



Department of Education

Landscape Review of the
Education Authority
June 2022



Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	6
1.1 Introduction and scope of review	6
1.2 Key Findings	6
1.3 Summary of Key Recommendations	9
1.4 Conclusion	13
2. Approach and methodology	14
2.1 Context for the Review	14
2.2 Scope of Review	14
2.3 Approach and methodology	15
2.4 Format of this report	16
2.5 Report content	17
Findings	
3. The Need for the EA and its functions	19
3.1 Introduction	19
3.2 Functions of the Education Authority	19
3.3 Overall Aim and Objective	20
3.4 Policy context	20
3.5 Findings	21
4. The appropriateness of the NDPB model	22
4.1 Context	22
4.2 Findings	23
5. Strategic Contribution of Education Authority	25
5.1 Context and Progress to Date	25
5.2 Programme for Government	26
5.3 DE Policy Priorities	27
5.4 CYPS Strategy	27
5.5 EA Delivery	28
5.6 Findings	29
6. Performance against EA Strategic Plan	31
6.1 Context and Progress to Date	31
6.2 Findings	32
7. Financial Management	34
7.1 Context and Progress to Date	34
7.2 The current budget position	35
7.3 2021-2022 Provisional Outturn	36



7.4	2021-22 and 2022-23 Initial Budget Allocations.....	37
7.5	EA's approach to financial management.....	38
7.6	Staffing.....	39
7.7	Findings.....	39
8.	Procurement.....	41
8.1	Context and Progress to Date.....	41
8.2	Structure and Staffing.....	41
8.3	Findings.....	42
9.	Estate Management.....	44
9.1	Context and Progress to Date.....	44
9.2	Estate Management in EA.....	44
9.3	Findings.....	46
10.	Staffing and Human Resource Management.....	48
10.1	Context and Progress to Date.....	48
10.2	The HR Strategy.....	50
10.3	The HR Function.....	50
10.4	Key Workforce Issues.....	50
10.5	Addressing areas of concern.....	51
10.6	Findings.....	51
11.	Quality of Service.....	55
11.1	Context and Progress to Date.....	55
11.2	Findings.....	58
11.3	Driving improvement.....	59
12.	Decision Making.....	61
12.1	Context and Progress to Date.....	61
12.2	Findings.....	62
13.	Relationship between EA and other organisations.....	63
13.1	Context and Progress to Date.....	63
13.2	Findings.....	65
14.	Business Planning.....	68
14.1	Context and Progress to Date.....	68
14.2	EA Approach to Business Planning.....	68
14.3	Findings.....	72
15.	Corporate Governance.....	74
15.1	Context and Progress to Date.....	74
15.2	The Education Authority; Board – composition and role.....	74
15.3	Committee – legislative requirements.....	74
15.4	Board, Committee and Operational Arrangements.....	75



15.5	Corporate Leadership Team	76
15.6	Directorate Management Team	77
15.7	Director Accountability Meetings.....	77
15.8	Governance Arrangements with Sponsor Department.....	77
15.9	Key elements of governance arrangements	78
15.10	Governance, Risk and Audit Committee	79
15.11	Findings	80
16.	Accountability of Schools	82
16.1	Context and Progress to Date	82
16.2	Current State	84
16.3	Surplus Deficit Working Group (SDWG) Review 2019-20	84
16.4	Findings	85
17.	Information Management	87
17.1	Context and Progress to Date	87
17.2	Findings	88
18.	Relationship with DE	90
18.1	Context and Progress to Date	90
19.	EA Board	94
19.1	Context and Progress to Date	94
19.2	Board membership	95
19.3	Individual Board member responsibility	95
19.4	Terms of membership	96
19.5	Committees.....	96
19.6	Findings	98
20.	Policy Compliance	102
20.1	Context and Progress to Date	102
20.2	Findings	103
21.	Stakeholder Engagement Findings – discussion	104
22.	Benchmarking of Education Spending	105
22.1	OECD 2018	105
22.2	UK and Northern Ireland	106
22.3	2021 onwards.....	107
22.4	Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 2019/20.....	108
22.5	Benchmarking the Education Authority	109
22.6	Findings	110
23.	Sub themes discussion.....	111
23.1	Leadership.....	111
23.2	Culture and Change	111



23.3	Transformation.....	112
23.4	Relationship Complexity.....	113
23.5	Delivering on Public Value.....	114
23.6	Emerging Good Practice.....	116
24.	Strategic Themes Discussion.....	117
24.1	Introduction.....	117
24.2	Education Authority’s Policy Context.....	117
24.3	Governance and Accountability Arrangements.....	118
24.4	Affordability of Education Authority services and Identifying Priorities.....	119
24.5	The effectiveness of delivery by EA.....	119
24.6	Stakeholder and Engagement Management.....	120
24.7	DE and EA relationship.....	121
24.8	Conclusion.....	122
25.	Recommendations.....	123
25.1	Introduction.....	123
25.2	Complex problems require creative solutions.....	123
25.3	EA capacity and capability.....	126
25.4	Demonstrating stronger accountability.....	127
25.5	Conclusion.....	129
26.	Conclusion.....	130
26.1	Acknowledgements.....	131
Appendix 1 – Survey and Fieldwork Data.....		132
a.	Survey.....	133
b.	Focus Groups.....	133
Appendix 2 – EA Board Membership.....		150
Appendix 3 – EA Directorates.....		152
Appendix 4 – List of Consultees.....		154
Appendix 5 – EA Policy Areas.....		158
Appendix 6 – Bibliography.....		162
Appendix 7 – Acronyms.....		166



1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction and scope of review

The Education Authority (EA) was established in April 2015 to replace the former Education and Library Boards (ELBs) into a unitary regional body. The EA was established by statute, the Education Act (NI) 2014, and its constitution is set out in Schedule 1 of the 2014 Act.

EA is a regional body with responsibility for the provision and delivery of education services in Northern Ireland. The Authority is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) sponsored by the Department of Education (DE) and Department for the Economy (DfE). Under legislation, the Authority is responsible to DE for ensuring that effective and efficient primary, secondary education and educational services are available to meet the needs of children and young people as well as ensuring the provision of efficient and effective youth services. EA is also legally delegated to administer student finance on behalf of DfE.

The EA is also the employing authority for all staff at Controlled Schools and non-teaching staff at Catholic Maintained Schools.

DE has committed to undertaking a review of the EA. This review adheres to guidance set out in the Public Bodies: A Guide for NI Departments' guidance (2008), which stipulates that there is a need to regularly review NDPBs to ensure they remain the best way to deliver the services for which they are responsible; and if they are, how delivery of these services can be improved.

This is the first such review of the EA since its establishment in 2015.

The review considers the effectiveness and governance of the EA including the extent to which the organisation is delivering against NI Executive/its priorities.

Specifically, this review sets out to consider the following areas:

- The EA's capacity for delivering more effectively and efficiently, including identifying the potential for efficiency savings, and where appropriate, its ability to contribute to wider goals such as economic and social wellbeing;
- An assessment or assurance that processes are in place for making such assessments and;
- The control and governance arrangements in place to ensure that the organisation and its sponsor are complying with recognised principles of good corporate governance.

1.2 Key Findings

It is accepted by all stakeholders that the transition from the legacy sub-regional model to a single regional unitary model has been slow. It is also fair to state that momentum and pace have only developed in the past three years and therefore the assessment of the Authority takes cognisance of an organisation which for the first number of years of existence was lacking in focus, was built around interim reporting structures, and was not adequately addressing areas of concern. Since 2018-19, the organisation has begun to 'form' with real progress being made across a whole suite of areas; highly skilled and dedicated professional staff work tirelessly (often against significant challenges). The organisation is beginning to respond to its landscape and 'settle' into that landscape and much good work has been done to get this far. However, the majority of observers and participants on this journey would recognise that the organisation has been on the 'backfoot' for too long, has inflicted too many 'own goals' and has been too slow in responding to the needs of the system it has been set up to support. As a result, the organisation continues to firefight, continues to be on the defensive (at times), all the while trying to establish an organisational delivery model within a challenging financial situation and with a range of internal and external pressures (which are explored throughout this text).



In summary this review has identified that:

- Whilst the NDPB model remains the most appropriate model for EA, there is confusion on the role and remit of the EA within the Authority itself and more broadly across the wider education system.
- EA in its current form, with its current strategic focus and operational delivery is well aligned with Programme for Government and the strategic priorities and delivery model are more consistent and sustainable than under the legacy organisations (albeit still with a tendency for its approach to business planning to be inward looking rather than pupil centric).
- There is a consensus that the regional unitary delivery model is more focused as a service delivery organisation than the legacy ELBs were and therefore increased alignment to DE policy implementation through one body as opposed to five bodies. However, notwithstanding that improved focus, there is a sense that the prolonged transition from the legacy model is slow, and aspects of EA delivery is still rooted to legacy cultures, behaviours and models.
- The EA has a wide range of responsibilities, and further responsibilities have been added to the organisation since 2015. This significant breadth and range of responsibilities is being delivered within limited resourcing and staffing levels, and as a result expectations on delivery quality/levels can be mismatched.
- Performance management is not consistent within EA; however, progress has been made to create a revised approach to performance within EA. This is manifested in review of corporate governance and planning, resulting in a strategic planning approach with measurable processes, outputs and outcomes designed, which should lead to improved quality across all areas of work.
- EA's financial strategy continues to be dependent on successful in-year monitoring bids (in the absence of a three-year budget plan). With an overall budget for 2021-22 of £2.322bn and a projected spend in 2021-22 £2.477bn there was a resulting funding gap of £155m. Ongoing funding gaps and a reliance upon monitoring bids to close these gaps indicates that the organisation is either underfunded or inefficient. It is our view that EA is probably underfunded for the scale of what it is expected to deliver but that the organisation still hasn't fully established agreed baseline costs to deliver those services nor the associated resourcing requirements for those services.
- EA's approach to procurement and estate management are in development and bedding in. Whilst there is evidence of significant progress being made in creating regional frameworks and approaches to these matters, stakeholder feedback highlights high levels of dis-satisfaction with EA's approach which suggests more work is required to support and communicate with key stakeholder groups.
- EA suffers from the lack of an overarching HR strategy and a strategic approach to workforce planning (notwithstanding Equality, Health and Well Being and Organisation Development Learning strategies which have evolved and are being implemented). The initial design of EA in terms of organisational structure does not necessarily reflect the needs of the organisation seven years on. Consequently, the lack of HR strategy provides limited definition or articulation of the future vision of the service, its ambitions and the people resourcing and capability issues. The function is delivered through departments which appear under resourced and there is a sense that in the absence of a strategy, the centrality of resourcing and people/culture matters is not wholly realised or appreciated.
- Feedback from the education system (through surveys (Appendix One) and consultations) suggests that the levels of engagement between EA and schools are not effective. Partners in the school system specifically fed back in consultations on the limited levels of engagement, the inadequate quality of communication from HR, the inability to get in contact with HR, the inconsistency of advice and the general sense that process is more important than supporting a school or principal.



- There is evidence that the organisation has reviewed and restructured corporate governance structures and reporting as well as implementing the architecture and frameworks which support more focus and energy in delivery of quality services.
- However, EA's ability to communicate and engage with its partners is not satisfactory. There is significant feedback suggesting that EA's capacity to engage with users/stakeholders falls short of most users' expectations.
- Decision making, despite recent progression in improved corporate governance arrangements is seen as cumbersome and a burden. Feedback indicates that the default position of EA is that it appears to be afraid to make a mistake and is consequently risk adverse, passive and not progressing at the pace required to effect radical change in the system.
- Whilst many organisations raised the bureaucracy of EA as an impediment to progress and agility, others identified the burdensome operating model as creating a very defined boundary between EA and the children it is meant to serve/support, in that the preoccupation appears to be on the school institutions and not the child.
- External stakeholders recognise that EA is an organisation under pressure, and this can 'spill' over into other relationships. However, this creates a lack of confidence in EA's capacity as a partner, a lack of confidence in its capacity to deliver and a sense that EA is not fulfilling a leadership role in the wider education system.
- EA's approach to business planning process is evolving and the organisation is beginning to improve the coordination and presentation of performance information to support decision making and scrutiny but does not yet have a complete overview of performance. The organisation has a tendency to focus on data richness but not data intelligence.
- A new strategic approach to corporate governance has emerged and there is clear evidence emerging of improvements in scope, practices, and culture around governance. However, this has not yet translated into performance baseline. There is a recognition that the Performance Improvement Framework and the new Corporate Planning Framework require time to 'bed in', and the organisation needs to further define and refine its data management and data production in order to effectively report on and measure performance.
- EA is a large and complex organisation and for many outside of the organisation; it can be difficult to penetrate. The reporting structures and governance structures are not clear or transparent to outsiders, and the experience of outsiders is that EA's approach to governance and decision making is bureaucratic and slow, can be risk adverse, inflexible and not always effective.
- EA is the funding authority for grant aided schools in Northern Ireland and this review highlights a widespread concern that a significant percentage of schools are operating in deficit positions, whilst others continue to accrue surpluses. It would appear that the current funding model does not meet school needs and that the funding model is underpinned by an over-engineered scheme which was introduced in 2005. Given how the scheme presently operates, there will continue to be examples of funding disparities regardless of the effectiveness of the financial management of the school.
- The nature and role of EA's powers in terms of school accountability are set out however, notwithstanding the policy basis, feedback indicates that despite the frustrations of trying to exert influence and ensure adequate governance, EA has limited resources to monitor, support and develop boards of governors and to put in place effective school improvement, school effectiveness or school governance interventions.



- The relationship between EA and DE is an evolving one and there are clearly frustrations on both sides. The complex policy environment, the need for better definition of the roles of all actors in the education system and the need for better alignment of EA delivery planning to DE priorities are all causes of frustration. The legislation and MSFM appear to give DE limited levers to hold EA to account and for its part, in the past EA was at times difficult to hold to account. That situation is improving but there is still variance in the expectations of both parties in terms of delivery and working together.
- In terms of the relationship between DE and EA as a sponsor department and the arm's length body – the length of the arm into EA differs dependent upon the situation – tending to be longer when it comes to formal governance arrangements, but shorter where policy and operational matters align.
- The board of EA is large. The nature of the board's composition is representative and diverse and as such the review considers whether the board's size and composition reflect the organisation's requirements, highlighting the curious feature of the EA board that, apart from the Chairperson, DE/ the Minister has minimal input into the nominated sectoral representatives and in the case of political representation, none whatsoever.
- EA has undertaken significant work in refreshing its committee structure. Through a cross directorate/ thematic approach to functional areas within the organisation is able then to provide more assurance to the whole board. It would appear that the quality of scrutiny and challenge has improved and the information flow from the organisation through Directorate Team meetings and CLT into committees and Board has increased transparency and improved assurance and re-assurance.
- Notwithstanding recurring themes around engagement and whole organisation approach to effectiveness and affordability, the organisation does demonstrate examples of good practice and emerging innovation. The fieldwork identified key emerging service improvement and innovation in the recently launched EdiS for example, the new digital admissions platform, the Youth Service, the CoPE accreditation for procurement – all examples of evidential service improvement and transformed approach to delivery. The key challenge is cascading the lessons from these examples across the whole organisation.

1.3 Summary of Key Recommendations

The recommendations presented address recurring themes identified that require attention. We have grouped these recommendations into three broad yet interlinked categories:

- **Complex problems require creative solutions** relates to recommendations around the need to revisit the future form, function and financing of EA.
- **EA capacity and capability** contains a series of recommendations which focus on improvements required to support organisational effectiveness.
- **Demonstrating stronger accountability** section holds a series of recommendations around governance, accountability and relationships which we believe will support future EA effectiveness.



Complex problems require creative solutions

- **Recommendation One** - Taking an **internal review** approach, DE with the EA need to re-visit a number of key aspects of the original design of EA in order to understand
 - > Clarity of purpose. In this case, everyone concerned – ministers, the department, the agency itself – all parties should reflect upon precisely what is needed to be delivered. This review highlights that the role of EA is not well understood and the scale and complexity of its functions unwieldy. If the wider sector is not clear about the EA's purpose, while understanding whose support is essential to its success, it will be vulnerable, regardless of its performance.
 - > Given the scale, size and complexity of the EA model and the fact that additional responsibilities have been added to it – DE and EA need to internally and collaboratively reflect upon that form and function to determine the size, shape and focus of the organisation going forward.
- **Recommendation Two** - by undertaking a fundamental internal review of EA, in re-visiting its purpose, in re-defining the services and provisions it is responsible for, will allow the opportunity for DE and EA to then address two fundamental issues;
 - > With a re-defined purpose and clarity on scope and service, there is an opportunity to identify the correct budget for EA that properly allows it to carry out the services and activities identified and redress once and for all the systemic and ongoing annual budgetary pressures and the subsequent issues manifested as a result. If the organisation is re-purposed and 're-financed', it allows the organisation then to focus on those priorities and adopt a more measured approach. There is an opportunity to make the budget process more responsive to priorities (accepting the financial constraints in place due to competing Executive priorities).
 - > If the organisation's budget is re-set and the affordability of what it will cost to deliver on the strategic objectives identified, then there is an opportunity to press the re-set button on the myriad of resourcing issues identified in this review (and in other reports). With a refreshed mandate and a refreshed budget there is an opportunity to right size the organisation once and for all and get the appropriate structure and workforce model in place.
- **Recommendation Three** - With a refreshed remit and scope, with associated identified strategic (and achievable) priorities and a budget agreed to reflect the delivery of those priorities, the organisation can begin to fundamentally address delivery effectiveness issues identified within this review. We strongly recommend that;
 - > A full-scale **external review** of the EA is carried out to determine the future structural model of the organisation (aligned to re-purposed strategic objectives and priorities and funding envelope).
 - > The external review of the organisation should examine the opportunity to explore alternative delivery models and the sustainability of more commercial or income generation models. Operational delivery services such as transport and catering are expensive, delivered on single sites, are identified as hard to manage and resource, and are key services which should be reviewed to test alternative delivery (regional) models (as well as how this can be potentially done within existing legislation).
 - > The external review should take a lead in designing the overall structure and model for the organisation, but every service line that remains within a new structure should be reviewed to determine the most appropriate and sustainable financial delivery model and if there are alternative models (including commercial models), these should be explored, and options appraised. These should be done internally and will form key parts of ongoing transformation efforts.



- > The organisation requires a strategic workforce plan with an associated resourcing model for service delivery. This resourcing model urgently requires a pay and grading review.
- > EA's approach to HR matters requires attention. HR resourcing issues aside, the organisation urgently needs a human resources strategy, and this should be a priority. Mindful that this review may result in subsequent reviews, which may in turn create changes to the organisational structure of delivery model, there is still an urgent requirement to address HR and people issues identified in this report and the development of a HR strategy, even in an interim format should be delayed as a result of any other potential reviews.
- > We recommend that EA identifies and takes the opportunity to review and test processes and systems to ensure they adhere to internal and external requirements and meet effectiveness and efficiency tests.
- > Furthermore, this review has identified that whilst EA is making effective progress in addressing and securing a robust approach to information governance, the handling and dissemination of information (inside and outside of the organisation) is not fully developed. We recommend that EA intensifies and accelerates internal work to create a more effective system of data and information management and usage (particularly in how this integrates with EA performance and reporting).

EA capacity and capability

A recurring theme of feedback in this landscape review has been EA's effectiveness in its environment and how it interacts with its stakeholders and partners.

- **Recommendation One** – EA urgently needs to become more child and pupil centric in its approach. Feedback suggests that the organisation is process heavy and that these processes get in the way of a child centric service. There is an urgent need to re-focus on the needs of the child/pupil and as such, EA needs to become more dynamic in response to events. This response should be tailored to the need of the user and cross directorate teams should be agile when responding to those needs.
- **Recommendation Two** – requires that underpinning all efforts is a consistent and effective approach to communication. There is an urgent need to ensure that the school system gets reliable information (as opposed to swamping them with disparate information, as is the case at present); there is a need to organise the corporate message to ensure it is consistent and on the 'front foot' as opposed to being re-active and operating from a position of defensiveness.
- **Recommendation Three** – in order to ensure a fit for purpose and child centric approach to service delivery, we recommend that all front line services are reviewed, tested and refreshed to ensure that they are appropriately resourced and skilled, and that the processes and systems they use allow them to interact with stakeholders in real time and allow EA staff to provide an improved quality of service and information. This requires a fundamental review of all frontline activities and the processes/systems to support them.
 - > Whilst we recognise that EA provides many frontline services, we suggest that priority is given to services such as; School Improvement services, Education Welfare Services and HR services as these are services that for a variety of reasons featured heavily in school/teacher/parent feedback.
 - > Furthermore we believe that initial reviews should be conducted independent of EA so that baselines can be established and needs identified. We recognise that this has a cost impact, but an external review will not take resource away from existing services which may be under pressure, and also provides the capacity for independence and degrees of objectivity.
- **Recommendation Four** - This review has identified that EA is a serial collector of data and information and has almost created an internal information industry. Unless that information is useful, integrated and real-time



– it is not effective. EA needs to ensure that it has in place an effective and integrated approach to data and information management and collection, and to integrate that data/information to inform and support better decision making.

- **Recommendation Five** – we refer in this review to the relationship complexity of the EA operating environment and how it is our view that the current landscape perpetuates a cycle of leaders heavily involved in multiple and often low value meeting culture. We strongly recommend that for EA to successfully make the changes required for the next stage of its journey, will require it to become a learning organisation and there is a need to embed quickly the emerging Organisational Development strategy to define and support leadership capacity and capability in the organisation.

Demonstrating stronger accountability

We have identified improving levels of accountability within EA and in relation to its' accountability axis with other organisations – primarily DE. There is however work to be done in moving towards a more streamlined approach to accountability to support a more integrated flow of assurance from the Minister through the department and into the EA, so that the roles and responsibilities (under accountability arrangements) are clear and assurance is full. Recommendations therefore include:

- **Recommendation One** – Accountable Officers should ensure that when the new partnership agreement between EA and DE is being drafted sponsor teams work with EA to make roles and responsibilities as clear as possible, discussing the wording in the framework document to ensure a shared understanding.
- **Recommendation Two** – DE should seek views from the EA Board Chairperson and Board members on how DE manages its relationship with the EA and in turn how EA manages its relationship with the DE and the Minister, putting in place any recommendations to improve those relationships, that might arise as a result of those reflections.
- **Recommendation Three** – Assurance. It is our view that relationships need to be underpinned by a systematic approach to assurance. We believe that there are two broad aspects of assurance which DE and EA need to address:
 - > assurance that EA is performing satisfactorily against the objectives, targets and performance measures agreed by Ministers – the 'controllability' dimension of accountability and the starting point for 'controllability' is establishing what success looks like for EA.
 - > assurance that the body is meeting the requirements of legislation and guidance – the 'transparency' and 'responsibility' dimensions of accountability.

The recommendation follows that DE and EA should ensure that EA has in place a well-developed performance framework that sets out Ministers' priorities within the overall Programme for Government outcomes, defined as clearly as possible how success will be measured and ideally covers expectations over several years.

- EA is sponsored by a team (Education Governance Team and DE Finance). It is our understanding that the DE model is reliant upon others (i.e. directorate policy leads) for scrutiny matters and therefore the EGT largely becomes a co-ordinating function as regards to EA's sponsorship. **Recommendation Four** therefore suggests that DE should review the capacity and capability needed in its teams to ensure that relationships are being managed well with EA and consider how best to organise that – through policy teams or a sponsorship hub, for instance – to ensure that there is a proper focus on sponsorship activity and a strong link with policy development. In reviewing the capacity and capability, it will be important to have nominated people who can provide support to the Departmental Accounting Officer and EA Accounting Officer.



- **Recommendation Five** focuses on the governance arrangements within EA and the structure and composition of the EA Board:
 - > Recognising the constitution of EA Board is set in primary legislation, we nonetheless recommend a full review of the Board to determine the appropriateness of the current model (even if it tests that legislation).
 - > In recommending changes to the skillset present on the Board, we recommend that any review of Board composition consider the addition of co-opted or non-voting members (such as experts in particular fields) to augment Board expertise.
 - > In line with more general movements towards board behaviours and standards of public office, we would recommend that in the next phase of board development, consideration is given to how the existing Code of Conduct can be enhanced/applied and ensure an *modus operandi* for board members and enhance performance and board effectiveness

1.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this review is to provide assurance to the Department that EA discharges its primary functions in an effective and efficient manner and that there is in place a robust system of stewardship of the organisation; sound governance, planning, performance management, reporting, financial decision making, direction setting and leadership. We are able to provide such an assurance, albeit with some caveats.

This review has identified that in the past two - three years the organisation has made significant progress in creating robust frameworks to provide oversight and governance across the organisation and that as a result decision making has improved, albeit with more improvements to make.

The review however has also identified that the organisation's approach to identifying base line costs is still a work in progress and that the levels of effectiveness in terms of service delivery and stakeholder management vary across the organisation and within directorates. It is therefore too early to determine whether or not the organisation is delivering as effectively or as efficiently as it should because the baseline information is not yet determined. However, progress is being made.

The review has identified that the legislative and policy context is unwieldy and EA's ability to perform effectively is often impacted by limitations to its authority. Furthermore, whilst the review findings can characterise that the EA has become a bureaucratic monolith which is process driven and at times appearing to be at odds with its stakeholders, the organisation is hampered by its scale, its relationships and the complexity, effort and energy required to service these partnerships and relationships.

More broadly the review identifies that the organisation scope, shape, size and future structure are not entirely clear and therefore there is a sense that DE and EA need to determine and right size the organisation in terms of its focus, remit and priorities. This will allow a better understanding of the organisation's affordability and allow it to focus on what it can deliver, rather than the present case, which is a disparate focus and being pulled in too many directions and ultimately not meeting many of its stakeholder expectations.



2. Approach and methodology

2.1 Context for the Review

The context and need for this review of the Education Authority – its first – is set out in a range of documents.

As outlined in the ‘Public Bodies: a Guide for NI Departments’ guidance (2008), there is a need to regularly review NDPBs to ensure they remain the best way to deliver the services for which they are responsible; and if they are, how delivery of these services can be improved.

Furthermore, additional guidance is contained in the UK Government document ‘Tailored reviews: Guidance on Reviews of Public Bodies’ (Cabinet Office, May 2019)¹.

The EA Management Statement - which sets out the broad framework within which the EA should operate - states that: “The EA will be reviewed periodically in accordance with the business needs of the Department and the EA. (In accordance with Chapter 9 of the Public Bodies: a Guide for Northern Ireland Departments). The first review will take place in the financial year 2020/21”².

DE therefore committed to undertaking a review of the EA in the 2020-21 financial year. However, this timeframe was subsequently impacted by the necessary diversion of resources in both the Department and EA in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Baker Tilly was appointed in October 2021 to undertake the review.

2.2 Scope of Review

The review considers the effectiveness and governance of the EA including the extent to which the organisation is delivering against NI Executive/its priorities.

Specifically, this review sets out to consider the following areas:

- > The EA’s capacity for delivering more effectively and efficiently, including identifying the potential for efficiency savings, and where appropriate, its ability to contribute to wider goals such as economic and social wellbeing.
- > An assessment or assurance that processes are in place for making such assessments and;
- > The control and governance arrangements in place to ensure that the organisation and its sponsor are complying with recognised principles of good corporate governance.

¹ Tailored Reviews: Guidance on Reviews of Public Bodies. Cabinet Office May 2019.

² Section 7. Education Authority Management Statement and Financial Memorandum October 2019



2.3 Approach and methodology

Our approach and methodology in carrying out the review included a number of methods including

- Desktop review of over 1000 documents provided by EA and DE.
- Over 250 one to one consultations including (full list is provided in Appendix 4):
 - > EA Board and Senior Management.
 - > EA Assistant Directors and Heads of Service.
 - > EA staff.
 - > DE officials.
 - > Political representatives.
 - > EA statutory partners.
 - > Teaching and non-teaching union representatives.
 - > The wider education system including school principals, school governors, EA staff (teaching and non-teaching).
 - > Parents, pupils and young people.
- Facilitated workshops with internal EA staff (Classroom Assistants, Transport staff and Cleaning/Catering staff).
- Facilitated engagement sessions with over 170 young people in 8 schools in a range of geographic settings (Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Enniskillen, Omagh, Banbridge and Ballymena).
- Surveys were issued to the wider education systems, seeking feedback on the performance of EA. Surveys were issued to:
 - > Boards of Governors.
 - > Principals.
 - > Teaching Staff.
 - > Non-Teaching Staff.
 - > Education Authority Staff (Corporate).
 - > Education System (i.e. statutory partners and other bodies whom EA come into contact with).
 - > Parents.
 - > Pupils and Young People.
- Furthermore, a general call for evidence was issued seeking feedback from any member for the public/community on their experiences of EA.

Full analysis of these surveys is provided in the Appendix 1 and key data is referenced throughout this report.



2.4 Format of this report

The findings of this report are divided into the sections identified in the original terms of reference;

- **Form and Function**
 - > The need for EA and its functions
 - > The appropriateness of the NDPB model
 - > Strategic contribution of EA
- **Efficiency and Effectiveness**
 - > Performance against EA Strategic Plan
 - > Financial Management
 - > Procurement
 - > Estate Management
 - > Staffing and human resource management
 - > Quality of Service
 - > Decision Making
 - > Relationships between EA and other organisations
- **Control and Governance**
 - > Business Planning
 - > Corporate Governance
 - > Accountability of Schools
 - > Information Management
 - > Relationship with DE
 - > EA Board
 - > Policy Compliance

Each section contains a summary of key documentary evidence provided, reviewed and validated; an outline of progress to date followed by a summary of findings based upon our fieldwork, consultations and engagement across those stakeholders identified in earlier sections.

Further sections of this report then contain sub-themes and strategic themes which have been identified and underpin all findings. These then are collated into a discussion chapter which in turn feeds into our recommendations.



2.5 Report content

The review considers the effectiveness and governance of the EA including the extent to which the organisation is delivering against NI Executive/its priorities.

This review is a 'landscape review' and as such is strategic in nature. We are mindful that the EA is a large and complex organisation and whilst we met with all directors and heads of services of all services provided by the Authority, this report is not a commentary on each service area. This report is not an operational precis or a granular analysis of each service line within EA. The functions of services which make up EA's activities and how they are organised (along directorate levels) are set out in Appendix 3.

This review is intended to provide a strategic overview of the effectiveness and governance of the Authority. As such we have considered the activities and services across all directorates, meeting all key personnel responsible for the delivery of those services and reviewing key documentation and performance data on those services.

Our review report collates all of that information and pulls the recovered data and findings into answers addressing the questions/themes asked under the original terms of reference and then creating sub and strategic themes. We reference where necessary, individual line areas, but for the main the focus is on the performance and effectiveness of the whole organisation and an assessment of the whole entity.



Findings



3. The need for the EA and its functions

Establish a clear understanding of the EA's functions and form.

3.1 Introduction

The Education Authority (EA) was established in April 2015 to replace the former Education and Library Boards (ELBs) into a unitary regional body³. The EA was established by statute, the Education Act (NI) 2014, and its constitution is set out in Schedule 1 of the 2014 Act⁴.

EA is a regional body with responsibility for the provision and delivery of education services in Northern Ireland. The Authority is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) sponsored by the Department of Education (DE) and Department for the Economy (DfE). Under legislation, the Authority is responsible to DE for ensuring that effective and efficient primary, post-primary education and educational services are available to meet the needs of children and young people, as well as ensuring the provision of efficient and effective youth services. EA is also legally delegated to administer student finance on behalf of DfE.

The EA is also the employing authority for all staff at Controlled Schools and non-teaching staff at Catholic Maintained Schools.

EA works in partnership with a wide range of bodies which include; Comhairle na Gaelscoliaiochta (CnaG), the Controlled School Support Council (CSSC), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Catholic Schools Trustees Service (CSTS), the Governing Bodies Association NI (GBA), the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), and the Transferor Representatives Council, (TRC).

3.2 Functions of the Education Authority

The EA has wide ranging statutory functions under education legislation. It is responsible for ensuring; there are adequate, efficient and effective pre-school, primary and post-primary education and youth services being delivered equitably across Northern Ireland; the availability of these services to meet the needs of children and young people, whilst continuing to drive for greater efficiency and effectiveness in their delivery. The EA is also expected to contribute to the development and implementation of the Children and Young People's Strategy, and is required to work in co-operation with other relevant bodies, when appropriate, to support the improved well-being of children and young people (as part of requirements under the Children's Services Co-operation Act 2015).

Its main functions include:

- providing a wide range of functions for the funding and delivery of efficient and effective pre-school provision, education and youth services;
- acting as the lead planning authority and in partnership with CCMS and sectoral bodies for all sectors and types of primary and post primary schools, ensuring there are sufficient schools of number and character in the right place at the right time and of the right size to meet the needs of all children and young people;
- equipping, maintaining and meeting other running costs of maintained schools (i.e. grant-aided schools which are not under the direct control and management of the EA);
- acting as funding authority for grant-aided schools (i.e. controlled, maintained, Voluntary Grammar (VG) and Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools);

³ Education Authority – Management Statement 2019

⁴ Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 Ch 12.



