

Seminar on the Review of Public Administration 'Education' and Inequalities in Education

Malone House, Shaw's Bridge, Belfast
Tuesday 13 May 2008

Joint
Consultative
Forum

Education Sector

AIM

To raise awareness on the implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) in the education sector and to consider issues related to inequalities in education.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

John Curran, Joint Chair welcomed participants and speakers. He explained that unfortunately the Minister was unable to address the Forum due to Assembly business and said that Chris Stewart had agreed to provide an update on the Review of Public Administration.

PRESENTATIONS

A brief overview of each of the speakers' contributions is provided below. Participants had the opportunity to comment and ask questions after each presentation. This information has been included in the template 'Inequalities in Education' at page 3. The slides used by each speaker are available by email from patricia.murray@scelb.org.uk

RPA - 'IMPLEMENTATION PHASE'

Chris Stewart, Head of RPA Division & Equality, Department of Education provided an overview of where the RPA process was at and set the scene for raising the Department's game in respect of its approach to equality.

Chris then took members through the current legislation timetable. He explained that it was anticipated that information on the high level assessment of the entire RPA programme, which included the screening of the first Bill, would be issued for consultation with stakeholders shortly. Chris indicated that he anticipated an equality impact assessment of the first Bill would not be necessary because it was a high level policy. He said that DE would welcome input from the Forum and emphasised that if the consultation process required changes to be made to the legislation there would be an opportunity for changes to be made prior to the legislation becoming law.

Chris then explained that the Minister was committed to equality and wanted DE to be at the 'leading edge' of best practice and he asked Forum members for their assistance in letting DE know what it did well and what it needed to do better.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS AUTHORITY IMPLEMENTATION TEAM: CHANGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive Designate, Education & Skills Authority Implementation Team outlined for Forum members the progress made since October 2007 in creating the new organisation, the difference the new organisation would make and some of the achievements made to date. In outlining the difference the new organisation would make he highlighted the following:-

- Improving outcomes for all learners by supporting and challenging schools
- Integrating delivery of children's services
- Area planning of school and youth provision
- Building schools more quickly
- Releasing £20m savings for front line by 2011/12
- Reallocation of resource to make a real difference.

Gavin then explained the three phases under which the change over would be managed namely Transfer, Transform and Innovate. He drew attention to the twenty workshops which were planned to take place during May and June to draw on the knowledge and expertise of staff in the existing organisations in order to develop the vision and service delivery arrangements under ESA.

In concluding his presentation Gavin outlined the roadmap for the design of ESA and the general principles under which it would operate.

INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT - EQUALITY COMMISSION'S STATEMENT

Antoinette McKeown, Head of Policy and Development, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland drew attention to the Equality Commission's Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland which was published in October 2007. She provided an overview of the work the Commission was taking forward in relation to this statement. She emphasised that the Commission neither claimed to be nor believed its role to be an expert in education policy, however she believed it had a legitimate and strategic interest in this field and said that its focus would continue to be on working in partnership, pursuing common interests and outcomes.

Antoinette explained that the Equality Commission's Statement on Key Inequalities was designed to open up public debate about some of the most enduring inequalities that persist in our society and she outlined the Equality Commission's vision for helping to achieve equality outcomes in schools as the five Cs approach, namely:-

- Children first;
- Coherence - policy and practice;
- Community – connecting schools;
- Cohesion – shared and better future; and
- Commitment – ECNI's

NORTHERN IRELAND LIBRARY AUTHORITY - PROPOSALS FOR ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Irene Knox, Chief Executive Designate, Northern Ireland Library Authority provided an outline of the proposed organisational structure for the new Northern Ireland Library Authority and the key principles on which it would be based which were:-

- Regionally led, locally delivered;
- Equity of provision;
- Disseminate and share good practice
- Innovation and creativity
- Strategic partnerships
- Community Planning; and
- Continuous improvement.

Irene referred to the principle of Community Planning and explained that, as a pilot exercise, four Consultative Groups were currently being established to engage with people at local level and ensure that the services being delivered by the library were relevant and meeting local needs. She said that she was committed to actively involving the community and voluntary organisations and was very interested to hear how this could best be achieved.

'INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION' (Template)

A number of issues were raised at the Forum which are capable of cutting across all or some of the nine equality grounds identified under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. These were:-

Sharing Best Practice

Has a baseline assessment been undertaken of what is best practice?

What research is available on models of good practice?

Is there a strategy for sharing best practice in high achieving schools/other geographical areas e.g., London?

