

**RPA Chairpersons Forum: 25 March 2009**  
**Room 152 Parliament Buildings**

**Present:** Education Minister Caitríona Ruane MLA  
Mrs Pat Carvill (CCMS)  
Peter Duffy (WELB)  
Colm Cavanagh (NICIE)  
Maire Young (YCNI)  
Alderman Roy Beggs (NEELB)  
Plunkett Campbell (SELB)  
Sally McKee (GTCNI)  
David McKee (CCEA)  
Pat Carvill (SEELB)  
Professor Bernard Cullen (Staff Comm)  
Caoimhín Ó Peatáin (CnaG)  
Councillor Jim Rodgers (BELB)

Will Haire (DE)  
John McGrath (DE)  
Joe Reynolds (DE)  
Gavin Boyd (ESAIT)

**Apologies:** Geraldine Tigchelaar (IEF)  
Douglas Osler (SEELB)  
Marie Donnell (SELB)  
Bishop John McAreevey (CCMS)  
Róise ní Bhaoill (InaG)

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

The Minister welcomed everyone and thanked them for their attendance.

**Minutes**

Members confirmed that they were content with the minutes of the previous meeting (held on 26 January 2009).

**Legislation Update**

The Minister advised that an extension to 30 September had been granted to the Education Committee to allow it to scrutinise the Education Bill. John McGrath then went on to explain that the Committee met every Wednesday morning to take evidence from interested parties and after each of these sessions Department officials responded to any concerns raised and provided further information as necessary to the Committee. Policy areas within Bill 2 were still in the process of being finalised and the Department was providing information to the Committee in modules for consideration.

Members were advised that it was unlikely that the Committee's scrutiny of the Bill would last to September but if it did there was still time to complete the legislative process to allow the Bill to become law by 1 January 2010. The Minister and Department representatives provided assurances that despite

the difficult issues that had to be worked through, they were confident that the implementation of the Bill would not be delayed.

The Minister stressed the need for all groups and individuals views on the legislation to be heard now and Joe Reynolds indicated that he would be happy to meet with any groups to discuss concerns they might have. This offer was welcomed.

## **Progress on Implementation**

### **ESA –**

Gavin Boyd provided an update on progress from the ESA perspective pointing out that a report on the outcome of the consultation on the ESA Organisation Structure had been submitted to DE for consideration and that final decisions on the structure were imminent. He went on to explain progress on other areas of work including Post Weighting, Voluntary Severance and the Strategy for Recruitment, Redeployment and Voluntary Severance (RRVS). In relation to the RRVS strategy Gavin reported that some responses had already been received to the consultation (which was due to end 30 April) and encouraged all to submit their comments and concerns as soon as possible. The opportunity to respond on this consultation was welcomed.

### **DE –**

John McGrath gave an update on the transformation taking place within DE pointing out that new structures, which reflected the Minister's policy direction, would become effective from May. Work had also been taken forward on the functions which would transfer to ESA. Details on both of these areas of work would be shared with the wider education sector in the near future. Work would be taken forward over the next 9 months to harmonise the processes and relationships (between DE and ESA) that needed to be put in place. Further work on another tranche of work after the 1 January 2010 would help these processes and relationships to bed down.

## **Financial Management 2009/10**

While acknowledging the difficult financial circumstances the Minister indicated that Education budget for 2009/10 was quite good. She went on to highlight the best ever spend on capital in 2008/09, stressed the need for the ELBs to submit RAPS as soon as possible and emphasised that if education sector could demonstrate that it managed and controlled its expenditure well, that this would make it easier to make a case for extra funds. In this connection Will Haire expressed his thanks and appreciation for the co-operation received from the SFOs and CEs at the monthly meetings now being held. He went on to stress the importance of close liaison with Accounting Officers over the coming months so as to ensure that all finance issues were tightly controlled and understood.

In response to a request to get schools budgets out as soon as possible Will Haire indicated that certain funds were being un-earmarked to ensure they are distributed more quickly.

Colm Cavanagh thanked the Minister for the resolution on the funding of Classroom Assistants.

The Minister left the meeting at 14:45

In response to a query raised on Sectoral Support Business Plans John McGrath advised that the submitted plans were being examined and that the Department hoped to respond to the initial proposals soon.

### **Role of Transition Board**

Gavin Boyd outlined the role of the Transition Board and advised that the terms of reference for the Board, which were being updated, would be circulated within the next few weeks – they would also be copied to Chairpersons. He explained the work that was being taken forward on convergence. Key priorities included:-

- To support the Every School a Good School policy;
- Developing a new single organisation (ESA);
- Creating a programme board around SEN (to ensure consistent policy implementation);
- The creation of a single point of decision making; and
- The reorganisation of back office functions.

Will Haire stressed the importance of locating services close to schools and acknowledged the need for on-going and clear communication with stakeholders throughout the convergence process.

It was pointed out that chairpersons oversight responsibilities for their organisations (which included the production of a report spanning the full financial year) ended on 31 December 2009. Will Haire indicated that he would clarify how this situation would be reported and would advise chairpersons accordingly.

**[Action: Will Haire]**

### **Contribution of Board Members**

Following a request from Will Haire as to how best to harness the help of Board members on developing thinking on the local committee structure envisaged for ESA, it was agreed that the matter merited detailed discussion and Will would write to Chairpersons inviting them to a meeting to discuss the matter in greater detail.

### **AOB**

The next meeting would be held on 20 May 2009 at the Middletown Centre for Autism.

The meeting closed at 15:25.