- providing school meals and transport for eligible pupils;
- promoting pupil attendance and providing support to pupils and schools as required;
- encouraging and facilitating the development of both integrated and Irish-Medium education;
- identifying, assessing and, where appropriate, making provision for pupils with special educational needs;
- making arrangements for the provision of suitable education otherwise than at school;
- providing advice and training to schools (including Boards and Governors) to help them meet their statutory duties in respect of the welfare and protection of pupils;
- providing appropriate supports for children with additional educational needs to ensure that they reach their full potential;
- providing a school development service to all schools;
- co-operating with other relevant bodies, when appropriate, in the delivery of functions which will improve the well-being of children and young people; and
- securing the provision of youth service facilities.

Furthermore, the EA has a wide range of additional duties including;

- holding schools and other education providers to account in relation to their child protection responsibilities.
- serving as a Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) for the education sector.
- statutory duties encouraging, facilitating and promoting shared education and the community use of school premises and establishing standing committees to promote shared education and the community use of school premises (including partnership with other sectors in the identification and development of shared campus schools).

3.3 Overall Aim and Objective

The overall aim for the establishment of the EA was to ensure that education administration operates efficiently and effectively to support the delivery of education-related Programme for Government commitments, Ministerial priorities, statutory functions and (overarching) educational services to children and young people.

3.4 Policy context

As part of a wider baselining exercise of EA's existing services and functions against DE's 2019/20 'Policy Code', in depth analysis was undertaken by EA itself to identify how the current functions and services of EA contribute to DE stated policy areas. This service baseline identifies:

- all current EA functions and services which contribute to each of DE's stated policy areas, identifying the responsible EA business unit, the extent to which relevant needs are currently being met and whether the activity is directly required by statute;
- all current EA functions and services which do not readily align with any of DE's stated policy areas, but nonetheless are necessitated by statute, prior agreement with DE, compliance with professional standards/requirements, or other stakeholder requirements;
- services or functions that the EA considers should be delivered but are not currently delivered due to financial or other constraints.



Recent policy baselining exercises have been carried out and whilst the DE Policy Code identifies approximately sixty policy areas; the EA baselining exercise has identified that EA services and functions do not readily align to those policy areas set out in the code. EA sets out a further eighty-nine current EA functions and services which are not covered by the DE Policy Code, but which are necessitated by statute, prior agreement with DE, compliance with professional standards/requirements, or other stakeholder requirements. Furthermore, the baselining activity identified additional service areas which EA considers could/should be delivered, but currently are not and the baselining report did not factor the impact of Covid-19 nor the changes to delivery models since⁵. (Appendix 6).

3.5 Findings

- There is continued confusion on the role and remit of the EA across the wider education system. Surveys and fieldwork suggest that within EA itself, the levels of understanding of the purpose, function and role of EA are low, and that level of misunderstanding extends to the wider system (see Appendix 1 for full survey findings and analysis).
 - > 92% of parents and pupils do not understand the role or function of EA.
 - > 59% of teachers and principals do not understand the role or function of EA.
 - > 50% of governors do not understand the role or function of EA.
 - > 69% of partners in the wider education system do not understand the role or function of EA.
- A possible explanation for these low levels of understanding may be the fact that there are so many different school types in Northern Ireland, and this creates confusion of EA's role as the EA does not have responsibility across all school types, e.g. the EA is not the employing authority for teachers in Catholic Maintained schools, but the EA would be responsible for other aspects within the Catholic Maintained sector.
- Survey and fieldwork evidence suggests a lack of understanding of the differing roles of DE and EA in policy development and policy implementation and there appears to be limited distinction between the two bodies to most organisations and/or individuals in the system. To the minds of those in the school system – DE and EA are inextricably linked and both were apportioned the 'blame' for failings in the system or delivery.
- Whilst the broader education system has a better understanding of the role and function of EA and how it differs from DE, feedback from the wider system (i.e. those other bodies with whom EA partners for statutory or service delivery) highlight the lack of EA engagement or promotion of its role as a contributing factor for the lack of understanding of EA's roles and responsibilities.
- Feedback does suggest that more broadly, there is a lack of coherence and synergy between the functions and roles of EA and DE with other parts of the education system. The legislation in its current form does not provide cohesion and the system is made up of many parts, operating under confined pieces of legislation and therefore most parts of the system are inherently restricted due to that overarching and restrictive legislative context (as illustrated through subsequent sections of this review).

⁵ Baseline Assessment Education Authority's Existing Services, Functions and Workstreams. August 2020



4. The appropriateness of the NDPB model

To consider whether the existing NPDB model of delivery is still appropriate and test that against the alternatives set out in Annex A of the Cabinet Office guidance.

4.1 Context

For policy/administrative purposes the EA is classified as an executive NDPB⁶. A non-departmental public body (NDPB) is a national or regional public body, working independently of, but still accountable to ministers - they are not staffed by civil servants⁷.

An Arm's Length Body (ALB) (or semi-autonomous agency) is an organisation that delivers a public service, is not a ministerial department, and which operates to some extent at a distance from ministers. Whilst such bodies are used globally, the term in the United Kingdom context can include non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), executive agencies, non-ministerial departments, public corporations, National Health Service bodies and inspectorates. NDPBs are bodies which are part of Central Government but not government departments, or part of one, and this, along with their purported arm's length relationship with ministers, means that they are independent, whilst operating within a framework of ministerial accountability and control (Cabinet Office 2015)⁸.

"Arm's-length bodies represent an extension of the department's delivery, so we should think about a department and its arm's-length bodies as a total delivery system. For the system to work well, the relationship between a department and its bodies cannot be just about oversight. An effective partnership must be based on trust, clarity of accountability, and a shared understanding of purpose and outcomes." John Manzoni, Chief Executive of the Civil Service and Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary⁹.

There is a recognition that public bodies have an important part to play in delivering the Government's vision of high-quality services for all citizens. To do so effectively they need to be set up correctly, be well-governed, and observe high standards of transparency and efficiency¹⁰.

The test for validating the appropriateness of the NDPB model of delivery follows the tests set by the Cabinet Office Tailored Review criteria in that an assessment should be made if the function/service:

- is still needed;
- is still being delivered;
- is carried out effectively by the organisation; and
- contributes to the core business of the organisation, the sponsor department and to the government as a whole.

⁶ Education Authority – Management Statement 2019 1.4.1

⁷ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-executive>

⁸ National Audit Office - Central oversight of arm's-length bodies June 2021

⁹ Partnerships between departments and arm's-length bodies: Code of Good Practice

¹⁰ Tailored Reviews: Guidance on Reviews of Public Bodies. Cabinet Office 2019



4.2 Findings

It is our sense that the NDPB model relies upon confidence in the delivery model – confidence from the sponsor department that the NDPB has the capacity and capability to deliver what is required, and confidence from the NDPB in knowing that the sponsor department provides the autonomous framework to deliver what is expected of them. Our review has identified that:

- There can be ongoing confusion over EA/DE roles and responsibility, with insufficient clarity on the respective roles and responsibilities of both organisations. The existing MSFM does not always provide sufficient clarity. We understand that work is due to begin on developing a new Partnership Agreement between DE and EA – it is critical that this explicitly details boundaries, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities so that each organisation can be held to account for performance;
- Micro-management: On occasions, DE over-reaches into the EA role or by-passes EA (e.g. with announcements on face masks in schools without notifying EA) and this in a way that can damage EA's ability to carry out a core function with an appropriate degree of independence;
- Increased scrutiny and requests for information – a common feature of feedback was DE's requests for information from EA. These information requests can often be poorly defined, but it can increase bureaucratic burdens for EA in terms of reporting on actions and decisions, resulting in EA representatives complaining about repeated requests for information which served no obvious purpose. Whilst we do not see any particular issue with the sponsor body requesting information from the NDBP, we recognise that any such requests should be appropriate and not a burden to the NDBP. Feedback from DE suggests a sense that EA is not always forthcoming with essential or basic information and therefore this can raise the levels of scrutiny or requests for information to ensure that the Minister (who is ultimately accountable) is not caught unaware;
- Our research suggests that the perception of micro-management of EA also stems from the belief that the sponsor department will always be blamed for EA performance failings, which is a natural tension in the sponsor body-NDBP relationship because the sponsor department is often having to satisfy the needs of government and political representatives and narratives.

It is our view that NDPBs are tasked with specific functions and given specific remits, often in statute. The view however from the sponsor departments can be more fluid due to priorities changing as governments, ministers and senior officials change. This means ensuring that there is often a danger that the expectations on an NDPB's role and about how the bodies delivering at arm's length fit into the department's overall activities is not always articulated clearly. There is an often unstated importance of creating a sense of how the NDBP fits into departmental priorities – and seeing it as a shared project. Additional communication/engagement, on top of more routine bilateral contacts can all help create a sense of 'common purpose'¹¹.

This review is clearly intended to answer those questions, however the review also asks that the EA delivery model is tested against alternatives set out in the Cabinet Office guidance. These options include; abolition, move out of central government, creation of a commercial model, bring in-house, merge with another body, a less formal structure, delivery by a new agency or continued delivery as an NDBP. It is our consideration that of all the options only of these could be seen as potentially viable;

- merger with another body.
- continued delivery as an NDBP.

¹¹ Institute for Government. It takes Two. How to create effective relationships between government and arm's-length bodies https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/it_takes_two_final_0.pdf



Our review and consultation has identified that there exists significant complexity and duplication of functions, relationships and accountability in the education system and these may well merit closer working relationships which could result in merger opportunities. However at this point it is unrealistic to factor merger with another body as we do not believe that the funding capacity, the operating nor policy landscape are sufficiently defined or developed to add in further complication or complexity at this point – notwithstanding the fact that the organisation is identified as too large in its current form. Therefore the evidence presented in this review will demonstrate that despite identified shortcomings, continued delivery as an NDPB is the only realistic delivery model for EA in the medium term.



5 Strategic Contribution of Education Authority

To consider the value of the EA to education, Programme for Government, and government as a whole.

5.1 Context and Progress to Date

The Education Authority occupies a critical position within the education system in Northern Ireland.

- EA is the managing authority for over 531 schools.
- Over 130,000 pupils attend schools under EA authority every day.
- EA has a budget of approx £2.3 billion.
- 141,000 meals are served every day.
- EA is the funding authority for;
 - > 50 Voluntary Grammar Schools
 - > 38 Grant Maintained Integrated Schools and
 - > 30 Grant Maintained Irish Medium Schools
- EA provides funding support to 443 Maintained Schools.
- EA employs almost 44,000 staff, plus an additional 18,000 contingent workforce.
- EA transports approx 90,000 pupils each day on its fleet of over 800 buses.
- EA maintains 22,198 statements of Special Educational Needs in 2021/2022 (20,505 in 2020/2021 and 19,208 in 2019/2020).

With a budget of approximately £2.3 billion; funding over 1,000 schools; and the managing authority for over 500 Controlled schools, the EA is the employing authority for teachers and staff in Controlled schools and non-teaching staff in Catholic Maintained schools and is Northern Ireland's biggest employer. It provides school transport and school meals and is responsible for assessing the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and providing them with appropriate support for example. Furthermore, EA also takes the lead in implementing key strategic policies such as the school improvement policy Every School is a Good School and Area Planning (Schools for the Future: Policy for Sustainable Schools is the underpinning policy).

Established in April 2015, the EA is still a relatively new organisation, and since its formation, has continued to acquire further areas of responsibility. In April 2017, for example, the administration of the funding of Voluntary Grammar/Grant Maintained Integrated schools transferred from DE to the EA; also in 2017, regional youth funding and provision for youth services transferred from the Youth Council of Northern Ireland (YCNI) to the EA.

It is now accepted that the establishment of a single Education Authority offered the prospect of implementing a new future that aligned to wider public sector reform (particularly in local government). Furthermore, the design and transfer to a unitary regional model was seen as an opportunity to overcome complex and contentious issues of boundaries. The creation of a single Education Authority was designed to become a strategic partner in community planning within a reformed local government context.



5.2 Programme for Government

The previous Northern Ireland Executive had committed itself to developing a long-term, strategic Programme for Government – this programme was based on a shared and strategic vision for the future which aimed to improve wellbeing for all¹². Whilst a Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework was developed and drafted, it was not published before the end of the last Assembly mandate.

The Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework, developed by the previous Executive, set out an ambitious vision for society, guided by the aim of improving wellbeing for all people in Northern Ireland. It was a framework of nine strategic outcomes. Together, they were intended to form a picture of the NI Executive's aspirations for an inclusive society.

The 'New Decade New Approach' (NDNA) document set out the process and approach for developing the Executive's Programme for Government (PfG). The key points being that the Programme should:

- be developed through engagement and co-design, using an Outcomes-based approach;
- focus on prosperity and wellbeing for all;
- establish a shared and ambitious strategic vision for the future;
- provide for accountable and transparent monitoring and reporting arrangements.

In terms of public services and the administration of government this PfG also recognised and "proactively responded to the dependencies and connections that exist between different strands of public policy."

Of the 9 identified strategic outcomes, EA (through DE) had a role to contribute in the following;

- Our children and young people have the best start in life;
- We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect;
- We all enjoy long, healthy active lives;
- Everyone can reach their potential;
- Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other;
- We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives;
- People want to live, work and visit here.

According to the draft PfG framework, 'outcomes' were real issues connected to people's day to day lives, and so there was a strong connection between what the government was aiming to deliver and what mattered to people in the real world.

¹² <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/programme-government-pfg-2021>



5.3 DE Policy Priorities

The educational case for establishing EA was consistent with and derived from DE's policy priorities:

- a responsibility to improve performance by ensuring that policies encompassed in Every School a Good School are delivered effectively by schools;
- better governance arrangements with a more simplified structure of education administration that will support the drive for improvement.

For 2021-2022, DE had the following Strategic Priorities

Strategic Priority 1	Make learning accessible to all
Strategic Priority 2	Improve the quality of learning for our children and young people
Strategic Priority 3	Look after our children and young people
Strategic Priority 4	Support those who need help with learning
Strategic Priority 5	Improve the learning environment
Strategic Priority 6	Tackle disadvantage and underachievement
Strategic Priority 7	Support and develop our education workforce
Strategic Priority 8	Effectively manage, review and transform our education system

5.4 CYPS Strategy

The Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027, is designed to improve the well-being of all children and young people living in Northern Ireland. The EA as a key agent within the education system has a role in the delivery of the strategy which has set the following eight key outcomes¹³.

- Children and young people are physically and mentally healthy.
- Children and young people enjoy play and leisure.
- Children and young people learn and achieve.
- Children and young people live in safety and stability.
- Children and Young People experience economic and environmental well-being.
- Children and young people make a positive contribution to society.
- Children and young people live in a society which respects their rights.
- Children and young people live in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.

¹³ <https://www.educationni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/education/Childrenandyoungpeoplesstrategy.pdf>



5.5 EA Delivery

The overall aim for the establishment of the EA was to ensure that education administration operates efficiently and effectively to support the delivery of education-related Programme for Government commitments, Ministerial priorities, statutory functions and (overarching) educational services to children and young people.

- Theoretically therefore EA's strategic, corporate and business planning should be aligned to the strategic priorities of DE and these in turn should provide linkage to the outcomes of PfG and the CYP Strategy.
- Furthermore the achievement of business plan objectives is therefore linked to EA's contribution to these outcomes and its value to education and PfG.
- The 2021-22 EA business plan has linkages to the draft PfG Outcomes Framework 2021 and the Executive's Children & Young People's Strategy 2017-2027. These linkages enable EA to demonstrate its value to education through operationalising DE policy, to PfG through contributing to its draft outcomes and the outcomes of the Executive's CYP Strategy 2017-2027.
- EA's ten-year Strategic Plan 2017-2027 sets five strategic priorities for EA¹⁴. A review of business plan objectives from 2018-2021 shows:
 - > 18% of business plan objectives fell within the strategic priority to meet the learning needs of children and young people and of those 87.5% were achieved.
 - > A further 18% of business plan objectives fell within the strategic priority to provide excellent education support service with 68% of those achieved within the business planning year.
 - > 19% of business plan objectives fell within the strategic priority to develop our people and of those 69.2% were achieved.
 - > 32% of business plan objectives fell within the strategic priority to manage our resources more efficiently and effectively with 69.8% achieved.
 - > 13% of business plan objectives fell within the strategic priority to nurture leadership and of those 72.2% were achieved¹⁵
- DE Transformation Programme (DETP)¹⁶, which EA was a key part of, was established in April 2018. The DE Transformation Programme was initiated to transform the education system in Northern Ireland recognising key challenges around strategic direction set out by policy; significant budgetary pressures; the recognition of the need to modernise and be more effective; the increasing demands on schools and the need to deliver on schools fit for the future; the needs of pupils and a recognition that the education model needed to adapt to a fast changing economic and skills environment. The DETP was designed to support transformation of the education system to ensure it is sustainable, effective and efficient and, critically, helps to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people in Northern Ireland. EA was a key instrument in this programme and submitted a range of project proposals (for funding) to deliver on internal transformation (which would contribute to the overarching transformation agenda). The DETP was stood down in March 2021 and EA continues to drive transformation programmes from within and use internal resources to maximise opportunities for change and delivering effectiveness.

¹⁴ EA – Interim Strategic Plan 2017-2027

¹⁵ EA – Review of 2018-2021 Business Plans

¹⁶ Department of Education. Transformation Programme Blueprint Paper 2017.



- In order for EA to make the strategic and operational commitments to the education system in NI, EA in conjunction with DE has initiated planning and change around the longer-term sustainability of the current model. Key to that exercise is EA's Financial Recovery Strategy which was approved by DE in February 2020¹⁷. It included 4 key phases i.e., Readiness Assessment, Grip & Control, Tactical Projects & Major Transformation. The key purpose of this work is to develop a service delivery model that will bring schools and the EA onto a stable and sustainable financial footing including a fundamental review of the scope, scale and delivery of services to children and young people including statutory, regulatory and policy basis for doing so.

5.6 Findings

- Feedback and indicative findings indicate that the EA in its current form, with its current strategic focus and operational delivery is well aligned with PfG and that the strategic priorities and delivery model are more consistent and sustainable than under then legacy organisations (albeit still with a tendency for its approach to business planning to be inward looking rather than pupil centric).
- As a result there is a consensus that the regional unitary delivery model is more focused as a service delivery organisation than the legacy ELBs were and therefore there is increased alignment to DE policy implementation through one body as opposed to five bodies. However, notwithstanding that improved focus, there is a sense that the prolonged transition from the legacy model is slow, and aspects of EA delivery is still rooted to legacy cultures, behaviours and models.
- The EA has a wide range of responsibilities and further responsibilities have been added to the organisation since 2015 (including the administration of the funding of Voluntary Grammar/Grant Maintained Integrated schools which transferred from DE to the EA; and regional youth funding and provision for youth services transferred from the Youth Council of Northern Ireland (YCNi) to the EA). This significant breadth and range of responsibilities is being delivered within limited resourcing and staffing levels and as a result expectations on delivery quality/levels can be mismatched. There is a sense that more work is required to manage stakeholder and DE expectations.
- The complexity of relationships, governance and accountability is played out in the strategic contribution of EA and particularly through the fact that EA has limited control or influence on school focus and priorities as identified in the school governance arrangements and EA influence in school financial model and school deficit/surplus positions. So, whilst EA's corporate strategy will broadly match policy objectives (albeit with caveats as noted above), there is evidence that schools will have their own focus/objectives and thus the golden thread of accountability and performance running from PfG, NI Executive priorities, through Ministerial priorities and DE policy objectives through then into EA corporate objectives and planning through to schools is not always clear and can be difficult to understand or measure the impact.
- The alignment between DE policy priorities and EA implementation do not always appear to be full. There appears to be a tension at times in the arm's length principle – with a very short arm applied at times with reference to the DE/EA relationship (see Section DE-EA relationship). This can manifest itself then in difficulties measuring the impact of DE policy priorities and EA strategic objectives.
- Performance management and measurement within EA is not consistent – it is clearly improving, and much work has been done in this respect. However, the lack of consistency can be witnessed through some areas service areas presenting better information than others. For example, SEN assessments (whilst conscious that this is an area under particular focus at the moment and the data is likely to be

¹⁷ EA Financial Recovery Strategy (Draft 4) February 2020



better), is presenting better performance management data, however service areas such as management of the estate, or the identification of surplus assets or equality for example, are not as good as would be expected and suffer from a lack of informed and detailed data. More broadly across all aspects of performance reporting and data management, there is limited commentary or guidance to provide better narrative or informed information to support better decision making and thus inform the strategic contribution of EA to the wider landscape (this will be discussed further in the next chapter – Performance Against Strategic Plan).

- Feedback from external partners refers to EA not taking external advice easily – it directs rather than guides/consults; from the outside EA appears to be segregated internally and outside agencies struggle to understand the EA structure and delivery model; there is a pre-occupation with child needs somehow having to fit around the design of what EA offers rather than the other way around – it is as if the child has to adapt to their systems as one partner put it. There is a lack of multi-disciplinary approach to children.
- As a result, it is our view that EA has yet to define what is good. Some staff think success is number of SEN statements, but, what do schools want, what do parents want for their children? What does success look like to them? What does our system produce and what do bodies such as EA contribute – this is the fundamental contribution to NI that is overlooked.

The strategic contribution of any organisation is measured in its impact. Whilst we have data on how much EA spends per annum, how many children are bussed to school, how many school meals are served and so forth, there is a sense that EA as an organisation struggles to tell its story and the impact it makes – fundamentally where does it make the difference? What difference do EA programmes make to schools and children, how does EA demonstrate its impact on individuals, schools, society and communities?

EA demonstrates its impact through activity – through the delivery of the services mentioned above; through the bussing of children to schools, the meals provided, the classrooms painted per annum, the number of SEN services, the number of children accessing educational welfare, the number of children getting music lessons – these are all impactful and for the most part positive experiences. EA does not do sufficient communication to quantify its story and the quality of the effort. The EA leadership is invisible to many, EA does not talk about the efficiencies or savings it has made, nor does it provide a narrative on the quality of the effort of a child centred approach. It is our view that perhaps it is time to start telling that story...



6 Performance against EA Strategic Plan

The extent to which the EA meets its objectives

6.1 Context and Progress to Date

The EA published its first interim strategic plan covering the period 2017-2027. This plan describes its' vision 'to inspire, support and challenge all our Children and Young People to be the best that they can be.'¹⁸ The document sets out a framework for development and is supported by three-yearly Corporate Plans and annual business plans. EA's strategic priorities are:

- *'Meeting the **LEARNING** needs of our children and young people.*
- *Providing **EXCELLENT** education support services.*
- *Developing **ALL OUR PEOPLE** to carry out their jobs successfully.*
- *Managing our **RESOURCES** efficiently and effectively.*
- ***NURTURING LEADERSHIP** across EA to give clear direction in a dynamic and complex environment.'*

In the period 2018-2021, in relation to:

Strategic Priority 1 Meeting the LEARNING needs of CYP:

- 18% of all business plan objectives were pursuant to fulfilling this Strategic Priority.
 - > 87.5% were achieved and
 - > 12.5% were substantially achieved or delayed.

Strategic Priority 2 Providing EXCELLENT education support services:

- 18% of all business plan objectives were pursuant to fulfilling this Strategic Priority.
 - > 68% were achieved and
 - > 28% were substantially achieved or delayed and 4% were not achieved.

Strategic Priority 3 Developing ALL our people to carry out their jobs successfully:

- 19% of all business plan objectives were pursuant to fulfilling this Strategic Priority.
 - > 69.2% were achieved and
 - > 30.8% were substantially achieved or delayed.

Strategic Priority 4 Managing our RESOURCES effectively and efficiently:

- 32% of all business plan objectives were pursuant to fulfilling this Strategic Priority.
 - > 69.8% were achieved and
 - > 30.2% were substantially achieved or delayed.

Strategic Priority 5 NURTURING leadership across EA to give clear direction in a dynamic and complex environment:

- 13% of all business plan objectives were pursuant to fulfilling this Strategic Priority.
 - > 72.2% were achieved and
 - > 22.2% were substantially achieved or delayed and 5.6% were not achieved.

¹⁸ Education Authority Interim Strategic Plan 2017-2027



The Corporate Planning Framework outlines EA's approach to corporate planning¹⁹. This approach reflects the requirement of EA planning and reporting alignment with DE accountability and reporting arrangements whilst recognising that EA's strategic, corporate and business planning must be aligned, at governmental and departmental level, to the outcomes and strategic priorities of the Programme for Government.

The Corporate Planning Framework was developed in 2020 and is aligned to other key EA frameworks including, Performance Improvement Framework, the Data Governance Framework/Data Strategy and the Digital Transformation Programme.

Corporate and business planning monitoring and reporting is further outlined in subsequent sections on Business Planning, but for the purposes of this section,

- Annual Corporate objectives are reported on quarterly, and these align to the EA's Strategic Plan.
- The quarterly reports are submitted to Directorate Accountability Review, CLT, EA Board Committees such as Performance & Engagement Committee as well as to DE through the Governance and Accountability Review meetings and quarterly reporting to DE.

6.2 Findings

Findings indicate that:

- Given the pace of introduction, EA still has in place a range of structures, functions, processes and locations that remain a legacy of five former ELBs and whilst there is clear evidence of emerging standardisation and consistency, this is not implemented across all services, nor all divisions and even all directorates in a consistent manner. EA's journey to a fully regional approach is still a work in progress.
- Significant progress has been made to create a revised approach to performance within EA. This is manifested in review of corporate governance and planning processes resulting in a strategic planning process with measurable processes, outputs and outcomes designed which should lead to improved quality across all areas of work. Furthermore, there is evidence of consultation with DE in seeking sponsor body feedback, which is an encouraging development.
- A new Corporate Planning Management Framework has been implemented and cascaded across the organisation.
- Performance Improvement Framework has been implemented to monitor and measure performance metrics.
- The organisation however is identifying and achieving priorities set. Delays or failure to meet objectives set can be traced to two primary causes – the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact; and resourcing. Notwithstanding these delays or failures to achieve (only 4% and 5% of objectives were not achieved under priorities 2 and 5 respectively), EA has made satisfactory progress in the achievement of priorities agreed.
- The organisation has suffered from the stalling of the DE Transformation Programme funding stream, which provided additional funding to EA to pursue a range of identified transformation activities in Education Technology Service, Area Planning, Review of Pupil Services for example (albeit that funding and DSF activity was continued under SSPPD after the DETP was closed)²⁰.
- Notwithstanding the achievement of the strategic priorities identified above, the review fieldwork has identified a sense that performance is not well understood across the whole organisation in that performance has not been properly defined and explicitly linked to how work gets done – an outcomes-based approach to delivery. As a result, the performance improvement framework needs to be seen as a starting point – and that this framework will provide direction to the collective effort. Furthermore, with a number of 'frameworks' in production or implementation, EA needs to ensure that these integrate and solve identified need rather than creating additional and burdensome layers of bureaucracy or reporting.

¹⁹ Education Authority – Corporate Planning Framework

²⁰ DE Transformation Programme Funding Position & Long Term Options



- Performance reporting is inevitably bound by data or metrics and whilst there is an acknowledgement that EA has yet to get a fully resourced in house data or information team in place, there is a feeling among some of the people we spoke to that financial and performance management are not as consistent or meaningful as it ought to be. From the department's perspective there are concerns about the quality of information being supplied in that there is often a lot of data or information but less narrative or quantitative assessment on the meaning of the data and how it informs performance.

Performance Improvement

It is our consideration that effective performance management demands far more than simply measuring the right aspects of corporate or service delivery. It requires the widespread interpretation and use of performance data to drive improvement in services; or a set of policies, strategies and techniques intended to direct managers' and employees' attention towards the improvement of an organisation's performance. This could entail an organisation monitoring data to identify the need for corrective action, such as changes to delivery methods or extra investment; regulators and scrutiny bodies using data to inform and support pressure for change; or citizens receiving data, which helps them understand how far their entitlements and expectations are being met and using that to hold service providers to account.

What we see often is the need to collect, provide and submit data and it is our view that the burden of the "data collection industry" (as many in EA have described it) shifts the attention from using data intelligently to improve performance to an exercise in simple measurement. Data becomes just abstract numerical quantities rather than reflections of service quality or the child's experience; and are collated and reported unthinkingly rather than being used better to inform decisions about which services need to be improved and how. That may lead to some of the weaknesses in organisational performance management.

So, our view coalesces around a theme of measurement not management as there is a tendency to collect data unthinkingly, or out of a simple need to comply with statutory or other duties to do so, rather than as a means of driving continuous improvement and with a focus on outcomes based impact.

At present the evidence suggests that EA's approach to performance management can err on the side of the burden of data collection. That same evidence may also reflect a narrow set of organisational values and behaviours. An unconsidered approach to performance management may allow the simple act of measuring performance to drive out the more difficult business of managing and improving it. It also risks turning performance management into a technical or statistical exercise for specialists, rather than a means of driving performance across and throughout an organisation.



7. Financial Management

The effectiveness of the EA's systems of financial management and internal control, including demonstration of value for money when compared to the previous regional model

7.1 Context and Progress to Date

EA became operational on 1 April 2015 in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act (NI) 2014 and since that date EA has reported overspends on its non-earmarked recurrent budget in 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Key data emerging from the review of finance in EA includes.

- Overall EA budget 2021-22 was £2.321.8bn.
- Projected EA spend 2021-22 £2.477.1bn resulting in a Funding Gap of £155.3m, comprising:
 - > Block Grant gap £77.8m.
 - > Earmarked gap (Schools & Youth) £93.8m.
 - > Capital gap £10.2m
 - > Offset by underspends on Schools (£25.7m). and costs funded by the Dept for the Economy (£0.8m)
- Underpinning the current financial situation is a real terms reduction of £229m to the Department of Education's budget between 2010 – 2020.
- According to EA figures, the organisation has delivered savings in excess of £120m since 2015-16²¹. The majority of these savings have been delivered through short-term actions or efficiencies within services. Future savings will require transformational change and long-term planning.
- As per 2020-21 draft accounts, staff costs comprise £1.6bn, 80% of total EA spend excluding non-cash items and grants to Voluntary Grammar (VG)/Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools.
- The EA financial strategy is heavily reliant on successful in-year monitoring round bids, however, these in-year monies are not recurring meaning that EA commences each year with an opening deficit, before considering any demand pressure increases or any further developments.
- For example, in 2020-21 EA received £119.1m in additional in-year monies and achieved a breakeven position. Block Grant spend for the year was £725.4m (which included non-recurrent spend of £6.8m), however, the opening 2021-22 Block Grant budget was £705.3m, resulting in an opening funding gap of £13.3m (£20.1m less £6.8m non recurrent adjustment).

At directorate level, five independent finance systems which did not share information and reported against five independent sets of accounts were operational at the time of EA's creation and subsequent attempts to map rules and processes were not always consistent and required significant workarounds. As a result, since then and in the short to medium term there has been a significant segregation of systems, duplication of effort and duties (e.g., payroll and bank reconciliations) and diversion of energy in trying to reconcile differing and disparate systems and processes. The evolving situation was compounded by a significant finance capability issue, as a disproportionate amount of financial expertise and knowledge left the organisation under VES arrangements.

²¹ EA figures



Consequently, at organisational level, EA has evolved through the earlier regional model which provided finance support to a range of EA services to meet the needs of various regions. Merging into one regional unitary body has not been without challenge as it was clear that operational practices differed across regions and there were inconsistencies in the application of financial management and policies across the regions – this creates a number of significant challenges in reporting and baselining costs and performance.

It is clear that since the establishment of EA, maintaining expenditure within budget and associated delivery of savings has been a key corporate objective for EA as well as DE. Consequently, there has been significant and coordinated focus by EA Board, EA Directors, budget holders, Department of Education and schools to implement the EA budget strategy and manage the EA corporate budget to a break-even position.

7.2 The current budget position

As noted above, the EA budget strategy relies heavily on in-year allocations to manage financial risk. The documentary evidence highlights that EA and DE have worked collaboratively in recent years to establish a more effective approach to its budget strategy regarding DoF monitoring rounds – this appears to be a successful approach in helping to manage the EA financial position. Significant additional in-year Block Grant allocations were received in 2019-20 (£59.7m), 2020-21 (£36.3m) and 2021-22 (£55.2m) through monitoring rounds and from internal DE budget exercises. These additional allocations allowed the EA to manage within budget in those years.



