

POLICY PAPER 19

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EDUCATION ADVISORY FORUM

Purpose

1. This paper sets out proposals for the role, remit and structure of the Education Advisory Forum.

Background

2. The November 2005 RPA announcement stated:

“A new, statutory Education Advisory Forum will be established to act as a unified advisory interface between the Department and the education sector. Its membership will include representatives from the Transferors and Trustees, as well as the Integrated and Irish Medium sectors and Voluntary Grammar Schools. Members of the Advisory Forum will provide on-going advice to the Department. The Forum will also meet with the Minister for Education on a regular basis.

The establishment of the Education Advisory Forum will provide new, more effective mechanisms through which the Department can commission and receive advice. The statutory advisory role of CCEA and CCMS will be repealed and there will also be fundamental changes to the relationship between the Department and other organisations providing advice. Consequently, DE will review existing arrangements to streamline and improve co-ordination. This will improve decision making and strengthen the local advisory role, as set out in the consultation report. The review will help to inform the constitution, roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Forum. It will give specific consideration to the most effective ways of providing a voice for parents and young people in influencing decision-making on education.

The review will consider the Department's wider engagement of education stakeholders within a social partnership model, with the aim of strengthening the channels of communication with the teachers' unions

and other interests. The review will lead to more direct engagement with Board of Governors, school principals and teachers to ensure that their views are considered.”

Approach to the Review

3. The Department commissioned the Business Consultancy Service of DFP's Delivery and Innovation Division to provide advice on this strand of the RPA Programme.
4. The approach adopted by the team included: -
 - Consulting with senior officials in DE and the Department of Education and Learning (DEL).
 - Consulting with those on the DE RPA Stakeholder Group on a 1:1 basis to ascertain their requirements for the Forum.
 - Benchmarking against other Forums/Committees.
 - Developing and testing various models with DE & DEL officials.
 - Testing models with groups of DE Stakeholders.
 - Revising and agreeing the model presented in this report.
5. It should be noted that no one Forum/Committee could be found that would have acted as an ideal template for the Education Advisory Forum. The model detailed in this paper is drawn from best practice across the benchmarked organisations and also taking account of DFP guidance on establishing public bodies.

Role of the Education Advisory Forum

6. The Forum's primary focus will be the provision of quality advice to DE and DEL on strategic issues in relation to policy, planning and delivery of education. It is expected that the Forum will play an integral part in influencing and informing decisions which DE and DEL will make as part

of the rolling strategic planning process for the education sector. The Forum will not be a decision-making body nor will it be the only source of advice to DE and DEL. However, it will be a unique source of advice in that it will be the only group mechanism that has a special advisory relationship with DE and DEL, set in statute.

7. In order to ensure that the Forum does not become a vehicle for “lobby groups” to further their causes, a key feature will be the expectation that, while members will engage in open and robust debate on matters being discussed, they will strive to offer advice which represents the consensus view of the Forum.
8. The Minister will determine, in the context of legislation and policy on freedom of information (FOI), whether any or all advice provided by the Forum on policy issues can be disclosed to anyone making a FOI request.
9. The Forum will not remove the capacity of interested groups to approach and advise the Departments separately on specific policy issues nor will it remove the statutory consultation process outlined under Section 75 of, and Schedule 9 to, the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Status of the Education Advisory Forum

10. In policy paper 4 “The Relationship between DE and Stakeholders”, the Department emphasised the importance of the Forum having a participative culture rather than a representative culture - ie members should work collectively to build a consensus on issues, rather than merely represent the established view of their organisations or sectors. With this in mind, it had been suggested that the Forum ought not to be established as a separate organisation (or non-departmental public body), but should be under the stewardship of DE.

11. However, on further consideration, DE now takes the view that this would weaken the independence of the advice offered. Therefore, it is now proposed that the Forum should be established formally as an advisory non-departmental public body, with appropriate governance arrangements.
12. It is intended that there will be a provision in the 2nd RPA Bill to provide for the establishment of the EAF. There will also be enabling provisions for DE to make regulations covering the composition, role, operation etc of the Forum. It is intended that the EAF will be established at the same time as the Education and Skills Authority.

Relationship with DE and accountability to the Minister

13. DE will provide a clear definition of how the relationship with the EAF will work. This will include clear information about:
 - shared aims and protocols; and
 - arrangements to ensure that the Department receives information to enable it to monitor the work of the EAF.

Structure/Membership

14. A key consideration in determining the structure/membership of the Education Advisory Forum is the need to provide a balance between the customer and supplier sides of education. Other considerations are the need to “hear” the voices of those who are not heard through any other current formal mechanism and the need to develop advice through discussion and consensus rather than from diverse groups proffering a single perspective.
15. Annex A contains detail on structure/membership of the EAF.

