

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT TO THE CHAIRS OF THE  
EDUCATIONAL SECTOR ON THE PROGRESSING OF  
THE RPA IN EDUCATION, ISLAND CIVIC CENTRE,  
LISBURN, 31 JULY 2007**

**(Please note the paragraphs in Irish are immediately  
repeated in English)**

1. Welcome
2. Seo an chéad deis dom bualadh le Cathaoirligh na bpríomheagraíochtaí oideachais le chéile mar ghrúpa agus tá lúcháir orm bheith anseo inniu. Seo tús leis an turas atá romhainn agus súil agam go mbeidh sé corraitheach ach is cinnte go mbeidh sé dúshlánach

This is the first opportunity I have had to meet with the Chairpersons of the main education organisations as a group and I am delighted to be here today at the start of what I hope will be an exciting, but challenging journey for all of us.

3. My key objectives for this meeting and subsequent meetings with you are:
- To underline my strong determination to progress the Review of Public Administration in education as quickly as possible;
  - To emphasise the key importance for your organisations of maintaining a focus on the continued delivery of high quality service delivery until the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority; and
  - To outline the key priorities moving forward, including ensuring the active involvement of your organisations in the reform programme.
4. As you will be aware, the Executive agreed at our meeting on 19 July that I should progress the proposals I presented on the implementation of the Review of Public Administration in Education.
5. I am convinced that the RPA proposals are the best way forward for Education, and I am pleased that there is now clear and strong political support from

the Executive for the RPA reform programme in education.

6. This gives us the impetus to proceed and I am determined to press ahead as quickly as possible. I believe, however, that the timetable set by the previous administration is unrealistic.
7. The scale of change facing the Education system at this time is enormous - it is the most radical and ambitious change programme in over 30 years.
8. The challenges are great, but the potential rewards are greater – if we take the time to plan the change properly and build success from the outset.
9. I realise, however, that the uncertainty surrounding progressing the RPA has caused anxiety for many of those affected.

10. I want to provide you with greater clarity and certainty by setting out my vision for Education here, the importance of the RPA to realising this vision, and to outline the revised RPA implementation timetable agreed by the Executive.

## **VISION FOR EDUCATION**

11. Mothaím go paiseanta faoi chúrsaí oideachais. Creidim go leagann sé an bhunchloch maidir le rath na sochaí sa todhchaí agus is é an t-ardán é ar a dtógtar síocháin fhadtéarmach, bunaithe ar chomh-mheas.

I am passionate about Education. I believe it provides the cornerstone for the future prosperity of our society, and is the platform upon which to build long-term peace, based on mutual respect.

12. Mothaím go paiseanta fosta maidir le cothromas- go gcuirtear luach ar gach páiste mar bhall tábhachtach dár bpobal a bhfuil an fáil céanna aige/aici ar na

deiseanna céanna chomh maith le hOideachas  
d'ardchaighdeán.

I also believe passionately in equality - that every child is a valued and valuable member of our community with equal access to the same opportunities and high quality Education.

13. I want to help all our young people realise their full potential, and to do this I need to ensure that every school is a good school, and that every learner is given a fair and equal chance.
14. The former Direct Rule administration placed great emphasis on the RPA as a means of reducing bureaucracy and streamlining organisations to realise savings.
15. I support the reduction of bureaucracy and the re-direction of funds from back office to front-line services. However, my emphasis for the RPA in education is different. My focus is always on the child and on helping all children reach their full potential.

Improving the experience and outcomes for every young person who passes through our Education system will ultimately benefit society as a whole.

16. I believe changes to the administrative system are only worthwhile if they facilitate better services, release more resources for front-line organisations and provide better education and better opportunities for all.

## **IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE**

17. The RPA can deliver this, but only if it is effectively planned and implemented.

18. I have decided that the RPA legislative programme is too big, too complex and too important to try to implement in a single step.

19. The Executive has agreed with my analysis and I therefore propose to bring forward two Bills to secure a phased approach to implementation.
20. The first Bill will focus on structural reform - the establishment of the ESA, including the transfer of staff, functions, assets and liabilities from the existing organisations.
21. I intend to bring forward legislation later this year to facilitate this, with a view to having the ESA operational by April 2009 at the latest, and sooner if possible.
22. With the return of the institutions, it is right and proper that the Assembly and the Education Committee should have sufficient opportunity to scrutinise the proposed legislation. This will have implications for the implementation timetable, but I shall be working closely with fellow MLAs to progress the legislation as quickly as possible.
23. The second Bill will focus on 4 key areas:

- i. Area-based planning - we can proceed now to develop further the concept of area based planning and the second Bill will provide the opportunity to legislate for it;
- ii. The extension of the Employing Authority role of ESA - the first Bill will cover 86% of staff and the second Bill will bring in the remaining 14%;
- iii. The reconstitution of school Boards of Governors which will simplify extremely complex arrangements; and
- iv. The ownership of controlled schools which will transfer to ESA in the first Bill.

24. The two proposed Bills represent a substantial programme of work that will have to be carefully managed to ensure that we achieve our goal. Moving forward, there are essentially **three strands** of work.