7.3 2021-2022 Provisional Outturn

MEMR Service Line	Revised Budget Plan	Draft Final Budget Plan*	Draft Final Outturn**	Variance
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Special Schools	140,706	141,165	141,165	-
Schools Delegated Budgets				
Controlled and Maintained Schools Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB)	1,005,297	1,010,540	1,012,285	(1,745)
VG & GMI Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB)	329,279	331,909	331,909	-
DE & Funding Authority Initiatives Allocated to Schools	-	5,348	5,348	-
Schools Net Increasing/Decreasing Deficits	-	-	(4,474)	4.474
	1,334,576	1,347,797	1,345,068	2,729
Resources Held at Centre (Part 6 of CFS)				
Staff Costs - Substitution (Teaching & Non-Teaching)	25,934	25,122	25,122	-
Special Education Needs - Statemented Pupils (in Mainstream)	174,087	176,736	176,736	-
Other Accommodation Costs - Rates	38,374	37,954	42,779	(4,825)
Other Resources Held at Centre	81,618	82,460	82,509	(49)
VAT - VG/GMI Schools	4,744	5,321	5,321	-
	324,757	327,593	332,467	(4,874)
Centrally Held Resources Attributed to Schools				
Central Administration/ Headquarters	53,577	51,830	51,830	-
Transport - (Excluding SEN related transport costs)	59,472	59,342	59,342	-
Transport - SEN related transport costs	39,047	40,415	40,415	-
School Crossing Patrols	2,883	2,757	2,757	-
School Library Service	1,389	1,391	1,887	(496)
School Development Service	9,863	9,710	9,710	-
Music Service	4,802	4,757	4,985	(228)
Pupil Support - SEN	27,903	27,799	27,799	-
Pupil Support - Non SEN	34,309	33,601	33,601	-
Legal Services	759	773	773	-
School Meals	58,754	57,068	57,068	-
Other Resources Centrally Held	5,173	5,113	5,113	-
Utilisation of Provisions - Pay & Procurement	1,546	1,399	1,399	-
	299,477	295,955	296,679	(1074)
Total ASB	1,334,576	1,342,449	1,344,194	(1,745)
Total Block Grant Excluding Earmarked Funds and ASB	764,940	770,061	771,185	(1,124)

*Subject to DE approval of proposed year end budget virements to fund overspends

** Subject to completion of year end processes.

EA Provisional Outturn by MEMR Service Line 2021-22



In figures provided by EA, the table above provides detail of 2021-22 budget and spend (subject to DE approval) and reports an overspend of £1.745m for Aggregated Schools Budgets (ASB)* equating to 0.13% of that total budget and an overspend of £1.124m across Block Grant Budgets equating to an overspend of 0.15%. This results in a total overspend of £2.869m (0.14%) which the EA suggests will be offset by total underspends of £5.9M (2.47%) across a range of earmarked budgets. Across all budgets (Total DE Recurrent Budget) EA has reported an underspend of £3m (0.13%).

* The total resources available for allocation to schools under the Common Funding Scheme

7.4 2021-22 and 2022-23 Initial Budget Allocations

Resource Budget Allocation ²²	2021-22 Initial Budget Plan	2022-23 Initial Budget Plan*	Increase / (Decrease) in Initial Allocation
	£M	£M	£M
Controlled & Maintained Schools ASB	1,048.410	1,056.283	7.873
VGS/GMI ASB	329.279	334.328	5.049
Total Schools Delegated	1,377.689	1,390.611	12.922
Block Grant Allocation	705.256	705.256	-
Total DE Schools Recurrent (exc. Earmarked)	2,082.945	2,095.867	12.922
Earmarked Allocation	127.364	100.158	(27.206)
TOTAL DE SCHOOLS RECURRENT	2,210.309	2,196.025	(14.284)
Youth Basic Resource Allocation	32.860	32.860	-
Initial Earmarked Allocations	5.369	0.370	(4.999)
TOTAL DE RECURRENT	2,248.538	2,229.255	(19.283)

*2022-23 Budget has not been agreed by the Executive

Comparison of 2021-22 and 2022-23 Initial Budget Allocations

Key issues from the 2022-23 initial allocation include:

- Initial allocations to ASB have increased from 2020-21 by 0.9% to maintain the Age Weighted Pupil Unit cash value at 2021-22 levels for both funding streams²³.
- There has been no increase in Block Grant funding in the 2022-23 financial year.
- Although initial allocated earmarked budgets have decreased from £127.364m to £100.158m, DE has provided further indicative budgets of £23.883m²⁴, which, if allocated in full, would bring the earmarked budget allocations £124.041m. Allocation of these indicative budgets are subject to business case approval and other criteria being met. Further earmarked allocations (in addition to these) may be allocated to the EA in year subject to Ministerial approval.

²² In the absence of an Executive to agree a Budget, the Education Minister has notified DE's NDPBs, including the EA of its opening expenditure planning baseline for 2022-23. However this is presently not the same as previous year's opening budget allocations. A new Executive will take further decisions on how the Budget process will proceed.

²³ Each funding stream is made up of a range of factors developed to reflect the main costs incurred by schools. The AWPU factor weights the number of eligible pupils enrolled in a school for funding purposes to reflect the differential costs of educating pupils at various stages in the curriculum.

²⁴ Further indicative budgets Exclude DfE funding which for comparative purposes has been included as allocated in both columns in the table above



- DE has indicated that £35m has been made available to account for teachers' pay awards. This allocation does not increase EA's 2022-23 budget allocation as it relates to 2019 and 2020 pay awards, which were accounted for in the 2021-22 Budget Allocation.
- As EA's initial budget allocation is in line with the assumption of a cash flat budget set out in EA 2022-23 Financial Planning, budget allocations have been maintained in line with prior year allocations.

After reviewing the 2022-23 Initial Budget Allocations, EA has profiled a total funding gap of £200.008M based on committed expenditure only, the table below provides details:

	Initial Budget Allocation ²⁵ £M	Forecast Committed Expenditure 2022-23* £M	Estimated Funding Gap £M
Block Grant excl. Increasing Deficits	705.256	863.318	158.062
Schools Increasing Deficits	-	37.051	37.051
Total Block Grant	705.256	900.369	195.113
Controlled and Maintained Schools ASB	1,056.283	1,061.178	4.895
VGS/GMI Schools ASB	334.328	334.328	-
Total Forecast Expenditure	2,095.867	2,295.875	200.008

* the Executive has not agreed the 2022-23 Budget

Initial 2022-23 Budget Allocations and resultant unfunded pressures

Given that EA Block Grant has remained cash flat at 2021-22 levels, at the time of report writing EA is proposing that initial allocations to directorates and services are maintained at 2021-22 levels. This position has yet to be approved by EA Board or DE. To address the current funding gap, EA is preparing bids for additional resources to submit as part of the in-year monitoring round process.

7.5 EA's approach to financial management

This review has identified and validated a range of actions undertaken by EA to enhance corporate financial management and to mitigate the EA financial budgetary risks.

- Development of a different approach to EA Budget Plan through a two-stage budget process differentiating committed and discretionary spend.
- Development of regional consistency in schools financial planning processes and implementation of cross directorate approaches to supporting schools through categorisation and a more integrated approach to financial planning.
- Conditional approval of school's financial plans.
- Implementation of the corporate financial accountability process facilitating focussed discussion between CEO and Director budget holders on their profiled financial position.
- Design and implementation of corporate vacancy control procedures including corporate prioritisation of approved new posts based on affordability (even though this process has created issues sometimes resulting in unfilled vacancies or resourcing pressure points).
- Introduction of monthly management reporting to CLT on directorate financial positions incorporating dashboards providing key financial metrics.
- Partnership working through budget planning workshops with DE to enhance the linkages between DE/EA/ Finance and policy/service leads on key areas of spend.

²⁵ See footnote 22.



- Improved engagement and communication with DE on key financial issues through the establishment of budget clearing meetings in advance of senior expenditure monitoring forums. For example, Pre MEMR meetings between EA and DE in advance of the main MEMR meetings.
- Open engagement with DE on operational financial management issues, supporting more effective working relationships and transparency.
- A robust bidding strategy to secure additional funding for emerging pressures.
- Enhanced financial management accountability arrangements for expenditure in schools (£1.3bn in 2020-21) to address the factors impacting on their financial positions and to determine what, if any, actions schools can take to address funding deficits.
- Implementation of a system for recording and valuing the stock on schools' premises at year end. This contributed total savings of approx. £23m to the corporate financial position over three years and improved the financial position of over 500 schools who engaged in the process.

EA's Financial Recovery Strategy was approved by DE in February 2020 which focused upon 4 key areas of activity - Readiness Assessment, Grip & Control, Tactical Projects and Major Transformation. The Financial Recovery Strategy sees EA and DE working together in shaping a service delivery model that bringing schools and the EA onto a stable and sustainable financial footing including a fundamental review of the scope, scale and delivery of services to children and young people including statutory, regulatory and policy basis for doing so²⁶.

The successful bidding process for additional funding from monitoring rounds and the effective management of budget has resulted in a breakeven position for 2019-20, 2020-21 and a projected breakeven for 2021-22.

7.6 Staffing

The BCS review of the Accounting & Reporting division (incorporating Budgetary Control & Reporting Division and Corporate and Capital accounting service)²⁷ identified significant resource gaps within the Finance function impacting on the capacity to address stakeholder requirements. We understand that following the 2021-22 Initial Budget Planning process, it was agreed that EA and DE Finance would look at addressing these resource gaps. However, given the lack of certainty in relation to the 2022-23 Budget along with the funding gap faced by the education in 2022-23, this piece of work has not yet been progressed.

7.7 Findings

It is clear from the documentary evidence provided that financial pressure is a key risk and is on the EA corporate risk register. Furthermore it is clear given the funding gaps and the requirement of EA to make up for funding shortfalls through monitoring rounds, that EA does not have the funding to deliver statutory services – it is still to be determined whether this is due to underfunding of the organisation or an inefficiency of resource, most likely to be somewhere in the middle as there needs to be more clarity around EA's focus and priorities, and any subsequent financial resources should match those requirements (based upon correctly baselining the cost of that requirement). However, EA achieved a financial break-even position in 2020/21²⁸.

- The evidence collated suggests that EA's approach to the strategy for financial management is evolving, but that implementation is still a risk due to resourcing and capability issues.
- EA has built significant effort in providing DE with transparency and robustness around the financial data and narrative on budgetary management and spend. This has resulted in improved levels of trust between the organisations, a better understanding of the financial issues and more transparency in dealing with the challenges facing the organisation and DE's capacity to fully fund EA services.

²⁶ Draft EA Financial Recovery Strategy

²⁷ BSC EA Strategic Benchmarking Analysis of A&R Division

²⁸ CLT finance reports



- It would appear that EA's financial strategy is unsustainable, dependant as it is on successful in-year monitoring bids (in the absence of a three-year budget plan).
- However, there is still a concern that, despite significant progress, EA has not yet fully established its baseline financial position. Whilst there is a plethora of data and information, there is still a sense that the organisation has not got to a point where there is complete internal and external confidence on the full costs of EA and its expenditure. One of the reasons for this is that not all service lines/activities have had full-service reviews to determine functionality, resourcing and costing.
- The organisation has embarked upon a financial transformation strategy - grip and control is a key feature of this strategy which is trying to embed a culture of financial restraint to live within EA's financial envelope. EA is building the right framework (e.g., programme management office) around this approach, so there is increasing confidence that grip and control will yield results in the short to medium term.
- There are real resourcing concerns within the Finance and ICT directorate, which previous external independent reviews have identified. The BCS review confirmed the internal EA view that there are a number of significant gaps in service delivery to be addressed. These reviews have benchmarked financial teams to other parts of the public sector and have identified potential resourcing gaps – this raises concerns on EA's capacity to deliver on what it is required to deliver currently, let alone create capacity to deliver on financial transformation.
- Whilst it is clear that there is ongoing and paced work on change within Finance, including a shift to automated process, survey and consultation feedback indicates that budget holders do not fully understand their budgets and spans. As a consequence, roles and responsibilities are not always clear and accountability for financial management is not robust. Levels of delegated authority are limited (given the size of the organisation) and some Heads of Service, for example do not have budget control or management. There is a sense that EA needs to develop clarity on who will be budget holders and provide support and data to enable improved accountability and responsibility. Whilst feedback suggests that not all budget holders have the financial skills expected of them – they tend to rely on financial partners within the organisation, which once again places more burden on an already stretched service.
- There is an alarming sense that the SEN budget allocation is growing exponentially, and this is having an impact on the budget of mainstream schools. The financing of the evolving SEN model is an area of significant concern for many, as the service now appears to be a demand led service, which will have no caps or limits on access, which in turn places enormous pressure on already tight resources.

It is difficult not to conclude this section on EA's financial position without cognisance of the broader pressure on public finance and the well-known pressures on schools budgets, together with the new need for focussed investment to enable children and young people to recover from the impacts of school closures. Recent research suggests the impacts of lost learning on children and young people are very significant, and risk being long-lasting if rapid support is not provided^{29,30}. The budget allocation for education does not seem adequate to prioritise the additional learning and wellbeing support needed when children return to school (see Section 22 for further analysis of spend on education).

The financial pressures experienced by EA are well rehearsed and identified further in the survey findings section. However, it would appear that EA is not currently resourced, financially or with staff, to be able to effectively deliver all the duties and expectations placed on it by its stakeholders. The under investment in education at Executive level identified in Section 22 of this report reflects itself in the resourcing of EA and the two are inextricably linked. Cascading from that difficult funding position lies EA's own financial position and capacity to deliver with concerns on EA's capacity to deliver financial stabilisation, deliver on financial transformation as well as reprofiling the function and making it more effective.

²⁹ <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-023.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.playboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Our-Voices-Matter-Summary-Report-PlayBoard-NI-Nov-2020.pdf>



8. Procurement

The EA procurement strategy and how it aligns with best practice.

8.1 Context and Progress to Date

The Northern Ireland Executive is responsible for procurement policy in Northern Ireland, and they are supported by the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) and other Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs).

The former Education and Library Boards achieved CoPE accreditation which then carried forward into EA on its establishment in 2015. The EA Procurement Service (EAPS) portfolio provides for the pupil journey from pre-school through to end of post primary school at aged 18 and also provides youth support beyond age 18.

The decision on whether to award CoPE status is made by the Department of Finance (DoF) Procurement Board (PB) following a competency review process, the requirements of which are set out in an accreditation model.

A preliminary review in February 2017 stated that the EA did not fully meet the requirements of the accreditation model, and a number of recommendations were made.

A final CoPE assessment was carried out in March 2018. The organisation failed that assessment, meaning that the evidence presented at that time did not provide confidence that the core business of the CoPE was being carried out at project and contract level in line with Public Procurement Policy. Therefore, the assessment was that there was an immediate risk to probity and effectiveness. As a consequence, EA was granted the status of continuing as a CoPE while preparing for re-accreditation in May 2020. Re-accreditation of EA Procurement was achieved in May 2020³¹.

EA has a complex procurement portfolio made up of a number of specialised directorates:

- Chief Executive
- Education
- Children & Young People
- Human Resources and Legal Services
- Finance & ICT
- Operations & Estates

In terms of the total value of all contracts let during the period of assessment (April 2018 to April 2020) across nine portfolio categories, the sum is £573m. The value of contracts under management is £1.4bn.

8.2 Structure and Staffing

The CoPE structure is built on nine categories, each of which is to be led by a Senior Category Manager. At present there are six Category Councils, five individual councils and one that provides coverage for three of the categories that have significant overlap – Capital Works, Minor Works, and Facilities Management and Maintenance. The Category Councils have a broad membership drawn from across the range of stakeholders.

As regards staffing and reporting lines Category Managers report through Senior Category Managers to the Head of Procurement. A Procurement Compliance Manager and associated team provide ongoing support. The Head of Procurement reports to the Assistant Director of Pupil Services and Procurement to the Director of Operations and Estates, who is the Head of CoPE.

³¹ Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) Accreditation Assessment Review May 2020



The EA Corporate Procurement Strategy 2018-2021 sets out Education Authority Procurement Service (EAPS) procurement objectives and these in turn are aligned with EA's strategic priorities as set out in the EA Interim Strategic Plan 2017 – 2027.

CoPE Assessment Review highlights that 'there is clear evidence of a risk management governance culture and framework in place for the CoPE, with EAPS identifying and mitigating risks at the tender, category, procurement leadership team and Procurement Board level. These risks are recorded in individual service and the directorate risk registers, driven by a bottom up process. There is subsequent escalation and risk management in the wider organisation through the Corporate Leadership Team, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) and the Board. In addition, the Head of Internal Audit reviews the Corporate Risk Register each quarter to provide assurance that all appropriate risks, including procurement, are identified and mitigated'³².



8.3 Findings

Considerable work has been undertaken to address legacy organisation arrangements, to unpick obsolete procedures and processes and to put in place a regional service which has successfully secured CoPE accreditation.

- Significant progress has been made in relation to category management and the roll out of standardised processes and procedures. Furthermore, the organisation has successfully resourced a model which appears to effectively deliver on operational requirements.
- A new EA procurement strategy is evolving³³, and this will provide better definition of the vision of the service and provide underpinning principles on service delivery and performance. This strategy has a focus on enhancing continuous development.
- Despite feedback from the sector (Survey feedback in Appendix 1), there is strong evidence of engagement through School User Group (SUG) and Principal User Group (PUG). Furthermore, a Procurement Communications Strategy has been drafted to manage both internal and external stakeholder engagement and provide a unified approach to communications³⁴.

³² Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) Accreditation Assessment Review May 2020

³³ Draft EA Commercial Procurement Strategy 2021-24

³⁴ Draft EA Procurement Communications Plan



- Feedback suggests that, whilst it is an improving picture, procurement has not yet built up an entirely effective use of data or data management. There is a sense that systems are fully integrated and that IProcurement, for example, which is currently owned by Finance, should sit in Procurement. This portrays a picture of disparate systems and a lack of integrated data and processes which undermines the effectiveness of the model.
- Work is still required in defining procurement within EA, in developing its own approach to contract management and creating a financial structure which can realise efficiencies and demonstrate savings. It appears to be a challenge to get a financial structure in place with aligned resource and competencies (e.g. the basis cost of processing invoices in procurement does not appear to be on Oracle so there is no understanding of how much it costs to deliver the service).

The EA is (relatively) unique in that it has its own CoPE; the accreditation process to achieve the CoPE status provided some evidence that the procurement function is effective in delivering Value for Money highlighting effective liaison with commissioners, the demonstration of advanced commercial skills; the establishment of an effective supplier engagement arrangements resulting in increased flexibilities and responsiveness to the market³⁵ – all resulting in early indications of progress in demonstrating savings and added value thereby allowing EA to demonstrate that it can procure just as effectively as if all its procurement was done via CPD.

There is a full recognition that procurement, when fully functioning at an optimal level, can make a significant impact to the EA's transformation journey. The foundations are in place and the CoPE accreditation is a significant demonstration of EA's capacity to improve service delivery models. There is need now to continue that work and ensure the fullest integration across other services and parts of the system (particularly finance) to ensure procurement plays its fullest role in delivery on efficiency and an effective operating model.

³⁵ Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) Accreditation Assessment Review May 2020



9. Estate Management

The effectiveness of the EA's estate management arrangements and the extent to which they deliver value for money, support organisational delivery and sustainability

9.1 Context and Progress to Date

Management of the schools' estate is the overall responsibility of the Department of Education (DE) in conjunction with the Education Authority and can include³⁶

- major capital works;
- minor capital works; and
- maintenance.

DE is directly responsible for overseeing planning and grant-aiding capital works in schools in the Voluntary Maintained, Voluntary Grammar, Irish Medium and Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) sectors. The EA has responsibility for capital works in the Controlled Sector.

Grant-aid for capital works in schools, for which DE is responsible is paid directly to school authorities by the Department. However, as the EA is responsible for Controlled schools, DE allocates funding for these schools to the EA.

Maintenance of schools in the Controlled and Maintained (including Irish Medium sector) is the responsibility of the EA and DE allocates maintenance budgets to the EA for this purpose.

Maintenance of schools in the Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) sectors is the direct responsibility of the schools themselves, with the cost for this being met from within the schools' existing recurrent budget.

9.2 Estate Management in EA

Since 2015, EA has implemented a new delivery structure comprising two primary services delivering the management of, and services to, the educational and corporate estates – Infrastructure and Capital Development (ICD) and Facilities Management (FM).

Facilities Management (FM). DE has responsibility for the provision of the EA's frontline services across Building Maintenance, Catering, Premises Management, Cleaning Services, Grounds Maintenance, Quality, Safety, Health & Environment.

The Infrastructure and Capital Development (ICD) DE leads and develops all aspects of capital development across the Authority. It is responsible for the strategic planning and effective management of the major capital investment programmes, the school enhancement programmes and the minor capital works programmes, with significant input across the full education sector to ensure that capital investment supports the area planning process and is in line with service requirements.

³⁶ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/management-school-buildings>



Since the establishment of the new delivery model, key features of progress to date include;

- Development and implementation of updated and harmonised policies, procedures and templates for business cases, design and delivery of capital work projects, in line with CPD Guidance, DoF Better Business Cases guidance³⁷ and RIBA Plan of Work Stages (ICD).
- Design and implementation of a revised Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Education for the non-controlled school and youth sector (ICD)³⁸.
- Design and implementation of a revised Memorandum of Understanding with the Controlled Schools Support Council (ICD)³⁹.
- Digitisation of the minor works application process.
- Ongoing planning, design and delivery of over 1,000 capital works programmes including Major Capital, School Enhancement Programme, Shared Campuses and Minor Capital in both schools and youth settings. (ICD).
- Ongoing contract management of 20 schools procured through the PFI / PPP route, including early thinking on options for the hand-back to the EA of the 4 original 'Pathfinder PPPs' from early/mid 2000s. (ICD).
- Development of new Maintenance operating structure to reflect the EA's regional areas and localities. (FM).
- Development of a new procurement/statutory compliance which has been aligned accordingly for Premises, Cleaning and Grounds and is reflective of EA regional areas (FM).
- Major policies in place, including Major Emergency Planning, Business Continuity Planning arrangements and Climate Policy (FM).
- Fire Risk Strategy agreed and approved with DE for the entire Education Estate including Voluntary Grammars and Grant Maintained Integrated (FM).
- Maintenance Dashboards operational to improve reporting and actioning (FM)⁴⁰.
- Memorandum of Understanding and SLAs in place with key partners and stakeholders as well as key engagement with schools including the design, procurement and establishment of a delivery model that harmonises the multiple Term Service Contractors (FM).
- Digital transformation initiatives including The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Cleaning app, online accident reporting and energy/sustainability reporting platforms all created and implemented to support service delivery (FM).
- EA commitment to the Energy and Sustainability Service Action Plan 2030 (FM).
- Ongoing review of EA 'Corporate Estate', which has resulted in the disposal of some assets including County Hall in Ballymena, Ballymoney Street in Ballymena and Forestview in Belfast amongst others; as well as the strategic relocation of EA officers to buildings that are in the EA's ownership.
- Development of a GIS (Geographic Information Mapping System) mapping project to support strategic planning across Grounds, Cleaning, Health and Safety, Environmental Compliance and Energy and Sustainability preparing a digital twin of EA estate.
- Development and review of the Asset Management Plan which was first published in 2019. This plan is now under review to take account of post covid working arrangements⁴¹.

³⁷ Formerly NIGEAE

³⁸ Memorandum of Agreement between DE and EA for the delivery of capital works

³⁹ Memorandum of Understanding between EA and CSSC.

⁴⁰ FM Maintenance Performance Dashboard

⁴¹ EA Asset Management Plan 2019



9.3 Findings

Fieldwork analysis and survey feedback indicates the following key trends;

- The formation of the ICD and FM teams has only recently finalised, but the structure is not fully populated. There is still further work to do in recruitment of additional roles including compliance officers and stock condition survey. However there is a sense that there have been significant improvements in the development of cohesive departments and subsequent improvements in the maintenance and capital development of the EA's Estate and Assets.
- The new structure and leadership within each of these service areas has allowed for a more strategic approach to planning, an improving understanding of issues and a broader capacity to partnership resulting in improved planning process and provision of capital development.
- Whilst there have been improvements in the delivery performance of maintenance, minor works and larger capital projects; further enhancement will require an increase in capital funding.
- There is a broad recognition of the need to ensure increased alignment between planning, capital funding, specialist provision and mainstream school requirements in order to realise educational transformation objectives.
- Overall whilst there has been investment in the school estate, the pace of progress for shared education, for example, is modest.
- There is evidence of estates/facilities management involvement in cross organisational and multi-disciplinary working (Area Planning Working Group or SEN Working Group for example), so there is increasing evidence that estates and facilities are aligned to understanding school needs and therefore able to adapt more effectively to changing needs/requirements. However feedback indicates an urgent need for a more strategic approach to estate investment and more widely to area planning so that all actors across the whole sector can access information and improve decision making and thereby create joined up thinking in school accommodation for example, with a number of examples quoted of too many school development proposals progressing in isolation. There is a pressing need for EA to take a more strategic approach to the accommodation needs of pupils and for DE to create the policy environment to facilitate an agile and rapid response to those needs.
- Notwithstanding the achievements to date, there is still an absence of an Estate Strategy. We understand that a strategy is in development, however the absence of an overarching strategy in place at present does not convey a sense of a strategic approach to estate management and a reactionary approach to issues. We are conscious that the Asset Management Plan is approved and in place, however this does not replicate a statement of strategic intent nor outline strategic vision, direction or guidance on EA principles of estate management.
- As with many parts of EA services, financial data indicates that both facilities management and maintenance have been operating in deficit positions. As a result, maintenance has an allocated budget which does not meet their needs and tends then to prioritise essential work and compliance elements of maintenance rather than the added value items, which would add ambiance or value to the school surroundings.
- School feedback indicates that maintenance tends to be an issue. 76% of school principals strongly disagreed and 18% disagreed that EA was effective in carrying out maintenance on time; furthermore 29% of the wider education workforce said that the EA was very ineffective, and 22% said that the EA was ineffective in keeping a well-maintained building. The levels of school principal dis-satisfaction are routed in the pace at which business cases for maintenance projects get developed and approved by DE/EA. At face value, a process which should be relatively straight-forward can take a significant period of time to get approved which can only be frustrating for schools. There is clearly a need and opportunity to review such processes and streamline the process whilst still adhering to DoF requirements on business cases/ expenditure approvals etc.



- The CoPE procurement approach, which EA is proud of, is a system which is not well received in the school system. Whilst recognising the need for consistency and trying to secure best price, many schools fed back to this review that there were fundamentally two problems with the service:
 - > It was difficult to access the service and there were often delays of many months before any repair was actually completed. Some schools reported that they have been waiting since September 2021 for repairs to fire alarms, toilets, windows and doors.
 - > Some consultation feedback highlighted a perception that EA has been slow in disposing of assets, particularly old schools which have closed.
 - > Furthermore, the centralised procurement system is expensive for schools who were used to being able to procure services from local vendors at reduced or negotiated rates. Now they have to purchase services from approved lists, often with mixed results in terms of delivery and quality of service.
- On the other hand, the survey responses indicate that parents and pupils have reasonable levels of satisfaction with the state of their schools and classrooms.

Parents	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable
I am satisfied with the physical state of my child or children's school	15%	40%	27%	18%	0%

Children	Really Agree	Agree	Disagree	Really Disagree	I don't know
The classroom and corridors are clean and tidy	29%	62%	5%	0%	3%
The bathrooms are clean and tidy	16%	48%	34%	0%	2%

It is clear from this review that the EA estate is large, geographically diverse and contains a huge range of assets in varying degrees of upkeep and maintenance. The organisation has made significant progress in how it organises itself, in defining what it can do and how it will do that and has made significant progress in establishing strong relationships across the wider public sector and with partners. The evolving procurement and maintenance model though are a source of complaint for the school principals in particular, as they see the added bureaucracy and increasing workload as additional pressure being delegated from EA into the schools. The introduction of a centralised system also disempowers their ability to make decisions at local levels and this is a case of further dissatisfaction. It will be critical for EA to demonstrate to the wider school system that initiatives being introduced do in fact save principal's time, do in fact save money and are in fact more efficient than what they have replaced. This is the key test for any service improvement plan.



10 Staffing and Human Resource Management

The effectiveness of the EA's human resources strategy including the appropriateness of the EA's organisational structure, staffing capacity and expertise, and whether it has sufficient resource and capacity to perform its functions.

10.1 Context and Progress to Date

EA is the largest employing authority in Northern Ireland with over 60,000 posts ranging from teachers, teaching assistants, cleaning, estates and transport staff, bus drivers, school patrol officers, social workers, youth workers, educational psychologists and many more.

- EA employs 60,153 staff which includes 8,212 teachers in 544 controlled schools and 51,941 support staff posts across controlled and catholic maintained schools and EA services⁴².
- EA directly employs 11,575 of total staff (7,186 FTE) through its directorate structure.
- Over 19,000 youth volunteers support the delivery of EA services.
- Under legislation, EA employs teachers in controlled schools and controlled integrated schools and employs non-teaching staff in controlled, controlled integrated, catholic maintained and other maintained schools. As such EA has the ultimate employer responsibility across a range of schools and provides specific advice and guidance in relation to employment responsibilities delegated under legislation to schools. EA also provides HR and legal advice and support to all Irish Medium schools.
- Furthermore, as the employing authority for teachers in controlled schools, EA is responsible for the management of the teaching appointments processes for teachers and principals and provision of learning and development opportunities for teachers.

EA is a large and complex organisation and since its formation in 2015, there has been a focus on a number of key aspects ensuring the successful transition of a significant number of staff from legacy organisations; to understanding the make-up of EA's workforce and on the restructuring of resources in order to support the delivery of services across a single and regional entity.

Since 2015, three broadly distinct but interlinked pillars of activity were identified to deliver on EAs staffing and human resource management approach. These include:

- a. Organisation Development and Design – under this pillar of work EA has focused on creating a vision and a new set of values for EA and its workforce. In the design element of this approach, EA has undertaken functional and service reviews as well as local restructuring activities to enable the emergence of the management of delivery of regional services (within a context of existing legal obligations).
- b. Human Resource Directorate – EA has identified and created a HR operating model along with business processes for essential core HR services in order to ensure employer obligations are met and delivered into schools. Key outworkings of this phase included the review of Policies and Procedures for a single organisation and provision of HR support for directorates and schools to support change, industrial relations support arrangements and the evolution of an EA approach to workforce planning.

⁴² Based on the Q1 Staffing paper of 2021/22

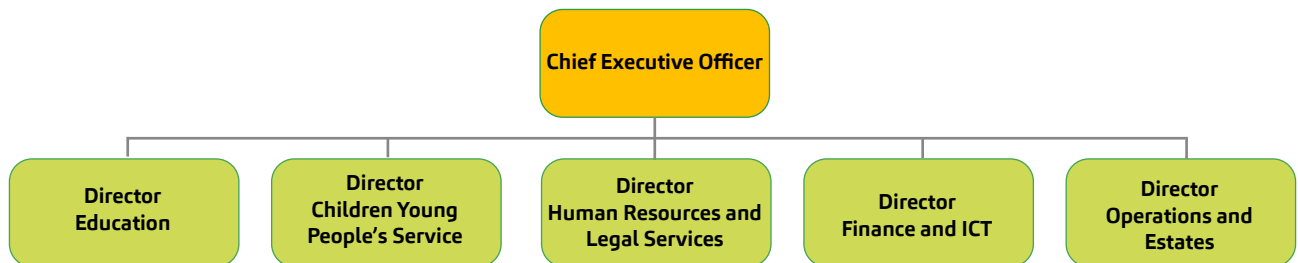


- c. Creation of directorates/functions – to enable these directorates/functions, EA undertook the development and design of a regionalisation and management of all services and teams through consultation and engagement and on the resourcing and initial development of leadership and management populations. This work was further supplemented by ongoing work on the EA's vision & values

From 2015 to the present day the progress of establishing, embedding and implementing a single regional body has moved at differing rates and with varying levels of effectiveness. The Organisational Development function is slowly developing and the implementation of both the HR function itself and the creation of directorates and functions was perhaps not as consistent or as timely as early expectations had hoped.

By 2017/18, it was clear that the evolution of EA was not progressing to plan and therefore decisions were taken in 2017/18 to focus on the recruitment, selection and appointment of an Assistant Director cadre. The anticipation was that the provision of this tier of management and leadership would be a catalyst in providing capable, cross functional and collaborative cadre of individuals who would take forward key aspects of service improvement and support wider organisational development and transformation.

Notwithstanding the successful outcome of that process and the appointment of a range of Assistant Directors across the organisation, the organisation created an organisational structure as follows;



Chief Executive Office: responsible for the effective management of the Corporate Leadership Team and its EA Board and Committees; Internal Audit and Communications; Establishment of Corporate Services Function (though line management of his activity now sits under HRLS directorate).

Human Resources and Legal Services Directorate: responsible for HR Policies and Procedures; Employee Welfare; Recruitment; Employee Records; Equality Monitoring; Industrial and Employee Relations; Claims and Legal and HR Advisory Services for Schools as well as most recently the Corporate Services function.

Children and Young People's Services Directorate: responsible for Special Education Operations and Provision; Pupil Support Services; Pupil Welfare Services (including Child Protection); Youth Service and Early Years.