16. In summary the Forum will be led by a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson (appointed by the Minister for Education, in consultation with the Minister for Employment and Learning, in accordance with OCPA principles) and will also have 26 core members (nominated from the sector, practitioner and customer sides of education). It will also have a DE observer (drawn from the Inspectorate).

Staff/Secretariat

17. The Forum will have a supporting secretariat, seconded from DE, to assist in its management, providing papers to members, paying expenses, taking minutes of meetings, inviting guests, ensuring that papers are circulated to Department/s etc. This service will be provided and paid for by the Department. The Secretariat, similar to other such bodies, will have a full time staff of around 3 and is likely to be headed at Unified Grade 7 level, with executive and administrative support.

Accommodation

18. It is not intended that the EAF will have its own permanent accommodation.
19. Meetings of the EAF, and any of its sub-groups, will be accommodated through the hire of conference/meeting rooms.

Budget for EAF

20. It is expected that the Chair and Vice Chair will work at least one day per month on Forum activities and will receive an annual allowance, sufficient to attract candidates with good knowledge and experience to discharge to a high standard the considerable responsibilities of the roles. Other members of the Forum will receive travel, subsistence and other reasonable expenses but will not be paid an allowance. Guests will also be paid travel, subsistence and other reasonable expenses.

The cost of hiring rooms, equipment and other resources and the provision of refreshments etc for meetings will also be met.

Research

21. It is likely that the Forum will need additional information to assist in its deliberations and enable it to provide evidence-based advice. Funding will be available from the Department's research budget. EAF bids for research funding will be channelled through the Permanent Secretary to the relevant Policy Division for consideration, with final decisions on allocation/s being taken by the DE Board.

Status of advice provided by the EAF

22. All advice produced by the Forum will be received formally by the Ministers and, through the Permanent Secretaries, will then be considered by the relevant Policy Division in DE or DEL. The advice and recommendations offered by the Forum will not be binding on DE or DEL as the Forum is only one source of advice. However, any subsequent policy submissions and briefing papers to the Minister on any subject examined by the Forum will include a copy of the advice provided by the Forum with an indication of how that advice has influenced the policy. This will help to demonstrate to the Forum that its views have been considered directly by Ministers before final decisions are taken. In addition DE and DEL will feed back to the Forum action being taken to progress/finalise policies on which the Forum has advised. The Forum will not be able to hold DE or DEL to account for the use of its advice as the role of scrutinising finalised policies falls to the relevant Assembly Committee.

Values

23. As the Forum aims to provide "quality advice" to the Departments, it will agree and adopt a set of core values to which members will operate.

Basic values will include the following (these can be added to by the members during their induction training):

- Each member will have equal status and have equal rights to have his/her opinion listened to; and
- Members should have a shared interest in achieving better educational outcomes for young people in Northern Ireland.

Operating Principles

24. Annex B contains a number of principles under which the Forum will operate.

Measuring Performance

25. The Forum must demonstrate that it has added value to the policy making process. To attain this the Forum must demonstrate evidence that the advice provided is valued by DE and DEL and has helped shape the resulting policy. Key constituents must also be able to see that the policy-making process is improving. Therefore DE or DEL must demonstrate clearly, in each case, how it has used the advice provided by the Forum in the development of policy.

Review

26. The Forum will be subject to informal review during its initial year of operation, and at regular periods thereafter, to identify any areas where changes (eg in groups represented etc) might be required.

Annex A

STRUCTURE/MEMBERSHIP OF THE EDUCATION ADVISORY FORUM

Recommended Structure

1. A number of options for the Forum were developed for consideration. The model detailed in table 1 below was iteratively developed through discussing requirements with senior officials in DE and DEL, undertaking two rounds of consultations with the DE RPA Stakeholder Group and examining Forums and Committees elsewhere. All of the education sectors along with practitioners and customers will be represented on the Forum.

Membership

2. To ensure effective communications, there will be a maximum of 26 core members on the Forum (see table 1 below for a breakdown). If feasible, this could be reduced where, for example, candidates can demonstrate that they can adequately present different viewpoints to the Forum in its discussions. The Department will have continuing discretion to decide whether these groups and/or individuals are the most appropriate and whether new groups may be added or existing groups replaced.

Table 1

Sector	Number	Practitioner	Number	Customer	Number
Integrated	1			Parents	2
Irish Medium	1	Head teacher	1	Children and young people	2
Transferors/public ownership schools ¹	1	Lecturer	1	Commercial Organisations	2
Trustees	1	Non-teaching staff	1	International perspective	2
Voluntary Grammar	1	Teacher – Primary (including nursery)	1	DE representative	1
Further and Higher Education	1	Teacher - Secondary	1	DEL representative	1
Training	1	Teacher – Special Education	1	Voluntary – community	1
		Trade Unions	1	Voluntary - youth	1
Totals	7		7		12

3. In addition to the 26 core members there will also be a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson both of whom should not have a vested interest in any education organisation in Northern Ireland. Appropriate competences for both roles will be developed and the performance of both roles will be assessed annually by DE.

