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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DE AND STAKEHOLDERS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PLANNED REVIEW OF ADVICE

Purpose

1. This paper sets out initial ideas on two key aspects of the relationship between DE and stakeholders namely:
 - The role, remit and structure of the Education Advisory Forum (EAF); and
 - Meeting the needs of the various education sectors for access to policy and professional support, so that they can engage effectively with DE, the ESA and each other.

More detailed recommendations will be brought forward as part of the Review of Advice project.

Background

2. In the November RPA announcement it was stated that:

“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 The statutory advisory role of CCEA and CCMS will be repealed and there will also be fundamental changes to the relationship between the Department and other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."

Proposed Functions of the EAF

3. The proposed functions of the EAF will include the following:
 - providing advice on issues referred to it by DE or DEL; and
 - raising issues for discussion with DE or DEL.

Other sources of advice to DE

4. It is recognised that the EAF will be a major source of advice for DE. However, it has been highlighted that the Department will be able to draw upon other sources of advice (eg the Education and Training Inspectorate, General Teaching Council (NI), ESA, Assembly Committee) as necessary. The Review of Advice project will address this issue in more detail.
5. Further work remains to be considered in respect of the provision of advice more generally and how sectoral interests will be included. This

will include:-

- the type of advice required to facilitate effective decision-making in relation to policy, planning and the delivery of education;
 - the implications for the current advisory organisations and their future role and responsibilities;
 - the structure of the new Education Advisory Forum, and the roles and responsibilities of the Forum and its relationship with the Department;
 - the most effective ways of representing the views of sectoral interests within the new Forum;
 - how best to strengthen the local advisory role, including councils, front-line education providers and voluntary/community interests; and
 - the most effective ways of providing a voice for parents and young people in influencing decision making
6. The Review of Advice project will consider how best to ensure participation by a broad range of parents, children and young people. It is recognised that the greater the time commitment involved in membership of the EAF, the more likely it is that participation will tend to be concentrated among established organisations. To address this, the project will need to consider measures to increase the EAF's accessibility. This might involve flexible modes of participation, eg allowing non-members to take part in specific debates or discussions in the EAF, or to be co-opted to particular working groups or committees. Such measures would complement the existing arrangements whereby the ETI incorporates the views of parents in its inspection reports.

Membership

7. In addition to those interests mentioned in the former Minister's statement, there is also a need to ensure that publicly owned schools

are able to participate effectively in the EAF. This is still at an early policy development stage.

Form of the EAF

8. The EAF will be established by legislation. It is proposed that primary legislation will provide for the establishment of the Forum. There will also be enabling provisions for DE to make regulations covering the composition, role, operation etc of the Forum. It is proposed that the Chair of the EAF will be a ministerial appointment.

In keeping with the core principles of the RPA, the EAF will not be established as a corporate non-departmental public body. It will be supported by a secretariat seconded from DE, and its costs will be met by DE.

9. There are a number of specific issues which will require further consideration and discussion:-
 - Whether the new Forum should be led, or jointly led, by the Department.
 - Which stakeholders should be involved and how representatives should be chosen.
 - Whether it should provide advice solely to the Department, or to other organisations and/or the public as well.
 - How its position on any matter is to be determined (consensus, majority, etc).
 - What its governance and accountability arrangements, including its degree of independence, should be.

Proposals for taking forward the Review of Advice

10. Two business consultants have been appointed to independently assess the issues and compile a report and set of recommendations

relating to the new Education Advisory Forum. They commenced work on 23 October and DE hopes to be in a position to consider their final recommendations early in the New Year, allowing for the establishment of the new Forum in shadow form thereafter.

Sectoral capacity and support

11. The establishment of the EAF, and other RPA changes, will have profound implications for a number of existing organisations and the sectors they represent. The organisations directly affected by the changes announced in November 2005 are: the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE); and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG). However, some of the issues outlined below may also have implications for the roles of the Governing Bodies Association (GBA); the Integrated Education Fund (IEF); Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta (InG); and the Transferors Representative Council.
12. The RPA announcement stated that the ESA will take on the employing authority role of CCMS, and the front-line support and related functions of CCMS, NICIE and CnaG. It also stated that the statutory advisory role of CCMS would be ended. An analysis by DE shows that most existing functions for which these organisations are funded by DE will either transfer to the ESA, or be subsumed in the role of the EAF.
13. However, over the years the roles of all three organisations have tended to broaden, and to include activity in areas such as representation and advocacy, and providing sectoral 'coherence and support'. These activities, whilst not the primary purpose of DE funding, have tended to become increasingly significant in terms of the organisations' plans and priorities. There is a strong argument that the various sectors they represent will need to retain some capacity to undertake these activities as well as having the capacity to play a role within the EAF. Similar arguments could be advanced for the voluntary

grammar schools and Protestant churches, as an important leading voice for the current controlled schools.

14. There would be advantages in having a source (or sources) of sectoral support under the new arrangements. This would bring benefits in areas such as representation and advocacy, maintenance and development of ethos, planning of the schools estate, identifying and nominating school governors, and building further co-operation between sectors. Such activities would complement – but must not overlap with – frontline support services to schools, and formal advice to DE, which will be the domains of the ESA and EAF, respectively.
15. DE will engage with 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 will apply.

- 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 sectoral 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.

RPA Division
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