

Report of the Meeting of the Joint Consultative Forum for the Education Sector held on Wednesday, 2 March 2016 at 10.30 a.m. in the Education Authority's Regional Office, 40 Academy Street, Belfast

Present:-

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| Alistair Donaghy | Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) |
| Andrew Murdock | Guide Dogs for the Blind |
| Ann Marrion | Association of Education Psychologists |
| Barry Mulholland | Regional Managing Director, EA |
| Bronagh Smyth | ATL (placement student) |
| Carol Johnston | Corporate Development Officer, EA |
| Cathy Lavery | Equality, EA |
| Clodhna Scott-Wills | NICIE |
| Colette Slevin | Mencap |
| Donal Collins | Equality Commission |
| Ellen Murray | Director, SAIL |
| Gavin Boyd | Chief Executive, EA |
| Gavin Norris | Presbyterian Church of Ireland |
| Helena McSherry | NIPSA |
| Jan Mathews | Special Education & Inclusion Review Team, DE |
| John Collings | Director of Education, EA |
| Kathryn Stevenson | Children's Law Centre |
| Mary Walker | Libraries NI |
| Michael Webb | ATL (placement student) |
| Paddy Skates | Women's Forum NI |
| Pauline Martin | North Eastern Region, EA |
| Robert Sye | Equality, Department of Education |
| Rosemary Rainey | EA Board Member |
| Sharon Lawlor | Special Education & Inclusion Review Team, DE |
| Susan Parlour | NASUWT |
| Teresa Connolly | Equality, EA |
| Teresa Moley | Equality Commission |
| Tony Wilson | Head of CMSU, EA |

1. Welcome and Introduction

Tony Wilson welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that John Curran and Paschal McKeown had retired from their posts as Joint Chairs of the forum. He then introduced the speakers at today's meeting.

2. Education Authority – Update

Gavin Boyd (Interim Chief Executive, Education Authority) provided members with the following update in respect of the Education Authority.

Gavin reinforced the importance of Equality within the Education Authority. He briefed members on the transition and how all staff at all levels had successfully delivered business continuity, working in challenging circumstances and with a challenging budget. Business continuity was the focus of the Education Authority since the amalgamation of the 6 legacy organisations. Over 200 staff had left under

voluntary severance. The new organisation was the biggest in Northern Ireland with a budget of £1.5billion.

He informed members that a new Senior Management Team was in place, with 5 new Directors. He introduced the Director of Education, John Collings to the forum and added that Clare Mangan had been appointed Director of Children and Young People Services.

EA's focus was on performance gaps and improving educational outcomes. A working group was being set up to look at inequalities in education and the role of education supporting society.

The EA budget fell within three areas: Schools Budget; the Central Budget; and Earmarked Initiatives, all of which were now under significant pressure. Gavin highlighted the increased demand on the Special Education budget. He acknowledged that if EA was to be successful it must tackle inequalities and he reiterated that the JCF was a critical part of the efforts to address inequalities and ensure EA was best in class at this.

Questions Raised

Question 1:

Alistair Donaghy (ATL) asked what impact National Insurance would have on budgets for schools, with reduced school funding available.

Response:

The Executive can only work with the block grant which has been reduced by approximately 5million over 5years. Gavin explained that there were consequences and measures would have to be adopted to manage. It is inevitable that pupil to teacher ratios will increase therefore other measures will have to be adopted to manage. He added that it is possible that EA may not be able to deliver some of its services in the future.

Question 2:

Susan Parlour (NASUWT) asked that as high levels of child poverty still exist, in particular the Free School Meals indicators, is achievement really the key issue?

Response:

There is a range of school types and more resources are needed in education. Gavin's opinion was that class size was not core to learning outcomes. Schools were operating in difficult times and the quality of the teaching workforce will have to be built on. The quality of teaching and learning is always extremely important.

Question 3:

Helena McSherry (NIPSA) asked two questions. Firstly how had the reorganisation of the Music Service, School Library Service and School Development Service/CASS impacted on equality; and secondly, about the regional variations with regards Special Educational Needs and in particular funding for Classroom Assistants.