Who would determine and how would it be assessed whether there had been an improvement in standards?

How conducive is the PRSD scheme to the development and sharing of best practice. A view was expressed that it was unhelpful as it created a competitive element within and across schools.

The importance of learning from other jurisdictions was highlighted.

Area-based Planning/Models

How does the area based planning/models identify and address the needs of children with specific needs who may be dispersed across Northern Ireland?

Role of Schools

Concerns were expressed that equality was not being mainstreamed into schools.

Will ESA have the statutory authority to make schools accountable for allocated funds?

How will ESA determine if equality of opportunity and good relations is being promoted at school level since schools have not been designated as public bodies?

Identification and Monitoring of Equality Outcomes

The need for ESA and NILA to identify, in consultation with Section 75 groups, what they envisage their key equality outcomes to be was emphasised.

Funding within the School System

Issues were raised regarding inequalities in funding within the school system, between pre-school and primary; primary and post primary. This coupled with the inequalities in provision in terms of the school estate with some pupils being taught in huts/portacabins while others were taught in fully equipped multi purpose state of the art schools which resulted in significant differences in pupils learning environments.

Employment

How will equality be mainstreamed into Schemes of Employment in schools?

Will teachers involved in the delivery of alternative education provision be employed on the same terms and conditions as teachers in schools?

EQUALITY GROUNDS

Religious Belief/Political Opinion

Underachievement among working class pupils and in particular working class Protestant boys. (*Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland – Equality Commission - October 2007*).

The exclusion of the “Transferor Council” from a large section of education, because of the equality legislation, was identified as creating an inequality within the system. (*JCF, 13 May 2008*)

Gender

The differences in terms of attainment by gender and subject choices were highlighted.

The impact of gender stereotyping in terms of career choices/equal pay. (*Statement of Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland - Equality Commission - October 2007*).

Boys outnumber girls as low achievers by three to two. (*Tackling Low Achievement - Joseph Rowntree Foundation*).

Race

The lack of data on Black Minority Ethnic communities was highlighted.

Evidence of lower levels of attainment for Traveller children, 92% of travellers have no GCSEs compared with 5% of all Northern Ireland school leavers. (*Early Years Organisation*)

Evidence of racist bullying in schools including extra-curricular school activities. (Statement of Inequalities – Equality Commission – October 2007)

Migrant worker children fail to achieve their potential - EU research (PISA data) shows migrant children are less likely to be enrolled in pre school education.

The UK education system is failing to improve performance between first and second generation migrant children. (*Adam Tyson, Director General for Education and Culture, EU*)

Concerns regarding the language barriers and support for migrant workers' children. (JCF – 13 May 2008)

UK research has identified that Chinese and Indian pupils are most successful in avoiding low achievement. White British students on average – boys and girls – are more likely than other ethnic groups to persist in low achievement. Afro-Caribbean pupils are the least successful on average, though their results have been improving. (*Tackling Low Achievement - Joseph Rowntree Foundation*)

Age

27.8% of young people in the 16 – 24 age group have no educational qualifications. (*Northern Ireland Census - 2001*)

Unemployment amongst school leavers was 30% in 2001/02. (*Statement of Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland – Equality Commission – October 2007*)

Marital Status

Inequalities were identified in educational provision for children of same sex parents in primary, post primary etc. (*CoSO*)

Sexual Orientation

Homophobic bullying, alienation and isolation identified as significant issues. (Statement of Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland – Equality Commission – October 2007)

The need for DE to influence policy in schools in regard to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans young people as inequality exists right across the system. (*CoSO*)

Disability

People with disabilities are less qualified than those without a disability, 41% of disabled people have no qualifications. (*Statement of Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland – Equality Commission – October 2007*)

The need for better monitoring/accounting mechanisms to ensure resources allocated for specific pupil needs is used exclusively for that purpose e.g., pupils with disabilities and those with special needs. (JCF 13 May 2008)

The idea of a 'virtual' school was highlighted to bring together all information on children who are deaf as if it were one school to look at the attainment and attendance levels and ascertain if individual schools were actually helping these children.

The need for more openness as to what is meant by disability and the need to capture information in terms of multiple disabilities was raised. (JCF 13 May 2008)

What changes would be made to ensure schools were meeting the needs of individual children and how would parents be empowered to challenge schools that were not? (JCF 13 May 2008)

Insufficient resources are available to provide equality of access to parents to enable them to challenge decisions of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal. The need for the Tribunal system to be brought up to the same standard as the UK was raised. (JCF 13 May 2008)

How does the area based model identify, collate information about and ensure the inclusion of children who attend a school located outside the area? (JCF 13 May 2008)

Dependants

Children in care are 10 times more likely than school leavers in general to leave school without any qualifications (*Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland – Equality Commission – October 2007*)

Was there adequate provision for School Age Mothers? (CoSO)

Social and Economic Issues

Was DE proposing to address inequalities based on social and economic issues?