Education Directorate: responsible for School Improvement: Professional Learning and Development; Strategic Area Planning; Community Planning and Community Use of Schools; School Governance; Shared Education and Sectoral Support; C2k Service; Music Service and Education Library Service.

Operations and Estates Directorate: responsible for Capital Development; Estate Services and Maintenance; Energy Management and Efficiency; Health and Safety; Catering Service; Emergency Management and Planning; Free School Meals and Clothing; Transport Service; Schools Admissions.

Finance and ICT Directorate: responsible for Budgetary Control; Management Accounting; Financial Accounts; Financial Planning; LMS; Payroll and Pensions; Accounts Payable; Accounts Receivable; Cash Management; Income Generation; Reprographics; Registry and ICT.

This organisational structure has remained largely unchanged since 2017 and is led by the Chief Executive Officer and five Directors who form the Corporate Leadership Team. A further 19 Assistant Directors and 68 Heads of Service provide strategic and operational leadership and management across the service areas identified above.



10.2 The HR Strategy

At present EA does not have a Human Resource or People Strategy. Whilst work is underway in scoping a people strategy, it is curious that almost seven years since formation, the organisation does not have a strategic approach or outline to the management of its people. This absence of a strategy aligns to the (up until recently) relative obscurity of HR matters from the formal governance arrangements of EA. The EA is the largest employer in Northern Ireland yet did not have a formal HR or People Committee at Board level reporting on the range and complexity of issues the organisation faced/faces. Notwithstanding the well-documented financial and budgetary issues that the organisation continues to face, the identification and deployment of human resource is one of the operational levers by which an organisation can influence its effectiveness and drive change.

We are aware that at operational level, EA had identified priorities around transferring staff from legacy organisations; in getting functional structures up and running and in populating structures and delivering services. Nonetheless there appears to be an overarching lack of foresight in determining the resource requirements of the organisation and an associated vision for the use and deployment of those resources – usually articulated or defined through a HR or People strategy. We are aware that in the absence of a HR strategy, sub-strategies for Health and Wellbeing, Equality and OD and Learning have been developed/implemented (dependent upon resource) and furthermore People Conversations are underway to canvas views which will feed into a strategy (as well as other engagement, surveying and external benchmarking).

10.3 The HR Function

The HR Services' function has a current FTE permanent staffing of 109.65, and is made up as follows:

- HR Services (teaching and non-teaching): 62.75 FTE
- Resourcing: 42.9 FTE
- HRCS Business Unit: 2 FTE
- HR Transformation: 2 FTE

Corporate HR & Business Partnering function's permanent staffing of 53.8 is made up as follows:

- Health & Wellbeing: 5 FTE
- Schools HR Partnering: 15 FTE
- Corporate HR Partnering: 6 FTE
- Employee Relations (Casework): 15 FTE
- Employee Relations (Complex Cases): 4.8 FTE
- Industrial Relations & Reward: 8 FTE

10.4 Key Workforce Issues

EA, like many public bodies, faces a diverse and wide range of legacy and ongoing workforce issues. These include;

- Capacity of the HRLS directorate to service existing workforce requirements across whole suite of HR, OD and Legal services (based upon identified benchmarking exercise the EA has a HR-staff ratio of 1:407, compared to the NI public sector average of 1:128).
- Ongoing organisational financial challenges and delivery model with limited resource allocation.



- Aligned to increasing budgetary pressures are conversely increasing demand and expectations from customers and employees.
- The recent and ongoing focus on Covid (and the subsequent outworkings of that in terms of working from home and ensuring a safe workplace) has resulted in increased financial pressures.
- An underpinning employment model which has been demonstrated to be ineffective and inefficient (i.e. the ratio of temporary non-teaching posts requiring recruitment per annum c.3000 posts).
- Whilst the organisation was designed at a point in time (seven years ago) and a delivery structure put in place, there is a sense that the structure and delivery model might not be appropriate.
- Leadership and management capacity and capability to deliver.
- Absence of an effective HR strategy and associated strategic approach to workforce planning.
- Key themes around harmonising legacy terms and conditions and resolution of legacy and current ER issues.
- Implementation of EA ONE (HR and Payroll system).
- Lack of learning management systems or platforms and associated employee engagement platforms.
- Alignment of HR processes to wider EA digital transformation programme and drive efficiencies.
- Resourcing of the HRLS.
- Development of a strategic approach to Organisation Design and Development with associated strategy, functions and resourcing.
- Ongoing management and maintenance of industrial relations frameworks and pay agreements.

10.5 Addressing areas of concern

In terms of the current position, feedback from senior corporate management and HR senior leaders indicate significant capacity issues, gaps in provision and pressures specifically in the areas of:

- Resourcing
- HR Services
- Human Resource Business Partnering
- Organisational Development and Learning

Furthermore, a sectoral gap including EA as part of the sector has also been identified in the area of workforce planning (including workforce information).

The gaps in these areas mean that organisational needs are not always met or risk not being met across a range of staffing areas, ultimately impacting on organisational and school performance of children and young people.

10.6 Findings

Feedback and survey findings indicate a wide range of issues.

- The function has implemented new online recruitment systems; development of a new health and wellbeing strategy⁴³; creation of a case management approach to employee relations; review of EA Equality Scheme⁴⁴; creation of online HR portals; Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) and Teaching Negotiating Council (TNC) reviews; directorate and service line support for review and restructuring and ongoing internal EA corporate support as well as HR support and advisory services into the school employee population⁴⁵.

⁴³ EA Health and Well-being strategy

⁴⁴ EA Equality Scheme, inc the EA Gender Action Plan, Disability Action Plan and Equality Action Plan

⁴⁵ ER Change Projects Schools and Services



- There is a sense that whilst some progress has been made in terms of embracing change, not everyone identifies with the single body and there are significant pockets of legacy culture, practices and behaviours across the organisation. These areas of looking to the past, present significant challenge in terms of the speed of getting things done.
- In the absence of a people strategy, there is significant feedback that the vision and focus of the HR function is unclear. The HR function priorities to date have been focused on transactional issues and getting structures and functions up and running, but there is limited sense that these functions, services or indeed directorates are right sized at this point. The initial design of EA in terms of organisational structure does not necessarily reflect the needs of the organisation seven years on. Consequently, the lack of HR strategy provides limited definition or articulation of the future vision of the service, its ambitions and the people resourcing and capability issues. There is a sense that in the absence of a strategy, the centrality of resourcing and people is not wholly realised or appreciated.
- There is consensus, based upon internal and external benchmarking that the HR function is under resourced (e.g. PSSSP Report).⁴⁶ Achievements realised to date have been achieved, often against the odds and often on limited budget and resources/personnel. The function does not have all the capability or skills mix that it requires to fully service the organisation with particular skills (range, depth and breadth) in Organisation Development (OD) in particular missing. Furthermore the function lacks capacity to deliver on statutory and mandatory training which supports organisational policy and statutory compliance.
- There are gaps in the workforce planning function which is a critical element of organisation architecture. In the absence of robust and current workforce analytics, it is difficult to understand how EA is able to project, plan and budget for resource allocation. This re-inforces the point that most services have not had a proper review to determine their resourcing requirements and therefore the resourcing model has to be questioned. It has not been satisfactorily resolved as to why this basic starting point has not been pursued by EA – the review of service requirements is a fundamental design principle and establishes not only the structural and design outline of a service/function or activity, but critically informs the workforce resourcing requirements. This should have been a priority for EA from the beginning and some of the issues experienced today stem from a failure to adequately identify the appropriate workforce plan.
- Whilst the organisation has undertaken and is progressing through a variety of transformation activities, it is not always clear to see the link between HR, people, resourcing, capability and the outcomes of those transformation activities. To be truly transformative requires more than the change of a process or procedure or the introduction of a new system – it often relies upon changed behaviours and working cultures. There is limited evidence that HR is fully integrated into those transformative efforts underway.
- There is a sense that the new payroll and finance system will be a significant development for the organisation; however underpinning this initiative remains the fact that there has been limited movement on the harmonisation of terms and conditions (270 terms and conditions of service) of employment and the ongoing attempts to resolve pay and grading issues.
- Consultation feedback has identified that current pay scales as they stand present a number of challenges and risks to the organisation. Existing grade frameworks (across multiple agreed and recognised/negotiated frameworks) are of varying lengths with some having overlap of pay points. The impact of the increase in National Living Wage has eroded the differential between entry level and supervisor posts. External labour market conditions coupled with the reported inflexibility of EA pay scales and associated job evaluation scheme is proving to be a significant challenge for recruitment.

⁴⁶ HRLS PSSSP Report



- More broadly, there is a widespread recognition that a fundamental pay and grading review is required. This has been identified as a critical organisational objective and it is our understanding that pay and grading review has been subject to much discussion between EA, DE and the Trade Unions. However it is also our understanding that EA does not have the delegated authority to change terms and conditions – this lies with DE and therefore a business case is currently being finalised to submit to DE to seek permission to engage with Trade Unions on options to resolve the pay and grading issues. Clearly DE support for this is critical to both resolving the increasing industrial relations issues and ensuring EA has a fit for purpose pay and grading structure that meet the needs of the transforming organisation.
- Significant work and effort have been put into initiatives such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (which won an Inspire award), however feedback from the school system indicates that this initiative felt EA corporate centred and did not reflect the needs or time constraints of teaching staff e.g., relaxation sessions at 11am when most principals or teachers are in fact teaching.
- Feedback from the system suggests that the levels of engagement (despite internal and stakeholder forum groups) is not effective. Partners in the school system provided consultation feedback on the limited levels of engagement, the quality of communication from HR, the inability to get hold of HR, the inconsistency of advice and the general sense that process is more important than supporting a school or principal (see survey response data). Direct feedback from the school system referring specifically to HR includes;
 - > “I believe that HR management could provide better information and training to school principals and office staff regarding resourcing and the roles within HR. I don’t think it is clearly defined who they need to liaise”
 - > “It is impossible to get through to anyone in HR, have to leave messages or emails and hope they call you back”
 - > “The advice from HR is not always consistent – depends on who you get...”
- Fieldwork, consultations and survey data suggests that EA has a significant path to journey in creating a 'one' culture. Survey data suggests significant frustrations 'our culture is paperwork gone mad', 'I can't define culture in EA, most people continue doing what they have always done'. Whilst there is evidence of well-intentioned initiatives, these do not appear to be consistent and any attempts at culture change lack the backdrop of an effective HR strategy.
- To be agile and responsive in the current day means having to create a workforce which is multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary, but structurally EA is designed to work in silos. Whilst there is more evidence of cross-organisational working, the default position of many people below Head of Service level is to work within their own service or activity. This is also reinforced by the decision-making model within EA in that decision making is pulled upwards and away from experienced and senior professional (many Heads of Service for example are not budget holders). So these aspects of organisation design feed into a model which can be resistant to change, because it is not necessarily encouraged to change. HR, through an effective OD strategy, is not affecting a changed behaviour or employee outlook in delivery models.
- HR and OD matters invariably suffered from lack of a dedicated people sub-committee. The fact that EA, as the largest public sector employer in Northern Ireland did not have a dedicated committee for people matters until 2021, remains a puzzle. Given the scale of the merger of five legacy organisations, the complexity of the formation of a single entity, the recruitment, payroll and employee relations for over 60,000 individuals in itself justified the creation of a HR committee. The fact that people matters



were dealt with amongst other matters in committee business, meant that the function and strategy had limited air time, had limited strategic direction (despite the significant risks and potential risks within the function and not getting basic HR action right) and as a consequence the HR function today reflects underinvestment - not just in resourcing, but in serious organisational reflections on the type of HR support and resource required to service, guide and support operational delivery.

As the EA continues to take shape and find its rhythm of organisational life, people managers and HR have a critical role to play in building the organisation with the right culture and capability. The HR function has a critical role to play in all aspects of EA's delivery model and is a critical level in effective talent management and "unleashing the organisation's energy" which is the key to raising performance levels.

HR can build, establish and manage change, helping to facilitate service delivery redesign and building the necessary leadership and management skills for sustained transformation. However, if HR is preoccupied by its traditional activities, such as hand-holding line managers and dealing with employee relations issues, then it will be left behind and its reputation as a transactional function will be reinforced and the strategic contribution will not be realised. Given the scale of challenges EA face, the complexity of the internal landscape and the opportunities to transform, a strong and highly skilled HR function is a necessity, not an aspiration.



11

11. Quality of Service

The quality and responsiveness of the EA's services, in meeting the requirements of its stakeholders (children & young people, parents, schools, Department of Education).

11.1 Context and Progress to Date

Public bodies have an important part to play in delivering the Government's vision of high-quality services for all citizens. To do so effectively they need to be set up correctly, be well governed, and observe high standards of transparency and efficiency⁴⁷.

As such, public sector services, such as the EA are responsible and accountable to citizens and communities as well as to the stakeholders it is set up to service.

The provision of customer-centric services in the public service is no simple task. Several significant challenges need to be overcome. Services must be delivered on a wide scale. Customer or stakeholder journeys often interface with several different public sector agencies. Diversity issues must be addressed to consider the unique attributes and channel preferences of individual customers and a detailed understanding of the costs involved in providing these services must be developed.

So, service provision is more complex in the public sector because it is not simply a matter of meeting expressed needs, but of finding out unexpressed needs, setting priorities, allocating resources and publicly justifying and accounting for what has been done⁴⁸.

Fuelling the evidential rise in public scrutiny of public bodies, such as EA, is the fact that citizens and users of public services are now more aware of their rights and – with the heightened media and social activism – demanding greater accountability and transparency⁴⁹.

Consequently, the public sector is increasingly expected to run itself effectively, efficiently and in a customer-centric manner, no longer does a one size fit all solution work, as customer journeys vary and require differing structures and solutions.

To become truly customer-centric, public-sector organisations need first and foremost to gear their cultures towards serving the customer. That means aligning organisational and customer priorities. It means understanding the complexity of different stakeholder groups and providing them with a choice of channels and interfaces via a demand-driven model – the more stakeholders there are, the more channels they tend to use according to the level of support and guidance they need. This means addressing organisation silos so that customers and stakeholders can be served effectively through a single point of contact and it means using truly customer-centric metrics to motivate staff⁵⁰.

It has already been established in previous sections that the EA was formed in 2015 against a back-drop of the rationalisation of the former Education and Library Boards. As the new EA came into being, a period of up to three years saw it continue to operate as a disparate organisation, with interim structures and personnel on a sub-regional basis often along previous geographic and office locations. This fragmented approach did little to create a unified approach to quality, continuous improvement or to standardising the stakeholder experience when coming into contact with the new agency.

⁴⁷ The Cabinet Office – Tailored Reviews: Guidance on Review of Public Bodies. May 2019

⁴⁸ Gowan, M., Seymour, J., Ibarreche, S. & Lackey, C. (2001) "Service quality in a public agency: same expectations but different perceptions by employees, managers, and customers," *Journal of Quality Management*, vol. 6, p. 275-291

⁴⁹ The Road Ahead for Public Services. PWC

⁵⁰ The Road Ahead for Public Services. PWC



There is a recognition that as the new agency was formed, that much organisational memory left the new organisation and consequently the organisation struggled to adapt to its new remit, functions and activities.

Since 2018, significant effort has been undertaken to place quality at the core of EA activities. The appointment of a new Chief Executive in December 2018 heralded a fresh beginning for the organisation and since then the organisation has been embarking upon a journey of continuous improvement and a more quality focused approach to service delivery.

Key features of the organisation's approach to quality and responsiveness at a corporate level includes (the following lists are not exclusive but provide an overview of policies, actions or projects with a quality/responsiveness focus):

- A new approach to corporate planning with the creation of a corporate planning function, a corporate planning strategy framework, a new approach to corporate performance measurement, improvement and reporting.
- A new approach to data management.
- Implementation of digital transformation leading the delivery of EdiS and its workstreams to ensure user needs are met (e.g. admissions, free school meals and benefits, support services, SEN and many other parts of the EA service delivery).
- Strategic Development Programme for SEND (including Statutory Assessment Improvement Project (SAIP))⁵¹.
- A revised approach to Statutory Assessment Performance reporting.
- Re-establishment of the Corporate Planning and Performance Group.
- Creation of a new Communications strategy with evidence of work underway to improve communication in general e.g. the new Customer Charter and the emergence of the locality network.

Key features of the organisation's approach to quality and responsiveness at a directorate level includes:

CYPS

- Regionalisation of services in the Pupil Inclusion, Wellbeing and Protection Division.
- Child Protection Support Service, Intercultural Education Service and Education Welfare Service became regional services
- Primary and Post Primary Behaviour Support and Provisions Services and the Exceptional Teaching Arrangement Services became regionalised services.
- Education Welfare Service is currently subject to a Transformation Project that will ensure further regional consistency in Service delivery.
- Statutory Assessment and Review and associated Improvement Plan.
- Implementation of the Regional Youth Development Plan.
- The Regional Assessment of Need (RAON).
- The Needs of Rural Young People Research.

⁵¹ SEND SDP Programme Reference Group



Education

- The Strategic Area Plan.
- Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools Framework and the Special Schools' Area Planning Framework.
- Special Education Strategic Area Plan.
- SAP Annual Action Planning.
- The Education Through Covid Programme.
- Cross Organisational Link Officers network.
- Locality Leadership Networks.
- EA School Improvement Strategy.

Finance and ICT

- EA One Project.
- Quarterly Accountability reviews.
- ICT Programme Board.

HR and Legal Services

- Joint Consultative Forum.
- Equality Forum.
- Equality Action Planning.
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- Joint Negotiating Council.
- Teaching Negotiating Council.
- Workforce Conversation.
- EA Legal Services Business Plan.
- Organisational Development and Learning Strategy.

Operations and Estates

- Procurement Programme Board.
- School User Group (SUG) and Principal User Group (PUG).
- Principals Reference Group (FMS).
- Strategic Investment School Meals Accommodation (SISMA) Project.
- Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Education.
- Memorandum of Understanding with the Controlled Schools Support Council.
- Regional operational guidance for transport.
- Regional operational guidance for School Crossing Patrols.



11.2 Findings

There is an evidence trail to demonstrate that EA is putting in place measures to support delivery of quality in service provision and in its responsiveness to its environment, though evidence of a customer lens in all activities is not consistent nor is the definition of the EA customer. There is sufficient evidence that the organisation has reviewed and restructured corporate governance structure and reporting, as well as implementing the architecture and frameworks which support more focus and energy in the delivery of quality services⁵². The new governance arrangements should provide the mechanisms to test the levels of quality across the organisation and the organisation's ability to meet stakeholder requirements, however feedback in Survey Findings section indicates low levels of confidence in the EA's ability to communicate and listen with its stakeholders.

- Internal feedback indicates that culturally, EA has some way to travel to effect change and a quality focus on service delivery. Feedback from many parts of the organisation suggest that it requires the CEO to shine the spotlight into an area for things to happen – if she doesn't do that, it doesn't happen. This raises a broader concern that the focus on governance, quality and assurance is only reaching so far into the organisation and that many parts of the organisation continue to work as before.
- Feedback suggests that the quality of ICT is a recurring organisational impediment. There is a recognition that the organisation quickly adapted to the public health emergency in 2020 by swiftly transferring operations to home base. However, the functionality and application of ICT and digital solutions has been slow overall. Multiple sources of feedback indicates that ICT was not a CLT priority prior to the Covid pandemic, but now is. Furthermore, the risk register indicates that ICT has been on the corporate risk register for two years, but it doesn't seem to have changed in status; a recent external review of ICT in EA highlighted many issues - particularly resourcing. Furthermore, feedback from staff within EA and in the school system indicate that whilst there has been a movement towards digital applications, many staff (in the EA and schools) are still working manually or working under old ways of working. This extends to the fact that many staff do not have emails, which raises questions around how these staff are updated on EA communications. So, whilst there is strong evidence of effective approaches to digital transformation (admissions for example), this transformation is disparate and raises questions about how quality and responsiveness can be as agile as required - if the underpinning systems are not.
- This is notwithstanding the recent launch of the Education Information System (EdiS project). It is our understanding that EdiS will be a fundamental element in providing modern, efficient and effective services and service delivery that will simplify school administration for school staff and wider education stakeholders and at the same time increase parental engagement and support teaching using technology. This will go a significant way to addressing issues identified in other sections around access by the school system to EA, access to digital support and the integration of learning to future policy making. EdiS represents exactly the type and nature of initiative that has the potential to be truly transformative as by taking a data analytics foundation, it has the opportunity to deliver a joined up technology environment that will provide analysis and reports to inform future policy making and support pupil centric learning to inspire and support our children and young people to be the best they can be.
- A recurring theme of feedback (explored in subsequent sections -Relationships with DE; Relationships with Other Stakeholders), is communication. A key and underpinning foundation of effective approach to quality and responsiveness is the ability to communicate effectively with stakeholders.

⁵² EA Review of Committee Structure



- We are aware that a new Head of Communications is recently in post and that work is underway creating and implementing a new communication strategy.
- There was significant feedback suggesting (and with anecdotal evidence) that EA's capacity to engage with users/stakeholders falls short of most users expectations. Within the school system, there was profound and universal criticism on the inability to get in touch with relevant parties within EA to get queries answered; there were numerous examples of inconsistent advice provided; of EA staff members passing school staff onto someone else to deal with their problem and a fundamental sense that EA was not listening (see Appendix 1 Survey feedback).
- More broadly EA's approach to engagement, was seen by many (external and internal stakeholders consulted as part of this exercise) as about avoiding complaints, not engaging with the media and sticking to a rigid and often terse corporate response. There was a sense from users and stakeholders that EA was invisible in the public space and 'silent' on too many issues affecting them and the children they were responsible for. As a result, many organisations and individuals felt that they had, to quote a senior school leader, 'lost trust in EA'.
- This transactional not transformational quality approach and responsiveness also extends to how EA deals with schools and principals. There was recurring feedback that whilst senior people might know the appropriate response and know what is going on within EA, most others within the organisation do not and they are the individuals who are talking to schools and governors. Consequently, there is a mis-match of information and this re-enforces the perception that there is a lack of a corporate or one approach to issues, communications, and dealing with the wider system (see Appendix 1 Survey feedback).
- Our review indicates that there is evidence of a more corporate approach to performance management, planning and information and we recognise that this takes time to embed into the organisation. Furthermore, the review feedback indicates that the quality and responsiveness of many of EA services is often delivered by excellent staff, who go out of their way to support and satisfy stakeholders. However, there is a sense that those individuals are doing that on their own volition, their own professionalism and that the broader system does not support that. Schools we spoke to identified and acknowledged that many individual support staff were key to them getting problems solved, to those staff going out of their way to help the principal, but the underpinning system is stymying both the schools and the EA staff.
- There is increasing evidence across the organisation of reviews of services taking place, which have high levels of engagement with service users – e.g. Catering Service review, the ongoing SEND SDP, and there is emerging evidence of a more robust approach to continual feedback mechanisms and monitoring arrangements of service delivery. These are welcome and provide direct quality assurance and enable EA to respond to issues arising.

11.3 Driving improvement

Technology has not just raised the bar for service expectations but has empowered the voice of the customer to complain. Social media platforms provide a huge audience of customers often eager to share and weigh in on complaints. The digital footprints of negative publicity and poor customer service delivery cannot easily be erased, thus having long-lasting consequences. What's more, full histories of events are easily accessible to curious audiences, ensuring that even public relations specialists cannot delete poorly managed customer service complaints. Delivering good customer service is thus no longer a choice for business, it is imperative to both thrive and survive.



The Institute of Customer Service envisions an organisation which delivers good customer service as “... honest, gives good value for money, has a high reputation, meets deadlines, has quality products and services, has easy to understand processes, responds to criticism, encourages complaints and handles them well, and demonstrates that it is passionate about customers.” The near utopian vision of customer service demonstrates the myriad of touch points high quality services need to target.

Listening to, and engaging customers in feedback, is of course paramount to continuously improving services. The recently published Civil Society Strategy includes initiatives to improve participation in local decision making. The authors cited that, “evidence shows that enabling people/users to participate in the decisions that affect them improves people’s confidence in dealing with local issues, builds bridges between citizens and the government, fosters more engagement, and increases social capital.”

Key to that engagement piece and the development of a quality focus on delivery is not just engagement, but an alignment of the service delivery model with the customer journey. For public sector organisations to fully realise improved customer/user experiences, there is a need to more readily rethink rigid processes based around the users requirements. This review highlights that work is underway within EA to transform services, to drive engagement and to place quality at the centre of activities. However it must go further and rethink the design of its services and look at the user journey to ensure these match.

Aligning service delivery and customer journey

- Charging cross-functional teams with finding innovative ‘connected’ solutions to customer problems.
- Offering a service guarantee with set and clear performance standards.
- Creating contingency plans for possible failure points.
- Deploying technologies to route callers to the most appropriate service.
- Understanding customers’ expectations of the experience for each contact channel.
- Organising delivery units around customer segments.
- Designing the service delivery process from the customers’ point of view and using ‘co-creation’ (a new form of value creation where value is co-created by the organisation and the customer). Examples of how this is achieved are through responding to customer feedback and the involvement of customer segments in the development of services to achieve customer-centric outcomes.
- Incorporating technology into the service delivery process.
- Differentiating service to customers based on their specific needs and preferences.

There is limited evidence, thus far, that EA has aligned or is attempting to align the service delivery model with the requirements of service users based upon the model above for example. The criteria identified above transcends sectors and industries and identifies the key criteria required to generate enhanced customer journey. Our review has indicated that EA has identified the need for this approach and has indeed commenced some of the above (including creation of cross functional teams, increased use of digital technology), however the experience of most users when coming into contact with EA demonstrates that there is a significant journey to travel before there is assurance around EA’s capacity, to firstly understand user requirements and secondly the model to deliver on those expectations/requirements.



12

12. Decision Making

Whether decision making within the EA is sufficiently transparent and expedient.

12.1 Context and Progress to Date

The Education Authority was formed in 2015 and for a period operated under interim structures and roles. During this period (approximately 2015 – 2017), EA continued to operate under a five regional office basis and decision making often aligned to the resultant geographic mix of locations, offices and personnel.

As the Authority was managed on a regional and interim basis, it was not until late 2016 – 2017 that Directors were appointed into the new organisation and the recruitment process for Assistant Directors commenced in early 2017. All the while decision making aligned to an interim structure with interim management arrangements often based upon legacy geographical arrangements and resultant local priorities. There was no sense of a corporate approach to decision making given the lack of structure, the leadership vacuum and the disparate operating model.

There are a number of underpinning foundations to decision making and process within the Education Authority;

- The draft Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) for EA was signed off by the Department of Education and EA in March 2015 and was later updated in 2019⁵³.
- EA Board Standing Orders were approved in April 2015. These Standing Orders regulate the conduct of EA business to ensure fair and accountable decision-making. They also provide for the delegation of authority, functions and decision-making to committees and sub-committees established by the EA. Since 2015 many of the Standing Orders have been updated to reflect the evolving nature and role of the organisation^{54 55}.
- EA is required, as a designated Public Authority, to assess the impacts of its policies and decisions for particular communities. This duty is called the Equality of Opportunity duty and is a key aspect of its Screening Policy – this duty extends to a requirement to carry out Equality Quality Impact Assessments and supports decision making within EA.
- The current Corporate Leadership Team Operating Model was developed in April 2019 and is updated each year. This operating model sets out the roles and responsibilities of the CLT and outlines the charter for the team along with the values. The model has defined the structure for CLT and Director Accountability meetings along with processes for the submission of papers (as well as the format of these papers). An annual planner was also developed to provide transparency on the timetabling of business to be discussed and to allow synergy and alignment between CLT meetings and Directorate Management Team (DMT) meetings. A SharePoint site has been created to house all relevant documentation for CLT meetings and provides transparency and accessibility to those identified users⁵⁶.
- All DMTs have developed Operating Models based on the content of the CLT Operating Model. This ensures consistency in the reporting structures.
- Subsequent to an independent review of the Board and Committee arrangements in May 2020, a new Committee Structure and Associated Schemes were designed, developed and implemented in March 2021. EA's Scheme of Delegations and Authorisations were amended in line with the new Committee Structure and Schemes and approved by EA Board on 29 March 2021.

⁵³ Education Authority MSFM April 2019

⁵⁴ EA Standing Orders - April 2021

⁵⁵ Scheme of Delegations and Authorisations Annex A and B 29-03-2021

⁵⁶ CLT Operating Model and Planner 2021 - 2022 June 2021



- EA Authorisation Framework was created in April 2020 (aligned to the MSFM) and sets out the expenditure types within the Authority and associated authorisation levels. This is reviewed annually by the General Purposes Committee and CLT⁵⁷.
- EA Corporate Performance Framework, established in 2020 which sets out the Authority key performance metrics and reporting arrangements.
- Other key decision-making fora across the Authority range from engagement with principals (through NI Principals Forum) through to Locality Leader Networks and the Joint Negotiating Council and Teaching Negotiating Council (which ensure appropriate consultations with relevant unions in relation to pay matters).

12.2 Findings

It is clear that the Authority has put in place a framework which provides transparency and openness, and this demonstrates significant improvement from the earliest days of the organisation. There is certainly a sense of a formal structure in place and a process through which decisions progress; there is a clear sense of decision-making architecture. It is our observation that there are many layers involved in some aspects of decision making. Recognising the need for transparency and assurance, effective decision making also needs to be agile. EA does not demonstrate agile decision making – decisions tend to go through innumerate groups and processes and as a result decision making is slow which can hold up decision making in other organisations (reliant upon or waiting for an EA outcome).

Decision making within any organisation is aligned to and rooted in broader cultural and governance considerations. The decision-making architecture identified demonstrates the decision making principles and the process, however, does not provide insight into the quality of information or conversations that often determine the decision making process. Key to this, for example, is the development and presentation of business cases within the organisation and the subsequent compliance and the development of each stage of the process. The review findings indicate from a wide range of internal and external sources that whilst projects generally align with the EA's strategic plans, that alignment does not always extend to deliverables, the degrees of control and reporting. Whilst the decision making framework provides CLT with ultimate decision making authority; it has in fact limited involvement in the prioritisation and subsequent working through of identified projects or initiatives. As a result, reporting updates through to the Corporate Leadership Team and Board Committees are not consistent and belies the often prolonged process for decisions to get made. This in turn raises questions on oversight and the associated corporate ability to identify, manage and mitigate risk. Whilst we are conscious of ongoing efforts to adopt new project governance arrangements, the current approach identifies certain limitations and risks.

Decision making in the EA can be characterised by 'has the process been followed?', which is a risk averse approach to decision making and provides a degree of assurance around the process but not the outcome. However, underpinning the process is the quality of the information and to that extent, EA has not yet fully realised data or information that satisfies tests (currency, appropriateness and timeliness) to provide assurance that the process in itself is delivering on effective decisions.

⁵⁷ EA Authorisation Framework



13

13. Relationship between EA and other organisations

The effectiveness of relationships relevant to the aim of the EA, identifying strengths, gaps and opportunities for improvement.

13.1 Context and Progress to Date

The ability of an organisation to effectively deliver its mandate often relies upon a range of factors, not least the effectiveness of the relationships it has with its key stakeholders. There is an accepted acknowledgement that public sector organisations face many challenges. These arise from the complex activities public sector entities undertake, their many different stakeholders, the need to plan for the longer term, resource scarcity and the wide definition of the value they create.

Public sector entities such as the EA work in the public interest in a range of ways: delivering on legislation or regulations, delivering services, redistributing income through mechanisms such as taxation or social security payments, or controlling assets or entities for example. As a result such public bodies are increasingly expected to be open and transparent, particularly around how, and by whom, decisions are taken. They are also generally required to demonstrate not just that they use resources efficiently and effectively, but also that they maintain the highest standards of trustworthiness.

Underpinning any approach to service delivery is the need for service delivery collaboration and a range of stakeholders to enable the delivery organisation to meet its mandate.

It is fair to say that the breadth and reach of the EA is extensive. The scale and size of the organisation provides a wide platform for engagement with others and that engagement is often a critical lever in its delivery model.

The EA relationships with others can be characterised as follows:

- A Management Statement and Financial Memorandum outlines its relationship with Department of Education.
- Memorandum of Understanding with CCMS, CSSC and CSTS.
- Memorandum of Understanding with CnG and NICIE.
- Formal working relationships with ETI, CCEA, TNC, GTCNI, NI Higher Education Liaison Group for Teacher Education, Standing Conference on Teacher Education (North/South).
- Formal partnerships across Local Councils and Area Planning.
- Formal relationships with Department of Justice (DoJ) and Department of Health (DoH) regarding EA delivery of youth and children service provision.
- Formal relationship with Department for the Economy (DfE) in relation to delivery of student finance activities.
- Covid Link Officer Network (COLO) network.
- The Joint Consultative Forum (provides structured engagement between the Education Authority and Community and Voluntary and Trade Union Sectors, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland; the Community Relations Council; the Human Rights Commission and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. The aim of the Forum is to facilitate effective engagement with the Community, Voluntary and Trade Union Sectors on Section 75 (Equality) legislation and developments on education policy).



