

**NOTE OF EIGHTH MEETING OF THE
STRATEGIC PLANNING AND POLICY FORUM**

TUESDAY 11 DECEMBER AT 2PM

NASUWT HEADQUARTERS, EDGEWATER ROAD, BELFAST

Attendees

Paul Sweeney	DE (Chair)
John McGrath	DE
La'Verne Montgomery	DE
Shane McCurdy	NEELB
Gregory Butler	SEELB
Noreen Campbell	NICIE
Seamus Searson	NASUWT
Sean Maguire	ASPECT
Clare Majury	NAHT (for Fern Turner)
Gerry Murphy	INTO
Mark Langhammer	ATL
Peter McMurray	GMB (for Eamonn Coy)
Jim Clarke	CCMS
Kathryn Menary	DE (Secretariat)

Apologies

Gavin Boyd	BELB & ESAIT
Clare Mangan	WELB
Avril Hall-Callaghan	UTU
Paddy Mackel	NIPSA
Tony Murphy	SELB
Anne Speed	UNISON
Micheál Ó Duibh	CnaG

1. Welcome

1.1 Paul Sweeney, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanking Seamus Searson, NASUWT, for hosting the meeting noting that it was an excellent room. He acknowledged the good work and commitment of colleagues in the work streams since the Forum last met and the continued delivery of work against tight timescales.

1.2 Paul commented that all members should have a copy of the information about the PIRLS and TIMMS study which was released that morning. This presented a most uplifting picture of our primary sector revealing outstanding performances in terms of literacy and numeracy in particular. The Minister had issued a press release and also sent a letter to Principals and Boards of Governors of all Primary schools to acknowledge this success. Paul noted that it was important to acknowledge and celebrate this terrific performance however the dip at post primary level remains a real concern given the significant tail of underachievement that exists.

1.3 Seamus advised that he and several other members were present at the briefing earlier that day. Whilst the report was welcomed, it must be acted upon and built upon and the Forum could have an input to this work. Paul agreed that this should be discussed under AONB.

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting on 20 September 2012 were agreed as an accurate account of the meeting and formally adopted and there were no matters arising. Paul updated members on a number of issues; advising that the Supporting Area Planning proposals had been submitted to the Minister, and asking John McGrath to provide an update on the Area Based Planning process. John advised that the Boards were working to have complete post primary plans into the Department by early January 2013.

2.2 Seamus noted that the NEELB had published details of their post primary review and asked when the other Boards would do so. Shane commented that the agreed proposals on the controlled sector had been published. Noreen sought an idea of the time span on the next phase and who would have sight of the plans that were being presented to the Minister. John advised once all the plans were received and considered they would be published and subject to public scrutiny.

2.3 Paul confirmed that members had invited the Shared Education Advisory Group to attend the meeting; however, they had been unable to do so. It had been suggested that members take the opportunity to meet individually with the Group who were on course to submit their report to the Minister in February 2013. Seamus advised that the Trade Unions were meeting with the Group the following day; however, he felt that the Group should have met with the Forum rather than going through individual channels. Paul agreed that it would have been beneficial for the group to attend; however, the Group is independent of DE.

3. Budget / CFF Work stream Update

3.1 Paul noted that the Forum had met with Sir Robert Salisbury and his Panel at the last meeting and a follow up meeting was planned with the associated work stream. He asked Seamus Searson, as the work stream Chair, to provide an update. Seamus advised that the meeting was very useful, commenting that this was proof of what could be achieved when the Forum worked together. The work stream had a further meeting to pull together issues and then raised agreed items (paper can be circulated if useful) with the Panel on 2 October 2012.

3.2 When the Panel's report is published, members will be able to determine how much was taken on board. The work stream hopes to engage further on the review and the budget as a whole. Paul advised that the Panel's report was to be with the Minister by the end of December 2012, and noted that the Chancellor's autumn statement highlighted the continued austerity and downward spiral of Resource DEL and it would be important to anticipate pressures for the future. Seamus agreed that the work stream would pull together their views in the New Year.

4. Raising Standards Work stream Proposals

4.1 Sean Maguire, work stream Chair, talked to the main paper produced by the group previously circulated to members. He initially outlined the overarching issues that the group felt had an impact on raising standards such as increased financing in early years, the inability to get an agreed transfer procedure and the need for increased collaboration across sectors. The group had welcomed the OFMDFM announcement on improving literacy and numeracy. Seamus commented that the PIRLS and TIMMS results provided great hope for the future and went on to explain the recommendations of each of the three sub-groups as outlined in the paper.

