INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF EDUCATION

FORMAL SUBMISSION BY EA

31 MAY 2022

CONTENTS

The EA Board Members and the Corporate Leadership Team met with the Independent Review of Education panel at Wellington College on Tuesday 22 February 2022 and provided the panel with their collective view on the following areas.

- Creation of EA

- What has improved?

- Challenges

- Vision

- Single Education System including the challenges and opportunities

1. THE CREATION OF EA

The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority spanned a ten-year period and during that period of inertia the necessary improvement and investment to remain aligned with other public sector organisations was significantly reduced. The Education Authority (EA) was established under the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and became operational on 1 April 2015. The immediate priority of EA was critical business need to maintain service delivery resulting in ongoing gaps in culture, process, policy and strategy.

Substantial work has been undertaken since 2015 to align services on a regional basis. The regional approach is effective.

EA is regional service delivery organisation that recognises the improvements required to deliver a high quality and sustainable education system for children and young people. EA continuously prioritises and reviews the improvements required within available resources.

There is demonstrable and tangible evidence of the positive impact this is making. EA recognises that this is a multi-year journey

EA must deliver a balanced resourced budget but is not currently resourced, financially or with staff, to be able to effectively deliver all the duties

2. EA's VISION

To inspire, support and challenge all our Children and Young People to be the best that they can be.

a. A system of education based on co-operation to enhance equality of opportunities and to minimise inefficiencies to ensure that every school is a good school.

b. Encourage and foster an effective leadership model.

c. Embracing the employee's voice and developing a confident and skilled workforce who can support all of our stakeholders effectively.

d. The ability to measure the quality of education services in the classroom.

e. Addressing the role of EA as a strategic authority for the education sector and the managing authority for the controlled sector. Consideration and confirmation of the role of EA as the lead planning authority.

3. WHAT HAS IMPROVED?

EA is a confident organisation

We know we have made significant improvements and we know we have challenges ahead.

a. EA is responsive to significant challenges which is evidenced by the ability to respond immediately to the Covid-19 pandemic.

b. EA has improved its cross-directorate responsiveness to emerging issues including: SEN placements 2021 and the Online Admissions Programme.

c. EA has continued to deliver services during a sustained period of increasing financial pressures.

d. EA has improved its communication with stakeholders including schools, elected representatives, children and young people and parents/ carers.

e. EA has improved its governance and assurance structures and implemented a new Committee structure.

f. EA has made significant improvements to the delivery of Statutory Operations.

g. EA has improved relationships with the Department of Education and other Arm's Length Bodies.

h. EA's Youth Service facilitates support to directorates in EA and Government Departments to engage with children and young people in the planning and delivery of services, policy and strategy.

4. CHALLENGES

a. There are budgetary pressures, including anticipated reduced Covid-19 related expenditure and the need for sustainable budgets for schools.

b. The ability to enable our schools' leaders and teachers to sustain school improvement.

c. EA wants to address reputational damage.

d. The role of EA – clarity is required.

e. Managing our large, remote workforce remains challenging.

f. The provision of Special Educational Needs and the increasing rates in Northern Ireland.

g. An improvement is required in the provision of learning for children with special educational needs, including in the medium of Irish.

h. The delivery of Strategic Area Planning and the ability / capacity of EA to discharge the role of lead planning authority within existing resources.

i. Moving forward – the ability to change, grow and evolve.

5. EA'S PLANS FOR 2022 - 2023

a.   Facilitate access to high quality learning for ALL children and young people and provide support to meet their learning needs.

b.   Continue to deliver core services and avoid financial pressures causing disruption whilst continuously improving service delivery and customer experience by listening to our stakeholders.

c.   Developing a confident and skilled workforce.

d.   Better use and management of assets to provide a safe and sustainable environment to learn and work.

e.   Further strengthening accountability, governance and assurance in relation to controlling expenditure and delivering services.

f.   Consider the outcomes of the Landscape Review of EA currently being progressed by Baker Tilly Mooney Moore and Independent Review of Education

6. A SINGLE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Children and Young People are at the heart of our system, their success depends on the quality of leadership, teaching and learning in our schools.

a.   A single education system across Northern Ireland does not need to be a homogenous system (controlled sector is a strong example of this).

b.   EA believes that a single education system should provide the fabric for Northern Ireland's rich cultural and linguistic tapestry to flourish in the interest of children and young people, it should be an equitable system in this context.

c.   EA supports the development of common principles for all schools based on inclusiveness.

d.   A single education system needs to remove duplication of provision, achieve efficiencies and drive school improvement.

e.   EA supports the concept of a single support delivery organisation for all schools.

