



Terms of Reference

Structural Reform Programme Board



Delivering a Stable, Sustainable and High-Quality Education System

Version Control

Version	Author	Date	Changes
V 0.1	Sharon Smyth	23-Mar-2026	First draft discussed at Programme Board meeting (14 April 2026)
V 0.2	Sharon Smyth	20-Apr-2026	<p>Draft updated following Financial Stability Board Meeting on 14 April 2026:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Board name changed to 'Structural Reform Programme Board' (to align with the Five-Year Budget Strategy) • Reference to EA Category 2 savings removed – these will be brought under the individual reform projects
V 0.3	Sharon Smyth	22-Apr-2026	<p>Changes made to draft following meeting with Education Authority on 22 Apr 2026:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context section added (section 1); • Detailed list of roles and responsibilities replaced with wording from the previous 'scope' section • Underpinning principles added to new roles and responsibilities section • Detail on sub-structures added • Risk management section amended to include Industrial Relations and Rural needs assessments
V 0.4	Sharon Smyth	11-May-2026	Draft updated to increase visibility of the work of the Board
V 1.0	Sharon Smyth	3-Jun-2026	Draft approved by the Board.

1. Context

- 1.1 The [Department of Education Five Year Budget Strategy](#) (hereafter referred to as the Strategy) seeks to deliver structural reform by:
- strengthening financial governance and accountability to restore stability;
 - developing a sustainable, inclusive, needs-led support model that improves education outcomes for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN);
 - creating a sustainable school network that reflects demographic trends and delivers curriculum breadth;
 - creating an affordable and sustainable transport system; and
 - modernising school catering to deliver high-quality, cost effective meals for all pupils.
- 1.2 Section 5 of the Strategy (i.e. Next Steps and Implementation) outlines the governance structures and states that:
- ‘the Department will establish a Structural Reform Programme Board and will oversee the delivery of reform at scale. Each of the core areas will need to be developed as a distinct reform project, with full programme and project governance in place...Detailed proposals, including costings, timelines, and milestones will be produced for each strand to ensure clarity, accountability and pace.’
- 1.3 These Terms of Reference seek to establish the governance structures outlined in the Strategy.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The Structural Reform Programme Board (“the Board”) is a high-level strategic team that will oversee and assure delivery of the reforms required under the Five-Year Education Budget Strategy designed to address the structural funding crisis facing education and create the optimum conditions for raising school standards. This Board replaces the Financial Stability Strategic Programme Board and Taskforce.
- 2.2 The purpose of the Board is to:
- Provide strategic leadership to deliver the reforms to policy and service delivery required to stabilise and control expenditure trajectory whilst protecting core school funding.
 - Oversee and assure implementation of the reforms across the five core projects outlined in the Strategy:
 - Home-to-school transport reform

- School meals modernisation
- SEN support reform in mainstream schools
- Restructuring the school estate
- Financial delegation reform for schools
- Ensure there is strategic alignment with parallel/related policy reform and transformation taking place in education.
- Provide oversight, accountability, and governance for system transformation.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 The Board will oversee all programme elements required to implement the reforms, including:

- Research and evidence to underpin the required reforms;
- Financial modelling and realisation of savings;
- Policy development, alignment and legislative changes;
- Programme sequencing, risk and issue management;
- Stakeholder engagement and communications;
- Resourcing; and
- Performance, impact and benefits realisation reporting.

3.2 The Board's remit covers all aspects of the reform Programme until full implementation (i.e. 2031/2032).

3.3 The Programme will consider:

- the finalised Budget Strategy document published following the outcome of the consultation process;
- any parallel reform/transformation work taking place in the Education sector; and
- any other emerging issues that contribute to financial sustainability.

3.4 The role of the Board is underpinned by a shared commitment to:

- Protect children's teaching and learning
- Collaboration and early engagement
- Accountability & transparency
- Equality
- Value for money & efficiency
- Prioritisation of reforms based on affordability, deliverability and impact

- Proportionality
- Agility/Maximise emerging opportunities or measures that contribute to financial sustainability

4. Outcomes and Benefits

4.1 As outlined in the Strategy, the key outcomes/benefits for the Board are:

- Resources are used efficiently and strategically to maximise value for learners;
- Modernisation of education services and improved operational efficiency;
- Stabilised or reduced delivery costs across the five core project areas (taking into account of inflationary trends);
- A more sustainable school estate with schools operating at an educationally appropriate and financially viable scale, matched to demographic trends; and
- Stronger governance, accountability and financial controls.

