
INTO Response to the Review of Public Administration: Policy Papers

Introduction

1.1 INTO welcomes the opportunity to respond to the policy papers issued in November 2006.

1.2 INTO supports the Secretary of State's proposal to establish a single Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to rationalise the functions currently undertaken by the five Education and Library Boards, CCEA, CCMS, NICIE and CncG. INTO supports the view that this will enhance front line service provision for pupils in schools.

2. Paper 1: The RPA in Education

INTO supports the context, vision, key criteria and strategic outcomes for the education sector as outlined in Paper 1. In particular, INTO is supportive of the new arrangements promoting equality of opportunity and giving effect to the policy commitments "A Shared Future". If anything, "giving effect" could be considerably strengthened.

INTO have reservations for the proposals for schools taking on greater responsibility and becoming more autonomous than at present. The new arrangements should demonstrate greater levels of support for schools in cross cutting areas such as Human Resources, funding, general administration and Child Protection.

3. Paper 2: The relationship between the Education Skills Authority and Schools

INTO would favour and has advocated a relationship between the ESA and schools similar to that which pertains in Scotland under Delegated School Management (DSM). INTO does not favour the concept of maximised supported autonomy. INTO is of the view that effective leadership by Boards of Governors is largely illusory.

INTO would strongly urge a rethink of the ESA schools' relationship to broaden the responsibilities for ESA.

In relation to schools, the INTO view is that schools i.e., principals and staffs should be responsible for education. The remaining duties - the discharge of employer functions, the management of budgets and other duties to be set out in a Scheme of Management should be tasked to ESA.

INTO is opposed to the continuation of a common formula determined by DE if it continues to contain teachers' salaries therein.

On the vexed subject of ethos INTO would contend that the ethos of a school is determined not by ownership but by school staffs' work.

The concept of "maximised supported autonomy" follows the English model of schooling and is likely to exacerbate competition between schools rather than promote collaboration.

INTO does not share the enthusiasm of the Education Minister and the Department of Education for the role of governors working in schools, as all our experience is that they melt away whenever there is a serious problem.

4. Paper 3: The Relationship between the Department of Education and the Education and Skills Authority

INTO agrees that DE and its Education Minister should focus on leading the education system and set the direction and the outcomes that have been sought for children and young people. There is a contradiction, however, in stating that the DE/ESA relationship will not be one of "command and control" and then later the statement that "it will be for DE to develop its policy programme to decide if and when the ESA (or others) should be involved or engaged". This is surely a contradiction.

5. Paper 4: The Relationship between DE and Stakeholders and Implications for the Planned Review of Advice

INTO welcomes the proposed functions of the Education Advisory Forum (EAF) including:

- (i) Providing advice on issues referred to it by DE or DEL;
- (ii) Raising issues for discussion by DE or DEL.

The INTO view is that the EAF should be constructed along the same lines as the Economic Development Forum (EDF) developed by DETI.

6. Paper 5: Governance and Accountability

INTO supports a Board consisting of 8-12 members and other proposals relating to the role, remit and constitution.

INTO disagrees in paragraph 15 with "the agreed approach" whereby schools are given the maximum delegation of financial and other responsibilities. This is a bureaucratic model and has placed enormous strain on schools since the introduction of the concept of local delegation. INTO would urge the DE to reconsider and adopt the Scottish model to enable schools to develop as centres of learning excellence.

7. *Paper 6: The Schools' Estate*

INTO welcomes the more unified approach to the planning and management of the schools' estate proposed in this paper.

8. *Paper 7: Employing Authority and Employing Roles under post RPA Arrangements*

INTO strongly welcomes the proposal that ESA will be the single employing authority for all teaching and support staff in schools. INTO would again refer to its preference for the introduction of the Scottish model of Delegated School Management.

INTO would wish to be consulted on any proposed ESA Scheme of Management. In paragraph 9 of Annex A Vice Principals are referred to as prescribed posts. Vice Principals have not been prescribed posts since the 1989 Education Reform Order. Indeed the Department of Education (E. N. McGuigan) notified all employing authorities and recognised teachers' unions of this revised arrangement in 1993.

However, the CCMS Scheme of Management, approved by DE, still refers to Vice Principals as being prescribed posts.

9. *Paper 8: The Future of the School Library Service (SLS)*

INTO stresses the importance of school libraries and welcomes the decision to consult widely with professionals in the field for the delivery of this service.

10. *Paper 10: Education and Training Inspectorate*

INTO would welcome more information in relation to the strengthening of the legislation governing inspection and the Inspectorate.

11. *Paper 11: General Teaching Council NI*

INTO endorses the proposal to extend the powers of GTC (NI).

12. *Paper 13: School Improvement*

INTO notes the DE views in relation to the school improvement. INTO does not share the view of complacency within the school system. Structural issues including selection need to be addressed. INTO would be concerned at the emerging view that the legislative base for school improvement is weak; that accountability is not sufficiently understood and the current process (Schools Support Service SSP) is no longer fit for purpose.

INTO would remind DE that the "6-pack" publication series on school improvement was developed by the Education stakeholders, minus teachers' representatives. Tackling school improvement could and should be a partnership matter.

INTO does not accept that there are 4 main players in the school improvement process. What is being suggested here is a top down, command and control model, which would be intolerable in practice. There is little or no reference to teachers which is quite shocking. INTO therefore opposes the emerging view that, as in England and Wales, there is a confirming need for a more formal process linked to ETI inspection. INTO has already outlined its concern on this matter to the ETI.

INTO resents the gobbledegook associated with performance tables. Any "value added" dimension developed by DE without engagement with the recognised teachers' unions is bound to fail. INTO will therefore oppose a combination of general duties and powers being enshrined in legislation and ESA being given powers to enforce this policy.

13. Paper 16: Vending Machines

INTO welcomes these proposals.

14 Paper 17: Age Appropriate Provision for Pre School Children

INTO is of the view that all pre school provision should be graduate led.

15. Conclusion

INTO welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this process of consultation.