## **Strand 1: Maintaining Service Continuity**

25. The first strand of work relates to maintaining service continuity. During this huge transformation programme, high standards must be maintained in the delivery of services to pupils and schools. This will be a challenging time for all of the staff and Board members in the affected organisations and we must manage the uncertainty that inevitably comes with change to ensure it does not adversely affect morale among staff or reduce service quality. We must all work together to ensure that during this time of transition our children in our schools - and the teachers and other staff that support them - continue to receive the high quality services they need and deserve.

26. To ensure service standards are maintained and that staff within the service have clarity about their future, it is vital that we move forward as swiftly as we can. **So change must start now** – and this will be the second strand of work.

## **Strand 2: CONVERGENCE PROGRAMME**

27. This second strand comprises the substantial work that can and must be done in advance of legislation to bring services together. I have therefore asked Gavin Boyd, working with the ESA Implementation Team and colleagues in DE, to develop and lead a **convergence programme** for the existing organisations.

28. This will be vital in directing the energy and expertise of staff in the education sector into shaping and developing a modern and innovative ESA, delivering efficient and high quality education services to our schools and young people.

29. The convergence programme will include:

- I. The planning and development of single finance, accounting, procurement, human resource and payroll systems;
- II. New consolidated governance arrangements for ICT across the education sector to ensure progress towards a single integrated system;
- III. The development of modern and improved arrangements for procurement of the schools estate through the early establishment of the Education Infrastructure Procurement Service;
- IV. The development and, as appropriate, the early implementation of regional arrangements for the delivery of education support services;
- V. The planning and development of models of location and accommodation for ESA.
- VI. Active management and oversight of the vacancy control policy within the affected organisations to minimise the need for redundancies;

VII. New approvals procedures for contractual commitments that will have financial and/or contractual implications for ESA; and

VIII. The establishment of a working group to bring forward new thinking and approaches that will enhance the quality and integrated delivery of children's services under the ESA.

30. In leading and taking forward this convergence programme, Gavin Boyd will work with the existing education organisations. It is therefore vital that all of you continue to play your full part in supporting and co-operating with him in this important work. Gavin will report to me on progress through Will Haire in my Department, who chairs the Programme Management Board overseeing the wider RPA Education programme.

### **Strand 3: Policy Development**

31. The third strand of work relates to the policy development work required for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bill. There are some elements of the RPA proposals which require significant policy work before we can legislate or move to implementation. Your organisations have an important and valuable contribution to make in these areas.
32. For example, the concept of “Maximised Supported Autonomy” has been broadly welcomed, but we need to do some further work to develop the concept into a reality for schools. Other areas of policy that will require further work and input from the wider education sector include:

- the development of area based planning and the implications for the existing school planning processes and procedures;
- the reconstitution of school Boards of Governors and the implications for support, advice and training; and
- the ownership of controlled schools.

33. I have asked the Department to set up a number of working groups to help to develop these proposals further to enable the drafting of the 2nd RPA Bill. I will be seeking your input to this policy development process through engagement with key stakeholders in relevant organisations. This engagement might take the form of secondment/s to the working groups or direct consultation on drafts of developing policy proposals.

## **OVERSIGHT OF WIDER RPA REFORM PROGRAMME**

34. I want to ensure that the full RPA education reform programme is progressing as planned. I will convene regular meetings with you, as Chairs of the current

education organisations, so we can work together to ensure that services to schools are being maintained through the transition, discuss how best your organisations can contribute towards the creation of ESA and to discuss any other issues you may wish to raise.

35. Your continued support is essential to the success of the RPA in education and you have a particular role to play in ensuring that your Boards and staff right across the sector are kept fully informed of all developments.

36. I trust you will ensure that the messages from 19 July and today, including the revised implementation timetable and the 3 strands of work I have outlined, are communicated to all staff as soon as possible.

37. For my part, I will ensure that there is regular communication on progress at key stages throughout this process.

## **CONCLUSION**

38. I realise that the timetable I announced earlier this month will mean change over a longer period, but it will be better planned and should result in a smooth transition to ESA and continuity in the delivery of quality services during this period.
39. Tá muintín agam sa mhéid is go bhfuil an fhís chéanna agaibh i dtaca le córas oideachais den chaighdeán is airde a chuireann an luach céanna ar gach páiste agus a mbíonn ról fíorthábhachtach aige i bhforbairt sochaí roinnte, fulangach agus cuimsitheach a aithníonn agus a cheiliúrann ilchineálacht.
- I am confident that you share my vision of a world-class education system that values every child equally, and that plays a crucial role in the development of a shared, tolerant and inclusive society that recognises and celebrates diversity.
40. Is é an RPA an bealach le héascú a dhéanamh ar réadú na físe seo, ar leas ár ndaoine óga ar fad.

The RPA is the means to facilitate the realisation of this vision, in the interests of all our young people.

41. Tá mé ag dúil le bheith ag obair leis na heagraíochtaí oideachais ar fad agus muid ag bogadh chun cinn le chéile i dtreo na sprice comhpháirtí.

I look forward to working with all the Education organisations as we move forward together in pursuit of this shared goal.