

Prospect Education and Children's Services

Response to consultation on School Development Service Interim Structures

The Education and Children's Service Group of Prospect welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the School Development Service interim structures.

Prospect represents school improvement professionals, education administrators and managers within the education sector in Northern Ireland and across the UK. In providing a response Prospect drew upon the expertise and experience of members in the Northern Ireland Education Authority and in the education sector generally.

The role of the School Development Service must be moving the education agenda forward and not simply being reactive to events.

This necessarily involves maintaining more than a reliable external intervention service when individual schools seriously underperform, and ensuring advisors are dedicated to such priority tasks as promoting literacy and numeracy initiatives. This requires the deployment of a Northern Ireland-wide generic school improvement and development service, capable of working closely with school leaderships to address a range of areas of weakness and, above all, to consistently focus on enhancing the quality of classroom teaching.

There has been a significant reduction (75%) of full time staff engaged in the original 5 ELB CASS services. However the list of roles and responsibilities for the SDS remain largely at the same level of work previously undertaken by the much larger workforce. It is unrealistic to expect a much reduced workforce to continue to deliver this former high standard of service much valued by the schools across NI.

Prospect is concerned that the continuation of the proposed School Development Service in its present interim form will result in the Service and consequently the region's schools continuing to experience the erosion of valuable skills and expertise in this field, as practitioners leave through redundancies and early retirements, and their remaining colleagues suffer rising and at times unreasonable workloads and associated demoralisation. The new SDS must focus on developing and enthusing its permanent professional workforce, and also utilise the services of Professional Associates to ensure that schools continue to receive the high quality development support and challenge they deserve.

Prospect believes that working constructively with the Education Authority on development of the current interim structure is essential to secure the future of the service as it moves to an enduring structure. Prospect recognises that there may be a need for officers to be deployed into those areas in Northern Ireland where there is now a gap in school development support. However as long as the Education Authority is prepared to facilitate this in terms of travel time, mileage expenses, flexible and home working and other practical considerations Prospect believes its members will continue to be accommodating in their response.

Equity needs to be secured across the SDS in terms of leave, allowances, 'time off in lieu', home-working and other considerations which were at variance across the previous ELB CASS services. If work patterns are to be more flexible and geographic areas much wider than these protocols need

to be discussed openly and agreed with Prospect and our sister Trade Unions to ensure officers are not disadvantaged and their professional integrity is respected.

It is essential that the Education Authority acknowledges that changes to terms and conditions should be negotiated with accredited school improvement representatives (Prospect and our sister Trade Unions) in advance of the interim arrangements being finalised. It must be clearly understood that TUPE Regulations apply to all school development staff that transferred from the previous ELBs. Officers may have agreed to occasional changes to normal working practices in the interests of ensuring a continuity of service to schools; however this cannot be interpreted as consent through acquiescence to a more permanent working pattern. Prospect as the leading representative organisation for school improvement professionals in the UK have at the core of our mission that the professional roles and responsibilities of our members are exercised in such a way that is most effective and beneficial to schools and through them to the children and young people.

Prospect request a meeting with EA management in advance of the next JNC meeting to discuss the issues raised by our members in response to this consultation. These issues include

- Equality of terms and conditions of service across the EA, particularly, leave entitlement and TOIL;
- Clarification of terms in the interim structure documentation such as “EA commissioning service”, internal and external partners and their roles;
- Definition of the extent of geographical working areas for individual officers;
- Management structure, roles and responsibilities;
- Re-grading and pay structures;
- Career pathways within the Education Authority.

While JNC is the recognised negotiating body for EA staff, Prospect believes that a meeting with EA management is necessary to fully explore the issues outlined above prior to any JNC tabled agreements.