- EA Child Protection Support (EACPS) is linked to the following external bodies due to ongoing Service Level Agreements: CCEA; NICIE; Southwest Regional College; Southern Regional College; Middletown Centre for Autism; Armagh Observatory & Planetarium; Northern Regional College; Northwest Regional College; Libraries NI.

Each directorate's relationships are characterised by a range of regional and local relationships, some strategic in nature and others delivery focused. These relationships have evolved since the creation of EA and have often replaced existing legacy relationships or new relationships have been formed as EA services and mandate develops/changes.

Key relationships EA have developed include:

- The Minister of Education.
- The Department of Education.
- The Department for the Economy.
- The Department for Justice.
- The Department for Health.
- The NI Assembly Committee for Education.
- Political Representatives.
- School Leaders and School Staff.
- Parents and Carers.
- Sectoral partners such as CCMS, CSSC, NICE, GBA, CnaG etc.
- Trades Unions.
- Health Trusts.
- Other Government Bodies and Sponsoring Departments (and their delivery bodies including PHA).
- NIAO.
- Information Commission.
- Suppliers.
- Banking providers.
- Education Technology Service (DE).
- NILGOSC for non-teaching pension providers.
- Teaching Pension Providers.
- HMRC.
- Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).
- Delivery partners (including Translink, HSENI, HSE, NIFRS, APSE, Environmental Health (NI), CPD).
- Education Sector partners.
- Multiple sectoral and representative groups.

The need for robust and consistent relationships is a key mechanism in which to examine and control the activities of public bodies - this is an unarguable dimension of any concept of public service. The Nolan Principles on Standards of Conduct in Public Life recognise this by stipulating that "holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office".



Whilst we are not examining accountability in its purest form in this section - more of that later – the baseline for most of the relationships which EA has formed often revert back to the EA's requirement to deliver a service and the organisation with which they have the relationship, is usually the funder, collaborator or recipient of that service. So, there is a degree of accountability in relationship management and formal accountability, whether by scrutiny, audit or policy direction, is a vital part of that.

However, what is more striking is the complexity and the multitudinous dimensions of these relationships – there appear to be a multiplicity of overlapping and non-complementary formal relationships which appear to hamper the scope and ability of any organisation and their leaders to drive strategic change and to improve delivery. The sheer breadth and range of these relationships (outlined above) provides evidence of the need to manage and respond to those relationships which then leaves little space for organisations to actually identify and respond to needs and opportunities to improve services, whether autonomously or by learning from those to whom they are accountable.

The multiple accountabilities to which EA is subject can pull it in different directions at different times, especially when those yield different priorities or areas for improvement. In doing so they may well hinder rather than enhance relationship development, in that the various mechanisms make it difficult to be effective whilst at the same time driving multiple agendas and meetings. Ultimately this relationship complexity can inhibit both the service improvements they claim to pursue and any accountability they seek to enhance. They also create and sustain short-term, risk-averse and compliance-driven organisational cultures: the priority becomes one of trying to satisfy all of the various accountability regimes rather than innovating to meet users' needs. There is a concern that much of EA's efforts are being pulled into satisfying these relationship regimes rather than the pupil need.

13.2 Findings

- External partners and agencies feel that the 'legacy' word is sometimes overplayed and used as an excuse to explain away things not being done – many external partners would like to see the word legacy banned from future conversations; they believe it distracts.
- Many partners in the wider education system stated that to be collaborative, you have to be responsive to others and EA is not always responsive, regardless of its intent to others and that can make collaboration difficult. Whilst many organisations were able to identify excellent collaboration, this often happened with individuals – and often the relationships is reliant upon that individual and doesn't translate to the corporate EA body.
- External feedback indicates that EA is not 'on top' of the data and therefore query how decisions can be made – there is a recognition that EA IT systems are not purposeful and as a result EA is often reactive.
- As noted above, decision making is seen as cumbersome and a burden and feedback indicates that the default position of EA is that it appears to be afraid to make a mistake and is consequently risk adverse, passive and not progressing at the pace required to effect radical change in the system.
- Whilst many organisations raised the bureaucracy of EA as an impediment to progress and agility, others identified the burdensome operating model as creating a very defined boundary between EA and the children it is meant to serve/support. Principals and the wider system identified that many in EA (and DE by extension) are too removed from operational delivery of education and are therefore too silo-ed into their own thinking and are in fact, despite the best will in the world, not child or pupil centric because the bureaucratic models created actually take effort and energy away from the child.
- Feedback from the wider stakeholder engagement raised queries on EA capacity to engage in an agile manner. Many organisations felt that the EA was not adept at the political processes and how it navigated



political questioning and even responding to ministerial queries or concerns. The engagement with this particular segment of stakeholder (highly influential) therefore requires further development, albeit there is emerging evidence of increasing engagement between EA and political representatives.

- EA has statutory functions in terms of sectoral support and a recurrent feature of stakeholder feedback from the educational system was the effectiveness of sectoral support. There appear to be significant weaknesses in the support offered by EA to CnaG and NICIE in particular, and feedback suggests a lack of willingness at times to engage with those bodies. There appears to be poor understanding of the Irish Medium Sector (IMS) needs, limited workforce planning and policy development to support IMS services including SEN services to children in need. EA has a statutory duty to support these organisations but appears to have limited ability to do so which is reflected in the overall findings and therefore raises concerns on EA's ability to meet its statutory responsibilities. We are aware of a Cross Directorate Group on Support for Irish Medium Education and at a recent Board meeting an update suggested that it had implemented an audit of EA support across all Directorates. It is anticipated that the outcomes of the audit would inform the development of a Cross-Directorate Action Plan – this may go some way to effecting positive change in this regard.
- Statutory partners highlighted that EA was not always a reliable partner – in that EA does not always attend meetings and when EA does attend, a different representative might attend on behalf of the designated representative. At those meetings (sometimes Area Planning and Community Planning for example, though the latter has improved since the appointment of a new Assistant Director), partners and stakeholders felt that EA makes promises and are keen to make promises but are not always good at the delivery.
- As a consequence, stakeholder engagement is not very effective at present, despite communication efforts already underway and identified throughout this report. External stakeholders recognise that EA is an organisation under pressure, and this can 'spill' over into other relationships. However, this is creating a lack of confidence in EA's capacity as a partner, a lack of confidence in its capacity to deliver and a sense that EA is not fulfilling a leadership role in the wider education system.
- External stakeholders report that they regularly encounter a culture of 'that's not my paygrade' decision making, of passing decisions across the organisation, of middle management who are very wedded to their corporate view and not prepared to engage with partners to create co-designed or collaborative delivery. As a result, many outside of EA (and within), believe that these attitudes re-enforce the silo approach to delivery (despite best efforts to create cross-organisational approaches).
- Key quotes from recent feedback included;
 - > "I have worked in the education sector for 20 years and I feel that EA talks to me, it doesn't consult with me"
 - > "The EA does not listen to local partners – it needs to listen and understand our plans and priorities, but they only seem to want to do what they want to do"
 - > "We keep hearing about the lack of 'money'. It's not just money that missing at the moment, but value and expertise – EA is not bringing the depth of insight or guidance that others are seeking from it"

The effectiveness of an organisation's delivery model is often shaped by the environment that it is operating in. The EA is the largest public body in Northern Ireland and given the breadth and scale of its operation, is involved in a huge range of day-to-day activities of life in this region. It is always going to be a difficult task to satisfy all stakeholders, however EA is running the danger of alienating key partners and stakeholders who are



essential for delivery of effective services. We are aware the organisation is taking a more proactive approach to engagement (a new Customer Charter, more engagement with locality networks and more engagement with political parties for example) and that with the appointment of a new Head of Communications, there is an anticipation that a more strategic and aligned approach will result in a more proactive performance of EA communications and a more proactive approach to media engagement. We are aware that further work is to be carried out in relation to the need for EA to have a defining ethos for communication, the need to identify a strategy for communication through the Irish language, and the need to keep children and young people at the centre of the communications strategy.

However further to that reflection, there is a growing appreciation of the role that people, and partners can play in shaping new approaches and informing the effective delivery of public services. Placing people at the heart of the reform process is more commonplace to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. This approach is reported to provide benefits for the public sector (e.g. efficient allocation of scarce resources) and for people (e.g. increased satisfaction with services, building trust). Therefore, any new revised approach to engagement and communication needs to recognise the identified need for greater partnership working and collaboration among EA's partners including greater levels of alignment and integration; and information or education or awareness raising piece is important for delivery of activity. This can be achieved by a revised Engagement Strategy (or similar). Such a strategy might be considered an example of good practice, as such a document sets out explicit organisational objectives and priorities around how bodies actively look to involve and engage their partners and the public.



14. Business Planning

The effectiveness and timeliness of the EA's business planning arrangements, including planning, reporting, celebrating success and addressing under performance.

14.1 Context and Progress to Date

Business planning in EA has evolved since its inception in 2015 with little formal progression of business planning processes until the development of a 2017-2027 Strategic Plan, which articulated the 10-year strategy for the organisation. Cascading from the strategic plan and in fulfilment of its requirements under its MSFM, the EA produces an annual business plan (corporate and directorate levels) which have built in reporting and progress monitoring mechanisms. The 2017-2027 strategic plan is aligned to wider PfG, DE and CYPs strategic priorities and outcomes and is routinely measured against these. The monitoring and reporting of this progress is outlined in other sections (Corporate Governance and Performance Against Strategic Plan).

14.2 EA Approach to Business Planning⁵⁸

Governmental & Departmental	Programme for Government CYP Strategy 2020-2030 DE's Strategic Priorities
Organisational	10 Yr Strategic Plan Vision - Mission - Values - Strategic Policies
	3 Yr Corporate Plan Strategic Policies - 3 yr Corporate Objectives
	Corporate Annual Business Plan Strategic Policies - 1 yr Corporate Objectives
	Directorate Annual Business Plan Directorate Objectives
	Divisional Annual Business Plan Divisional Objectives
	Service Annual Business Plans Service Level Objectives
	Personal Development Plans Employee Objectives

⁵⁸ Education Authority Corporate Planning Management Framework



- EA's ten year (interim) strategic plan 2017-2027 sets out its Vision, Mission and Values as well as the Strategic Priorities for the longer term.
- The three-year Corporate Plan (2018-2021) sets out the corporate objectives in order to deliver against the ten year plan with medium term, manageable and measurable objectives and outcomes. The EA corporate plans act as bridges between EA's long term strategic plan and its short annual tactical planning, the annual business plan.
- The Corporate Annual Business Plan further breaks down the EA corporate objectives set out in the EA's Corporate Plan, setting out what is to be achieved in that year of the three-year term. This plan will identify key organisational objectives and identifies key actors/involvement in the cross-directorate planning and delivery.
- Directorate Annual Business Plans align to the Corporate Annual Business Plan. This plan identifies key objectives that will dominate the work of the directorates in that year and may also contain the same corporate objective as in the corporate business plan where the directorate wishes to set out, in more detail, the key actions that are specific to that directorate in contributing to or delivering against the corporate business plan objective.
- Divisional Annual Business Plans (Assistant Director responsibility) align directly with the Corporate and Directorate Annual Business Plans. They will contain the objectives that will dominate the work of the division in that year. The Plan seeks to report against objectives contained in the corporate or directorate plans where appropriate as well as down to the service level plans. They may contain the operational and business as usual objectives for the division that are routinely reported against at DMT level.
- Service Level Annual Business Plans (Head of Service responsibility) align with the Corporate, Directorate and Divisional Annual Business Plans. They contain objectives that will dominate the work of the service in that year. The Plan reports against objectives contained in the corporate, directorate or divisional plans where appropriate and will also contain the operational and business as usual objectives for the division that are routinely reported against at SMT level.
- Personal Development Plans - the final element of EA's approach to business planning is the Personal Development Plan in which staff are able to plan their development and set their objectives in line with the strategic, corporate and business planning and reporting structure.



Business Planning Processes in Education Authority⁵⁹



Monitoring of performance⁶⁰

Conscious that the EA has embarked upon a new approach to performance improvement and corporate planning, a revised approach to the monitoring of performance and planning has recently taken place. Reporting or monitoring of performance against targets is now through a Quarterly Performance Report which will be produced every quarter and reviewed by CLT and Board. The key reporting and monitoring framework around business and performance planning now includes:

- A cross-directorate Corporate Business Planning and Performance Group (CBPG) has been set up to support the new approach to performance and planning – this group will input into the Quarterly Performance Report. It is a stated ambition of the EA that performance reporting will be supported by quantitative metrics and an aspiration that the Data Insights & Analysis team will provide ongoing support.
- Business Plan objectives and performance forms a key part of DMT monthly meetings. Additional support is provided to DMTs by the Continuous Improvement Team on performance metric measurement and management.

⁵⁹ Education Authority Performance Improvement Framework March 2021

⁶⁰ As above



- Directorate Accountability meetings were established in October 2020 and take place quarterly – the key focus of these meetings is a robust review of recent performance for each directorate. Where it is identified that performance is below expectations there is an opportunity to explore the performance issues in detail and identify appropriate remedial actions. If required, further interventions such as Performance Clinics may be considered.
- CLT then reports progress to the Performance and Engagement committee and to the EA Board and escalate any issues as appropriate. The EA Board then reviews quarterly progress against stated Performance Improvement targets and associated objectives in the Annual Business Plan. This progress is reported to DE on a quarterly basis and also reported GAR meetings.

Performance Improvement Plan

Subsequent to a range of iterations of service improvement plans and service standard reports, for example, the EA has moved towards a holistic and organisation wide approach to performance improvement. The Performance Improvement Framework was signed off at board level in 2020 and provides a strategic focus and framework for EA's continuous improvement journey. This framework was updated in March 2021 and subsequently approved by CLT & Performance & Engagement Committee in April 2021⁶¹.

Review of Business Plans

A review of the business plans and reports produced from 2018 to 2021 has been carried out with a view to capturing a RAG status summary of EA's performance of objectives in its business plans against its strategic plan. In this period EA has achieved a green status for 72.8% of its business planning objectives since 2018. 25.7% of business plan objectives were substantially achieved or delayed and 1.5% were not achieved.

While it is positive that a very small percentage, 1.5% of business planning objectives, are not achieved, effectively EA is achieving just around three out of four of its business planning objectives on time and one in four are almost achieved or achieved with some delay. It is anticipated that improving business planning and reporting processes will result in more realistic and achievable plans.

Performance Under Achievement and Success

In terms of arrangements to celebrate success and address under performance, with specialist resource now in place, business planning and performance culture is being further embedded across the organisation in a more consistent way. EA has a business planning and reporting function in place that sets objectives and reports to DMT, Accountability Review, CLT, EA Board, Committees such as Strategic Planning & Policy Committee as well as to DE, through the GAR meetings, on achievement, delay or non-achievement in delivering objectives. Directorate Accountability Review Meetings were established in October 2020 and have met in October 2020 and January 2021 and will continue to meet quarterly. These meetings provide the opportunity to celebrate successes and address under performance or address any risk presented by an objective being reported as being delayed, not likely to be achieved. Business planning and performance management are two of the components discussed at directorate accountability review meetings. The quarterly reports on the annual business plan, that is the performance against business plan objectives, are discussed and reviewed at these meetings. A schedule has been shared with DE setting out EA's governance and reporting structures around the business plan.

Resourcing Improvement and Planning

The implementation of a Performance Improvement Framework and a Corporate Planning Framework, as well as the often cited outcomes based approach to delivery (OBA) requires effort, energy, coordination and ultimately resourcing. Furthermore, to be wholly effective such improvement and planning framework must rely upon useful business intelligence monitoring and continuous improvement reporting. Consequently, performance planning along with data analytics and insights are inextricably linked and together these are key to forming the foundation for an effective approach to performance and planning matters.

⁶¹ Education Authority – Performance Improvement Framework



14.3 Findings

Evidence suggests that;

- EA has reviewed its corporate performance management framework⁶². We found that, while corporate priorities had clearly been strengthened and identified, the detailed service business plans designed to deliver them were inconsistent and some directorates had stopped producing them. We also found variations in employee development reviews and the setting of objectives, weakening the link between individual performance and overall progress which probably undermines ownership of and accountability for delivery of corporate priorities.
- Action plans were included but did not always link clearly to all corporate measures or priorities. Most business plans included action plans with lead officers, milestones and measures but there was not always a clear and direct link between the priorities identified at the beginning of each business plan and all of the actions included in the action plan. Some had linked their activity to the delivery of the improvement objectives, but in general, there could be a clearer articulation of how the priorities and actions are contributing towards the delivery of the improvement objectives to strengthen the 'golden threads'.
- EA is beginning to improve the co-ordination and presentation of performance information to support decision making and scrutiny but does not yet have a complete overview of performance.
- It is fair to say that the business planning process is evolving. It is clear that EA is trying to prioritise DE strategic priorities and the Children and Young People Strategy, and there is increasing evidence of integration of risk register inputs. There is certainly a sense that the organisation is becoming more mature in its approach, however it does have to be said that it was starting from a fairly low base.
- There is now an EA and DE business planning group and emerging evidence of a more collaborative approach to business planning and alignment. We know that one of these meetings was dedicated to discussing what DE expects to see within EA's Business Plan for the forthcoming year. However, feedback indicates that this process is not without challenge and that the process of business planning is not wholly effective. DE will report that there are varying degrees of listening from EA to DE's priorities and the perception of reluctance to share monitoring information (until it has gone through internal EA CLT and committees – by which time the information is two months after the quarter has ended). This appears somewhat at variance with other ALBs who appear able to provide required information within timeframes agreed. Furthermore, it is our understanding that DE publishes its strategic priorities annually and these are provided to EA and all other ALBs when business plans are commissioned in autumn in advance of a March deadline, so there is adequate notice of DE requirements.
- Feedback from within EA suggests that it can feel under pressure from DE to provide information, particularly around these types of requests for information and feel that DE can at times 'pick through' information provided. From an external perspective we can see that this can be frustrating however, we are also conscious that EA is accountable to DE (and ultimately the Minister) and therefore they are entitled to seek that information in a timely manner.
- There is clearly a tension in the dynamic and process of business planning and the sharing of information between EA and DE typified by recurring delays in getting the EA's Annual Business Plan approved – it is our understanding that in the last three years, this has been delayed until late Autumn - (some six months into the business year) – which is not acceptable by any standards.

⁶² Corporate Planning Management Framework



- What is clear is that business planning needs to work for both parties. From the sponsor department's perspective EA's business plan needs to provide it with appropriate assurance that EA is achieving on DE's priorities. From EA's perspective, business planning effectiveness is critical as it defines the focus of incoming activities (and associated budget and resourcing implications) as well as its governance and reporting responsibilities into DE. There is clearly more work to be done in ensuring that both parties understand the mutual benefits of timely and aligned production of these plans. DE bringing forward its business planning cycle and defining its priorities early may assist in preventing any subsequent obstacles.
- Whilst timeliness may be identified as an issue for business planning production issues, the absence of dedicated analytics and an information function also frustrate the process. These core functions would be able to map and build the data and thus produce real time data on any issues and support progress in business planning matters. The building of this function is a work in progress we understand, but in the meantime, improved metrics or agreed data would help the process (i.e better alignment between business planning and measurement).

There is a sense that over the past twelve months, EA has begun to weave and integrate the corporate business plan, risk and performance, affordability and finance in a better manner than previously. Whilst there is a recognition that the organisation may not have the resource to deliver on these needs just yet, there is an explicit recognition this is a golden thread that the organisation is working towards.



15

15. Corporate Governance

Governance arrangements in line with the principles contained in Cabinet Office Guidance. The appropriateness and effectiveness of existing controls, processes and safeguards should be assessed.

15.1 Context and Progress to Date

The Education Act (NI) 2014 - established the EA and transferred to it the functions of the former Education and Library Boards (ELBs) which are set out in the various Education Orders from 1986 to 2006.

The EA must meet the requirements of extant statutory obligations, and all of the associated standards, policies and strategies set by DE; the conditions and requirements set out in the MSFM agreed with the Department; and other Departmental guidance and guidelines. In addition there is a wider requirement to comply with relevant legislative provisions applicable to all corporate bodies (covering, for example, employers' responsibilities, equality and human rights requirements, confidentiality of personal data, financial probity, health and safety matters, etc.), which from time-to-time may be enacted by the NI Assembly or Westminster Parliament or through EU Directives, International Treaties or United Nations Conventions.

15.2 The Education Authority; Board – composition and role

The EA comprises a Chair appointed by Department of Education (DE); 8 persons nominated in accordance with paragraph 2(1)(b) of Schedule 1 of the 2014 Act; and 12 persons appointed by DE in accordance with paragraph 2(1)(c) of Schedule 1 of the 2014 Act ("the Members") (total Membership of 21).

The EA Board has corporate responsibility for ensuring that the EA fulfils the aims and objectives set by the sponsor department (DE) and approved by the Minister. In addition to the non-exhaustive list of statutory functions set out at above, the EA Board is responsible for:

- establishing the overall strategic direction of the organisation
- ensuring effective financial control;
- monitoring the organisation's performance;
- appointment of the Chief Executive;
- appointment of the Directors and Assistant Directors; and
- demonstrating high standards of corporate governance at all times.

15.3 Committee – legislative requirements

Paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 1 of the 2014 Act provides the EA Board with the power to appoint such committees as it thinks necessary. The EA Board may authorise a committee to appoint sub-committees for such purposes of the committee as the EA Board may approve.

The legislation requires the board:

- to appoint a standing committee to exercise the duty of the EA under the Act to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education.
- to appoint a standing committee to exercise the duty of the EA under the Act to encourage, facilitate and promote the community use of premises of grant-aided schools.
- Teaching Appointments Committee was established under Article 153 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, (as amended by Schedule 3 paragraph 11 (18) of the Education Act (NI) 2014).



The Standing Orders require EA to appoint an Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

The legislation allows the Board of EA to appoint at any time such other committees, as it considers necessary. The EA Board determines the membership and terms of reference of its committees.

Other key features of the Standing Orders in relation to the Board of EA include:

- The EA Board will make a scheme specifying the functions to be discharged and the procedure to be followed by each Committee. Such a scheme is subject to alteration or amendment at any time by resolution of the EA Board and be subject to such conditions as the EA Board will decide.
- The EA Board may at any time dissolve a committee.

15.4 Board, Committee and Operational Arrangements⁶³

The EA Board has corporate responsibility for ensuring that the EA fulfils the aims and objectives set by the sponsor department (Department for Education) and approved by the Minister. In addition to the non-exhaustive list of statutory functions, the EA Board is responsible for:

- establishing the overall strategic direction of the organisation;
- ensuring effective financial control;
- monitoring the organisation's performance;
- appointment of the Chief Executive (with the exception of the first Chief Executive who was appointed by the Department);
- appointment of the Directors and Assistant Directors; and
- demonstrating high standards of corporate governance at all times.

The roles and responsibilities of the Accounting Officer and the Chair of the Board are set out in the Management Statement. The Financial Memorandum also delineates responsibilities and Standing Orders set out the operating procedures of the Board.

Key elements of the Governance Arrangements at Board and Committee level include;

- Board decision making, including setting and reviewing the Authority's long-term objectives, strategy, business plan and annual budget, overseeing operations, management of governance, risk and control.
- The Management Statement which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Accounting Officer and the Chair of the Board, including their responsibilities regarding matters to be presented to the Board.
- A governance structure which has been established through the various Committees of the Board to allow for scrutiny and challenge.
- Board agenda and papers which are presented in a format to ensure Members are focused on strategic matters. Members of the Corporate Leadership Team are available at Board and Committee meetings to answer and address queries.
- All papers presented to Board and Committee meetings are accompanied by an 'executive summary' sheet which summaries the purpose of the paper, the recommendations of officers and the consequences, if any, of approving the paper.
- Workshops have been held for Board Members on corporate governance with a view to ensuring that Members are aware of their responsibilities as a corporate body.

⁶³ Education Authority MSFM April 2019



- The Governance, Risk and Audit Committee exercises a strong challenge function and has requested on various occasions that exercises are undertaken to provide assurance on various matters, in addition to those identified in its Annual Audit Plan.
- The Chief Executive and Directors attend Board meetings to present papers, address queries and provide additional analysis and detail.
- Relevant Directors and Heads of Service are available at Committee meetings to present papers, address queries and provide additional analysis and detail.
- Performance reports against key targets and commitments are provided to the relevant Committee and progress is subsequently reported to the Board by the Chair of the relevant Committee.
- Each Board meeting includes information on financial performance against key targets and commitments and budget integrity.
- The Corporate Risk Register is considered by the Governance Risk and Audit Committee and progress is subsequently reported to the Board by the Chair of the ARAC. Furthermore, a Risk Management Strategy and Policy is in place, which is endorsed by the Chief Executive and GRA Committee.

15.5 Corporate Leadership Team⁶⁴

The Corporate Leadership Team comprises the Chief Executive and the Directors of the organisation and the role of the Corporate Leadership Team is to:

- Set the strategic direction of the organisation; translating DE Policy and EA Board decisions into strategic operational direction and decisions.
- To provide strategic leadership, ensuring that corporate decisions are implemented through directorate structures.
- To provide corporate governance and decision making.
- To ensure the EA vision and values are central to decision making and to model those.
- Maximise the use of all our resources in line with our visions and values.

As part of the new overarching governance arrangements implemented by the Chief Executive Officer, the CLT meets weekly, and its operating model includes:

- **Governance:** Approval of all Board / Committee Agendas / Papers / Presentations.
- **Directorate Specific Issues:** Including Directorate Management Team Notes of Meetings and Directorate Development Day updates.
- **Finance:** update on previous month's MEMR / any other issues.
- **Senior Leadership Team** (made up of CLT plus all Assistant Directors and chaired by a nominated Director): Transformation Programme, Organisational Development, Organisational Change Specific Issues (including structures information).
- **Quarterly Planning & Performance:** review of Risk Registers / Corporate & Directorate Business Plans, Service Standards Report, Priority 1s and Audit Reports.
- **Updates on Corporate Functions:** Equality, Communications, Information Governance, Health & Safety.
- **Audit:** update and review of audit issues, review of ARAC agenda and papers.

⁶⁴ CLT Operating Model



15.6 Directorate Management Team

Directorate Management team meetings comprises the Director and Assistant Directors. It is our understanding that these team meetings, a new feature of governance since the appointment of the new CEO in April 2019, are designed to collate, gather and review information which is then provided to the CLT for review/approval/guidance.

15.7 Director Accountability Meetings⁶⁵

Accountability Review meetings take place quarterly, following the end of each quarter. The Chief Executive, Finance & ICT Director, Assistant Director for Recovery & Transformation meet with each Director and their Business Services Manager (BSM) to review the following for the directorate. The Chief Executive's Office BSM issues the agenda two weeks in advance of the meeting and a Quarterly Accountability Report template is provided to Chief Executive's BSM two working days in advance of meeting.

- Finance
- Recovery and Transformation
- Directorate Risk Management
- Performance
- Recruitment – agency spend
- Absence Management
- Priority One Recommendations and associated actions
- Project Updates from Senior Responsible Officers (SROs)

15.8 Governance Arrangements with Sponsor Department

Governance and Accountability Review Meetings (GAR) are the mechanism through which The Department of Education holds the EA Chair and the Chief Executive accountable for the governance of EA. The GAR meeting is attended by the Permanent Secretary and their senior officers and the Chair, Chief Executive and Directors of the EA.

EA produces an Annual Governance Statement (plus a Mid-Year Governance Statement) that provides assurance on the governance arrangements and their effectiveness to DE and the wider public. This governance arrangement is supplemented by one-to-one meetings between each DE Director and their counterpart in the EA.

Furthermore and underpinning these accountability meetings, the EA has a 10 year Strategic Plan which translates into a three year corporate plan and annual business plan. These plans are created in conjunction with DE taking into account the Programme for Government and DE objectives. The plan is shared with and approved by the EA Board.

Performance report - The Monthly Expenditure Monitoring Report (MEMR) is shared with the EA Board and DE to keep them apprised of the financial position.

EA is monitored by internal and external audit providing the EA Board and the sponsor organisation with assurance regarding contracts within the organisation.

⁶⁵ Directors' Quarterly Accountability Review Meetings



15.9 Key elements of governance arrangements

There are multiple elements which comprise and contribute to overarching governance within EA, but key elements/documents include:

- Draft Corporate Governance Framework 2022-2025.
- Management Statement and Financial Memorandum.
- Standing Orders.
- 10 year Strategic Plan.
- Corporate Plan.
- Annual Business Plan.
- Governance Statement as part of the Annual Report and Accounts.
- The Governance and Accountability Review meetings with the Permanent Secretary.
- A Code of Conduct for Board Members.
- Board Members declaration of interest form on appointment (reviewed on an annual basis).
- Report to Those Charged With Governance completed annually.
- EA Risk Management Strategy.
- Corporate Risk Register.
- DE NDPB Risk Register Alignment Annual Exercise.
- Head of Internal Audit Annual Report.
- Performance Improvement Framework.
- Corporate Planning Management Framework.
- Continuous Improvement framework.
- Governance arrangements within directorates – e.g., Procurement Governance and Compliance, Financial Governance.

As a result, EA has established a very clear corporate governance structure and defined control mechanisms in line with good governance arrangements. Furthermore, in response to an independent review of Operational Governance Arrangements⁶⁶, a new Head of Governance post was created and successfully recruited for in 2021.

Subsequent to a review of Committee Structure arrangements, the Board approved a new committee structure, effective from March 2021. The following committees are now in place

- Strategic Planning and Policy Committee.
- Performance and Engagement Committee.
- Resources and People Committee.
- Governance, Risk and Audit Committee.
- Membership and Teaching Appointments Committee.
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Committee.
- Remuneration Committee.
- Expulsions Committee.

⁶⁶ EA Review of Governance Operational Arrangements April 2020



EA's Scheme of Delegations and Authorisations Annex A and Annex B were amended to reflect EA's new Committee structure. The new Committee structure has been designed so that each Committee now has an overall (and not specific directorate) view of the work being progressed in EA and all Directorates now contribute to the business of each Committee. This should result in improved internal processes and support greater corporate oversight and insight (as well as information) provided to the Board and Committees. It also means that all members of the CLT now attend all Committees and thus Board and CLT are working more collaboratively on shared problems and developing improved relationships, built upon more effective challenge and scrutiny.

15.10 Governance, Risk and Audit Committee⁶⁷

In the recent review of Committee arrangements, the enhancement of corporate governance in the EA has been identified and quantified through the establishment of the Governance, Risk and Audit Committee as an advisory Committee of EA to support it in its responsibilities of reviewing the reliability and integrity of its:

- corporate governance framework;
- management of risk across EA; and
- delivery of internal audit function.

This Committee ensures that the comprehensiveness of EA's governance framework is meeting the Board's and the Accounting Officer's assurance needs and to support nurturing leadership across EA to give clear direction in a dynamic and complex environment.

Further levels of assurance on corporate governance have been created through the establishment of a Performance and Engagement Standing Committee as a standing committee of EA. This Committee's focus is to support EA on the oversight and monitoring of:

- the exercise of EA's statutory functions (so far as its powers extend) in relation to encouraging, facilitating and promoting shared education and community use of schools;
- the exercise of EA's functions in relation to integrated education in the context of the Department of Education's duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education;
- the exercise of EA's functions in relation to Irish Medium schools in the context of the Department's duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education;
- the exercise of EA's statutory functions in relation to children with special educational needs;
- the effectiveness and performance of EA services; and
- the quality of EA's services including EA's stakeholders' experience.

A DE Observer also attends EA GRAC meetings.

The recent appointment of a new Head of Corporate Governance is providing additional and tangible evidence that EA has moved through a process of identifying, defining, developing and enhancing governance arrangements through its structure, decision making processes, delegations and management of risk. The process of aligning all strands of governance and embedding good practice is a long journey and the creation of the governance framework is a key and critical aspect in building that culture of robust corporate governance. The work achieved to date provides an impression of the desire to have robust controls and systems in place that allow for timely, rigorous and effective decision making. However the challenge for the organisation going forward is that in order to achieve this, corporate governance must be understood, owned and valued by all.

⁶⁷ Scheme for Governance Risk and Audit Committee



15.11 Findings

The evidence presented demonstrates a recognition of the importance of a robust approach to corporate governance. It is clear that the organisation's approach to governance has evolved, as the structures, processes and maturity of the organisation have developed. The appointment of the new Chief Executive in 2018 appears to have been the impetus for a fresh injection of motivation and energy to get things done. It is clear that her approach to ensuring that the organisation has effective governance standards in place is now beginning to embed.

The new draft Corporate Governance Framework 2022-25 sets out the integrated approach to governance, identifying five pillars that are essential to a comprehensive and robust governance; accountability and leadership; risk management; planning and performance compliance and assurance; learning and review. Furthermore, the draft framework provides illustration of the roles and responsibilities of all parts of the organisation in ensuring good governance.

