

# RPA NEWS

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## TRANSFORMING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Whilst much of the focus for RPA has been the establishment of ESA there is clearly another strand to RPA, that of transforming the Department. With the Department moving towards a more strategic, policy, and performance monitoring role, work is progressing rapidly to ensure the Department is ready to meet the challenges that this will bring. This will require extensive change which will not take place overnight but over a period of time.

### The nature of the change

We are looking at a major change in the orientation of our work. It will involve:

less day to day briefing, routine administrative and financial tasks, and the co-ordination of what is an over-complicated administrative structure;

more strategic direction, accountability and the leadership of a streamlined administrative structure whose purpose is focused on its real task – raising educational standards through effective planning and support of the spectrum of education provision from early years through to the youth service.

### DE and ESA Relationship

The need for a clear and coherent working relationship between the Department and ESA will be vitally important in shaping behaviours as well as internal structures. This relationship will have several key characteristics:

#### (i) Policy – DE determines; ESA delivers

ESA will require a clearly articulated set of policies to guide its activities. This is a priority action and the Department is working on a policy code that will set out clearly and concisely each of the main education policies and the outcomes they are expected to achieve.

#### (ii) Priorities – DE sets; ESA delivers

ESA's activity will take place within the parameters of an annual approved "operating plan" which will include relevant performance targets. DE will monitor and evaluate a wide spectrum of indicators including educational outcomes and service quality.

#### (iii) Finance – DE approves; ESA accounts

The way we set ESA's budget will be the cornerstone of the DE/ESA relationship and the key indicator of the degree of autonomy. Reporting mechanisms will have to be agreed, including the frequency of monitoring and the level of detail involved.

An effective DE/ESA relationship will help drive up standards by securing consistent high quality support to those involved in the front-line delivery of education. The Department will also need to take greater account of the contribution of after-school provision; the role of parents and local communities; and the importance of linking together the work of professionals in education, health and social services so that children and their families receive the help and support they need.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*(continued overleaf)...*

## TRANSFORMING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION *(continued)*

### Transformation – Making it Happen

A lot of "transforming" is required, both in the focus and behaviour within the Department and in the structures and processes through which we do our business.

An essential starting point for this is a shared Vision for the Education Service and clarity about the separate but complementary roles of DE and ESA.

The Education Service Vision is *"To ensure that every learner fulfils his or her potential at each stage of development"*.

Building around that central Vision, a good deal of work has been done to consider the details of the key components of the "new DE" and its relationship with ESA.

The Vision has been expanded in the form of a concise statement of current Education Priorities and Areas for Action which in turn will guide the preparation of business plans for the coming year.

Those same priorities need to be reflected in the arrangements for approving ESA's budget and setting performance. The internal structure of DE also needs to be fit for purpose in enabling us to focus on the policy agenda and to direct and monitor the performance of ESA and the wider system.

Making this change happen requires concerted effort by staff across the Department, with clear leadership from senior and middle management. But we are all clear that the goal of a "transformed" DE is worth pursuing, in the interests of the children and young people we serve and our staff in the Department.

### THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) requires legislation to be passed by the NI Assembly. In July 2007 the Minister for Education announced that the relevant legislation would be brought forward to the Assembly as two separate Bills. The Department of Education is working closely with the Legislative Draftsman's Office to draft these Bills. The process that the Bills will go through in order to become law is laid out below.

**Pre introduction scrutiny by the Speaker** - 7 days before the Bill is introduced the Minister sends the Bill, the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum, the statement of legislative competence and, if applicable, the Secretary of State's consent to the Speaker.

**First stage** - introduction. A short formal process on the floor of the Assembly when the Minister formally introduces the Bill to the Assembly

**Second stage** - Members debate and vote on the principles of the Bill. Amendments to the Bill can be tabled to the Bill office after completion of this stage.

**Committee stage** - During this stage, which normally takes 30 days, but can be extended if necessary, the Committee undertake a detailed scrutiny of the Bill. The Committee take evidence from the Minister, Departmental officials and other interested parties. The Committee present their report to the Assembly and the Committee Clerk sends a copy of

the report to the Department and the Legislative Progress Unit of OFMdFM.

**Consideration stage** - The Committee reports its findings and proposed amendments to the Assembly Plenary. All amendments and the details of the Bill are voted on.

**Further Consideration stage** - A final opportunity for MLAs to amend the Bill. Only amendments are debated and voted on at this stage.

**Reconsideration stage** - This takes place if the Bill is referred back to the Assembly by the Judicial Committee or Secretary of State. Any amendments must be approved by the Assembly.

**Final stage and Royal Assent** - MLAs vote to pass or reject the Bill without the opportunity to make further amendments. The Speaker sends the Bill to the Secretary of State who submits the Bill for Royal Assent.

There is no definitive timescale for the process. The length of time varies from Bill to Bill and depends on the level of political discussions, public consultation and subsequent amendment to the drafts. Indeed, the Education Minister stated in an Assembly debate on 6th October - *"I look forward to my colleagues in all parties working with me to fast-track the review of public administration and the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority"*.

## Roadmap to ESA – Engagement with the Sector

In relation to the legislation the Education Minister in her speech on Friday 17 October to the Association of NI Education and Library Boards said "Let no one doubt my commitment to putting ESA in place. There are wider political difficulties but the case for reform is now better understood and I believe accepted."

