

**INTO RESPONSE
TO
DE SECTORAL SUPPORT POST RPA CONSULTATION**

***Review of Public Administration:
Policy Paper 21 – Sectoral Support Post RPA***

INTO welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Department of Education Consultation.

INTO is surprised and concerned at the Department of Education proposal to seek to establish Sectoral Support organisations. INTO remains of the view that the widespread support for the Curran Independent Enquiry recommendation (February 2004) should be acted upon. This recommendation, which was accepted by the Department of Education, Education and Library Boards, Employing Authorities and recognised teachers' unions stated:

"... The Department of Education should establish at an early date a NI regional consultative forum for the education service where the employers, unions and other key interests would discuss and offer advice at a strategic level on planning options."

The follow-up statement by former Education Minister, Angela Smith on 22 November 2005, announced the establishment of a new statutory Education Advisory Forum (EAF):

"... to act as a unified advisory interface between the Department and the Education Sector..."

Ms. Smith stated that this would include representatives from all the Sectoral Interests.

INTO therefore opposes the establishment at taxpayers' expense new bodies entitled Sectoral Support Bodies and is unconvinced by both the definition of Sectoral Support Bodies outlined in Policy Paper 21, nor the necessity.

Role of Education and Library Boards

Education and Library Boards were established as Area Planning Boards for Education. This was elaborated in the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, Para 6 (1): Duty of boards to secure provision of primary and secondary education.

“... Each Board shall secure that there are available in this area sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education and the schools available for an area shall not be deemed to be sufficient unless they are sufficient in number, character and equipment to afford for all pupils opportunity for education offering such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes, and of the different periods for which they may be expected to remain at school....”

INTO accepts that there were issues in relation to the ability of Boards to act as “Area Planning Boards” in the provision of Catholic Schools, Grant Maintained Integrated Schools and Grant Maintained Irish Medium Schools.

The Education Reform Order (1989) created the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and gave it overlapping powers in relation to Area Planning that had originally been intended for Boards in the 1986 Order. The Good Friday Agreement 1998 likewise developed statutory duties on the Department of Education for the promotion of Integrated and Irish Medium Schools.

As a result, the Department funds three separate organisations – the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) for the Irish Medium Sector. The Department of Education does not fund the Governing Bodies Association (GBA) which is a voluntarily organisation loosely advocating the views of individual grammar schools as employing authorities in their own right. The GBA is not a Sectoral Interest. INTO is totally opposed to it being funded by the Department of Education as a Sectoral Interest, as is envisaged in this policy paper.

INTO is of the view that there is no basis for the statement in the policy paper that:

“...the Transferor’s Representative Council is the voice for transferred schools within the Controlled Sector...”

The Transferor’s Council, representing the Protestant Churches who transferred their schools to the Northern Ireland state in the 1930s, represent a tiny proportion of schools now within the Controlled Sector. INTO regards the proposal to give the Transferor’s Representative Council core funding from Government as the sectarianisation of education, a backward step and entirely antithetical to the principle of “A Shared Future” in education.

Sectoral Interests

INTO rejects the hypothesis presented in page 3 that:

“...the active involvement/ engagement of ... Sectoral Interests has had a positive impact on the performance of the school...”

The document accepts that this is something that is difficult to quantify. There is no evidence for this hypothesis. Rather the hypothesis seeks to diminish the role of principals and teachers working together in the teaching learning process of pupils.

INTO is unconvinced that there is a need for new Sectoral Support Bodies which are tax payer funded. INTO is of the view that the creation of such bodies is reinventing the wheel and that fine-tuning this role can be most effectively be undertaken by the existing Education and Library Boards.

INTO therefore rejects the concept of taxpayer funded Sectoral Support Bodies in education. It rejects the Governing Bodies Association as a Sectoral Support Body. It is of the view, that the creation of Sectoral Support Bodies adds unnecessary levels of additional bureaucracy, sectarianises educational provision unnecessarily and advocates that the status quo in the circumstances is the most acceptable alternative for the development of an effective and fit for purpose education administrative structure.

Summary

INTO is of the view that the Review of the Public Administration process in education should be halted to enable an evaluation to take place of the way forward in educational administration. There are a number of reasons for this:

- (i) INTO does not foresee significant savings being made in educational administration, which will transfer to frontline support in classrooms.
- (ii) INTO is unconvinced that a top-down root and branch approach to educational administration with the establishment of an Education and Skills Authority (ESA) is appropriate and that change should take place in a generic manner.
- (iii) The process of educational change and proposed change is complex and bewildering to the extent that it is unsustainable and potentially harmful to the teaching and learning of pupils.
- (iv) INTO is increasingly concerned at the lack of democratic accountability being advocated for future educational administrative arrangements both under the proposed ESA and the taxpayer funded proposed Sectoral Support Bodies.

INTO
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