Feedback from stakeholders (internal and external), broadly recognise that EA inherited a model which was 'run down', that the legacy organisations demonstrated individual and often conflicting practices and therefore the journey to create a single regional governance model was going to require time. Consequently, most stakeholders have seen significant improvement in the governance arrangements in the past two years and external organisations are beginning to see a more effective governance model. However, some broad themes emerged from feedback and fieldwork.

- There is still a sense that governance is detached from the whole EA population and that the importance or necessity of good governance has not permeated through grades below Heads of Service levels. Consequently, in defining what good governance looks like in EA, there is an obvious starting point – which has to be the child/pupil – but if many EA staff do not understand the importance of good governance or their actions and contribution to it, then does that translate into the child centric practices that EA espouses?
- There is a consensus that the strategic approach to corporate governance is appropriate and that there are improvements emerging in scope, practices and culture around governance. However this has not yet necessarily translated into performance baseline. There is a recognition that the Performance Improvement Framework and the new Corporate Planning Framework require time to bed in, and that the organisation needs to define and refine more its data management and data production in order to effectively report on and measure performance. At that point the governance piece becomes more effective because there is more confidence around the information.
- There is evidence that EA is reflective of what works and what doesn't work well, with senior management reporting how frameworks and policies and internal initiatives are developed in alignment to best practice – with lessons learnt from other organisations and benchmarking to Cabinet Office guidance and Best Practice Orange/Green book standards.
- EA is a large and complex organisation and for many outside of the organisation – it can be difficult to penetrate. The reporting structures and governance structures are not clear or transparent to outsiders, and the experience of outsiders is that EA's approach to governance and decision making is bureaucratic and slow, can be risk adverse and inflexible and not always effective as recently identified in the NIAO report to those charged with governance, which identified recommendations in this area⁶⁸. That belies the implementation of a new approach to corporate governance, because the new framework, processes and systems should in fact support and speed up decision making, support better sharing of information and create more transparency. So if the new approach is still not unlocking a heavily bureaucratic approach – then that becomes more about EA behaviours and culture than the frameworks that are being developed.

⁶⁸ NIAO Draft Report To Those Charged With Governance Sept 2021



- There is evidence of improving levels of awareness of individual roles and responsibilities within both DE and EA. EA for example has provided DE with a list of Directors and Assistant Directors and in return DE has provided EA with a copy of its own organisational chart. Furthermore DE provides all its ALBs with its Governance and Accountability Oversight Manual which sets out the roles and responsibilities of all parties and governance arrangements.
- More broadly there is a sense of an organisation which lacks confidence. This lack of confidence probably emanates from ongoing, robust and very public scrutiny. Lack of confidence also tends to come from a lack of knowledge or a fear to do something wrong. Feedback from internal EA stakeholders did allude to the fear of making mistakes, to a fear of public or political scrutiny. It is clear therefore that the creation of the governance frameworks is only the start of the journey and it will take time to nurture and develop a culture of effective decision making and a confident workforce.
- In our review we note that the Head of Corporate Governance is based in HRLS Directorate. We thought this a curious placement as most governance roles sit within the CEO function.
- A key and notable gap in accountability and the emerging governance framework is the line of accountability between EA and the Minister. There are clear lines of accountability and governance reporting into the EA Board and into DE (GAR, represented through the Permanent Secretary). It is our observation that EA has a high sense of accountability to its own Board, but a low sense of accountability to the Minister. Under section 3.1 of the EA MSFM, the Minister is accountable to the Assembly for the activities and performance of the EA, however there appears to be limited sense of Ministerial involvement in EA activities nor its governance regime. We recognise that the DE Permanent Secretary is the Departmental Accounting Officer, but ultimately it is the Minister who is accountable to the Assembly for EA's performance and therefore we would expect to a greater line of accountability between EA and the Minister. We have however noted that the incumbent Minister has had several meetings with the Chair and Chief Executive of EA, though these tend to be on an ad hoc basis rather than through any formal arrangements.

EA has made significant progress in defining good governance and in creating suitable frameworks to deliver governance. There is evidence of high levels of awareness of the importance of good governance, across all aspects of organisational life and the roles and responsibilities of each player within EA. The new Corporate Governance Working Group, established in 2022 with a focus on all aspects of corporate governance with the aim of enhancing, strengthening, and aligning governance arrangements in EA. Clearly, EA has 'strategically prioritised' corporate governance and the resultant frameworks testify that. There is however further work to be done in linking the internal EA governance culture to an outcomes-based approach; to child and pupil welfare and development and to ensuring that all staff, across all parts of the organisation fully subscribe to this refreshed approach to governance matters.



16

16. Accountability of Schools

Whether the EA has sufficient powers to hold schools accountable for the way they manage their finances; and the extent to which the EA is making sufficient use of those powers.

16.1 Context and Progress to Date

The EA is the Funding Authority for all grant-aided schools covered by the Common Funding Scheme. All controlled and maintained schools are funded by the EA. The Education (1998 Order) (Commencement No 8) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016: No 207 (C.14) transferred the Funding Authority role to the EA for voluntary grammar schools and grant-maintained integrated schools.

In addition to funding allocated directly to school budgets by means of the relevant funding stream, schools will also have access to central funds for specified purposes and this Scheme sets out common arrangements governing disbursement of these funds by the EA, as Funding Authority for all schools.

Article 5(1) of the 2003 Order provides for the delegation of the management of a school's budget share under the Common Funding Scheme to be subject to such conditions as may be imposed by this Scheme or as may be imposed in accordance with the Scheme, by the EA. Consequently, the EA is required to set out the conditions under which the Board of Governors of each controlled and maintained school is given delegated authority. In imposing such conditions, Article 5(2) of the 2003 Order (as amended) requires the EA to have regard to any guidance issued by the Department as to the conditions it regards as appropriate for imposition by the EA.

Voluntary grammar schools and grant-maintained integrated schools are subject to separate funding arrangements with the relevant Financial Memoranda operated by the EA.

It is important to note that arrangements for VG and GMI schools are different to Controlled and Maintained Schools in particular, the Board of Governors of VG and GMI schools are the employing authority, and, as such, are responsible for the employment of all staff (both teaching and non-teaching) in their school.

Local Management of Schools (LMS)

The Local Management of Schools (LMS), introduced in 1990, changed the way in which schools are funded and managed, by giving Boards of Governors and school principals the autonomy to make decisions on resource allocation and priorities in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

The aim of the Local Management of Schools (LMS) was to secure a new form of governance by re-defining roles and responsibilities amongst various interested parties – the DE, the former Education and Library Boards, schools, teachers, parents and pupils. DE had identified that the overall objective of LMS was to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

Under the Local Management of Schools funding arrangements, the EA is required to pass on the calculated share of each funding stream budget directly to all schools (VG, GMI, Controlled and Maintained), maximising the delivery of available resources to the classroom.

Under the application of the Common Funding Scheme (CFS), the Board of Governors of every school receives a delegated budget to meet the on-going costs of running their school, enabling them to plan and use resources to maximum effect in accordance with their school's needs and priorities.

The EA is required to set out the conditions under which the Board of Governors of each Controlled and Maintained school is given delegated authority and its delegated budget. In imposing any conditions, EA must always have regards for guidance issued by DE.

VG and GMI schools have direct control of their finances, and the conditions applied to these schools are subject to separate arrangements, operated under a financial memorandum. The majority of VG and GMI schools operate as companies limited by guarantee and/or charities, and they all have direct control of their



finances. Unlike Controlled and Maintained schools, whose annual funding and outturn positions are included within the EA's annual accounts, all VG and GMI schools must prepare their own, externally audited, set of annual accounts⁶⁹. It is important to note that any overspend on annual budgets by VG and GMI schools must be financed by the schools from their own or bank (overdraft) resources.

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 sets out the legislative framework for the development and implementation of the CFS⁷⁰.

The application of formula funding, and the delegation of financial and managerial responsibilities to Boards of Governors, are key elements in the Department's overall policy to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools by;

- Enabling Boards of Governors and Principals to plan and use resources (including their most valuable resource, their staff), to maximum effect in accordance with their own needs and priorities; and
- Making schools more responsive to parents, pupils, the local community and employers.

Conditions specific to the approval and quantum of accrued surpluses and deficits are specified in the EA Guidance on Financial and Management Arrangements⁷¹. Furthermore, EA requires that Controlled and Maintained schools aim to contain expenditure within their allocated budget. Schools should not accumulate surpluses in excess of five per cent of their delegated budget or £75,000, whichever is the lesser, unless they are being accumulated for specific purposes.

Permission for schools to overspend, that is incur a deficit, is subject to the EA not exceeding its recurrent budget, an upper limit of five per cent of a school's budget share or £75,000, whichever is the lesser and a Board of Governor approved plan demonstrating that the deficit can be cleared or substantially reduced during the period of the plan.

As with Controlled and Maintained schools, Voluntary Grammar (VG) and Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools are allocated fully delegated budgets via the CFS. The limits imposed for Controlled and Maintained schools (five per cent or £75,000, whichever is the lesser) do not apply to GMI and VG schools. If a VG or GMI school underspends against its budget, the unspent cash is held in a commercial bank account. However, any school overspends against budget must be covered out of the school's assets, a credit bank balance or, if needs be, by a bank overdraft.

⁶⁹ NIAO The Financial Health of Schools. 2018

⁷⁰ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/common-funding-scheme-2019-2020-final-draft.pdf>

⁷¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/common-funding-scheme-2019-2020-final-draft.pdf>



16.2 Current State

As of March 2021, 432 schools had a year-end deficit of more than £10k (30 in Nursery sector, 320 in Primary sector and 82 in Post Primary sector).

The legislation provides that delegation of the management of a school's budget share under the CFS may be subject to such conditions as imposed by the EA. In accordance with this legislative provision, the EA may restrict the authority delegated to individual Boards of Governors where it believes that the school cannot operate within the level of resources it has at its disposal. Such restrictions can be used to ensure that planned and actual expenditure are acceptable to the EA.

However, whilst the legislation provides EA with the power to suspend the right to a delegated budget for example, by virtue of Article 6(5) of the 2003 Order, the members of a Board of Governors of a school shall not incur any personal liability in respect of anything done in good faith in the exercise or purported exercise of their powers to spend any sums made available to them in respect of a schools' budget share⁷².

A Board of Governors of a grant aided school in Northern Ireland is constituted as a 'body corporate' by virtue of Article 40 of the Education (NI) Order 1996⁷³. As a consequence, Governors are not Directors (in a company sense) and therefore their voluntary positions have to retain exemption of liability (provided, as the Scheme refers, they are acting in good faith and following EA (i.e. the Funding Authority) advice and guidance).

16.3 Surplus Deficit Working Group (SDWG) Review 2019-20

In response to the potential consequences to EA's financial position as a result of the increase in deficits and the drawdown of the schools accumulated surplus a Working Group on Surpluses and Deficits was reconvened to consider how all schools could be more effectively monitored and supported to live within their available resources. The aim of the group was to reduce and mitigate any risks to EA (as the funding authority) and by extension DE; to support and improve effective financial planning in all schools; to support and monitor schools in surplus or deficit positions; and to create more robust financial governance mechanisms between schools and EA as the Funding Authority.

EA, as the funding authority for schools, has a monitoring role of finances in schools and reports monthly to DE on the Controlled and Maintained schools through the MEMR process. However, feedback from EA suggests that the EA's Schools Finance Team lacks adequate resource to monitor the financial situation of every school and therefore the impact of the monitoring and control function is limited both through lack of resource and the fact that there are no clear mechanisms to address such circumstances.

The Surplus Deficit Working Group has proposed an escalation procedure, however, this new process, if adopted will certainly require a cross directorate team in place to provide support and analysis to the panel and to monitor and support the school through the implementation of required actions.

The issues encountered by EA, as the Funding Authority are well rehearsed in that earlier reviews of LMS identified governance issues with the scheme and that whilst learning quality may have improved, reviews identified cost and budgetary management issues^{74 75}. However, there is direct impact to EA's financial position as a result of increasing number of schools in deficit and running surpluses. We do note that the SDWG provided a set of recommendations for action which required implementation – we highlight the urgency in ensuring that these actions are in fact implemented to address matters addressed throughout the sections above.

⁷² The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

⁷³ The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 No. 274 (N.I. 1) PART III. Article 40

⁷⁴ An initial analysis of the impact of formula funding and LMS on the management of NI Schools. 1997. Research Report Series. University of Ulster and Department of Education

⁷⁵ Local Management of Schools. Report by the NI Comptroller and Auditor General 2004



There is a broad recognition that the financial position of schools has declined – for example, NIAO Financial Health Of Schools report in 2018 highlighted the precarious position of school finances and estimated that there had been a 9% reduction in the General School Budget up to 2016- 2017⁷⁶, a trend which has continued today – IFS highlights that school spending per pupil is lowest in Northern Ireland of all the four nations of the United Kingdom⁷⁷. Furthermore, the NIAO report highlights the number of Controlled and Maintained schools with a surplus is decreasing and the number of schools with a deficit is increasing. Equally the number of VG and GMI schools with surpluses is decreasing. As a result, there is a direct impact in the base financial position for EA and school budgetary management, and these pressures raise fundamental questions on EA's ability to ensure schools are accountable for their budget and financial management.

16.4 Findings

The findings suggest that:

- There is widespread acceptance from internal and external stakeholders that the Common Funding Scheme requires refreshing. There is significant concern that a high percentage of schools are operating in deficit positions, whilst others accrue and continue to accrue surpluses. It would appear that the current funding model does not meet school needs and that the funding model is underpinned by an over-engineered scheme which is reliant upon school governor volunteers with limited financial skills to manage on behalf of EA.
- As regards the transfer of the Funding Authority role to the EA for voluntary grammar schools and grant-maintained integrated schools, feedback suggests that this transfer was not without issue as it appears that this extension of the EA's remit took time to bed in. We have been made aware that, there were a number of occasions when the Department would request schools funding information from the EA, and data on controlled and maintained schools would be provided but VG/GMI schools data would be omitted from the return, which suggests that EA did not have sufficient resource/management in place to monitor and oversee this extension of functions.
- A broad area of feedback concerned the capacity and capability of schools to manage their own budgets. Boards of Governors are composed of a range of local individuals who are there for the right reasons (i.e. they have an attachment or relationship to the school), however the legislation specifies how many governors the EA, DE or other appointing bodies can appoint, raising the queries on the broad capacity and capability of the whole board to undertake all its functions/activities). Whilst EA has a significant role more broadly in governor appointments and through other aspects of school management including Schemes of Management, LMS and CFS, - including the authority and responsibility to support/challenge schools and their running of a school - there is a sense that EA still does not have sufficient human resource to effectively manage or oversee the process.
- EA is the funding authority of many schools (i.e. for all grant aided schools and funding agent for special schools), and it has authority to support/challenge schools. The legislation does provide for EA, and it is not powerless providing it uses the data and processes effectively. Feedback from EA indicates that existing arrangements limit the influence of EA at the outset and makes it difficult to exert influence or any control on Board of Governor decision making – particularly in relation to financial matters (re SDWG above). This means that if a school then gets into a deficit position, the levers available to EA (as outlined above) are limited, however the liability appears to lie with EA as the deficit numbers are included in EA budgets and the figures that it reports on to various agencies.

⁷⁶ NIAO. The Financial Health of Schools. 2018

⁷⁷ Comparisons of school spending per pupil across the UK. IFS 2021



- It is our understanding that the EA is both the managing authority of a large proportion of schools in Northern Ireland and the Funding Authority (for all schools). Furthermore (alongside CCMS and individual school Boards of Governors) EA has a duty to ensure schools are effectively and efficiently managed. It is our understanding of the legislation that the delegated responsibility of schools continues only insofar as they are following policies and rules. EA can (statutorily) restrict this delegated authority and the associated delegated budget (Controlled and Maintained sectors). The EA also is wholly responsible for central funding support and determining when such funds can be used to support schools (outside of the delegated formula budget). It is our understanding that this has seldom been applied and as a result, the decision not to address these matters (within the authority outlined above) can be a contributory factor in school budgetary fluctuations. Furthermore, we understand from review of the legislation that if EA has evidence to demonstrate that the financial irregularities of schools (significant deficits/surpluses) are due to or exacerbated by the formula allocations, they (as the funding authority for all schools) should be providing this evidence to inform any future change. Feedback from the wider sector indicates that the position of EA and others is that the 'formula' is to blame (Notwithstanding the 'formula' issue, if there is not enough funding for all of the schools in NI, then no distribution methodology will make it so that there is enough money). As a result, there have been a number of inconclusive reviews and amendments with formula distributions since its introduction in 2005.
- Regardless of the context set out above and extent of EA's authority in this matter, feedback indicated that despite the frustrations of trying to exert influence and ensure adequate governance, EA appears to have limited resources to monitor, support and develop boards of governors and to put in place effective school improvement, school effectiveness or school governance interventions.
- More broadly, the school system feedback does indicate that they are experiencing increasing accountability and as that accountability increases, many schools rely upon EA for support – support EA cannot provide at present due to reasons outlined above.

Clearly the school governance and wider accountability is an issue which both EA and the school system continues to grapple with. We do note that the ultimate sanction of suspension has not been enforced by EA (and by extension DE) on any school in breach of the guidance, which we believe provides no restraint to any school to stay within the guidance. There is a need to review the effectiveness of the present arrangements and it is our understanding that the model will be within scope of the Independent Review of Education and consideration of the levels of funding and extent of EA authority should be included within that reflection.



17

17. Information Management

The effectiveness of the EA's information management arrangements.

17.1 Context and Progress to Date

“Managing information effectively and appropriately is essential to the delivery of secure, seamless and efficient operational services. It provides the basis for informed decision making and the platform upon which performance can be measured. Modern, knowledge-based service delivery underpinned by effective information architecture and open standards will support government to build more transparent, trusted and efficient information exchange processes”⁷⁸.

Information is needed to inform policy development and make evidence-based decisions, as well as to ensure accountability to parliament and the public. At an operational level, information can be used to drive efficiency and service improvement - enhancing public services, whilst at the same time reducing waste and improving value for money. Given the importance of information to the public sector, there is therefore clearly a need for it to be consistently and effectively managed, protected and exploited.

Information Management has become an increasing challenge for organisations due to the continuing development of technological advances, legislative requirements, joint working/partnership arrangements and central government requirements. Clearly, information comes in many forms – policy documents, research papers, minutes, statistics, operational data, images, photographs, databases, datasets, personal data – and is held in a variety of printed and electronic formats.

However in many organisations, information is often silo-ed and most organisations struggle to find appropriate data of sufficient quality. This can lead to valuable time being wasted challenging data quality and questioning the truth, rather than focusing on decision making.

Within EA, information management is classified as Information Governance and is currently led by an experienced Head of Service, who also acts as the organisation's Data Protection Officer (DPO).

The dedicated Information Governance team is responsible for developing and implementing an Information Governance framework across EA to ensure compliance with Information Governance related legislation (including UK GDPR / the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000) and provides support and guidance to EA staff. In April 2019 the EA approved a permanent expanded team structure so that EA would have the capacity to meet the increased regulatory requirements of GDPR, FOI obligations and to provide the DPO service to schools.

Key features of EA's approach to information management include:

- EA monitors and reports on its performance in relation to FOI, SAR, Data Breach and Data Protection Training as part of its corporate metrics.
- EA privacy notices describe how personal information about Children and Families, EA employees and the general public is collected and used. EA has a record of its data processing activities in Information Asset Registers (IAR) for each of its directorates to ensure compliance with data protection legislation and for accountability purposes and is in the process of reviewing and updating those IARs.

⁷⁸ Information Principles for the UK Public Sector, 2013.31



- The EA has established an integrated governance framework. As part of that wider revised approach to governance matters, a new information risk management structure has been implemented in all directorates which includes a Senior Information Risk Owner, Information Risk Owners, Information Asset Owners and Information Asset Administrators. The Information Governance team has provided guidance and advice on these identified roles^{79 80}.
- Information Asset Registers have begun to be implemented across the organisation (delayed due to Covid-19).
- A Combined Legacy Retention & Disposal Schedule approved by PRONI which sets out the storage limitations and disposal arrangements for records created by the ELBs and inherited by EA⁸¹.
- The introduction and implementation of a suite of new practices and policies relating to Data Protection (for example, Data Breach Management procedures, Data Impact Assessments, Data Protection Training and Clear Desk Policy).
- A range of policies have been implemented to support the embedding of a corporate approach to information governance including Criminal Records Information policy and guidance on email encryption and usage.

17.2 Findings

Findings indicate that:

- At present EA does not have an Information Management strategy nor aligned policies around Information and Records management; security policy. There is however emerging evidence of a corporate approach to an Information Asset Register.
- There is however evidence of a defined approach to Information Governance which supports the organisation in the discharge of its compliance and statutory requirements.
- There is evidence of an enhanced approach to defining EA's roles and responsibilities in ensuring legal and regulatory compliance, but it is difficult at times to see how this extends to other areas such as communications and publications schemes and how EA makes it easier for the public to access EA information. A key feature of feedback was the inaccessibility of information in EA and how organisations and individuals struggled to access the correct information or individuals – this was a particular feature of feedback from the school community.
- There is limited evidence of an integrated technology environment that supports the management, protection and exploitation of information which is fully aligned to the emerging Corporate Governance Framework.
- Information management and digital services consistently emerged as a theme from our evidence taking sessions. The main issues raised with us were:
 - > The inability to access and share data/information to provide a coherent and joined up response particularly to individuals.
 - > The availability of, and ability to share, data and information to improve the planning, delivery and efficiency of services; and
 - > The opportunities to improve efficiency and reduce costs. These are issues of people, processes and technology.

⁷⁹ EA Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) Interim Guidance and Procedure

⁸⁰ Role of the Senior Information Risk Owner, Role of the SIRO, IRO and IAO guidance

⁸¹ EA Interim Combined Legacy Retention and Disposal Schedule



A modern and efficient public service body cannot operate without effective and functional information and aligned ICT services. Effective information management can only be done through a coherent strategy and programme which prioritises, plans and delivers improvements in digital and information services to provide better outcomes for the stakeholder. We believe that information management within EA is defined as information governance - however, in our opinion, these are two different things. We believe that EA is making effective progress in addressing and securing a robust approach to information governance, but the handling and dissemination of information (inside and outside of the organisation) is not yet fully developed. This is not simply a matter of technology and integrated ICT systems. Data quality, standards, protection and sharing are all key issues that must also be resolved. Implementing such a strategy will require strong cross organisational leadership. The programme should prioritise, at the outset, the changes that are necessary for the delivery of integrated information services to the stakeholder in high priority services. This is complex work with significant risks as well as opportunities.



18 Relationship with DE

The effectiveness of the sponsor relationship between the EA and the Department of Education. This should include consideration of arrangements within both DE and EA

18.1 Context and Progress to Date

“For the system to work well, the relationship between a department and its bodies cannot be just about oversight. An effective partnership must be based on trust, clarity of accountability, and a shared understanding of purpose and outcomes.” John Manzoni, Chief Executive of the Civil Service and Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary⁸².

The Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM), revised October 2019, defines the relationship between DE and EA. The MSFM sets out the broad framework within which the DE and EA and operate and engage outlining the formal framework.

As an Arm’s Length Body of DE, the partnerships/relationships between Arm’s Length Bodies (ALBs) and the department is critical to ensure the delivery of high-quality public services and the current MSFM (future Partnership Agreement) between the sponsor department and the Arm’s Length Body sets out the overall governance framework through which these bodies should operate. By extension therefore it is always critical that sponsor departments and their Arm’s Length Bodies have certain level of engagement which creates and supports the flow of assurance and decision making and ultimate use of public money.

The Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice (the Code) sets out the overarching framework of the relationship and governance arrangements between sponsor departments and their Arm’s Length Bodies and the code provides explicit guidance that there should be strategic alignment between the aims, objectives and expected outcomes and results of the ALB and department concerned. Departments and ALBs should be clear about the outcomes they are seeking to achieve, and when planning and discussing performance focus on what high-level outcomes the ALB is required to achieve⁸³.

The benefits that arise from an effective working partnership are clear: the right engagement and assurance avoids costly and inefficient use of time and duplication of work due to disproportionate oversight, while managing risk well.

The Code sets out the five principles which define the working relationship, and it is along the terms of this code that we will examine the working relationship between DE and EA.

The review has classified findings for this section under the five headings from the Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice March 2019.

Purpose⁸⁴

Partnerships work well when the purpose, objectives and roles of Arm’s-Length Bodies are mutually understood; reviewed on a regular basis; and clearly set out in relevant documents. There is absolute clarity about lines of accountability between departments and Arm’s-Length Bodies. In exercising statutory functions Arm’s-Length Bodies have clarity about how their purpose and objectives align with those of departments⁸⁵.

⁸² Partnerships between departments and arm’s length bodies; code of good practice. The Cabinet Office 2017

⁸³ The Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice May 2019

⁸⁴ Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice March 2019

⁸⁵ Cabinet Office, Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s-Length Bodies: Code of Good Practice, Cabinet Office, London, 2017, p. 4, www.gov.uk/government/publications/partnerships-with-arms-length-bodies-code-of-good-practice



Findings indicate that⁸⁶

- Appropriate governance and accountability frameworks are in place including the MSFM, which provide definition and clarity around the roles and responsibilities of the partners in the relationship. The MSFM outlines the role and purpose of the EA, provides definition of the lines of accountability and provides clarity on how the priorities and objectives of the DE and EA should align.

Assurance

Partnerships work well when departments adopt a proportionate approach to assurance, based on Arm's-Length Bodies' purpose and a mutual understanding of risk. Arm's-Length Bodies have robust governance arrangements in place; departments give arm's-length bodies the autonomy to deliver effectively. Management information exists to enable departments and Arm's-Length Bodies to assess performance⁸⁷

Findings indicate that⁸⁸

- There is evidence of robust governance arrangements in place (primarily driven through GAR meetings).
- There is further evidence of DE and EA representation on various partnership bodies to implement and deliver on DE policies and priorities.
- There is evidence of reporting systems in place (from Board through to CLT) from EA into DE and the provision of assurance on matters.
- There is evidence of improving collaboration between DE and EA in the development of EA corporate and business plans and monitoring and reporting of these plans⁸⁹.
- Management information does exist and is shared between DE and EA to report on matters within scope.
- However, there was significant feedback indicating that budgets are under intense scrutiny. Whilst this is to be expected, there was feedback that there are high levels of scrutiny at times, and we found that DE (in particular) can over reach into EA and exert its influence and control at times (at corporate and individual level).

Value

Partnerships work well when departments and Arm's-Length Bodies share skills and experience in order to enhance their impact and deliver more effectively. Arm's-Length Bodies are able to contribute to policy making and broader departmental priorities. There is a focus on innovation, and on how departments and Arm's-Length Bodies work together to deliver value for money⁹⁰

Findings indicate that;

- Whilst there is evidence of improving and strengthening personal relationships at senior levels across DE and EA, there is still some tension in defining the roles of both organisations. EA appears to have limited input into policy making and from a DE perspective is seen (broadly) as an implementing body solely. EA for its part appears to lack confidence to challenge what it considers poor policy development and this limits its influence in delivering and implementing.

⁸⁶ EA Education Committee Papers

⁸⁷ As above

⁸⁸ Quarterly DE/EA Stocktake meetings; DE/EA Advance GAR meetings

⁸⁹ Quarterly meetings between DE and EA Directors

⁹⁰ Partnerships between Departments and Arm's Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice March 2019



- There was considerable feedback from all stakeholders across the sector that DE policy can be seen as outdated and not reflective of a modern education system. Many stakeholders felt that DE was slow to react to events and often took a cautious approach to policy. However, many stakeholders within EA felt that DE policy took limited cognisance of implementation or of impact of policy on the ground and there were many incidences of feedback that DE made policy announcements, but EA was informed of these through the media and not from the department itself.
- As a result, there is an imbalance in the policy development and implementation relationship with some degrees of separation between the two, rather than a tight alignment. There is a sense that there is difficulty in matching the paces of DE and EA and that one often holds up the other either in policy development or implementation.

Engagement

Partnerships work well when relationships between departments and Arm's-Length Bodies are open, honest, constructive and based on trust. There is mutual understanding about each other's objectives and clear expectations about the terms of engagement.⁹¹

Findings indicate that;

- The quality of engagement between DE and EA has improved. There is a sense that at individual director to director level, these relationships are often beneficial. However, the adjective used by most stakeholders to describe the EA/DE relationship is functional and not collaborative.
- In trying to understand the functional aspect of the relationship and the absence of collaboration, feedback indicates that;
 - > The engagement at corporate level appears to be less effective than at individual levels.
 - > DE is seen as operating within its own silos and not always presenting a corporate position and as a consequence, DE does not always present functional alignment which makes it difficult for EA to respond to.
 - > Conversely many outside of EA are frustrated by inconsistent levels of engagement, how there are inconsistent levels of information provided (sometimes too much, sometimes none at all and other times the wrong information).
 - > This presents a picture of priorities not aligning and no clear measures for success agreed on both sides despite the formal frameworks in place to develop, progress and monitor success.

Leadership

Partnerships work well when departments and Arm's Length Bodies demonstrate good leadership to achieve a shared vision and effective delivery of public services. Strong leadership will provide inspiration, instil confidence and trust and empower their respective teams to deliver good outcomes for citizens.

⁹¹ Partnerships between Departments and Arm's Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice March 2019



Findings indicate that;

- There is frustration within both DE and EA at what each other organisation's priorities are. At times it appears there is limited common ground – that DE creates policy and EA implements (whether or not it was consulted in policy formulation). There is a sense that the leadership piece is still in development, because the two organisations have not developed an effective rhythm of working together. It would appear there is no golden thread running through DE into EA and through all the various policy and procedures and reporting flows – this is the leadership piece, and it appears to still be absent – much to the frustration of everyone involved.

The relationship between DE and EA is an evolving one and there are clearly frustrations on both sides. The aged and complex policy environment, the need for better definition of the roles of all actors in the education system and the need for better alignment of EA delivery planning to DE priorities are all causes of frustration. The legislation and MSFM appear to give DE limited levers to hold EA to account and for its part, in the past EA was at times difficult to hold to account. That situation is improving but there is still variance in the expectations of both parties in terms of delivery and working together. It is not clear that the common purpose required to enable effective working relationship is well articulated between the two bodies and a failure to establish baseline costs and activities within EA and a constant need to 'plug funding gaps' as well as ongoing social and media publicity, can put a strain on the relationship and challenge confidence levels.

There is a sense that the DE/EA relationship is paternalistic/governance heavy and that the Department, for a variety of reasons, creates conditions to deliver within key line of sight. It was difficult at times to understand how either organisation defined 'good' and therefore there is limited evidence of co-design/collaborative and practitioner led delivery with Department and EA devolving more responsibility to those that know.

There are signs that Covid-19 has placed additional stress on the relationships and whilst EA has some autonomy, with a roadmap provided by DE; ultimately it is DE who chooses how far EA is allowed to follow that road. Both organisations appear to work at different paces, with sometimes different objectives and as a result both organisations need to find the balance between good governance and best value.

The characteristics of the DE/EA relationship can be defined by the development and evolution of formal frameworks through which matters are discussed and developed. The MSFM and other governance documents provide the formal architecture or the framework for the relationship to develop and nurture. However good the formal structures are, much of the quality of the relationship will come down to the individuals involved and their willingness to put time and effort into creating effective relationships. There is widespread agreement that good relationships are characterised by 'trust' and 'mutual respect', by 'communication' and by "being clear about what we expect from them and what they can expect from us". Neither organisation has fully explained to the other what they can expect from each other.. as yet.



19

19. EA Board

The effectiveness of the strategic leadership, direction, support and guidance provided by the board. This should include consideration of whether the Board has an appropriate balance of skills, experience, independence and knowledge, including for the effective discharge of its challenge function.

19.1 Context and Progress to Date

The role, remit, membership and responsibilities of the EA Board are set out in the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum⁹².

The EA Board has corporate responsibility for ensuring that the EA fulfils the aims, objectives, actions and targets set by DE and approved by the Minister, for ensuring the safeguarding of public funds and for promoting the efficient, economic and effective use of staff and other resources by the EA. To this end, and in pursuit of its wider corporate responsibilities, the EA Board shall ensure that the EA activities are consistent with its functions, services, duties and powers as set out in the legislation and that it complies with all relevant statutes.