4.2 Members discussed the report in some detail. Paul advised that every member reserved the right not to agree with everything in the report however it was accepted that the broad thrust of the report provided a framework for the way forward for the Forum and would be presented to the Minister. Members also agreed to submit the short report on Examination Reform. Paul commended members of the work stream and noted that by the time Forum met again in March, the outline of the 13/14 DE Business Plan should also be available for discussion.

5. Review of Forum Operation

5.1 Paul invited La'Verne Montgomery to talk to the associated work stream's proposals. La'Verne commented that it was unfortunate that not all sectors were represented in the work stream; however to ensure all members had an opportunity to comment or input, the draft proposals had been circulated to all members at each stage. The current proposed amendments to Principles and Terms of Reference (ToR) document were highlighted – the agreed work stream amendments were in red, some comments or questions received were in green and suggestions from the Chair were in purple. The addendum document included proposed additions on practical issues.

5.2 Following discussion on the documents, it was agreed that point 4 would be amended to note that "ideally all four constituencies would be represented". With the exception of this small addition, members were broadly content with the proposals. Given the reduced attendance, members present agreed that the secretariat should make the change and circulate to all members again to provide a final opportunity for comment rather than wait to obtain consensus at the March meeting. Unless requests for fundamental change were received, the proposals would be finalised and sent to the Minister for his consideration. Paul thanked the work stream members for their input to the review of Forum operation. He finally drew members' attention to the note in the addendum that hosting of Forum meetings would be rotated with DE meeting any hospitality costs.

Action 1: Secretariat to circulate papers for comment and agreement

6. DE Corporate Plan 2012-2015

6.1 John talked to the DE Corporate Plan which incorporated the Business Plan for the current financial year. The targets were grouped around the five main pillars of DE's work. The plans, whilst incorporating Programme for Government Targets, apart from this were not set in stone and it was accepted that new challenges and developments would arise during the periods covered, particularly in terms of changes to the Department's resources.

6.2 Members suggested that the Forum should come back to this issue, putting a full session onto the agenda of the next meeting to identify the issues which the Forum could examine. Paul agreed that the 12 March 2013 meeting would have a substantive focus on business planning and there may be a draft 13/14 Business Plan at this stage. Seamus commented that March may be too late to have an input to the School Workforce Review and it was also important that the School Development Service (SDS) was dealt with. La'Verne noted that the Forum Operation Review work stream had agreed that annual business plans would be used to determine the establishment of future work streams. Gerry suggested that members could contribute suggestions as to what the work streams might be between now and March for discussion at the next meeting.

Action 2: Corporate Plan to be substantive item on next agenda

6.3 Sean commented that there were some extremely challenging milestones and John commented that the PfG targets were not negotiable. Sean noted this, commenting that work needed to commence now to attempt to meet some of the targets such as increasing the percentage of STEM subjects' post 2016. John agreed noting that the OFMDFM project on numeracy and literacy was introduced after the publication of this target and this was an example of what could be done to help to achieve the milestones. It was the introduction of new projects like this or different strategies to achieve targets that the Forum could have the best impact on, rather than imposing changes to the targets themselves.

6.4 Paul advised members that the Department was appointing Derek Baker, the current Head of Corporate HR in DFP, as Deputy Secretary in the Department, thus filling the Department's complement of two Deputy Secretaries. Derek would be taking up post in January 2013.

7. AONB

7.1 Paul advised that there was no other notified business other than to return to the issue of PIRLS and TIMMS. Seamus envisaged three potential work streams in the coming months – one examining the DE Corporate Plan, another examining PIRLS and TIMMs and the existing Budget/CFF work stream. He suggested that it would be useful for the Raising Standard's work stream to examine the PIRLS and TIMMS report and comment on the key issues to be examined. Sean agreed to convene a meeting of the work stream and feedback to the Forum at the next meeting on thoughts of what the key issues to be considered might be.

Action 3: Raising Standards work stream to be convened

7.2 Gerry commented that he understood that the OECD review was only going to examine 6 schools. He questioned the validity of this against the 7 sectors in the region. Jim agreed that the sample size would be criticised and this could undermine the review. Mark advised that in general terms, the international study was welcomed. Paul agreed to feed this back within the Department, whilst acknowledging that it may be too late to amend the plans.

8. Date and Venue of next meeting

8.1 The date of the next meeting was 12 March 2013 at 2pm. Further meetings were scheduled for June, September and December in the Diary of Events (Annex B of the addendum to the ToR). Jim offered to host the meeting in the Boardroom of CCMS Headquarters, Hollywood, and this was agreed.

8.2 The meeting closed at 4.15pm.