5. Authority

5.1 The Board has authority to:

- Approve programme documentation, project deliverables and proposed options within delegated limits;
- Direct the work of project and workstream leads and the central DE Programme Team; and
- Commission research, analysis, modelling, and external advisory support as needed.

5.2 Project or workstream leads have authority to deliver as per approved plans and in line with existing authority/delegations.

5.3 The Education Minister will be advised on progress of each project/workstream and approval will be requested on key decisions.

5.4 As appropriate, relevant decisions, issues and risks may also be escalated to the Executive or EA Board, as appropriate.

6. Board Membership

6.1 The Board is co-chaired by the DE Permanent Secretary and the Education Authority (EA) Chief Executive. The core membership of the Board is:

Department of Education

- Permanent Secretary (Co-Chair)

- Deputy Secretaries
- Chief Inspector
- Finance Director

Education Authority

- Chief Executive (Co-Chair)
- Chief Officers
- Assistant Director of Finance (Budgeting)

6.2 Department of Finance officials will participate as observers;

- Deputy Secretary, Public Spending; and / or
- Director of Supply or Director of Budget Sustainability

Member Responsibilities

6.3 Members will be required to:

- Represent their area with full authority to commit resources and actions (as per existing authority, governance and delegations);
- Cascade information within their organisation;
- Ensure alignment to corporate governance and statutory responsibilities; and
- Maintain confidentiality, where required.

6.4 Reflecting the wide-ranging nature of the proposed reforms, advice may be sought from a range of specialists who may be asked to contribute to the work of the programme and/or attend Board meetings.

7. Meeting Arrangements

7.1 The Board will meet **monthly**, or as otherwise required.

7.2 A formal schedule of meetings for 12 months will be agreed in advance.

7.3 Extraordinary meetings may be convened by the Chairs.

Papers & Secretariat

7.4 Secretariat support for the Programme will be provided by the DE Structural Reform Programme Team.

7.5 Papers will be issued at least **five working days** before meetings.

7.6 Draft Minutes and actions will be circulated within **five working days** after the meeting for review and finalisation.

Standing Board Agenda Items

7.7 Standing agenda items will include:

- Conflicts of Interest

- Agreement of Minutes of the last meeting
- Update/Progress on actions (by exception)
- Programme Director's Update
- Update from each Project on current status and forward work programme
- Review of Programme Risks/Issues
- Key decisions required from the Board
- AOB

8. Sub-Structures

- 8.1 The Programme Board will oversee the work of each Reform Project which will operate as a **Project Board** reporting to this Programme Board;
- Transport Reform Project Board
 - School Meals Modernisation Project Board
 - SEN Support Reform Project Board
 - School Estate Restructuring Commission
 - Financial Delegation Reform Project Board
- 8.2 The Department will nominate a lead officer for each project. EA will nominate a co-lead.
- 8.3 Supporting delivery groups or sub-structures may be formed as required. DE and EA leads will agree membership and attendance.
- 8.4 It is acknowledged there are parallel and pre-existing programmes of transformation, particularly in respect of SEN, whose scope includes aspects of this reform programme. Where existing Boards or governance structures exist to direct reform, new or additional structures and reporting will not be created. However, the Board will capture the highlight reports from these programmes/projects to ensure progress is collated and reported against the five reform projects.

9. Risk Management

- 9.1 A Programme-level risk register will be maintained, with particular emphasis on:
- Financial risk (delivery of required savings)
 - Workforce and Industrial Relations risk (redeployment, voluntary exit schemes)
 - Failure to achieve appropriate buy-in from key stakeholders

- SEN equality impacts and rural needs impacts
- Continuity of Learning
- Legal challenge risk (especially around school closures)

9.2 High-level risks will be escalated to the Departmental Board's risk register as appropriate.

10. Reporting

10.1 The Board will provide at least bi-monthly updates to:

- DE/EA Senior Leadership Teams
- Minister of Education
- Executive (where required for decisions, legislation, or approvals)

10.2 Programme progress reports will include:

- Milestone achievement status
- Financial impacts
- Risk updates
- Stakeholder engagement status
- Implementation dashboards

11. Review

11.1 These Terms of Reference will be reviewed:

- After the Programme Board has been operational for six months;
- Annually thereafter; and
- Following significant changes to programme scope, budget, or legislation.