Accordingly, EA Board carries out the following functions:

- Establishes the overall strategic direction of the EA within the policy and resource framework determined by DE;
- Participates, as appropriate, in the performance management framework determined by DE for EA's executive team including setting and assessing the annual performance objectives;
- Constructively challenges the EA's executive team in their planning, target setting and delivery of performance;
- Ensures that DE is kept informed of any issues which are likely to impact on the strategic direction of the EA or on the attainability of its targets, and determine the steps needed to deal with such changes;
- Ensures that any statutory or administrative requirements for the use of public funds are complied with; that the EA operates within the limits of its statutory authority and any delegated authority agreed with DE, and in accordance with any other conditions relating to the use of public funds; and that, in reaching decisions, the EA takes into account all relevant guidance issued by DoF and DE;
- Ensures that the EA Board receives and reviews regular financial information concerning the management of the EA; is informed in a timely manner of any concerns about the activities of the EA; and provides positive assurance to DE that appropriate action has been taken on such concerns;
- Demonstrates high standards of corporate governance at all times, including using the independent audit committee to help the EA Board to address the key financial and other risks facing the EA;
- Participates in any DE review of the EA;
- Represents the EA on other bodies;
- Appoints, with the approval of DE, the Chief Executive to the EA; and
- Participates as DE considers appropriate in the performance management framework determined by DE for setting the EA executives' performance objectives and for determining annual pay progression.

⁹² Education Authority Management Statement and Financial Memorandum



19.2 Board membership

The constitution of the EA Board is set out in the Education Act (NI) 2014. The Board comprises a Chairperson appointed by the Minister and 20 members who are nominated by a range of interests

- 8 political members who were nominated by political parties according to the D'Hondt mechanism;
- 4 members representative of the interests of the Transferors (the 3 main Protestant churches) of Controlled schools;
- 4 members representative of the interests of the Trustees of Catholic Maintained schools;
- 1 member representative of the interests of Integrated schools;
- 1 member representative of the interests of Irish medium schools;
- 1 member representative of the interests of Voluntary Grammar schools; and
- 1 member representative of the interests of Controlled Grammar schools.

19.3 Individual Board member responsibility

Section 3.5.5 of the EA Management Statement and Financial Memorandum outlines the responsibilities of the individual members of the Board of EA. Key accountabilities include;

- Complying at all times with the Code of Conduct that is adopted by the EA and with the rules and guidance relating to the use of public funds and to conflicts of interest;
- Abiding by the Seven Principles of Public Life, as laid down by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and with the rules and guidance relating to the use of public funds and to conflicts of interest;
- Undertaking induction training and any other training considered necessary;
- Not misusing information gained in the course of their public service for personal gain or for political profit, nor seeking to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons or organisations; to declare publicly and to the EA Board any private interests that may be perceived to conflict with their public duties; and to take all reasonable steps to safeguard public information and comply with Data Protection legislation;
- Bringing an independent challenge to bear;
- Holding an individual and collective responsibility to ensure that the EA Board operates effectively and fulfils the aims, objectives, actions and targets approved by DE;
- Complying with the EA Board's rules on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality and of business appointments;
- Acting in good faith and in the best interests of the EA; and
- Complying with the Freedom of Information Act.

Critically, the MSFM sets out that individual Board member should also:

- Make a constructive contribution to the work of the EA Board and use their skills and experience to inform group discussion;
- Ensure that EA Board decisions take proper account of guidance provided by the Minister/Department and promote and work for consensus in the decision making processes of the EA Board;
- Be prepared to participate actively in the work of the EA Board and its committees; and
- Make the commitment of time necessary to fulfil their role as a member of the EA Board, and any associated committees.



19.4 Terms of membership

In the MSFM (3.5.1) there is an acknowledgement that the 2014 Act does not provide for a term of office of specified length for political members but provides that political members shall cease to be appointed (and new nominations shall be sought) in the Education Authority event of certain changes in the Executive and Assembly as defined under the Northern Ireland 1998 Act (e.g. an Assembly election).

Furthermore the members representing the interests of transferors, trustees and the respective school sectors will be appointed after consultation with the bodies representing such interests. These members usually serve two terms of office.

“Appointed member” will be appointed for a specified period of not more than 4 years and members will hold and vacate office in accordance with the terms of their respective appointments. An appointed member may be reappointed when their period of office has expired and reappointments will be carried out in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI.(MSFM 3.5.1).

List of members and duration of membership is provided in Appendix 4.

19.5 Committees

Under section 3.5.2 of the MSFM 'the EA Board will establish standing committees to promote shared education and the community use of school premises. It will also establish an Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and may also appoint such other committees as it considers necessary'.

When EA was formed in 2015, the approved Committee structure included the following committees;

- Audit and Risk Assurance;
- Teaching Appointments;
- Education;
- Membership;
- Remuneration;
- Finance & General Purposes;
- Suspensions & Expulsions;
- Child Protection and Safeguarding;
- Shared Education;
- Children and Young People Services; and
- Community Use of Schools.

Subsequent to an independent review of governance arrangements in May 2020⁹³, EA Board reflected on the existing committee arrangements and adopted the recommendations of the independent review, forming a Board Sub Group to take forward thinking on a refresh of the committee structure. The internal Board reflection resulted in a fundamental restructure of Committees including⁹⁴:

⁹³ EA Review of Committee Structure April 2020

⁹⁴ Special Board Meeting - 29 March 2021



Dissolution of the following Committees

- Finance and General Purposes Committee
- Education Committee
- Children and Young People's Services Committee
- Shared Education Committee
- Community Use of Schools Committee
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Committee
- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

The Establishment of the following Committees and Sub-Committee

- Strategic Planning and Policy Committee
- Resources and People Committee
- Performance and Engagement Standing Committee
- Governance, Risk and Audit Committee
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Sub-Committee

Committee Schemes

- Strategic Planning and Policy Committee
- Resources and People Committee
- Membership and Teaching Appointments Committee
- Performance and Engagement Standing Committee
- Governance, Risk and Audit Committee
- Expulsion Committee
- Remuneration Committee

EA's Scheme of Delegations and Authorisations Annex A and Annex B were amended to reflect EA's new Committee Structure and Standing Orders were amended in keeping with due process - new schemes / delegations within Standing Orders were established where necessary.

Furthermore, an additional aspect of the revised EA Committee structure was the establishment of an Appointments Advisory Committee⁹⁵. This Committee comprises of a balanced representation from each sector and includes those Members who did not wish to be a Committee Chair or Vice Chair. The role and authority for this Committee is to support the EA Chair in reviewing Committee membership and the appointment of Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs with a view to ensuring that membership reflects community, geographical and gender balance.

Board member appraisals take place regularly, board induction is provided and Committee Development days are provided for all members to support effective organisation and management of Committees and to ensure members' priorities and needs are met.

⁹⁵ Appointments Advisory Committee - Meeting 17 May 2021



19.6 Findings

There is a general consensus that the operating environment of a board has become more complex and that the demands and responsibilities on boards and its members are increasing. Boards often face unique obstacles to their performance and certain characteristics contribute to the diminished capacity for a board to be productive such as: partial affiliation, episodic interaction, limited time and information, preponderance of leaders, changing expectations of work, aura of formality, focus on meetings, never mind the impact of Covid-19 and the shift to remote governance.

There is however, increasing awareness that excellence in governance requires 'boardroom' effectiveness and consideration of the culture, behaviour and dynamics within boards⁹⁶. This increasing awareness challenges the traditional agency approach⁹⁷ which views composition and structure as key to effective governance, to support a new paradigm seeing board process as key to making boards more effective. This has resulted in strong support for board culture as a significant determinant of board effectiveness⁹⁸. Consequently, there appear to be consistent characteristics of effective board cultures: openness, trust, respect, engagement, candour, constructive dialogue and challenge.

There are direct and causal links between Board culture and organisational performance – culture is the building block of group behaviour. Cultures have been shown to have a direct impact on the performance and competitiveness of businesses. Nadler⁹⁹ offered a compelling view that board culture remains an underappreciated factor in the effectiveness of boards providing strategic guidance and fulfilling their fiduciary responsibilities.

Governance and management are separate but related activities. To govern is to steer, to oversee, to challenge and to hold to account, but not to run day-to-day operations. Governance is partly about strategic oversight, compliance, and processes but, just as importantly, is about values and culture. It is dynamic rather than static, always developing in response to internal and external stimuli.

Broadly our findings indicate that:

- The board of EA is a large body. The nature of the board's composition is representative and diverse and as such the obvious question is to consider whether the board's size and composition reflect the organisation's requirements. It is a curious feature of the EA board that, apart from the Chairperson, DE/ the Minister has minimal input into the nominated sectoral representatives and in the case of political representation, none whatsoever. With most other public sector boards in NI, it is the Minister who will make the appointment based upon recommendations emerging through the public appointments process. Therefore, the Board of EA is populated with a mixture of political party nominees and sector representatives, with limited 'independent' voices to provide alternative narratives/views (notwithstanding the two independent members of the GRAC).
- That said, this is a board in its second iteration and there is a sense that the quality of governance is evolving. The board arrangements within EA have operated more successfully than many stakeholders (including those board members themselves) would have thought possible. There was much feedback that the design of the board, the nomination process of members, the background of members and the 'political' context of the board have the potential to create tensions or fault lines and thus interfere with or at least frustrate governance within the Authority. Many members and stakeholders identified that there was however a sense members were able (on the most part), to transcend their nominating organisation positions and to act in a corporate manner focused on the issues and problems and

⁹⁶ Bevington, J., (2010), 'Healthy Boards, Healthy London'

⁹⁷ Daily, C., M., Dalton, D., R., and Cannella, A., A., (2013), 'Corporate Governance: Decades of Dialogue and Data', *Academy of Management Review*, 28(3)

⁹⁸ Dailey, P., R., (2011), 'Understanding the Culture of Your Board', National Association of Corporate Directors, Directorship

⁹⁹ David Nadler. *Building Better Boards* [2006]



work together to support the executive team in creating solutions. The fact that this has happened is not because of design – rather through the will and hard work of individual board members. Boards frequently have members who are nominated representatives of different stakeholder groups. This can give rise to members using the board as a platform to champion their own interests. Whilst we have pointed out that EA Board does act in a corporate manner, on the whole, board and committee minutes as well as feedback indicates that board members can use board or committee meetings to pursue single item agenda or advocate areas of sectoral interest. We recognise that there is a balance to be struck in representing the sector/party/group that nominates an individual – however it is critical that nominated representatives act solely in the interests of the board and do not let personal agenda take over. Whilst this is not the overall culture of the EA Board, thanks in main part to effective chairing skills, there can be a tendency for advocacy or promotion of self-interests. Advocacy can help inspire decision making but an effective board member must exhibit corporate responsibility and remember they have a wide and unified role to play at all times¹⁰⁰.

- This raises the ongoing concerns of the political appointment process and whether it interferes with EA decision making. Feedback indicates that whilst it might not directly interfere with decision making, at times – particularly around area planning for example, EA staff fed back that they can feel under pressure from board members not to bring matters to board for discussion. This is not acceptable and strays beyond the role of a board member. The board member's role is outlined above and the interests of EA and the children it supports are and should always be foremost. It is not acceptable that a political position, no matter how oblique, should interfere with officer duties nor EA business. Moreover, any EA officer then not bringing that matter to board should be reporting that internally and getting it addressed - there is no evidence that any such reporting has occurred. So whilst there is evidence that, for the most part, the board is able to rise out of its nominating organisation shadow, at times that pressure does come through into individual behaviours and actions – this should not be allowed nor tolerated.
- Feedback indicates that the current committee arrangements are effective and are providing members with a more transparent and effective 'whole organisation' view of the Authority, as the new committee structure and the executive reporting arrangements has provided a more cross-organisational approach to reporting and delivery. There is a sense that, whilst this new committee structure is creating more work (for both members and the executive team), the new structure provides a more robust platform for engagement between board members to various delivery areas and creates a more effective platform to challenge and gain assurance. This new committee structure, through a cross directorate/thematic approach to functional areas within the organisation is able then to provide more assurance to the whole board. It would appear that the quality of scrutiny and challenge has improved and the information flow from the organisation through Directorate Team meetings and CLT into committees and Board has increased transparency and improved assurance and re-assurance.
- However, there are still some concerns on the level of information coming through and feedback as well as our own fieldwork indicates that the organisation is adept at collecting data – lots of it – and this data is then presented in myriad forms, however it can then be difficult to join this data cohesively to provide an overarching view. This is an observation noted in previous section, that EA needs to refine better the use of information and data and align it better to outcomes-based reporting. At present a lot of information is making its way through committees and board – but the sheer volume often renders it impossible to scrutinise all of it, let alone challenge it. So the quality of challenge and scrutiny is led by the quality of data and information and there is a sense that there is still some way to progress on this matter – this raises questions on the effectiveness of the board decision making processes. The better the data – the better the decisions. It is not quite possible to definitively say that, at this point.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/sites/niao/files/media-files/BoardEffectiveness-AGoodPracticeGuide.pdf>



- Information is best when it is designed in a way that informs the board about all the essential activities undertaken by the organisation and the issues facing it. When thinking of information design, boards typically think of information coming from management (how brief, well focused and strategic it is, prioritised, with executive summaries, key issues to tackle and options to consider). But information architecture should also include external information and a consideration of the organisation's place in the world. External information also provides a more rounded assessment of the organisation's performance. Most information processed by EA board is internally created, which suggests that the external perspective is sometimes missing.
- In terms of the composition and skills/experience of Board members – most members are nominated by a sectoral organisation or through a political party. Many of the individuals on the board are experienced individuals with long careers in, primarily education or public service. There is a clear commitment to education and a very prominent understanding of the sector and the issues the sector faces. Critically, there is a clear focus on the child and this was evident in consultations and feedback sessions. There is no doubting the sincerity or commitment of individuals nor their efforts. However, it is our view that the board lacks broader skills (outside of education) and were struck by the limited levels of financial skills or experience on the board (given that EA is the largest public body in NI and the scale of its budget and the challenges of budget management). Whilst there are some capable individuals who are able to provide scrutiny and challenge around finance and resourcing matters, we have a concern at the lack of these skills and the collective ability of the board to probe and get assurance on these matters.
- The new internal governance arrangements appear to be providing better flows of assurance through the various levels within the organisation and up to committees and the Board (notwithstanding our previous point around finance).
- There is evidence (seen in minutes and correspondence) of effective challenge – but particularly as regards to matters relating to education, children welfare, education services and SEN for example – where the board clearly has significant experience.
- There is feedback from members and from the executive team (and from evidence presented) that the board and committees are getting better at asking the right questions. Whilst some are still prone to delve into operational details, there is a better discipline at board now in focusing on the strategic landscape, on EA's responsibilities and on performance.
- As a result, the executive team appear to be more adept at working with committees and members – in so far as bringing members along with them at the earliest point rather than springing surprises onto members when an activity has already proceeded a certain direction. So the quality of the executive interaction appears to be improving and there appears to be more effective understanding of servicing a board.
- There is always a debating point in organisations on the role of the Board in terms of leading the organisation and this question challenged board members and executives alike. The general consensus was however that it is the CEO who leads the organisation and that staff and the wider education system look to the CEO, not the board, for that leadership piece. We however do believe that the Board does have a significant leadership role in any organisation. The board sets the strategic direction of an organisation, is the guardian of the culture and values of the organisation and should be the role model of organisational behaviour – as such this provides Boards with an important leadership position. However to staff below Head of Service level, the board is not visible and therefore not leading the organisation.



- A final observation in terms of the board's role in EA delivery is the relationship with the Minister. The Minister is responsible and answerable to the Assembly for the exercise of the powers on which the administration of that department depends. In the case of EA, the Minister has a duty to the Assembly to account, and to be held to account, for all the policies, decisions and actions of the department, including its NDPBs. Therefore, communication between the board and the minister are normally through the Chairperson of the Board, consequently, the relationship between the EA board and the Minister is therefore critical. We identified limited evidence of an effective relationship between EA and the Minister. There is widespread evidence of relationships with DE officials – but not necessarily with the Minister. Given that the EA is the largest public body in NI, that EA is a large NDPB for a relatively small department, we would have expected to see a closer working relationship at this level. We believe these meetings, in addition to ongoing GAR meetings, present an opportunity to help disentangle operational issues from the strategic issues. These meetings would also provide an opportunity to discuss with the Minister any issues within the EA of potential public interest – of which there are many.

The EA has put much effort and energy into creating an effective board and committee structure and operating model. Boards of course are populated by individuals, and it is their experience and skills aligned to the processes and structures of a working board that create levels of effectiveness. However, what is equally important to board effectiveness is the board dynamic. More generally (not exclusive to EA Board) dynamics are fundamentally linked to the culture of the board. In this aspect, it is necessary to consider board pathologies. Group-think tendencies, for example, hinder effectiveness as do disruptive or dominating members of the board. A low energy level on the board, the sleepy board, is also typical. In some cases, dysfunctional dynamics are openly employed to set a board up for governance failure. Late distribution of information and not making relevant information available are examples of intentional practices that hinder governance. This is often a symptom of a deeper issue: lack of trust, role overlap, etc. Governance is enriched by the directors' differences in opinions and constructive dissent: having a critical view of assumptions makes for an effective strategy. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the dynamic of the EA board as most meetings have shifted to the remote setting. A new Chair and all new members have not met face to face, as yet (some meetings running are hybrid meetings with a mixture of in person and remote attendance). It becomes increasingly important that to ensure levels of board dynamics that is based on a culture that promotes quality discussion – this will greatly contribute to the strategic coherence of the organisation and in doing so reflect the effectiveness of the board.



20. Policy Compliance

The level of compliance with best practice in relation to key corporate governance policies; such as appointment of Board members; use of consultants; compliance with Terms of Reference for committee structures.

20.1 Context and Progress to Date

The broad policy framework for EA comprises various categories and levels of policies and procedures. As well as policies which apply across the organisation, the breadth of policy reach and therefore compliance requirements includes internal EA and external (i.e. school system) requirements, professional and specialty-specific policies, and local and site-specific policies.

By definition a policy is a formal, concise, accessible statement on how an organisation intends to conduct business and deliver services. Generally, it will be a statement of intent with rules that influence and enable decision making. A policy statement will lessen the risk of conflict and remove the opportunity for unfair selective application of rules. A new policy or a revision to a policy must be consulted on in accordance with this framework before being approved by the appropriate policy committee.

It is important to review policies regularly to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and compliant with current legislation/regulations. Normally a three-year review period is sufficient. In some cases, review may be required earlier if there is a legislative or regulatory requirement or significant change and in other cases a review every five years may be more appropriate. In the preparation and review of a policy, the reviewer should consider sector practice as well as external requirements.

Our review indicates that the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) commissioned a scoping exercise to review the extent of statutory and mandatory training activities throughout EA. The results of the review indicated there was an identified and urgent need for change within EA to ensure compliance with statutory obligations. The internal EA review findings concluded that at present there was a high level of risk to both EA as an organisation and to individuals responsible for ensuring the safety of staff, children, young people and visitors – the review and consultation also indicates that the organisation is putting in place measures to address these findings and that more effective monitoring is now in place to redress and reduce this risk.

Further to this review, a Statutory and Mandatory Working Group has been established to urgently progress actions. This process was aligned to EA's development of a long-term financial recovery strategy, whereby working with DE the strategy seeks to identify service delivery options that, if properly funded, will bring the EA and schools onto a stable and sustainable financial footing.

As part of that process a comprehensive baseline of EA's existing services, functions and workstreams was developed, with a baseline set against an updated DE 'Policy Code' document which details the statutory basis for its policies, the programmes through which they are implemented and which is intended to provide a "definitive point of reference for the Department and its ALBs"



20.2 Findings

Findings indicate that:

- Work is underway across the organisation to create a framework in place that provides staff with guidance about policies and procedures. This includes a series of mandatory policy packages designed to draw attention to key organisational policies. However, the process for implementing and monitoring the application of the framework requires improvement.
- Non-compliance stems from a lack of awareness. Sometimes, a peripheral awareness exists, but people do not clearly understand the expectations for compliant behaviour. From the institutional side, doubling down on regulation would likely be ineffective at altering behaviour; the main issue with this group is they are missing the baseline message. The link between statutory and mandatory compliance with policy was not always obvious to staff, even at senior level, therefore reinforcing the need for more effective communication and training on compliance and conformity issues.
- There is however evidence of a developing culture of compliance through board minutes and committee minutes which provide a detailed trail of the links between governance arrangements, decision making and EA's roles and responsibilities. The issue seems to lie in the implementation of some of these matters and the failure to then hold that failure to account.
- More broadly, the EA has updated and developed its approach to compliance with Committee Terms of Reference, for example by putting in place a restructured committee arrangements and associated Standing Orders and Schemes – reflecting enhanced compliance.



21

21. Stakeholder Engagement

Findings – discussion

A key aspect of this landscape review is the consideration of EA's contribution to the wider education system and its effectiveness in delivering on its statutory and non-statutory requirements. The views of the wider education system are clearly vital to understanding the current levels of effectiveness.

Consultations were carried out with organisations identified in Appendix 4, those organisations (and individuals within them) were also invited to either submit written evidence (in support of their consultation) or to participate in the surveys (Appendix 1). The key thematic feedback arising out of the wider stakeholder engagement centred on the following areas.

- The ability of EA to effectively 'listen' to others was raised by all stakeholders. Many consultees doubted that EA has the capacity to actively listen to the concerns or issues of the wider system because it was too pre-occupied with its own shortcomings and trying to resolve these.
- As a consequence, whilst many were cognisant of the significant efforts of individuals (often identified and named), the EA was not a welcoming nor inclusive organisation, but was shut to the outside and frowned on revealing too much information unless it was absolutely necessary to do so. EA was projected by many as defensive and closed, furthermore engagement was characterised as 'being told by EA what to do', rather than being consulted with or engaged by EA.
- Senior management and leadership of EA is invisible to the wider education system and wider school system, re-inforcing a view that EA is a bureaucratic and faceless body which operates at a distance from the individual school, teacher or board of governors.
- When pressed on the quality of engagement with EA, e.g. its statutory partners – the emerging picture was mixed. The quality of the engagement was often dependent upon individual officers or EA staff members. As noted in previous sections, EA was noted as not being a reliable partner in that it sometimes did not turn up to meetings, did not always commit to a programme and did not always deliver on promises made.

The over-riding theme from the stakeholder engagement is that whilst all stakeholders do recognise the difficult financial position of EA and recognise its difficult starting position – they also recognise that seven years on, there has still been limited improvement at their level of interaction. Ultimately, parents and pupils are the most satisfied of all the stakeholders met as part of this landscape review and one could argue that this is critically important – and so it is – their satisfaction is absolutely pivotal. However, parents and pupils are not coming into contact with EA on a daily or weekly basis – the school is often the go between and therefore the experience is possibly exaggerated because of that. For those organisations, institutions, representative bodies, sector bodies, statutory partners, the feedback is clear - EA needs to significantly and urgently improve its communication and the effectiveness of its approach to partnership.



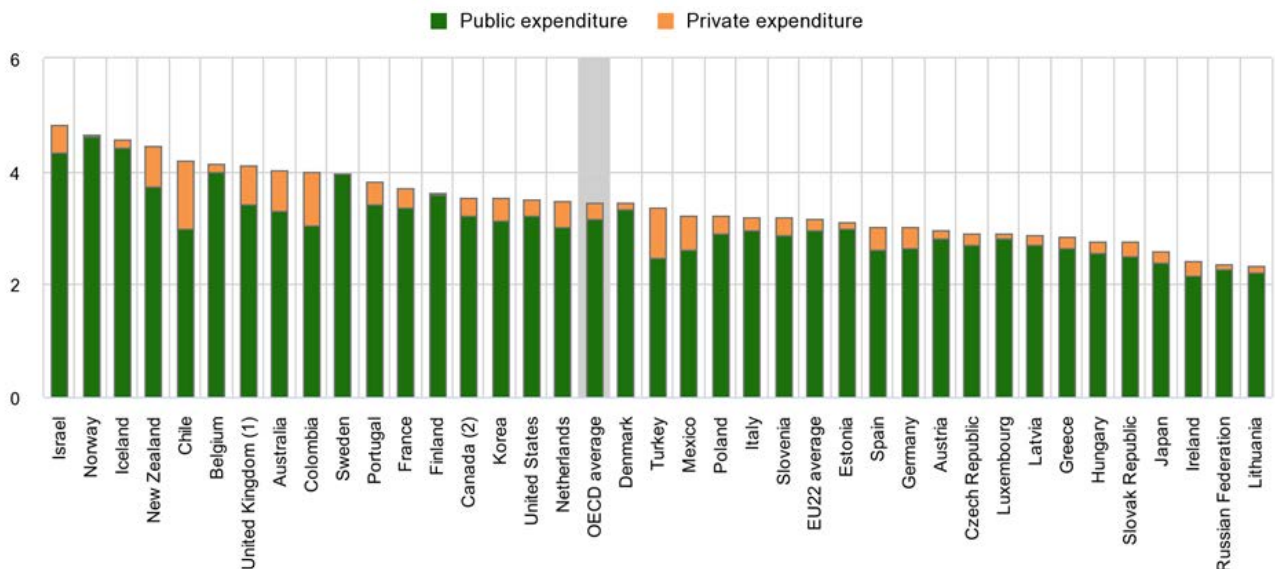
22. Benchmarking of spending on education

22.1 OECD 2018

The most recent international comparisons for national financial resources invested in education (across all sectors) is highlighted in the OECD Education at a Glance 2021 report ¹⁰¹. In order to calculate the expenditure, OECD employs a methodology calculating per student on educational institutions at a particular level of education which is calculated by dividing total expenditure on educational institutions at that level by the corresponding full-time equivalent enrolment. Key data for 2018 (most recent up-to-date data) suggests:

- In 2018, OECD countries spent an average of 4.9% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on educational institutions from primary to tertiary levels, with wide variations across educational levels. On average, the share of national resources devoted to non-tertiary education (primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary levels) was 3.4% of GDP, much larger than the share devoted to tertiary education (1.4% of GDP).
- Between 2012 and 2018, public expenditure on educational institutions as a share of GDP decreased by around 4% on average across OECD countries.
- Many factors influence the position of countries including the relative number of students enrolled, the duration of studies and the effective allocation of funds.
- Public spending remains the main source of educational funding in OECD countries. On average, public expenditure on educational institutions from primary to tertiary educational levels (after transfers to the private sector) accounts for 4.1% of GDP.

Figure C2.2a. Total expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, by source of funds (2018)
Primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, after transfers, in per cent



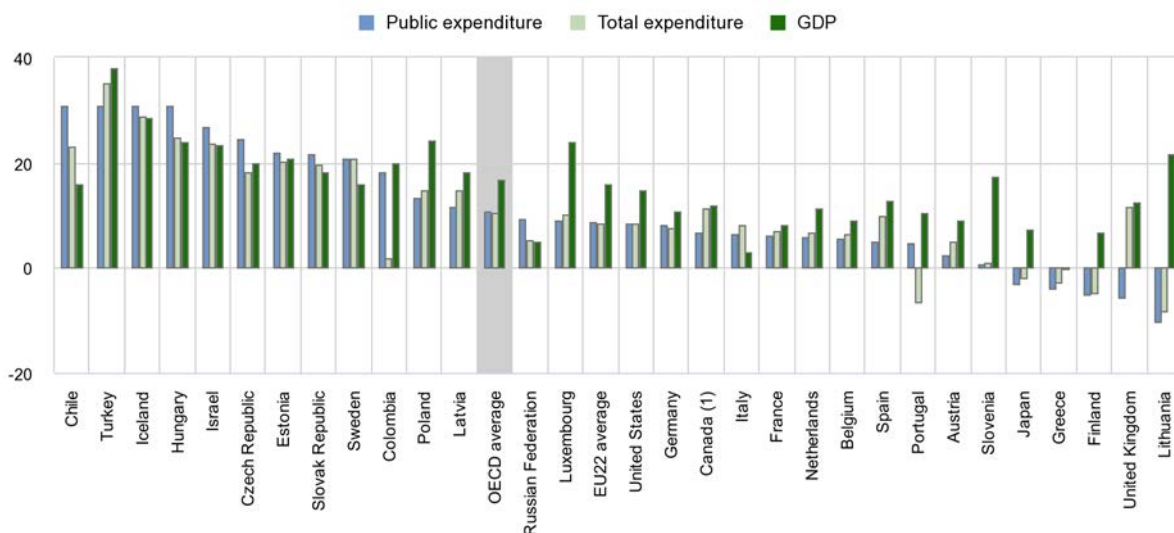
Total expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP 2018

¹⁰¹ https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterC.pdf?_ga=2.41680738.1371784033.1650034281-1025501835.1650034281



- Between 2012 and 2018, OECD countries increased public expenditure on educational institutions across all levels of education, but at a slower pace than average GDP growth.

Figure C2.3. Change in GDP, public and total expenditure on educational institutions between 2012 and 2018
After transfers, primary to tertiary education, in per cent



Change in educational expenditure 2012-2018

22.2 UK and Northern Ireland

According to OECD figures¹⁰²

- In 2018, spending on primary to tertiary educational institutions in the United Kingdom was 6.1% of GDP, which was 1.3 percentage points higher than the OECD average.
- In 2018, the United Kingdom spent \$12,245 per student at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, \$1,791 higher than the OECD average of \$10,454.
- Between 2012 and 2018, expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education increased at an average annual growth rate of 1.6% across OECD countries. In the United Kingdom, expenditure on educational institutions grew at an average annual rate of 1.9%, while the number of students remained fairly stable. This resulted in an average annual growth rate of 1.8% in expenditure per student over this period.
- The OECD (2018) average ratio of students per teacher in primary sector is 14.5 (UK 19.8, Ireland 15.3, Scotland 16, England 21, Wales 22, NI 22.5)¹⁰³.
- The OECD (2019) average ratio of students per teacher in post primary sector is 13.0 (UK 16.1 – Scotland 12.2, England 16.8, Wales 17, NI 15.9).
- Across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there is greater similarity in the current level of the pupil-teacher ratio, though there are some differences in the trends over time. The pupil-teacher ratio is highest in primary schools in Northern Ireland (22.5), which fits with the lower level of spending per pupil. This figure appears to have been rising over time reflecting the larger declines in spending per pupil (noted below).

¹⁰² https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterC.pdf?_ga=2.41680738.1371784033.1650034281-1025501835.1650034281

¹⁰³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-education-and-training>

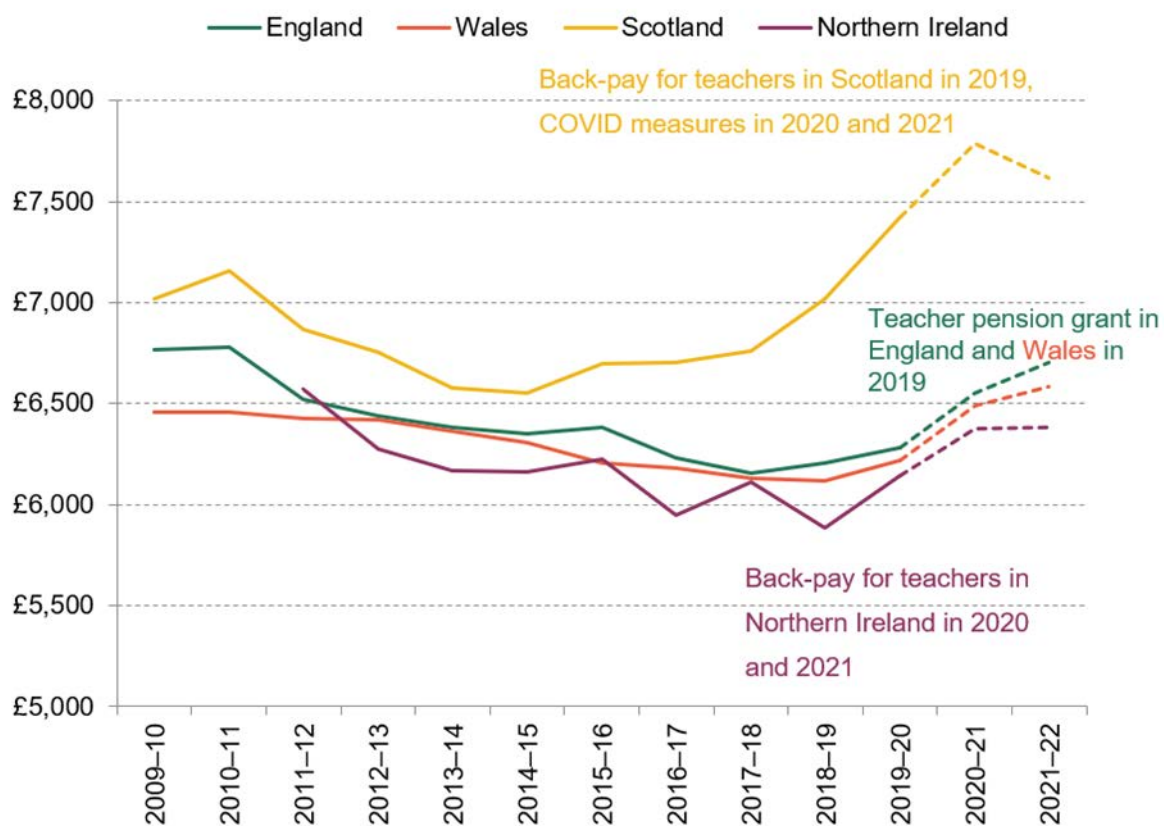


22.3 2021 onwards

According to a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies¹⁰⁴, in 2021–22, spending per pupil totalled £7,600 per pupil in Scotland (including COVID-related spending) and £6,400 in Northern Ireland, with spending per pupil to total about £6,700 in England and £6,600 in Wales.

