

MINUTES OF THE DE BOARD MEETING
Thursday 22 February 2024
Conference Room, Rathgael House

Attendees:

Mark Browne (Chair)
Linsey Farrell
Ronnie Armour
Neil Palmer
Marcella Phillips
Andrew Scott
Nicola Byrne (Item 2)
Cathy Galway (Item 2)
John Kennedy (Item 2)
Karen McCullough (Item 3)
Joan Cassells (Item 3)

Apologies:

Faustina Graham
Heather Cousins
Paul Corrigan

In attendance:

Bryan Lavery (Board Secretary)

Observer:

Frances Curran – G7 – Shared Education Team
Fiona McMahon – DP – Additional Educational Needs Team

ETI Report

Nicola introduced the ETI's 'cross-phase report on the quality of education provision 1 September 2022-31 August 2023'. She outlined the structure of the report, its focus on the ETI Quality Improvement Strategy, and particularly on Professional Learning for Impact. She advised that as well as reporting on the various sectors, a number of thematic evaluations have been undertaken and reports on these circulated previously.

The Board discussed several issues arising from the report:

- Professional competence of teachers, the continued requirement for appropriate Teacher Professional Learning and ensuring that the availability of training is communicated to teachers;
- The impact of covid on the experience of middle managers in schools;
- Dealing with anxiety around inspection and the ETI Empowering Improvement programme;
- Limited capacity in areas such as SEN where bespoke training is required;
- The impact of ASOS;

- The importance of the end to end reviews in establishing a baseline of provision and data availability from the EA;
- Models of provision – e.g. Middletown, clustering;
- New models of inspection – international interest in the model;
- Capacity issues within the ETI to deliver the model should ASOS end.

The Board agreed that the ETI report will form the basis of a discussion at an SMT away day;

Qualifications Reform

Karen outlined:

- The drivers of change;
- Work being progressed;
- Current position of post-16 qualifications reform;
- The impact of the Independent Review of Education;
- Implications of the introduction of the Advanced British Standard in England;
- Reform/Refresh and the importance of regulation;
- The significant resource implications for DE and CCEA to progress qualifications reform;
- The need to appraise the Minister of the current position and the way forward.

The Board agreed that the policy issues should be taken forward through TMG.

The Board discussed the importance of the Three Country Agreement, the recognition of the A level brand, and the portability of qualifications.

The Board noted;

- CCEA is currently not resourced to deliver what DE asks of it, and that regulation is key to the successful implementation of a qualifications regime;
- A commonality across the various jurisdictions in considering the purpose of high stakes exams at 16.

Finance Director Report

Neil reported that taking into account existing contingency the Department continues to forecast a significant Resource overspend this year of around £146.8m.

An issue just emerging is an admission from the EA that it cannot stand over the figures it has produced relating to the number of staff impacted by the Pay and Grading Review of support staff. It now says that the figures previously notified are significantly lower than now envisaged, and that the possible financial impact will be £11m.

Neil advised that two Executive papers have been issued regarding 2023-24 in year funding and addressing the 2024-25 budget planning process. The in-year paper

suggests that the projected overspend will be fully funded and there is the potential that DE may have an underspend.

Including known and anticipated pressures, including the implementation of a childcare strategy, DE's budget requirement for 2024-25 will be c£4,062.

Neil updated the Board on:

- The capital budget position;
- Earmarked budgets;
- Annual reports and accounts;
- High Risk EQA IT projects; and
- Prompt payments.

HR Report

Marcella reported the following on resourcing:

- The SHRBP team continue to meet with DE colleagues. At present the focus on discussions has been in relation to workforce and resourcing matters.
- The deferment of recruitment competitions for G7 and G6 continues. This position is being kept under review and a launch of competitions is subject to budget and consultation with CTUS.
- A small supply remains available at SO and DP levels and plans are underway to schedule further interviews
- Merit lists are expected shortly to fill vacancies at EOII and EOI levels with plans in place to schedule further interviews.
- Plans are underway to launch a new AO external recruitment competition in the new financial year.

The number of TPs in DE at the end of January 2024 was 62, indicating a downward trajectory.

It is important that senior managers encourage line managers to undertake End of Year Performance Management conversations with staff. At 12 February 67.6% of in-year reviews had been completed.

Non Departmental Public Bodies

Linsey reported the following:

- There is ongoing engagement with CCEA regarding building capacity to deliver strategic priorities and statutory requirements;
- Four new Council members have been appointed to CCEA;
- A review of online RSE Resource materials is underway – any outdated or inappropriate material is being removed.

James advised that the NICIE Chief Executive position is being recruited at present.

