

## **RPA Chairpersons Forum: 2:30pm 17 September 2009 – Elmbrook Special School, Enniskillen**

**Present:** Education Minister Caitríona Ruane MLA  
Bishop John McAreavey (CCMS)  
Peter Duffy (WELB)  
Sean Murphy (NICIE)  
Alderman Roy Beggs (NEELB)  
Gerry Carson (BELB)  
Pat Carvill (SEELB)  
Bertie Faulkner (YCNI)  
Professor Bernard Cullen (Staff Comm)  
Marie Donnell (SELB)  
Sally McKee (GTCNI)

Will Haire (DE)  
Joe Reynolds (DE)  
Gavin Boyd (ESAIT)  
Seán Hogan (ESA Chair Designate)

**Apologies:** Geraldine Tigchelaar (IEF)  
Douglas Osler (SEELB)  
Róise ní Bhaoill (InaG)  
Councillor Jim Rodgers (BELB)  
Maire Young (YCNI)  
David McKee (CCEA)  
Caoimhín Ó Peatáin (CnaG)  
Colm Cavanagh (NICIE)

**In attendance:** Peter O'Neill (DE)

Peter Duffy welcomed the Minister and all attendees to Elmbrook Special School. The Minister then thanked everyone for their attendance and welcomed Seán Hogan, the ESA Chair designate, to his first meeting with the group. Mr Hogan thanked chairs for the welcome he had received and for the co-operation that had already been extended to him across the sector.

### **Minutes**

Members confirmed that they were content with the minutes of the previous meeting (held on 20 May 2009).

### **Legislation Update**

The Minister provided an update on progress with the RPA legislation and advised that a number of amendments to Bill 1 had been presented to the Education Committee for consideration. The Committee would be meeting on 23 September to vote on the Bill clause by clause.

In response to a query about the make-up of the ESA Board, the Minister confirmed that she would propose an amendment to Bill 1 to allow for 11 – 14 members plus the chair, with the majority of members being councillors.

In the course of discussion it was revealed that 220 applications for Board membership (60 councillors and 160 non-council) had been received. There would be open process of recruitment to ensure a diverse membership drawn from a broad range of people who have an interest in education and the skills and competences to play a leading role. There would be parallel processes for recommending elected and non-elected members. Seán Hogan indicated that the process was currently at the initial sifting stage and that he hoped to be able to provide names to the Minister before the end of November.

The Minister confirmed that the legislation remained on schedule to ensure the establishment of ESA by 1 January 2010.

### **Progress on Implementation**

The Minister advised that Seán Hogan had been appointed as ESA Chair Designate and that all but one of the ESA Director posts had also been filled. Work on the identification of functions in DE to transfer to ESA was also being finalised. She then invited attendees to provide an update on progress within their own organisations.

While feedback on progress/involvement with the implementation of RPA from the chairpersons of all of the organisations represented was in the main positive, the following concerns and issues were raised:-

- Some organisations would be impacted by the loss of key personnel who had been successful in the ESA Director competition;
- A number of key staff in organisations were seeking redundancy;
- The need to carefully manage budgets until the establishment of ESA and linked to this, concerns about managing services during the period January to March 2010. In this connection the YCNI was in the process of preparing a legacy document which it would pass to the ESA Board;
- The need for more emphasis on communication to negate the uncertainty being experienced by staff – staff need to know how the ESA will operate, their role in the organisation, who will take decisions etc.;
- The need to take forward work on the establishing Boards of Governors (BoGs) ahead of the establishment of ESA and linked to this an understanding on the part of prospective BoGs members of the huge commitment required of Governors;
- Staff concerns about the location of ESA offices and sensitivities around letting staff know as soon as possible where and to whom they will report;
- The need for any voluntary severance scheme to be held in place as long as possible and as long as uncertainties over locations continues;

- The GTC reflected concerns of teachers re the impact of RPA on frontline services and the implications for them in terms of accountability under the new ESA; and
- NICIE reported that a new Chief Executive had been appointed.

In response Gavin Boyd indicated that the Business Case for the Voluntary Severance Scheme made provision for it to last for the full 3 year transition term and therefore individuals who wished to apply for redundancy after the establishment of ESA (and when locations issues had been clarified), would not be disadvantaged.

In relation to concerns about communications, Joe Reynolds outlined the extent of the various forms and forums of communication being used now and in recent months and advised that DE and ESAIT staff would be happy to meet with any group to provide information and to answer questions as required.

### **Local Committees of ESA**

Seán Hogan advised that the initial sifting stage for the ESA Board was taking place at the moment and that it was hoped that a list of possible Board members would be passed to the Minister for consideration in November. He then went onto briefly explain arrangements for the Local Committees of ESA, pointing out that the intention was to set up advisory committees (each chaired by a member of the ESA Board) that would be linked with local area teams. It was envisaged that this arrangement would provide wide representation which would feed useful and relevant information back into the ESA Board. He would be to arranging a seminar/workshop within the next month during which he hoped to draw on the experience of personnel within legacy organisations and identify good practice (as well as things which may not have gone well). Organisations would be invited to provide nominations for this event. He confirmed that co-terminosity with local government boundaries would be a factor in shaping local arrangements.

### **Financial Management 2009/10**

Will Haire stressed the difficult budget situation being faced, registered his appreciation for the close working relationships between the Department and the legacy organisations and stressed the importance of keeping all services running.

### **AOB**

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that one more meeting of the group was needed and that this meeting would be held in Armagh. The date and venue would be confirmed in due course.

The meeting closed at 4:15pm.