

PAPER 1

THE RPA IN EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to set the RPA within the wider education context, describe the purpose of the review and identify key criteria that should guide decisions on policy and implementation.

Education Planning Context

2. DE, in consultation with stakeholders, has developed a strategic framework for education, which sets out a vision and strategic aims and desired outcomes for the education sector. This provides the framework within which the Education Strategic Plan has been developed and to which the business plans of DE and other funded education bodies are aligned.
3. The vision for education is

“To educate and develop the young people of Northern Ireland to the highest possible standards, providing equality of access for all”.

As a key action within the Education Strategic Plan, it is essential that the RPA is taken forward in a way that contributes to the realisation of this vision and the achievement of the desired strategic outcomes for education that are central to the Strategic Framework (see Annex A). These cover a wide range of aspects of education and learning. Their central focus is on developing young people to reach their full potential through the provision of a wide variety of suitable and flexible learning opportunities, appropriately resourced and efficiently and effectively organised, that are delivered with the support of education staff, parents and the community. Children and young people, and the raising of education quality and the improvement of education outcomes, are therefore at the heart of all that we are seeking to achieve in the education sector.

Assessing the Benefits of RPA

4. It is vital to keep to the fore that while the RPA is a key Ministerial commitment and an important part of the wider government agenda, it is not an end in itself. Rather, it is designed to improve the quality of education services and enhance the delivery of teaching and learning for young people. To ensure that the RPA contributes as much as possible to the achievement of wider education objectives, and that the full benefits are realised, proposals for new arrangements must be tested, in the first instance, against the extent to which they facilitate achievement of the desired strategic outcomes for education. New arrangements must also support key cross-cutting government initiatives and, in particular, must promote equality of opportunity and give effect to the policy commitments in “A Shared Future”.

5. In order to deliver these educational outcomes, the new arrangements must realise the desired improvements in administrative structures, processes and relationships. RPA proposals should therefore meet the following criteria:
 - enhancing the capability of schools, youth settings and other education providers to deliver high quality education and raise standards;
 - supporting the continued development of a highly skilled and motivated workforce that is efficiently and effectively organised and deployed to deliver high quality education services;
 - establishing a clear and effective planning and accountability framework;
 - creating a simpler, more efficient and effective administration system.

Delivering the Benefits of RPA6.

From an administrative perspective the RPA will deliver benefits through:

- streamlining education administration;
 - realising economies of scale;
 - delivering services in a more efficient way;
 - releasing resources to improve the quality of services at the front line;
 - improving the speed, consistency and coherence of decision making and policy implementation.
7. In addition, the RPA provides a vital opportunity to review key relationships within the education sector, to clarify roles and responsibilities and brigade functions in a more effective way. In particular, to put the improvement agenda at the centre of education policy and administration and to support and develop schools and youth settings in delivering better education outcomes.

Outline of the Proposed Model for RPA in Education

8. The central focus of the proposed model for the RPA in Education is on raising the quality of education, through the creation of a policy and administrative framework that fosters and supports schools as the main drivers of educational improvement, enabling them to achieve greater autonomy and assume enhanced responsibility for raising standards of teaching and learning. This will be complemented and enhanced by high quality youth work. The education support and ancillary services needed by schools will be provided by ESA in a coherent, consistent and cost effective manner and to a high standard. Strategic vision and direction will be provided to the education sector by the Department of Education which will have an increased focus on policy formulation and ensuring the delivery of better education outcomes.

9. The responsibilities of the respective bodies within this model will be as follows:

Department of Education responsible for establishing the strategic direction for education, setting policy, priorities and standards for schools and youth services, allocating and monitoring resources and ensuring the efficient and effective delivery of services by the new ESA.

Education and Training Inspectorate responsible for the inspection and monitoring of all education and training establishments and related services and operating independently of all service providers and users.

Education and Skills Authority responsible for funding and providing support services to all schools, delivering school improvement programmes, monitoring school performance and intervening and supporting as necessary, strategic planning and procurement of the schools' estate, advice on curriculum and assessment, development and delivery of qualifications; acting as employing authority for teaching and other staff in grant-aided schools.

Education Advisory Forum, on a statutory basis, representing the education stakeholder interests and providing advice to the Department on key education issues.

Schools with the potential to take on greater responsibilities and become more autonomous than at present, that are more sustainable and capable of acting as drivers of education improvement.

ESA Implementation Team
28th November 2006

Desired Strategic Outcomes For The Education Sector

- ❖ Education attainment levels for young people that are the best in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and reduced differentials between pupils from different circumstances.
- ❖ All young people having access to an Education and Youth curriculum in settings that meet their individual learning needs and enable them to achieve their full potential.
- ❖ The varying learning and development needs of young people met by highly skilled and motivated teachers, youth workers, other staff and volunteers.
- ❖ Education and youth services organised and funded so that young people in all education and youth work settings have appropriately resourced and cost effective provision.
- ❖ Widespread recognition of the value and benefits of education to the individual, society and the economy.