Other aspects of work to establish ESA have progressed significantly since the previous issue of RPA News.

Draft future service delivery models have been developed by ESAIT and, following review by DE, will be discussed with staff in the current organisations and TUS at a series of workshops before Christmas. This will build on the work of the 20 workshops held in May and June 2008 and provide an important further opportunity for staff in the current organisation to shape the way services will be delivered under ESA.

Work continues on the organisational structures to support these new

	Oct 08	Nov 08	Dec 08
	Outline of process to DE Oversight Board and Transition Board		
	Service Delivery Models and role etc of Local Area Support Teams considered within ESAIT		
		Discussions with DE staff and senior education staff	
			Workshops with service managers and unions

models and on the strategies and processes necessary to put the new structures in place. A draft Recruitment, Re-deployment and Voluntary Severance Strategy (RRVS) has been developed in conjunction with the HR managers of the current organisations and the TUS and is at a very advanced stage. The RRVS strategy sets out the processes for recruiting to senior management posts in ESA (Director and Assistant Director) and the arrangements for voluntary severance and re-deployment. The

strategy will be developed further in due course to set out similar arrangements for staff at other grades.

Good progress has also been made on the Staff Transfer Scheme and work is continuing on the HR Principles and Policies document.

An audit of existing office accommodation is well underway. Together with the work on structures and service delivery models, this will provide the basis for development of a location strategy.

## MANAGING CHANGE, MAINTAINING SERVICE

The creation of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will see a period of major change to the administration of education in Northern Ireland. A top priority must be to ensure services to teachers, pupils, youth services and the wider community continue to be delivered to the highest standards.

### Careful planning

The ESA Implementation Team (ESAIT), the Department of Education and the leadership of the existing organisations are working together to plan and implement each stage of the process.

The last six months in particular have seen an unprecedented level of formal engagement and discussion to consult upon and communicate the change management strategy.

School leaders and teacher representatives have played and continue to play a key role in informing planning for change and the shape of education services in ESA.

### Managed transition

It is essential that key services for teachers, pupils and youth services provided by the existing organisations transfer smoothly to the new body.

On 'Day One' of ESA therefore schools will see little obvious change and essential services such as buses and school meals will be maintained.

Over time carefully planned change will take place. While ESA will be managed regionally, it is envisaged education support services will be delivered closer to schools through the provision of local support teams.

More information on the range of services these teams will provide will be made available in the coming months.

### Clear communication

In the run up to the creation of ESA, and as changes such as those outlined above are rolled out, timely and appropriate information will be provided to school leaders, teachers and youth services.

When changes to service are being made, communication will take place well in advance and through a variety of formats, such as circulars, news letters and websites.

You can keep up to date on all matters relating to the creation of the Education and Skills Authority on the ESA Implementation Team website – [www.esait.org.uk](http://www.esait.org.uk)

## Principals give views on **FUTURE SERVICE PROVISION**

Over two days in June, the ESA Implementation Team (ESAIT) met with a cross section of principals from primary and post-primary schools to hear their views on how ESA can deliver better services to their schools.

The discussions focused on four main issues:

- Developing leadership in schools
- Helping principals manage their organisations
- Supporting teachers in the classroom
- Coordination and support for children with social problems outside the school

### **Developing leadership in schools**

A key issue which arose was the need to provide structured programmes of training for school leaders. This should be seen as integral to the work and development of a school principal and not an 'add on' to existing duties. PQH needs to be consistently targeted at senior staff aspiring to principal level.

ESA must act to make school leadership a more attractive option for teachers. Many potential applicants are put off applying for leadership roles by the extra administrative burden. This issue must be addressed and the positive aspects of the principal's role promoted. Leadership training should be part of training for teachers at all stages of their careers.

There is a need to formalise support networks for teachers and facilitate more sharing of information and good practice.

### **Helping principals manage their organisations**

Principals stressed that ESA must recognise schools are at different stages of development. This means understanding the requirements of each and offering tailored training and support.

There was support for the introduction of local area support teams. However principals were clear that these teams must be staffed by credible professionals; that schools should have clear information on contact arrangements; and that coherent and consistent service standards should be set and maintained.

There is a need for robust management information, showing how the schools are performing and the context in which they are operating.

### **Supporting teachers in the classroom**

A priority for ESA must be to bring a more unified and coherent approach to the roll out of both policy and training programmes. In relation to the curriculum, support should move closer to schools with a change in emphasis from direction to facilitation.

There was agreement that ESA must listen to what teachers have to say in both developing services and framing advice.

A theme touched upon in all of the focus groups was ICT training. It was agreed that if maximum benefit was to arise from the investment in technology, then training in this area must be prioritised.

### **Coordination and support for children with social problems outside the school**

Some of the attendees commented on the lack of a joined-up service at present. A multidisciplinary approach is required with clear roles set out for schools and other services. There is need for a core set of services operating in local areas.

Issues of non-attendance, counselling and transport need to be addressed.

Concerns were expressed over the waiting time for education psychologists. It was noted that subsequent reports should offer schools solutions and explain diagnoses.

It was noted that, as numbers of SEN pupils were increasing, this needed to be reflected in the training and support offered to teachers and classroom assistants.