Challenges

f.   The complexity of the current system - size and scale of the challenge.

g.   Significant change will require significant support.

h.   EA is encouraging creative thinking on how different types of schools can co-exist through the area planning process. However, it requires legislative change and a new approach to policy, and appetite for delivery which has not always been forthcoming.

i.   The level of expenditure on special educational needs services cannot be sustained and in order to change this, significant systemic change is required.

j.   Wider societal issues cannot be ignored - beyond the scope of the education sector.

k.   The current education system is evolving and regrouping while also self-evaluating.

Opportunities

l. We should recognise and build upon examples of good practice and innovation right across our schools' system.

m. Huge potential - Youth Services, as part of EA, link to schools and educational outcomes.

n. EA, as a single support organisation for many schools has demonstrated that this delivery approach can be effective.

o. In doing this, we maintain strong collaborative relationships with our sectoral partners / bodies in delivering outcomes for children and young people.

p. EA is always committed to meaningful change that is in the best interests of children and young people and is evidence based.

SECTION 2: EA'S FORMAL WRITTEN SUBMISSION – MAY 2022

The Education Authority's Board have discussed a possible future for education in Northern Ireland. Using the expertise and working knowledge of the system we are presenting the change that our system would require to ensure the needs of every child are met. To ensure that the educational journey of a child, every child, prepares them to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to society.

While there is a focus on seven key themes in this submission they are all interconnected and interdependent and hinge off on key central focus – the child. Members have always been united in their commitment to ensure that all decisions made; are in the best interests of every child.

Members met on Thursday 7 April 2022 and discussed 11 key themes.

1.   Fundamental transformative review is needed.

2.   Clear need for the alignment of policy and strategy that is both funded and prioritised.

3.   Skills based curriculum that is flexible and agile and is driven by needs of the child not the system.

4.   Assessment framework must reflect the educational journey of the child by supporting and nurturing and challenging.

5.   Develop a system of school and system wide inquiry and professional development.

6.   Effective sustainable school policy that recognises the role of sectors and community involvement.

7.   SEN provision to be inclusive – fundamental research to be carried out and more autonomy to be given to schools – effective use made of professionals and links between organisation – assessment framework that allows all children to develop and achieve.

8.   New model of school governance is required that provides the appropriate level of support and challenge

9.   Establishment of separate organisations to facilitate delivery of educational needs of children and young people; and educational business support functions.

10.   A collective vision for the education workforce, an employment model and practices that enables delivery and high performance, and workplace cultures where staff are highly engaged.

11.   The funding model should deliver a financially stable and sustainable system, based on the needs of children and young people attending educational settings and youth services

Areas that there was divergence of thinking were:

-      school governance;

-      delivery of services; and

-      workforce and employment models.

Academic selection was referenced during the discussion however it was not addressed as a separate theme.

Education system that makes a profound and positive difference in the learning and lives of all children and young people

It was unanimously agreed that change was needed in our system.

The fundamental question is: what is education for?

Until we agree what a new future looks like from an educational perspective it will be difficult to define how we fund it or design a service delivery model that supports it.

Starting from the centre which is, and always will be, the child.

The core purpose of the curriculum is to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.

To do that we need to develop their skills, allow them to grow and develop in a nurturing education system designed to be participative, flexible and meets their needs throughout their education journey.

There is a clear need for our curriculum to be supported by an assessment framework that allows all learners to grow and flourish at their own pace.

'The aim of the curriculum is to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions through their lives.'

- Skills
- Assessment framework
- Educational development

Since 2020 one of most fundamental learning points is that that the emotional health and well-being of our children and young people and staff is of paramount importance and we must get that right above all else

Our digital skills and knowledge have developed exponentially, as have the skills of resilience and independence. The report from the ICT excellence Awards judging panel 2022 states:

"*The response to Covid in Northern Ireland schools that were represented was of an exceptionally high standard. The fact that the integrated managed network provision and ICT tools available are widely available to all schools, compared to those in other countries in the UK (if not the world), was clearly a factor in facilitating this response.*

The system you have in Northern Ireland is unique. Its uniqueness arises from the forethought of those who developed the underpinning infrastructure that continues to be managed by Capita and C2k through the Education Authority – and in this regard, I certainly wish the very best to the EdIS Programme in taking the legacy forward into the 2030s.

