

SECTORAL SUPPORT POST-RPA

BACKGROUND

Throughout the Review of Public Administration (RPA) there has been an assumption that there will continue to be educational sectors in Northern Ireland, and that the Department of Education (DE) will continue to engage with those sectors. The RPA consultation document stated, “To ensure informed policy development and implementation it will be vital to collate and disseminate advice across the full range of education stakeholders. This will include...sectoral advice.” It went on to say that DE would undertake a review of the provision of advice, and that this should include “assessment of the most effective ways of representing the views of sectoral interests.”

In her statement of 22 November 2005 on the outcome of the RPA as it related to Education, Minister Angela Smith announced the establishment of a new statutory Education Advisory Forum (EAF) “to act as unified advisory interface between the Department and the education sector.” It would include representatives of all of the sectoral interests. However, the EAF would not be the only channel of communication between the Department and the sectors.

What are “Sectoral Interests”?

A high percentage of schools here are defined by ownership or specific type of education offered, for example Irish Medium, Catholic, Grammar etc. Groups of schools defined in this way are referred to as education sectors. Organisations, which represent the views of those sectors, are referred to here as the sectoral interests. Given the way in which different sectors emerged and developed here over the years, the sectoral interests have very different relationships with government, play differing roles and receive vastly different levels of support. **The RPA presents an opportunity to reform these inequalities in relationships, roles and funding, and ensure that all sectors are treated in a consistent and equitable manner.**

The Department currently funds three organisations that support particular types of schools or sectors: the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), and Comhairle na Gaelscholáiochta (CnaG) for the Irish Medium sector. Under the RPA all of the front-line support and related functions that DE funds these organisations to deliver will be transferred to the ESA. Work is currently underway within the sponsor divisions to identify the specific functions and staff to be transferred.

Further, the statutory advisory role of CCMS will be repealed meaning that it will no longer exist as a statutory body or NDPB. The other two organisations are not statutory therefore can continue to exist independent of government.

The Governing Bodies Association (GBA) represents the voluntary grammar school sector; and the Transferors' Representative Council is the voice for transferred schools within the controlled sector. Neither organisation currently receives core-funding from government.

While we are treating transferred schools as a sector in its own right, as indicated above, it is a sub-set of controlled schools. Controlled schools are not a recognised sector as such. They are the schools that do not fit into any other category and are owned and managed by government. They lack the sense of shared identity and ownership that is evident in other sectors. Nonetheless, this is a large and important group of schools that needs to be given the same opportunity as other sectors to play an active role in the post-RPA structures. How this is to be achieved is discussed in policy paper 20 – “Publicly Owned Schools”, but in the context of sectoral support we should consider this group as a sector that will at some stage have a representative voice that will require professional support.

Why Support Sectoral Interests?

There is significant benefit to be derived from the involvement of sectoral interests in education. Past experience has demonstrated that the active involvement/engagement of owners/Trustees/ governors of schools (i.e. sectoral interests) has had a positive impact on the performance of the school, and should be encouraged and facilitated. Involvement of owners/Trustees/governors can help establish a strong sense of ownership and pride in a school that appears to contribute to the positive experience of children attending the school and its overall performance. This is something that is difficult to quantify, but there is no doubt that the correlation can be made and this valuable contribution should be recognised.

As detailed policy work underpinning the implementation of the RPA progressed it became clear that there would be a significant role for the sectoral interests within the new arrangements. It also became clear that the sectors would need sufficient professional support and capacity if they were to fulfil the role envisaged. A project was therefore established to examine and quantify, in consultation with the sectors, the sort of support that would be required.

Separately, Sir George Bain published his report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education in December 2006, and recommended a role for sectoral interests in a new area based planning process for the schools' estate. It further recommended that DE "should provide appropriate resources for each of the sectors to ensure they have the capacity to support the planning of the schools' estate."

Work To Date

Over the past number of months the RPA Policy team has been working with the different education sectors to agree an approach to providing support that will enable all sectors to play a full role in the post-RPA education structures as well as fulfilling the role envisaged by Bain. DE officials have engaged with the relevant sectoral stakeholders with a view to agreeing:

- The roles and functions that sectoral interests/representatives would undertake;

- The capacity required to support the agreed roles and functions; and
- The form that such arrangements would take, and how the support capacity will be provided.

A number of key principles underpin this work:.

