

**RPA Stakeholders Meeting
12th December 2006**

Attendees:

**Will Haire
Eddie Rooney
Mark Browne
Chris Stewart
Liam Barr
Revd Robert Herron
Frank Bunting
Donal Flanagan
Irene Knox
Terry Herron
David Cargo
Gordon Topping
Barry Mullholland
Finbar McCallion
Monsignor Liam McEntegart
Michael Wardlow
Pamela Montgomery
Sean O Coinn
Richard Hanna
John Darcy
David Guilfoyle
Denis Palmer
Tom Hesketh
Tom Gillen
Elaine McIlduff
Eddie McArdle
Patricia Weir
Bernie O'Haire**

In Attendance:

Christine Kidd

No.	Description	Action
1.	Minutes of Previous meeting	
a.	The minutes of the last meeting were passed as a true and accurate record.	
2.	Update	
a.	The main policy papers have now issued to stakeholders for their comments. They are also available on the Department of Education's website. The closing date for comments will be 19 th January 2007.	Group members
b.	The youth policy paper is due to issue today. This will also be placed on the Departmental website. The deadline for responses to this paper will be extended accordingly.	PMO
c.	There has been some slippage on issuing the equality screening forms for comment. This will be done as soon as possible.	PMO
d.	Policy paper 20 is not yet complete – once completed, it will be issued to stakeholders following Ministerial approval.	PMO
e.	The Minister has made it clear that the original deadlines for RPA must be met. This means that some steps will be carried out in parallel, rather than sequentially; such as Equality screening and Legislative instructions. However, the Department will ensure that there will be on-going opportunities to hear the views and comments of stakeholders throughout the Programme.	
f.	It was stressed that the policy papers currently out for consultation are not final. All comments submitted will be given due consideration.	
3.	Business Change	
a.	The Department has engaged PA consulting to assist in meeting the Gateway 0 recommendations.	
b.	Michael Maguire and Charlie Henderson are taking forward the business change aspect of this work. Group members will be contacted by them shortly, as part of this work.	
c.	The consultancy exercise is due to end March 2007.	
4.	Communication	
a.	The Stakeholder and Communication Manager has continued to engage the sector.	
	The Communication Steering group has agreed on some changes to the RPA newsletter. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section has now been added, which should help address staff concerns and issues.	
5.	Detailed Discussion of Policy Papers	
a.	The group had a discussion on particular points of	

	the policy papers .	
b.	The date of 19 th January for consultation responses was discussed. Group members expressed that this should not be a cut-off date for stakeholder involvement. W Haire re-assured the group that this would not be the case and DE remained committed to engaging with stakeholders..	
6.	Papers 1 - 4	
a.	It was raised that the Scottish model should be explored further, to establish its potential for application here. It was discussed that all schools should have access to the same expertise and support in terms of finance, child protection etc. The concept of groups of schools sharing access to the same support was discussed and had support from many group members.	RPA Division
b.	It is recognised that schools will want differing levels of autonomy, but the Department will work to ensure that issues such as child protection will be catered for equally across the sector.	
c.	It was raised that some schools have a shortage of Governors, and that this needs to be proactively addressed.	
d.	There was a discussion on the perceived powers and workloads for Governors under RPA. Some members felt that Governors would be disempowered by the role of ESA, while others asserted that it was their view that Governors would have too much responsibility. W Haire asserted his commitment to ensuring that Governors are better supported under the new system.	
e.	It was raised that it would have been useful for the overview papers to have contained measures for improvement under RPA. DE was currently addressing this issue and was in the process of developing a Benefits model to illustrate what improvements the RPA will deliver.	PMO
f.	The question of contracting services out from ESA was raised. Some members advocated the idea of delegation of the provision of some services to the Irish medium sector, transferors, CCMS etc.	
g.	It was raised that there is a fear that the ESA will determine school ethos and weaken freedom of choice in teacher's employment and children's schooling. It was stressed that this is not the intention of the Department, and that ESA would not do this.	
h.	The Director of Children's Services role was discussed. The group felt that more work needs to be done on this, as it des not yet seem to perform any useful role.	RPA Division