¹ These are currently known as controlled schools.

4. Generic role descriptions will be developed for all members of the Forum.
5. The Minister for Education will make all appointments to the EAF, in consultation with the Minister for Employment and Learning.
6. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson will be recruited using OCPA principles.
7. DE and DEL will both attend the Forum to contribute to and listen to members debating issues on which advice has been sought.
8. Separately, the Education and Training Inspectorate will provide an observer role. This role will entail observing and supporting the work of the Forum, and any of its sub-groups, by contributing honestly and openly. He/she will offer impartial professional advice and expertise, based primarily on specialist knowledge and first-hand experience of schools and other education and training institutions and also informed by discussion with colleagues in the Inspectorate and in relevant branches in DE.

Nomination of sector/practitioner/customer members

9. Members who represent sectors/practitioners/customers will be nominated from within the groups they represent. However, they will not attend meetings as delegates of their particular group. Rather, they will highlight how policies under consideration might affect their particular group.

The Department would particularly welcome views on how children and young people should be identified to participate, how they should be trained and supported, and how they should participate.

Competences

10. Competences will be developed for all posts on the Forum. The following will be the core competences for all members:

- Influencing and networking skills
- Relevant knowledge and experience
- Capacity to deal with uncertainty
- Visioning capabilities
- Contributor to Forum values
- Capacity to establish effective relationships with others
- External perspective
- Emotional intelligence and resilience

Term of Appointment

11. The term of appointment for members will range from 2 to 4 years. This will help to ensure a regular turnover with the aim of no more than 50% of the members changing at any one time. Prospective members will be asked to state their preferred period of office.

12. Prospective members in full-time employment will be expected to confirm that they have the full support of their employer to contribute to the Forum.

13. Members will be able to be nominated for a second term providing, in the case of those who are representing groups, they continue to have the support of the group.

Induction Training

14. On appointment, members will receive training on the purpose of the Forum, their roles and responsibilities, core values and the Forum's

operating principles. Members will be required to sign a declaration of commitment to the aims of the Forum.

Specialist Advice

15. From time to time, the Forum will have access to those with specialist expertise who can provide it with advice on matters of interest eg drug prevention, health and safety issues etc. Any interested parties can approach the Forum through the Chairman.

Position of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA)

16. The ESA will not have membership on the Forum and will not be involved in the development of the Forum's annual work plan. It is expected that, as policies are being developed, DE will involve the ESA in identifying and considering practical implementation issues which need to be taken into account before draft policy documents are passed to the Forum for consideration.

Annex B

OPERATING PRINCIPLES FOR THE EDUCATION ADVISORY FORUM

- The Chairperson will develop an annual work plan for the Forum, in consultation with the Permanent Secretaries of DE and DEL.
- The Chairperson will produce an annual report on issues discussed and advice offered to DE and DEL.
- All formal contacts between the Departments and the Forum will be through the Chairperson.
- The Chairperson may advise the Ministers directly and all such advice will be supported by written documentation.
- The Forum will meet with the Ministers at least once a year.
- The Forum will meet 5-6 times per year to discuss progress on the work plan, contribute to debate on papers presented by the Departments and/or sub-groups (should these exist).
- Most business should be conducted by Forum members on the day that they meet. However, there may be a need for a second tier or sub-group structure to allow for more detailed discussions to take place.
- Sub-group decisions will be ratified by the full Forum.
- The agenda for each meeting will be agreed jointly between the Chairperson and the Permanent Secretary of DE in consultation with the Permanent Secretary of DEL. Any disagreements on the agenda will be determined by the Ministers taking into account resources available and priorities.
- Forum members can influence the agenda setting process through submitting items for inclusion through the Chairperson.
- The Forum must aim to arrive at consensus, having had the necessary debate on the issues being discussed. There will be no votes.
- All members will speak freely on all issues under consideration – the Chatham House Rule will apply ie participants in the meeting are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker/s, nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

- All Forum meetings will be minuted and will reflect the full range of opinions raised and, in the event that consensus cannot be reached, an attachment to the minutes will record the full range of views expressed.
- In the interests of transparency, the Chairperson will agree with members the nature of the advice is to be provided to DE or DEL.
- Given that trust and continuity of discussion are important, members of the Forum cannot send substitutes except in exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the Chairperson.
- Continuing membership will be questioned if non-attendance has not been communicated and agreed in advance. In the case of long-term illness, a substitute can be nominated – that substitute must fulfill all of the competence requirements.