Response:

The EA will support schools. The School Development Service (SDS) have a fundamental belief that what goes on in the classroom is key and EA has to support best practice in reshaping the service. Significant numbers of staff have left and we have to remodel the service. The new Director of Education, John Collings, will lead the process of remodelling. The outcomes of a school are very much down to the Principal and leadership in the school; the SDS is there to support the Principal and the leadership in the school.

The use of school libraries has changed with technology. Funding will be invested in this area as the Schools Library Service has to change to reflect the impact of technology in schools. A Service Level Agreement will be developed with Libraries NI.

Gavin acknowledged that approximately £80million was spent on Classroom Assistants a year and he was aware of the regional variations which cannot be allowed to continue. With the appointment of the Director for Children and Young People's Services, Clare Mangan, there will be an effort to take a regional approach to the fair treatment of children throughout Northern Ireland. The focus will be on outcomes and on the individual child's performance.

Question 4:

Katherine Stevenson (Children's Law Service) enquired how the Authority would measure success and how the impact on reduced resources and best value would be measured.

Response:

The Education Authority would not consider it in value for money terms, there was ring fenced money for Special Education. Gavin reiterated the need to see outcomes not inputs. When a child no longer required a Classroom Assistant and had gained independence, then that was a success.

Tony thanked Gavin for this update.

3. Update on The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill and new SEN Framework

Sharon Lawlor and Jan Matthews (Special Education and Inclusion Review Team, DE) gave a presentation on The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Bill and new SEN Framework. The SEN Regulations were currently out for consultation and Sharon and Jan offered to visit any organisation to discuss this further. Sharon explained the new legislation and the impact on improving children's rights.

(The power-point slides for the presentation are available at <http://www.eani.org.uk/about-us/equality/regional-equality-unit/joint-consultative-forum-documents/>)

Question:

Helena McSherry (NIPSA) asked what provision there was in the new legislation if a child was in hospital and the Classroom Assistant was not required for long periods of time?

Response:

The Special Education & Inclusion Review Team (DE) thanked Helena for highlighting this issue. It was explained that this was an issue for the Board of Governor of the school; it was a separate issue to this review as it was a terms and conditions of employment matter.

4. Education Authority – Update on the Equality Scheme/Audit of Inequalities/Equality Action Plan

Cathy Lavery (Equality, Education Authority) provided an update on the Equality Scheme, Audit of Inequalities and the Equality Action Plan. She thanked members who participated in the consultation event in June 2015 and confirmed that the feedback was most valuable.

She highlighted that the Equality Scheme and interim DAP were both submitted to the Equality Commission in October 2015 and confirmation had been received of their approval on 24 February 2016. Awareness and training programmes for EA Senior Management Team, Board Members, Staff and consultees were being planned. Cathy was working on a summary for staff and an Easy Read version was currently being produced. All documentation would be available on the staff intranet and the EA website.

Cathy explained that the Equality Scheme included a commitment to conduct an Audit of Inequalities which then informed the Equality Action Plan. The work from the legacy Boards had provided a baseline for moving forward. Documents were currently being drafted in liaison with the new Directors. Cathy highlighted that the JCF was vital to the consultation, which will be taking place in coming months. She asked that if there was any issues members would like addressed at this stage, to contact her.

5. Review of JCF

Carol Johnston (Corporate Development Officer, EA) gave a brief explanation to the background of the JCF. She explained it was now in its 12th year and that with the establishment of EA it was timely to consider a review of the JCF. Carol proposed the creation of a small working group to take this forward.

This working group would consider a number of areas including the Terms of Reference, future agendas, Chair/ Joint Chair roles and membership. She explained that two meetings would take place between now and May and asked if any members were interested in assisting with this to contact her before the 18th March. It was envisaged that the working group would report back to the JCF at the autumn meeting.

6. Closing Comments

Tony thanked members for their contribution at today's meeting and stated that a meeting would be arranged in October 2016.

The meeting closed at 12:30p.m.