

**MINUTES OF THE DE BOARD MEETING**  
**Thursday 27 February 2025**  
**Conference Room, Rathgael House**

**Attendees:**

Ronnie Armour (Chair)  
Linsey Farrell  
Heather Cousins  
Faustina Graham  
Anna Carragher  
Neil Palmer  
Marcella Phillips  
Janis Scallon  
Barry O'Rourke  
Cathy Galway

**Apologies:**

Paul Corrigan

**In attendance:**

Bryan Lavery (Board secretary)

**Observer:**

Patricia Nickell – DP – Special Education and Inclusion Review Team

**End to End Review of SEN**

Janis spoke to her paper and provided a presentation on the current position of the End to End Review of Special Educational Needs (E2E Review), providing:

- a background to the Review;
- an update on engagement undertaken;
- an outline of the closure of the E2E review and outworkings, namely the SEN Reform Agenda; and Action Plan published in February 2025; and
- the next steps for the SEN Reform agenda.

Ronnie offered his thanks to Janis and the Team for their work to date on the Review.

The Board discussed:

- The breakdown of statistics into the degree and type of need;
- Identification of areas where financial saving (redirection of existing funding) might be achieved; and
- The impact of the absence of inspection during ASOS.

**Statistical Compendium**

Linsey provided the Board with an update on the development of an annual statistical compendium, which was raised at the Board meeting in June 2024.

Statistics and Research Team has compiled the information already available to policy teams within the Department into a single user-friendly compendium document to serve as a central resource. This covers a range of datasets collected by DE Statistics and Research Team and several research surveys of interest to DE.

The intention is that the compendium document could be updated annually. The current version will need to be updated with the latest available data before being made available.

The Board:

- Reviewed the proposed Compendium publication and agreed to it being updated on an annual basis and made available internally to DE policy teams.
- Agreed that the Compendium publication should be published externally on the DE website.

### **ETI Report**

Barry spoke to the report that highlights the work undertaken by ETI during the academic year 2023/24. The report draws upon the findings from the suite of phase reports covering the period 2021 to 2024 for: early years; primary and post-primary, including EOTAS; youth; and further education and training.

Barry outlined the evidence based gathered from inspections, the thematic evaluations undertaken and the key themes that emerged.

Barry explained that the ETI published a new framework for inspection in May 2024 and outlined the key objectives of inspection transformation.

The Board had a brief discussion around the benefits of collaboration at further education level with regard to sixth form provision.

### **Permanent Secretary Update**

Ronnie advised that he met with the NEBMs last week to discuss a range of issues and provide an update on departmental priorities. He intends that the meetings will become a regular event. The Board agreed that it would be helpful to have a presentation at a future meeting on minor works.

Ronnie gave a brief update in relation to:

- The budget strategy for the next year;
- Industrial relations – three of the teaching unions are holding consultation events around workload. Meetings with TUS are ongoing.

Ronnie also noted the publication of the Programme for Government, the main elements for DE are Special Educational Needs and Early Years and Childcare. The Board requested that Paul Brush is invited to a future meeting regarding the Early Years elements of the PfG.

### **Grade 3 Updates**

Heather advised the following:

- The Curriculum Capital Programme has been announced. A paper will go to the Minister next week on the way forward.
- The School Uniform Bill has been introduced to the Assembly.
- She has a session with the Education Committee next week on capital.

Linsey provided an update on her area.

- The Review of the Curriculum has submitted its interim findings. The final report is due at Easter.
- The first meeting of the International Education Advisory Board has taken place. The Board will meet four times a year. The purpose of the Board is to inform the Minister's thinking on curriculum and assessment.
- The Minister will be making a statement to the Assembly shortly on the Education Strategy and his priorities for the remainder of the mandate.

Faustina advised that the ETI is continuing to issue invitations for inspection despite the reintroduction of ASOS and while some have gone ahead, most haven't. The ETI is encouraging schools to continue with their planning day for inspection and to meet with District Inspectors regarding school improvement to maintain working relationships. She advised that the ETI has not been mentioned by TUS regarding issues around workload and T&Cs.

## **HR Report**

Marcella provided an update to the Board on the HR report.

She provided an update on resourcing:

- There are currently 100 declared vacancies across DE, 19 of which are non-general service.
- Business Partners are undertaking a piece of work with DE currently. Numbers of vacancies are expected to rise so it is important that the necessary paperwork is lodged with NICSHR as soon as possible.
- An internal general service competition for G6 launched on 27 January 2025 with a closing date of 14 February 2025.
- The online assessment tests have been completed in respect of the G7 internal general service competition.
- There is currently no supply at DP or SO grades. The planning assumption is that competitions will be launched during Q1 of this financial year.
- Successful candidates are due to commence employment at this grade during week commencing 7 April..

Marcella provided an update on temporary promotions, sickness absence, performance management and learning and development.

## **Director of Finance Report**

Neil provided members with an update on the current key financial issues.

- The current estimated deficit for 2024-25.
- The pressures highlighted by the EA.
- A draft submission is ready to go to the Permanent Secretary on upcoming allocations and the budget position to the end of the year.

- Resource bids of £21.8m were submitted in January monitoring. A capital bid of £28m was submitted.
- Additional resource funding of £3m allocated to address costs (initially estimated at c£5.8m) relating to Storm Éowyn.

In respect of the 2025/26 budget position Neil advised that the Department faces £260m of inescapable pressures, increasing to more than £335m when high priority/desirable pressures and pressures relating to the Independent Review are included. Discussions will take place with the Minister on priorities.

Neil provided an update on:

- Capital;
- Accounts; and
- EdIS.

### **Non Departmental Public Bodies – verbal update**

Linsey advised that:

- Deborah O’Hare has been appointed Chair of CCEA;
- Together with Ronnie she will attend a meeting of the Council in March.

Ronnie advised that:

- He had met with the new Chair of the EA, Mervyn Storey;