i.	A question was raised as to who would decide the powers to delegate to schools. W Haire stressed that maximised autonomy would not mean automatic delegation to schools. This would be a matter for individual agreement between schools and ESA.	
j.	It was queried whether all the policy papers would be subject to Equality screening, and when this would happen. All policy papers are currently undergoing screening within the Department, and the results of the screening exercise will be subject to a consultation period early in 2007.	
k.	The issue of schools being regarded as authorities by the Equality Commission (and therefore being required to produce Equality Schemes) was raised. C Stewart confirmed that this issue is still under discussion with the Equality Commission.	C Stewart
l.	It was raised that some members did not agree with the definition of 'ethos' in Paper 2. W Haire welcomed comments on this matter from all group members.	Group members.
7.	Paper 5	
a.	It was raised that at paragraph 22, where it is stated that 'ESA will appoint', that this should happen in consultation with others, rather than being a unilateral move by ESA. A discussion ensued as to whom ESA should consult with. The group agreed that this should be with those not involved in the situation on a day-to-day basis.	Governance and Accountability team
b.	A discussion was held as to whether the Department would make a recommendation on the number of governors a school should have. The group was asked whether this would be helpful, and what, if any, this number should be. It was agreed that different solutions worked for different schools and sectors, and that it would therefore not be appropriate for the Department to impose any limits on this.	
c.	Concerns were raised as to whether ESA would interfere in the appointments process, or if it would simply ensure that the appropriate processes are adhered to. E Rooney gave assurance that ESA would only assure the processes, rather than get involved. Group members welcomed this.	
d.	The issue of nomination rights to Boards of Governors was raised. There are problems where governors need to be governors in feeder primary schools. Concerns were raised that if nomination rights were lost, this could lead to problems getting governors. W Haire explained that the Department is aware of this and is addressing the issue.	W Haire
8.	Paper 6	

a.	Page 9, paragraph 5.1 will be updated to read 'foundation governors'. Also, in the reference to integrated schools, accountability rests with the limited company, not Board of Governors, as indicated. This will also be updated.	Estate Management project
b.	It was raised that a number of Principals across the sector were not aware of the club bank scheme until the issue of this paper.	
c.	A view was expressed that maintenance should be included within inspection reports. This will be passed to ETI for consideration.	ETI
9.	Paper 7	
a.	Members asked for clarity as to whether ESA will be responsible for only the development of grievance procedures, or their implementation. It was confirmed that ESA would only develop the procedures.	
b.	A query was raised as to why ESA could insist in being co-joined with a school in a legal action. It was explained that this would be its right, as it would be ESA's responsibility to defend the public purse. Some concern was expressed at this, as some members felt this could lead to ESA dictating what action schools should take. W Haire stated that he was happy to consider any views on this submitted to him by group members	Group members
c.	It was raised that some members feel that it will not be possible to separate the employer and employing authority functions. W Haire stated that he would consult Departmental solicitors on the view that have already been forwarded to the Department on this matter.	Employing Authority project
10.	Paper 13:	
a.	The view was raised by several members that this paper should not be necessary as the purpose of ESA and the Department as a whole is school improvement.	
11.	Paper 15	
a.	It was raised that some schools would prefer to have the option of buying in transport services, rather than charging parents for this. W Haire explained that this may still be an option – at this stage, the Department is not bringing in charging, merely the legislative power to enable this, should the policy decision to do so be taken.	
12.	Chief Executive designate of ESA	
a.	At 11.15 it was announced that Gavin Boyd had been appointed as Chief Executive designate of the ESA. The group wished Gavin well in his new post.	
13.	ESAIT presentation	
a.	M Browne gave a presentation on the implementation of RPA, including the anticipated	

	benefits of the RPA.	
14.	Close	
a.	PMO will contact members with a date for the next meeting after Christmas.	PMO
b.	W Haire and E Rooney wished members a happy and peaceful Christmas, and concluded the meeting.	