice from elsewhere.
- Similarly with Children's Services, getting the right support structures in place is vital to ensure that children and young people can avail of an integrated and comprehensive range of support services which are child focused and responsive to need. A Working Group will also be established by Will and Gavin to examine how these should be delivered within ESA. I look forward to seeing the recommendations from these groups.

- The incoming financial year will be a key year in the lead up to the establishment of ESA and I want to ensure that the strategic direction for each organisation is fully consistent with, and supports, the move to ESA in an effective way.

- Therefore it is vital that the contribution of existing organisations to the successful establishment of ESA is explicitly included in
 - the Boards Resource Allocation Plans and in the Business Plans for the other organisations,
 - Performance targets for each organisation, and
 - Performance targets for senior staff in the organisations.

- I have asked Will and Gavin to ensure that this happens and I will also be monitoring how this work is progressing through these meetings with you and through the Accountability meetings throughout 2008/09.

- We all want to ensure that the RPA changes lead to stronger support for front line education services. Engaging with Gavin on the implementation of the Change Management Strategy for the establishment of ESA will ensure that that we harness the vast amount of expertise that exists in your organisations to ensure that front line services see real benefits from the change.