

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

4 March 2008

RUANE DETAILS 'AREA-BASED PLANNING' APPROACH

Education Minister Caitríona Ruane has provided more detail on how the future structure of education provision across the North will be shaped.

The Minister was speaking after unveiling to the Assembly the process for an area-based look at post-primary provision.

Highlighting the consensus that existed on the need for such an approach, the Minister said: **“The need for area-based planning has found broad support across the educational and political spectrum. Everyone agrees that without this, we will be unable to plan and deliver the curriculum to all young people, wherever they live. Area-based planning will be a dynamic way of dealing with this challenge and coping with the growing demographic downturn.”**

Ms Ruane moved on to explain that the Education and Skills Authority would take forward full area-based planning following its establishment in April 2009. There would, however, be a post-primary area-based planning exercise launched immediately, working with the Further Education (FE) sector, to identify any structural change required for the delivery of election at 14 and the Entitlement Framework.

The Minister continued: **“I have stated many times that I am not advocating a ‘one size fits all’ approach to educational provision. There are a number of structural options which can deliver election at 14 and the Entitlement Framework and I do not believe that central government is best placed to decide on the best options for individual areas.**

“I see government’s job as providing direction to enable decisions to be made at a local level. That is why I am bringing forward a layered approach.

“I will, therefore, form a representative central group of educational stakeholders, independently chaired, to drive this change. This group will be complemented by five area groups involving a representative from each of the sectors and from FE. These groups will consult within – and between – their areas and submit preliminary area-based plans for approval by the central group.

“In addition, schools in local areas, acting collectively, could bring forward their own proposals to the area-based groups for consideration.”

This work is necessary for the delivery of a broader based curriculum and to address demographic decline, but will inform the debate about new transfer arrangements as the Minister moves forward seeking Executive and Assembly agreement.

The Minister said: **“It is my intention, given the urgent need to address issues of transfer and offering young people the choice they need at 14, to make the delivery of the 24/27 course minimum of the Entitlement Framework mandatory from 2013 and consequently to introduce the first election at 14 at this stage.”**

The Minister indicated that she hoped to announce the membership of the central and area-based groups shortly, with chairs being announced before the end of this week. The formal plans coming from the work of the groups would be issued for formal consultation in the autumn with the formal consultation period completed by January 2009.

The Minister concluded: **“In the past, there have been isolated examples of schools working together to provide improved educational opportunities for their pupils. Today’s announcement will, for the first time, enable all educational stakeholders to work together in partnership to provide a wider range of educational choice for children across the North.”**

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The area-based planning criteria will be decided through a short consultation process. The main elements in the proposed approach to area-based planning are:

- the central role of Educational Skills Authority in the production of draft area-based plans within a policy framework set by DE;
- the importance of sustainable schools, a new policy on this issue will be published shortly;
- a process including asset management , the development of area plans and strategic investment plans and project appraisal;
- consultation on an area/sub-area basis involving the sectors and the schools; and
- plans will cover all forms of schools the contribution of DEL and the FE sector in the process.

2. The area-based planning process for the post-primary sector will be initiated and driven by a representative central group involving:

- independent chairpersons;
- one senior figure drawn from each of the ELBs and the Catholic sector, CnaG, GBA, and NICIE;
- a representative of the Trade Unions;
- the Education and Training Inspectorate;
- representatives of DEL and the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges;
- senior staff from the Department of Education;
- an expert from the South; and
- a representative from the team that is working to set up ESA.

3. The work at central and local levels will take fully into account:

- the existing school structures;
- existing approvals for school capital projects;
- existing sectoral plans for development;
- existing Further Education provision;
- data on existing and projected enrolments;
- data on performance and other aspects of quality;
- progress towards the provision of the Entitlement Framework;
- the impact of and on transport policy;
- opportunities to promote sustainable schools;
- opportunities to promote sharing between schools; and
- opportunities for merger or federations in the development of learning communities.

4. Media enquiries to the Department of Education Press Office, Tel: 028 9127 9207. Out of office hours please contact the Duty Press Officer via pager number 07699 715440 and your call will be returned.