The infrastructure offers important networking and communication potential, the support for ongoing professional learning and provides for the crucial choice of facilities that school leaders and teachers can take. But, the uniqueness is then crystallised through the ways that those underpinning provisions are adopted and used, through crucial and critical insights of leaders, teachers, pupils and parents, making the difference. In your curriculum, there is focus on the future, that in classrooms and in learning is manifested through the current and future application of knowledge, rather than on a simple focus on content, where the former is fundamental for developing success in your learners. The foresight you bring from your insight into technology uses is enabling that future."

There was a clear focus on pedagogy as we developed and implemented remote learning strategies. We need to build on this experience.

The 'Sustainable Schools' policy that has, as its vision, an estate of educationally sustainable schools planned on an area basis, with focus on sharing and collaboration and ensuring schools provide every child with a high quality learning experience.

The School Improvement Strategy which will align policy and strategy to make a profound and positive difference in the learning and lives of all children and young people, promoting teaching and learning which impact positively on the cognitive, social and emotional development and outcomes of children and young people. Cultivating leadership at school and system level which drives the realisation of these intentions for today and for the future.

We have a skills-based curriculum and our children's' experience has the potential to be excellent so why are we still talking about breaking down barriers to learning.

What we need is:

- long term planning and investment and not short term interventions; and an

- assessment framework that supports learning not focusing on narrow performance targets.

Education system that makes a profound and positive difference in the learning and lives of all children and young people

Aligning policy and strategy to make a profound and positive difference in the learning and lives of all children and young people, promoting teaching and learning which impact positively on the cognitive, social and emotional development and outcomes of children and young people; and cultivating leadership at school and system level which drives the realisation of these intentions for today and for the future.

Minimal Effort Minimal Impact	Medium Effort Medium Impact	Maximum Effort Maximum Impact
1. The here and now 2. Learning from experience 3. Emotional health and well being 4. Digital understanding 5. Focus on Pedagogy 6. Collaboration 7. Challenge Intervention Support	8. Policy Landscape 9. School Improvement Strategy 10. Fair Start 11. Learning Leaders 12. Supported by assessment framework that supports a skills-based curriculum 13. Breaking down barriers to learning	14. Utopia 15. Plan and implement a high-quality curriculum that is informed by research, reflects the needs of learners and makes the best use of technology to enable innovative, immersive and flexible learning experiences 16. Develop and implement an assessment framework that supports a skills-based curriculum and child development 17. Professional Learning communities 18. Cultivating leadership culture at school and system level

A fundamental review of our assessment framework has the potential to unlock all of this.   It is odd to make such an issue of underachievement within a system which is specifically geared to differentiate and separate, to select and reject, to reward and promote, on the grounds of attainment. Research suggests that 'underachievers, in contrast to slower learners, may in fact learn rapidly and well, but what they learn may not coincide with the content of our examinations.

What are we measuring and what difference is it making to our children and young people? Our system is too results driven; too high stakes driven.

Assessment should represent every child in every school at whatever stage and we need to lead with assessment and not the use it as an add on.

High stakes external outcomes skews curricular provision without emphasis on personal and skill development. We have a culture of entry requirements. The assessment framework must reflect the educational journey of the child by supporting and nurturing and challenging.

Investment in our workforce – Pathways to Partnership should set expectations and develop a professional learning strategy that facilitates continuous high-quality individual and team learning for all staff.

Explore opportunities to widen understanding and knowledge of current educational developments, inquiry, exploration, and innovation.

We need to develop a system of school and system wide inquiry and professional development.

- The need to consider the role of CCEA and ETI moving forward.
- What will be their purpose? CCEA's role in curriculum and assessment needs reviewed'.
- ETI's role in raising standards in a self-evaluating system requires consideration.

We need research into understanding the complexity of needs of our children and young people; why do we need to statement?

Data profile and tracking would allow us to develop the appropriate services for schools to support and enable young people.

The creation of multi-disciplinary teams across our system.

Make better use of our professionals.

Removal of EOTAS to a school-based nurture provision and the development of specialist provision in mainstream schools.