- Decisions on the transfer of front-line support and related services to the ESA remain extant, and are not affected by the consideration of the need for sectoral capacity.
- The ESA will be required to establish the capacity and expertise to provide sectorally sensitive services to schools of all types.
- DE will not support the development or continuation of functions that duplicate or overlap with functions that are the responsibility of the ESA.
- Support for sectoral capacity must be modest, reflecting the need to maximise investment in front-line services.
- DE would expect to see any supported capacity being used to engage with other sectors to explore and develop models of sharing and co-operation.
- DE could not support the establishment of non-departmental public bodies, or large organisations of any type outside the ESA.”

Working Assumptions

In addition to the key principles set out above, the sectoral support work has been progressed in the context of the following working assumptions:

- There must be consistency across all the sectors in terms of the types of activities to be supported;
- The support is for the benefit of the individual sectors and therefore must be “owned” by those sectors;
- There will be an agreed allocation of money for each sector to fund an agreed list of activities, but it will be up to each sector to decide how best to deploy the funding – including what organisational form the support should take. The allocation will have to cover all aspects of support to the

sector, including administration costs, therefore the onus will be on individual sectors to keep overheads to a minimum if they are to achieve best value from the funding allocated.

- Where possible we should take account of experience and expertise already within each sector, and to that end we will consider the potential benefits of working with pre-existing bodies, but not to the exclusion of alternative means of achieving the desired outcome for each sector.

Activities to be supported

RPA Division officials have met with all of the key players within the sectors to discuss the functions to be supported and explore initial views on the organisational arrangements that might deliver the support to the sector. Based on these discussions, the types of activities we have agreed with the sectors as appropriate to be supported through the provision of funding for professional capacity are:

- A representational and advocacy role, including advice and support in responding to consultation exercises in respect of education policies, initiatives and schemes, and in regard to relationships with the Department, the ESA, other Departments and the EAF. ;
- Working with schools within the sector to develop and maintain the collective ethos of the sector including, where appropriate, a role in ensuring ethos is part of employment considerations;
- Identifying/nominating foundation governors and encouraging others to put themselves forward as community governors;
- Discharging any role or responsibility relating to ownership of schools where appropriate;
- Participating in the planning of the schools estate, assessing current and ongoing provision within the sector, participating area-based planning co-ordinated by the ESA, and engaging where appropriate in strategic planning processes, including community planning;

- Building co-operation and engaging with other sectors in matters of mutual interest, including promotion of tolerance and understanding, respect for diversity and the aims of A Shared Future.

In addition to these activities there might be other sector-specific services that ESA will wish to commission from particular sectors, for example ethos-related training for school governors.

Who should receive this support?

The table below shows the sectors identified to receive support and the channel for the support to that sector.

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Channel for support</i>
Catholic maintained schools	Catholic Trustees
Transferred Schools	Transferors' Representative Council
Publicly owned schools	New Trust? (subject of a separate paper)
Integrated Schools	NICIE
Irish Medium Schools	CnaG
Voluntary Grammar Schools	Governing Bodies Association

Quantum of Support

Having identified the sectors, and the functions that should be supported, there remains the question of the funding that can be made available.

Ideally support should be “modest” in order to maximise funding to front-line services. It is recommended that the Department should aim to ensure that the total amount of funding for sectoral support under the new arrangements should be significantly less than the total amount of public funding going to the existing DE-supported sectoral organisations.

Proposal for Allocation Process

It is proposed that each of the sectors should be asked to submit a robust business case setting out and justifying their requirements for professional support to deliver the envisaged roles and responsibilities. The sectors should be required to demonstrate value for money in their proposals, and Department should aim to encourage each of the sectors to minimise its

overheads, through avoiding unnecessary permanent infrastructure by buying-in specific services/support as required. The allocations will reflect the strategic nature of the role and the variation in the functions to be undertaken by the different sectors.

Once initial allocations have been agreed, a formal letter of offer covering the first year of operation should issue to each sector. At the end of the first year the position will be reviewed and fresh business case sought using the experience of the first year to agree a rolling 3-year budget for each sector. Built into this process will be a requirement on each sector to demonstrate value for money and, where appropriate, deliver savings in line with those to be delivered against the overall education administration budget. A dedicated unit within DE should be established to manage this process and monitor the operation of sectoral support across all the sectors.

RPA Policy Team

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