

RPA Chairpersons Forum Meeting, 25 June 2008, North West Regional College,
Derry

Present: Education Minister Caitríona Ruane
Alderman Roy Beggs (NEELB)
Colm Cavanagh (NICIE)
Marie Donnell (SELB)
Bertie Faulkner (Vice Chair YCNI)
Rev Robert Herron (WELB)
Bishop John McAreavey (CCMS)
David McKee (CCEA)
Sally McKee (GTCNI)
Una O’Kane (Staff Comm)

Will Haire (DE)
John McGrath (DE)
David Woods (DE)
Gavin Boyd (ESAIT)

Apologies: Prof Bernard Cullen (Staff Comm)
Douglas Osler (SEELB)
Maire Young (YCNI)

In attendance: Joanne Eland (DE)
John McCourt (DE)

The meeting commenced at 3.50pm.

- The Minister opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending.
- The minutes from the previous meeting on 9 April 2008 were agreed.
- The Minister gave an update on the current situation regarding RPA legislation indicating that work was continuing to bring the legislation forward in line with the Executive’s commitment in the Programme for Government. The objective remains that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will be established by 1 April, and if not then, very shortly thereafter.
- John McGrath updated the forum on the finance situation, stressing that this was likely to a difficult year, with little or no additional allocations. NDPBs must plan on that basis and maintain close monitoring of expenditure. The Department was nevertheless hopeful that extra funds could be obtained to obviate the reductions to Extended Schools funding.

RPA

- The Minister invited Gavin Boyd to provide an update on recent activity by ESAIT. Gavin provided a summary of the key issues arising from the recent 17 service-based workshops for 350 participants with management responsibility for different services across the whole sector.

- Gavin indicated that, drawing on the feedback received, ESAIT would be developing service delivery models for key services, identifying skills, people and resources needed for new models of working and developing an organisational structure and locations strategy.
- Members stressed the continued importance of communication. There is great uncertainty amongst many staff, and the level of understanding of the proposed changes is variable. Reference was made to the information on ESAIT's website and the first edition of RPA News which had just issued. The Communicating Change Consultative Group (CCCCG) will continue to ensure timely information is made available, and it was pointed out that Boards and other NDPBs also have a role in disseminating information to staff.
- In response to a question about whether schools would still be able to employ their own schools staff, it was explained that it would be the responsibility of the Board of Governors to recruit staff for schools. The need to give priority to the appointment of newly qualified teachers was emphasised. On the appointment of principals, legislation would enable the Board of Governors to interview and make appointments: there will be no Teaching Appointments Committee.
- The availability and quality of support services to schools was discussed. Gavin Boyd indicated that in the new term ESAIT would be carrying out a statistically robust survey on the services that are currently being provided to schools.
- A question was raised regarding the responsibility for youth services. It was explained that discussions are on-going and a decision is still to be taken.
- On the timing of the RPA Bill, it was stressed that the Minister was still aiming for April 2009 but if this changes, the message would be communicated to the Chairs.

Redundancies

- John McGrath updated the Chairs on the position of redundancies for non-school-based staff. A letter had been issued to the Chief Executives informing them that processing of redundancies must await the legislation. £40 million has been made available to fund the redundancies which would in turn result in savings of £20 million by year three. It remains the expectation that compulsory redundancies would not be required. Decisions on redundancy would aim to ensure ESA retains the mix of skills and experience to enable it to discharge its functions effectively.

Wider Involvement

- It was asked whether the Chief Executives from the organisations that are not represented on the Transition Board would be invited to the meetings. It was explained that a wider group incorporating all the Chief Executives of the affected organisations would begin to meet in the run up to the establishment of ESA. It was agreed that the minutes of the Transition Board could be circulated and also posted on the ESAIT website.

Next Meeting

- It was agreed that due to time constraints, the agenda item on Business Planning would be deferred until the next meeting.
- It was also agreed that the next meeting of the forum would take place in Antrim Board Centre in September with a date and time to be confirmed.
- The meeting finished at 5.40pm.