Low income was a strong predictor of low educational performance. (*Joseph Rowntree Foundation Research Ref. 2123 September 2007*)

Boys as young as nine in disadvantaged schools were disenchanted with school and starting to disengage. They were being particularly failed by the educational system due to the interaction of:-

- educational disadvantage faced by children growing up in poverty;
- the difficulties faced by teachers in disadvantaged schools; and
- differences in the ways that boys and girls are socialised.

(*Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Research Ref. 2146 November 2007*)

70% of young men in Hydebank have 'low/no educational attainments – essential skills deficit. 30% of young people in custody have been/are in care. (CoSO)

Research used to assist in the compilation of this template and/or highlighted as a useful resource by consultees at the event is listed at Appendix 1.

CLOSING REMARKS

In closing the seminar Paschal McKeown, Joint Chair, reflected on the day. She said that the seminar epitomised the considerable value of the Joint Consultative Forum for everyone who had an interest in education. She stated that the event had enabled a wider audience to be involved in discussing the challenges faced within the education system reminding all present of the critical role played by education in the removal of barriers.

Paschal referred to the discussion on the structural changes and emphasised how important it was, from an equality perspective, to get the structures right as it would have a significant impact on service delivery if they were not. She commended NILA for its outreach work aimed at engaging the local community and highlighted DE's acknowledgement of the challenges it faced in achieving meaningful engagement and effective participation in order that true consultation took place.

Paschal highlighted the Equality Commission's concern in regard to the need to improve baseline data and felt that this should be made a priority. She stressed the importance of developing structures which took account of the needs of excluded groups and hoped that the targeted initiatives referred to by the Equality Commission could be expanded to include other marginalised groups.

John Curran, Joint Chair, then thanked the speakers for their very useful and informative contributions and the participants for their valuable and interesting comments. John also thanked Sharon and Rosie who had provided sign translation throughout the day.

There was general consensus that it had been a valuable and worthwhile event.

Useful Research:

In the course of developing the initial template and arising from discussion at the Joint Consultative Forum a number of research reports have been highlighted/utilised. These are:-

Research

Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland (Equality Commission - October 2007)

Northern Ireland Census – 2001

Tackling Low Educational Achievement - Joseph Rowntree Foundation – June 2007
Ref. 2095

Early Years Media Initiative to help tackle exclusion of Traveller Children (www.early-years.org/programmes/media_initiatives)

30 Years Seen But Not Heard (A Listening Session with the Bangladeshi (Sylheti) Community in Northern Ireland) – Daniel Holder - November 2000 (Published by the Multi-Cultural Resources Centre, Belfast)

Count Me In – Exploring Cultural Diversity Amongst Children and Young People - 2004 (Inter Agency Report commissioned by DE)

‘Too Young to Notice?’ – Professor Paul Connolly, Queens University, Belfast

The Impact of Poverty on Young Children’s Experience of School (Goretti Horgan – Joseph Rowntree Foundation & Save the Children)

Shout Report – 2003 (www.youthnetni.org.uk)

‘No Choice: No Chance’ Findings of Disability Action/Save the Children Research – on the education experiences of young people with disabilities.

‘Bullying Wrecks Lives’ the experiences of children and young people with a learning disability – Mencap

Connecting with Autism – Final Report on the Evaluation of the Keyhole Early Intervention Project in Autistic Spectrum Disorder (Roy McConkey, Victoria Milligan, Maria Truesdale-Kennedy and Brenda Poulton – Institute of Nursing Research, University of Ulster – January 2007)

Cont’d/...

An Evaluation of the Need and Early Intervention Support for Children (Aged 2 – 4 Years) with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder in Northern Ireland (Roy McConkey, Greg Kelly and Arlene Cassidy – 2007- Study commissioned by the Department of Education)

The Keyhole Early Intervention Project in Autistic Spectrum Disorders – Final Report – April 2003 (Roy McConkey, Elaine McGreevy, Heather Crawford and Arlene Cassidy – Report available from PAPA Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Saintfield Road, Belfast)

Autistic Children and Their Families – TEACCH Research Report, Current and Past Published Research – Conducted by Division TEACCH Faculty and Staff (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children) January 1996

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