THEME 7

The SEND Strategic Transformation Programme should be a DE strategic priority over the next three-five years

Education system that makes a profound and positive difference in the learning and lives of all children and young people

Minimal Effort Minimal Impact	Medium Effort Medium Impact	Maximum Effort Maximum Impact
1. A rapid review of the evidence as commissioned by DE should inform the direction of reform including understanding the increasing parental demand for statements and the complexity of need 2. OBA framework should be developed for all services and performance metrics published 3. EA based multi-disciplinary teams for early years, primary and post-primary, with single point of entry into EA 4. Shift Education Psychology emphasis from assessment to consultative model 5. A regional Research & Development Team should be established to commission research that ensures the educational needs of children with SEN are understood at policy, commissioning, and practice levels 6. EOTAS provision should be replaced by school-based Nurture classes		7. Systemic transformation as per OBC is essential if the current failures within the existing arrangements are to be addressed 8. A rights-based approach should be adopted meaning that all schools are equally obliged to accept children with SEN and children with SEN should have places available within their communities 9. DE and DoH should cooperate in the commissioning of a research programme that informs collaborative & jointly funded / delivered practice models 10. Pupil Support Services should be school based supported by locality / regional experts 11. School based specialist provisions at KS1, 2,3 & 4 should be available for pupils who require small group teaching (Statement not required)

- SEN provision to be inclusive fundamental research to be carried out.

- More autonomy to be given to schools.

- Effective use made of professionals and links between organisation.

THEME 11

The funding model should deliver a financially stable and sustainable system, based on the needs of children and young people attending educational settings and youth services

Minimal Effort Minimal Impact	Medium Effort Medium Impact	Maximum Effort Maximum Impact
1. More effective and efficient arrangements, not just more money 2. Pay and price inflation fully funded 3. Multi-year budget cycle 4. Longer-term earmarked funding commitment aligned to an education strategy	5. Pay and price inflation fully funded 6. Multi-year budget cycle 7. Longer-term earmarked funding commitment aligned to an education strategy 8. School budgets based on the Common Funding Formula, with some amendment to help address some of the more significant funding anomalies 9. EA budget right sized to meet the needs of schools and the support required from EA	10. Pay and price inflation fully funded 11. Multi-year budget cycle 12. Longer-term earmarked funding commitment aligned to an education strategy 13. School budgets based on equitable assessed need rather than the generic Common Funding Formula, with appropriate mechanisms to minimise bureaucracy 14. EA budget right sized to meet the needs of schools and the support required from EA 15. Adequate capital and resource funding to support modernisation and maintenance of the school estate

This would signal a revision to, or a fundamental move away from, the Common Funding Formula and would more realistically reflect the specific funding requirements of all schools and youth services.

CONCLUSION

Theme 1   Fundamental transformative review is needed

⇨   **Clearly define the role of EA as service delivery model with support from sectoral bodies within it.**

⇨   **Review of Assessment Framework**

⇨   **Review of School Governance**

⇨   **Review of Common Funding Formula**

Theme 2   Alignment of policy and strategy that is funded and prioritised

⇨   **School Improvement Policy with long term vision that is funded and separate from political influence**

Theme 3   Skills based curriculum that is flexible and agile and is driven by needs of the child not the system

⇨   **Focus on skills development – introduction of a transition year for older pupils, review and repurpose of vocational education**

Theme 4   Assessment framework must reflect the educational journey of the child by supporting and nurturing and challenging.

⇨   **Assessment should represent every child in every school at whatever stage – we need to lead with assessment and not the use it as an add on**

Theme 5   Develop a system of school and system wide inquiry and professional development

⇨   **Investment in our workforce – Pathways to Partnership - set expectations and develop a professional learning strategy that facilitates continuous high-quality individual and team learning for all staff.**

Theme 6   Effective sustainable school policy that recognises the role of sectors and community involvement

⇨   **Too many schools but schools reflect communities. Sustainable school policy needs to be redefined to support the context of Northern Ireland and promote diversity and social inclusion in our schools**

Theme 7   SEN provision to be inclusive – fundamental research to be carried out and more autonomy to be given to schools – effective use made of professionals and links between organisation – assessment framework that allows all children to develop and achieve.

⇨   **Promoting social integration**

> **Theme 11** The funding model should deliver a financially stable and sustainable system, based on the needs of children and young people attending educational settings and youth services

⇨ **This would signal a revision to, or a fundamental move away from, the Common Funding Formula and would more realistically reflect the specific funding requirements of all schools and youth services.**

KEY CHALLENGES

Themes where there was a divergence of thinking.

8. New model of school governance is required that provides the appropriate level of support and challenge

9. Establishment of separate organisations to facilitate delivery of educational needs of children and young people; and educational business support functions.

10. A collective vision for the education workforce, an employment model and practices that enables delivery and high performance, and workplace cultures where staff are highly engaged.