The report notes that their research shows a 10% real-terms fall in allocated spending per pupil up to 2018–19. However, the report identifies that spending per pupil in real terms was partly depressed from 2017 onwards as a result of a long-running dispute on teacher pay and conditions. This back-pay and other funding increases then led to a 9% real-terms increase in spending per pupil between 2018–19 and 2021–22. Despite these increases, planned spending per pupil is due to be about £6,400 per pupil in Northern Ireland in 2021–22, about 3% lower than in 2011–12.

It is important to note that this report reflected the planned budget for 2021–22, which could have been added to during the year. Indeed, actual spending levels ended up about £30 million and £70 million higher than planned in 2018–19 and 2019–20, respectively.



UK Educational Spend 2009 - 2022

In summary the IFS report concludes that school spending per pupil fell across all four nations of the UK from about 2010 onwards. This decline extended to 2018 for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but only up to 2014 in Scotland. More recently, we have seen increases in school spending per pupil across all four nations. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, this partly reflects backdated increases in teacher pay.

¹⁰⁴ Comparisons of School Spending per pupil in the UK. IFS October 2021



22.4 Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 2019/20

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales
Pre-primary and primary education	468	427	717	530
<i>of which: under fives</i>	33	59	141	13
<i>of which: primary education</i>	435	367	575	517
Secondary education	604	709	571	639
Post-secondary non-tertiary education	–	10	–	–
Tertiary education	167	40	274	91
Education not definable by level	40	11	25	38
Subsidiary services to education	151	54	49	39
R&D education	0	41	0	–
Education n.e.c.	98	26	50	45
Total education spend per head of population 2019/20 (£)	1,528	1,319	1,685	1,382

The table above summarises the total spend which was identifiable as education spend per head of population, by category, for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland for the fiscal year 2019/20¹⁰⁵. This data shows that total education spend per head in Northern Ireland (£1,528) was higher than Wales and England, but lower than Scotland. The data identifies that Northern Ireland had a higher spending per head on “subsidiary services to education” and “education not elsewhere classified (n.e.c.)”, - as Northern Ireland has a comparatively larger school age population (see below), this could include spending that directly supports schools such as school transport, pupil support and special education.

	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales
Pre-primary and primary education (£m)	886	24,026	3,916	1,670
Secondary education (£m)	1,144	39,922	3,120	2,015
Total education spend 2019/20 (£m)	2,030	63,948	7,036	3,685
Number of pupils 2019/20	341,456	8,890,357	702,197	469,176
Total school spend per pupil 2019/20 (£)	5,945	7,193	10,020	7,854
Population (mid-year 2019)	1,893,700	56,287,000	5,463,300	3,152,900
School pupils as % of the population	18.0%	15.8%	12.9%	14.9%

As a percentage of the overall population, the school population of Northern Ireland is 40% larger than England, Wales and Scotland, which is reflected in Northern Ireland’s lower spending on a per pupil basis. It is possible then to extrapolate that, even if all of the “education n.e.c.” and “subsidiary services to education” spend was classified as school spending, spending on a per-pupil basis would still be lower in Northern Ireland compared with Great Britain.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/public-expenditure-statistical-analyses-2021>



22.5 Benchmarking the Education Authority

In our fieldwork, we have tried to identify other comparable educational authorities to benchmark the role, function or budget allocation with that of the EA however, this has proved difficult.

Within the United Kingdom, whilst there has been a broad trend as regards the development and emergence of regional or national educational agencies, these agencies have taken very different forms and responsibilities, but all have been designed with a common focus on school improvement.

Since 2011, in England and Wales, regional bodies have emerged. In England, Regional School Commissioners provide oversight and support to under-performing schools. They are also heavily involved in approving conversion to Academy status and new free schools.

In Wales, four Regional Consortia were created in 2012 to coordinate school improvement support across local authorities. They also now have responsibility for professional development and for distributing various grants to schools¹⁰⁶.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, national agencies with broad responsibilities have emerged. Education Scotland was formed in 2011 as a merger between four different predecessor agencies (Learning and Teaching Scotland, HM Inspectorate of Education, the National Continuing Professional Development Team and the Scottish Government's Positive Behaviour Team)¹⁰⁷.

As a result of this merger Education Scotland has very broad responsibilities, including: school improvement; implementation of the new curriculum; professional development; and inspecting schools. The fact that Education Scotland has responsibilities for school improvement, the curriculum and for inspecting schools is unique for the UK, because in the other UK nations the responsibility for inspections is kept separate from those responsible for school improvement and the curriculum. In addition, 'Regional Improvement Collaboratives' were established in 2018 to facilitate greater collaboration between local authorities and Education Scotland on school improvement within given regions.

Clearly then, here in Northern Ireland, the creation of the EA in 2015 replaced the old Education and Library Boards, effectively replacing five local authorities with a single authority. We have identified that the EA has broad responsibilities for the provision of education and youth services, the funding authority for all schools, the employer of teachers in controlled schools and non-teaching staff in schools (other than voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated) and oversees the provision of education services including admissions to all schools. In contrast to Education Scotland, it is not responsible for inspections, which are the responsibility of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Each system is funded differently and each has its own operational structures and reporting mechanisms. A 2021 report 'A comparison of school institutions and policies across the UK' identified significant regional differences in funding models, approaches to resourcing and curriculum development, as well as the evolution of national agencies noted above¹⁰⁸. Consequently in determining the 'right size' of EA, this requires a revision and validation of the existing mandate and functions and an aligned cost structure.

¹⁰⁶ Evans, G. (2021). Back to the future? Reflections on three phases of education policy reform in Wales and their implications for teachers, *Journal of Educational Change*

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.education.gov.scot/documents/ES-corporate-plan.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ A comparison of School Institutions and Policies across the UK. Education Policy Institute April 2021



22.6 Findings

This review has identified well-rehearsed arguments around the funding model of the EA (Section 7) and the data retrieved from recent OECD reports as well as UK parliamentary reports and public expenditure statistics demonstrate that spending levels on education in Northern Ireland have fallen. EA itself indicates that it inherited a reduced budget, coupled with the expectation that the creation of a single unitary regional body would yield efficiencies has resulted in ongoing budgetary pressures.

Schools funding continues to play a prominent role in the debate over improving educational standards. Teaching unions and parents' organisations have raised concerns about 'underfunding', while others have argued that the overall quantum of funding is sufficient, but that schools need to spend money more efficiently.

It is too simplistic to suggest that schools are either facing hardship simply as a result of grant cuts or that proposed funding levels are perfectly adequate. In reality, there is a complex interplay between government funding, budget pressures and school balances and ultimately with an EA context, there is a requirement to better understand the linkage between its role, outcomes and remit to its associated funding model.



23

23. Sub themes discussion

23.1 Leadership

In wider public service, the challenges that leaders are facing, and will continue to face, are unprecedented. The operating environment in which EA leaders work is complex and requires increasing need for working across departmental, organisational and sectoral boundaries and often relies upon co-production in order to deliver services. As a result, the complexity of these challenges requires adaptive leaders – in other words, those who can deal with uncertainty and ambiguity and are able to tackle issues where there is often no simple management solution. When we refer to leaders, we are not just talking about those senior management cadres but those people throughout the organisation who are responsible for providing services and managing teams. Leaders at all levels will need to be open to different ways of working, including collaboration or co-production, and to focusing on population outcomes and on prevention to manage and reduce demand. They will need to mobilise their organisations and resources to make changes real.

This landscape review has identified that whilst significant progress has been made in addressing leadership capability within the EA, there are still leadership capacity issues across the organisation and how that leadership (across all levels) interacts internally and externally to address and solve problems/challenges. We are conscious that at the time of the creation of the EA, legacy institutions and the new body lost significant leadership and management capacity and capability – we would suggest that whilst progress has been made to identify and put in place an appropriate operational structure, there is still a gap in leadership capability across the whole organisation and this exposes EA's capacity to be responsive and agile in addressing some of the challenges it faces.

23.2 Culture and Change

One of the overriding aspects of this review was the reference on multiple occasions to EA culture and the need to develop and build an EA culture or identity. EA was formed through the amalgamation of five legacy institutions and is populated by many personnel who were closely associated with values, behaviours and ways of working with those institutions. The slow evolution of EA – particularly between 2015 to 2019 - did not address or try to create an “EA way” of doing things and thus legacy behaviours and ways of working have not been replaced by an EA approach to service delivery (in totality, neither in each service, each office, nor sub-region). Whilst management recognise the need for cultural change within the organisation, cultural change is inherently difficult to achieve, it requires long term behavioural change. It is our experience that organisations, such as EA often lack capacity and space to see beyond the routine of day-to-day delivery. We fully recognise that cultural change cannot be imposed, however, we also suggest that neither can it be ignored. Organisational case studies demonstrate that there is a very strong connection between effective leadership and positive organisational culture. However, creating and embedding culture change within EA must be driven through a bottom-up and top-down approach; it cannot be applied from above or by the outside.

Fieldwork carried out as part of this review identified that EA has struggled to create an EA way of working, there has been limited investment in organisational development and there is limited resource to support and enable a refreshed approach to defining culture let alone cultural change. Albeit there are good examples of the new approach to corporate governance, a revised approach to performance and reporting, more transparency within the organisation and improving communication. However, these do not address fundamental issues around the common purpose. Whilst the EA has a strapline that every child and pupil is at the centre of what it does, that was not always obvious in conversations with individuals. So, there is a need to revisit the values of the organisation and behaviours framework which would encourage good quality reflective practice, supporting a change in service culture should be developed. There needs to be a change in culture which



drives innovation, shares best practice, supports risk management and sound governance, and works towards the overall benefit of EA services.

Feedback from multiple internal and external stakeholders refer to the culture of EA and for some EA is 'the most bureaucratic organisation I have worked in', for others 'a lack of trust stifles good decision making' and for some others 'it is impossible to make progress in this organisation - everything is done through briefing papers – it is a hugely frustrating way to work'. These types of feedback filter into a broader feedback theme emerging around creativity and innovation. Typical feedback suggests that 'our (i.e EA's) approach to outcomes-based delivery is to ensure we have followed the process', others suggest that 'innovation and creativity is difficult in our directorates – there is a lack of trust'. And yet, there are examples of innovative approaches to solutions in admissions, to ICT implementation, to SEN for example, however creativity and innovation are not hallmarks of EA culture nor are they consistently supported or desired.

There are lessons to be learnt from dysfunctional cultures as these can have very serious consequences. Aspects of dysfunctional culture include a lack of openness to criticism, defensiveness, looking inwards and not outwards and an acceptance of poor standards, a sense of complacency and a lack of challenge. Our fieldwork and evidence gathering has identified that EA has been guilty in the past of some of these behaviours, but there have been more recent attempts to become more transparent, more open to communication and creating a culture of openness and challenge. This is still a work in progress.

The systemic failure of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust identified many areas of concern and dysfunctional culture, but Francis concluded that to achieve a change in culture did not require "radical reorganisation but re-emphasis of what is truly important"¹⁰⁹.

We can see evidence of change within EA, but it is slow and not moving at pace and there needs to be more emphasis on, and commitment to, common values throughout the system by all within it. Ultimately changes to leadership, culture and values are fundamental to better and more sustainable governance and delivery.

23.3 Transformation

A sense of fatigue relating to the word 'transformation' was something that came across very clearly in our interviews with EA staff. There was also a concern about a lack of clarity around what actually constitutes transformation. It is important to distinguish between transformation, which should have a clear beginning and end point, and change, which is focused on keeping up with ongoing fast paced changes of the environment.

So, whilst transformation is a much heralded term within EA, and correctly identified as being needed in many cases, what is missing is the transition stage – there is often no connection between the transition and transformation piece and this is creating additional and un-necessary pressure across the organisation and at individual levels.

Not only is the 'transition' element missing in the change continuum, but transformation in EA is defined differently across the organisation and depends on 'need', 'resource' and 'urgency' and as a consequence the pace, scale, ambition and progress of transformation differs accordingly.

The transformation activities within EA, are being scoped and delivered in an organisation with a high number of competing priorities. Therefore the pace of change is slow because teams are working on projects that whilst important, are absorbing attention and slowing everything else down.

An additional context for transformation in EA is the need to work to maintain organisational stamina and resilience as most teams and services are working against a "perpetual incident" environment. There is no capacity for refreshing and resting people.

¹⁰⁹ Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry. Robert Francis QC. 2013



EA as an organisation has been built on functional silos and whilst there is much more evidence of a cross organisational approach to delivery and ongoing reporting of more effective delivery models emerging, transformation efforts need to be conscious that delivery is often based upon behaviours and not process.

Accordingly, whilst the need to develop and deliver transformation is required within EA, cognisance needs to be paid to some key guiding principles:

- Transformation is as much about the journey as the destination. EA needs to create a shared understanding of the drivers for transformational change to ensure staff and stakeholders understand the overall transformation vision and end point. This will better enable buy-in and focus and help to mitigate transformation fatigue.
- Technology: Driving force or distraction? Whilst EA should be focused on technology and customer-driven transformation to modernise aging systems amidst rapid technology disruption, the organisation also needs to ensure that central to transformation is the child/pupil and education system and ensure technology does not distract them.
- Successful transformation requires leadership; therefore EA needs the right team to be in place, and leaders need to be agile and adaptive to develop and manage relationships to overcome resistance and create buy-in.
- Stakeholder buy-in. Whilst internal stakeholder engagement is critical, external stakeholders are also crucial. Engaging with stakeholders to ensure transformation delivers to those stakeholders' needs does require more effort but does create an increased level of acceptance in the end result.

In the words of one staff member within EA, “transformation is becoming so corporate that we are losing sight of the child and pupil”, this is clearly not the desire nor the intent of any of the transformative efforts underway within the EA, but it is worth reflecting on the focus, output and results of these transformation activities to ensure they align back to their EA mission and strategic objectives.

23.4 Relationship Complexity

Some complexity is understandable and indeed desirable in the public sector. Public organisations deal with complex and often intractable issues which cannot just be contained within the remits of single organisations, and which have to be addressed through their working together. However the structure of the relationships EA has with other organisation is highly complex, and may appear to lack an adequate overall rationale. There are several aspects of this which we believe cause serious problems for the governance, and which inhibit its ability to deliver well-coordinated, seamless and high-quality services to the user of the organisation – in this case children and young people:

- The formal interrelationships, reporting lines and accountabilities between EA and other public bodies; (relationship complexity).
- The geographical boundaries of EA and other public bodies and the extent to which they are coterminous; (spatial complexity).
- The respective responsibilities of EA and other public bodies, and the overlaps and duplications between them; (functional complexity).
- The arrangements for working across organisational boundaries through partnerships and similar. (collaborative complexity).

However what is more striking is the complexity and the multitudinous dimensions of these relationships – there appear to be a multiplicity of overlapping and noncomplementary formal relationships which can



limit the scope and ability to drive strategic change and to improve delivery. The sheer breadth and range of these relationships (outlined in Section 13) provides evidence of the need to manage and respond to those relationships which then leaves little space for organisations to actually identify and respond to needs and opportunities to improve services, whether autonomously or by learning from those to whom they are accountable.

The multiple accountabilities (including internally to its Board and Executive, to DE, its Minister and divisions, the Education Committee, the NI Assembly and other statutory partners) to which EA is subject can pull it in different directions at different times, especially when those yield different priorities or areas for improvement. In doing so they may well hinder rather than enhance relationship development, in that the various mechanisms make it difficult to be effective whilst at the same time driving multiple agendas and meetings. Ultimately this relationship complexity can inhibit both the service improvements they claim to pursue and any accountability they seek to enhance. They also create and sustain short-term, risk-averse and compliance-driven organisational cultures: the priority becomes one of trying to satisfy all of the various accountability regimes rather than innovating to meet stakeholders' needs. There is a concern that much of EA's efforts are being pulled into satisfying these relationship regimes rather than the pupil need.

Partnership and collaboration working

Partnership and collaborative working take a number of forms, from loose understandings to exchange information and co-operate in routine decision-making, to permanent and formal partnerships with their own budgets, staff and decision-making powers.

Therefore from our perspective, the underlying rationale for any collaboration must be that it can deliver improvements and/or attain outcomes which organisations acting alone could not deliver so easily or at all. We heard mixed evidence as to whether that had actually occurred. Some respondents pointed to particular programmes or approaches which they believed fitted this description. Whilst not the focus of this review, feedback received and the balance of evidence indicates that collaborative working has led to at best sporadic and limited improvements in service standards or attainment of outcomes. That must call into question the considerable time and management capacity devoted to establishing and maintaining such arrangements.

23.5 Delivering on Public Value

A final sub-theme emerging from this review is the capacity of EA to provide and demonstrate added value to the public purse¹¹⁰.

There is a recognition that public sector organisations such as EA face many challenges. These arise from the complex activities public sector entities undertake, their many different stakeholders, the need to plan for the longer term, resource scarcity and the wide definition of the value they create.

However, underpinning these challenges is a fundamental accountability to the stakeholder base that the organisation has been set up to serve. Public bodies, such as EA are expected to be open and transparent, particularly around how, and by whom, decisions are taken. They are also generally required to demonstrate not just that they use resources efficiently and effectively, but also that they maintain the highest standards of trustworthiness. Such accountability is all the more important given that, a body such as EA needs robust decision-making mechanisms to ensure they achieve their defined outcomes in a way that provides the best trade-off between available resources and the consequences (intended or otherwise). They also need to establish effective, efficient and sustainable operations.

¹¹⁰ Focusing on value creation in the public sector. CIPFA and World Bank (2019)



A further challenge in achieving added value to the public purse is the ability to maintain a longer-term perspective, while delivering in the short term. The responsibilities delegated to EA are longer term, so there is a need to define and plan the delivery of outcomes carefully and make sure that operations will be sustainable, but it is often difficult to get a sense of sustainability when the underpinning financial model is annualised and the organisation plugs funding gaps through requests for additional funding to the sponsor department. However, to judge the EA on financial position alone is erroneous, because EA, like all public bodies needs to be judged on demonstrating the sustainable value of the activities it provides beyond the financial costs. We all recognise that the primary objective of most public sector entities is to deliver services to the public, rather than to make profits and generate a return on equity to investors. Consequently, performance can only partially be evaluated by examining their financial position and financial performance. Current reports only tell us a limited amount about how well a public entity is equipped to deal with the challenges ahead and to continue delivering services and supporting communities.

In keeping with the earlier section referencing EA's approach to transformation, in our experience many jurisdictions have undertaken public sector reforms to improve the quality of public service delivery – usually driven by constrained budgets. However, while the demand for better services is a common factor amongst those charged with the delivery of service improvement, the spectrum of expectation differs from the customer or service user perspective. Consequently, in driving added value to the public purse, organisations, such as EA need to be cognisant of the user expectations – who will not necessarily judge EA on financial effectiveness (that is the role of the internal governance and sponsor department), but survey findings and consultation feedback outlines hoped-for improvements in customer experience and outcomes span seven key areas:

- Speed – The time taken to deliver a service should be the shortest possible for both the customer and the EA delivering the service; right first time.
- Engagement – The manner in which EA services are delivered should be seen as customer-centric (i.e. participatory and trustworthy with the customer's needs at the core).
- Responsive – There should be an 'intelligent' mechanism in place to address any variation in meeting service levels and to drive changes in the service delivery organisation.
- Value – The customer (pupil or stakeholder in the wider system) needs to believe that the service delivery mechanism is cost effective, and value is driven by customer outcomes, not organisational processes.
- Integration – The service delivery mechanism should be integrated. There should be no 'wrong door' policy for the customer.
- Choice – There should be multiple channels for service delivery, so that your service users can have 'channels of choice', depending on specific needs at specific times.
- Experience – Personalisation of service is necessary to ensure that service user experiences are on a par with what they are used to receiving from the private sector.

We recognise that delivery of this optimum user experience has not been met across EA, which re-inforces the recurring theme that despite progress to date in addressing core issues, the organisation still has not managed to get on top of key effectiveness metrics. This review highlights that despite any incremental progress which has been identified, this progress will always be constrained by a model (and associated funding model) which appear pressured and therefore require attention.



23.6 Emerging Good Practice

This review encapsulated documentary and literature review of all parts of the EA and included one to one consultations with all senior management within the Authority from the Head of Service tier and above. As a consequence, we were able to get an overview of each service activity within the organisation. It is important to highlight that the EA is a large and complex organisation which interfaces with significant parts of the wider public and private sectors and is a significant organisation within the wider Northern Ireland society. That breadth/depth of service provision provides some context to the scale of the challenge in creating a unitary regional body. Notwithstanding the issues identified and discussed within this review, it is clear that the pace and scale of change/service improvement differs across directorates, however there are encouraging signs of a real recognition of the need to do things differently. We are conscious that reviews can focus on what is wrong – we are aware that readers can focus on the negative, but real and substantive progress has been made and this should not be lost or not acknowledged.

Notwithstanding the budgetary and resourcing issues documented in the review already, we have seen evidence of real progress in service improvement and service innovation. One has to be cautious in singling out specific projects or initiatives, for fear that others go unacknowledged – but these projects are identified to demonstrate that the organisation has the capability and capacity to deliver on real service improvement. Consultation feedback provided high levels of positive feedback on the effectiveness of the Youth Service for example – highlighting its ability to place the young person at the core of its service and to offer a flexible and agile service; digital admissions service was seen as an early attempt at cross organisational working and the results demonstrated the positive outcome for both pupils/parents and the EA itself. Whilst the Covid pandemic provided real and significant challenges to society, the emergence of the COLO networks is widely recognised as a significant development in the EA/school relationship and demonstrated a capacity to change the narrative. The CoPE accreditation for the procurement function provides an external verification of service improvement and quality. Furthermore, most recently, the launch of the EdiS project – perhaps the most ambitious project yet - provides a very real platform and opportunity for change and huge possibilities in transforming and integrating systems, learner journeys and future policy making decisions.

There are many more projects within the organisation which demonstrate a real capacity for service innovation and service improvement and whilst the challenge remains in delivering service improvement within a resource depleted environment, there are broader lessons for EA itself in how it cascades the lessons from these examples across the whole organisation to ensure examples of good practice are not isolated but become the norm.



24. Strategic Themes Discussion

24.1 Introduction

In this section, we try to navigate the multiple sub-themes and issues that have been identified during the course of this review and to collate these into a set of strategic themes which form the foundations of subsequent recommendations.

Our diagnosis and the review findings may read like an overall criticism of the EA and of its leaders and staff. We want to be absolutely clear that we intend no collective or individual criticism. We recognise the widespread commitment and passion of those in the EA; they are not to blame for the wider challenges that the sector faces.

Broadly, it is our view that the original design of EA and structural funding problems mean that those within EA have insufficient space, time or capacity to function well and more often strategically. Too often, EA and its leaders are drawn into negotiating and managing the complexity of the system, by responding to multiple demands, policy changes and accountability pressures, or managing relationships with multiple partners and all too often with limited funding. This consumes scarce leadership and management resource and can easily inhibit delivery of consistently high-quality and responsive services.

There are multiple and complex accountability, funding and reporting channels (e.g. to the government, partnerships, scrutiny and regulatory bodies). Managing and responding to these is a significant task in itself, in particular when they pull the organisation in different or conflicting directions. EA must devote so much effort to reporting, responding and managing relationships, they do not have enough left to identify and anticipate genuine pressures and opportunities for change; and innovations and good practice are slow to spread as a result. A lack of corporate capacity further exacerbates this tendency.

Our review has identified a wide number of sub-themes and in this section, we seek to collate these sub themes and group these as strategic themes that have emerged from our review findings.

These strategic themes include;

1. EA's policy context.
2. Governance and Accountability arrangements.
3. Affordability of EA services and meeting strategic priorities.
4. The effectiveness of delivery by EA.
5. Engagement and Stakeholder Management.
6. DE and EA relationship.

Each theme is interwoven as the findings and solutions of each are inextricably linked to the other. The policy environment and context inform the governance arrangements; the affordability and ability to meet strategic objectives creates the condition of effective delivery which in turn dominates and influences the quality of the relationships with others.

24.2 Education Authority's Policy Context

The findings of this review have highlighted that the legislative context is aged and not necessarily reflective of a modern education system. A review of the legislation which drives DE policy and informs EA delivery and implementation demonstrates a legislative context which is unwieldy and has many secondary provisions for example. Some of the primary legislation through which EA operates is aged (e.g. Education and Libraries



Order 1986; Education Reform Order 1989, Children (NI) Order 2005; Transport primary legislation for example stems from the 1989 Order with more recent updates; the primary and secondary legislation for school buildings dates to the 1990s).

This legislative landscape highlights that the policy context for EA's delivery is broad, disparate, unwieldy and whilst we recognise that pulling all these policies into a more focused or defined policy/legislative context will not necessarily improve EA effectiveness, we do believe that traditionally, government has taken a straightforward approach to societal problems. By that we mean, departments tend to take an approach that breaks a problem down into its component elements and designs policies to address each piece. Today that approach is often doomed to fail because the problems at hand—and the potential solutions—are more complex than ever before and as a result, policy solutions cannot be built around single ideas or single solutions but must be built around multiple elements taking into account a complex and changing environment. The operating context of EA therefore is characterised by single policy design solutions and this lack of policy solutions around multiple needs, can impact EA's ability then to respond to stakeholder needs.

We have noted previously that the legislative basis for EA is also fractured in that the design stage of EA was widely seen as a compromise solution and therefore the resultant body was a hybrid model – not quite the five legacy library boards, but not quite the full education and skills authority that was envisaged. Political lobbying and sectoral pressure resulted in the creation of the current EA model, which is the result of vested interests and being reliant upon old and ageing legislation.

As a consequence, the EA model which emerged was probably compromised from the start.

24.3 Governance and Accountability Arrangements

There is increasing evidence of a changed approach to governance and increased awareness of the need for a corporate approach to governance matters. There is evidence of investment in and implementation of a refreshed approach to governance, with definition provided of what good governance looks like with the Authority. This evidence is quantified through the new Corporate Governance Framework.

Fieldwork has demonstrated a more robust approach to information and assurance, with a more effective approach to scrutiny and challenge. The organisation has clearly learnt lessons from previous internal examples of poor governance and under the leadership of the Chief Executive, significant progress has been made in pursuit of a robust governance platform.

Aligned to corporate governance development, there are clear examples of aligned organisational change approaches including an improved approach to risk management (with an increasingly dynamic risk register).

Underpinning the new approach to governance are attempts at transparency and more informed decision making. EA has put in place decision making frameworks and has created accountability frameworks from the Chair and CEO and Board right through the organisation, however it is less clear at this point how these frameworks are impacting upon individual performance and creating a culture of accountability and good governance. The new corporate governance framework provides robust articulation and illustration of what good governance looks like, but there still appear to be gaps in linking governance to the individual staff member and ultimately to the child.

Decision making is clearly predicated upon good information and there is increasing evidence that EA is producing better information. The information is still prone to be transactional and operational with limited outcomes based focused and there is a tendency to create data – creating a burden within the organisation – for data's sake. The quality of decision-making rests on good information flowing across the organisation and there is suitable evidence to suggest that this is improving.



24.4 Affordability of Education Authority services and Identifying Priorities

This review has identified issues with the stated baseline data and metric issues and therefore there is a strong impression of significant affordability issues and a sense that EA is delivering primarily on as many of its statutory functions as it can, within the resourcing envelope that it has. All the while EA is not effectively delivering on additional services, nor adding value to new services as the focus is on delivery of frontline routine services.

There is evidence of a systemic issue of budget setting and a reliance upon spending rounds to make up gaps and whilst there is emerging evidence that the organisation is beginning to achieve baseline positions in terms of cost base and service delivery base, there is not full confidence that this is achieved yet and so full cost is not fully understood.

Consequently, there is a somewhat dichotomous state whereby the system and EA, and even DE are saying that the budget is not covering EA costs, however, does anyone fully understand the full costs of the delivery of EA services? Therein lies a major challenge in that EA continues to ask for funding, DE applies for additional funding from DoF in spending rounds, but the actual baseline cost of delivery of EA services is still unclear.

Whilst significant work has been undertaken and is ongoing to identify baseline costs – it is difficult to understand how this can be achieved when most service lines within EA have not had a service review to determine their activities nor the resourcing requirements of that service. Recognising that most of the EA budget goes into the school system and that the small minority is spent on the corporate functions, it is difficult to understand how EA can identify and create ongoing efficiencies when it appears that the organisational model may not yet be right sized.

The question of affordability is clearly a significant concern to the wider education system and EA appears at times defensive when addressing issues around school finance and budget matters. Managing funding is as much about managing expectations and EA needs to get better at this and needs to put in place a more effective communication strategy to mitigate against these perceptions.

Affordability also determines the ambition of an organisation and influences the organisation's priorities. Our consultation feedback indicates that EA is 'awash' with priorities and in annual internal calls for the identification of priorities – the organisation can identify up to 200 priorities, but only invest in 20 as strategic priorities. The fundamental question arises of how you identify priorities in a sea of many competing priorities – it is not clear that EA has managed to define this yet. However, where it could start is in the dilution of the word 'priority' – everything cannot be a priority and therefore the word requires re-classification.

24.5 The effectiveness of delivery by EA

One of the most significant challenges for EA has been bringing a range of multiple sub-regional models into one unitary regional model and in trying to create standardisation and consistency across this 'one organisation'.

It is fair to say that delays in getting a management structure in place has impacted upon EA's capacity to 'hit the ground running', and provide effective and immediate delivery. There is widespread anecdotal feedback to suggest that legacy organisations were left to be 'run down', with limited investment. The establishment of EA occurred during a time of significant austerity; the introduction of the Voluntary Exit Scheme (resulting in corporate knowledge/expertise loss) alongside expectations of immediate cost savings (without the required investment to save). So, in many ways, the new body was starting from an extremely low base and made a number of false starts.

Notwithstanding the challenges outlined above, the organisation has begun to form over the past 2-3 years and there is increasing evidence of high performance in some areas. In previous sections, we have identified areas of emerging good practice and initiatives demonstrating service improvement and innovation.



This shows us that the organisation has the capacity and capability for major change and effective delivery, but the pace and level of change and transformation is not consistent across the organisation.

The feedback from the education system does indicate that the EA has a significant journey to travel to create higher levels of satisfaction amongst the school institutions. Regardless of where organisations or people sit on any change curve – the consensus from the sector feedback is that EA is not meeting their needs. It is difficult not to conclude that the levels of service cannot therefore be effective.

The reasons for this appear to be varied but revolve around a number of recurring themes:

- The lack of workforce planning within EA and lack of data to inform the staffing/roles/levels required to deliver services. Aligned to this is the lack of service reviews to define those service activities.
- A mismatch of expectation and delivery is usually caused by poor communication and the survey feedback indicates that the sector does not believe EA communicates effectively with it.
- A lack of understanding of levels of 'input' so it cannot determine resourcing levels. Because then the input and by extension, the output is not clear, this underpins both capacity and capability issues. Feedback constantly stated that staff were busy – the key question to be asked is are they busy doing the right things? - that is not clear.
- The organisation is evolving from a place where there was a fundamental lack of understanding of the importance of investment in ICT and digital. Until the Covid-19 pandemic ICT within EA lacked adequacy (experiencing poor design, procurement and user specification which has subsequently failed to develop the right processes) and consequently the organisation was unprepared. However, notwithstanding the progress made since, there continues to be evidence of continued silo approach to ICT solutions with limited corporate approach/funding/planning and the corporate ICT function left under resourced and under-invested. Ultimately this means that the organisation is not well connected and if it is not well connected internally it cannot connect to its users and partners. We do however accept that there may well be a plausible explanation for the delay in achieving this level of ICT functionality and integration as the organisation may have been waiting for the outworkings of various business cases around the EdIS project, which is now operational and should hasten progress in this regard).
- Effectiveness is also judged by the experience of a user coming into contact with EA. Feedback from parents and teaching communities suggest limited evidence of a multi-disciplinary approach to the child. There is limited evidence of a holistic approach to supporting child welfare/development or needs, rather EA continues to deliver services to a child in a silo-ed fashion (though there is recent evidence of improvements in this regard).

24.6 Stakeholder and Engagement Management

Earlier sections have identified that there is a sense from many stakeholders that the EA model has been confined since it was formed, tied in as it is by legislation, policy direction, funding decisions, relationships and lack of authority. As a result, there is some recognition that there are limitations within which EA must operate and as a result these limitations restrict its reach or influence.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the EA is still the largest public body in Northern Ireland, it is the largest NDPB of the Department of Education and it is an employing authority, managing authority and funding authority, thereby occupying a critical part of the wider education system.

As such, relationships and stakeholder engagement/management are a key aspect of organisational delivery. This review has found that the EA is not particularly effective in shaping, supporting and developing relationships.



In developing this further with consultees, a theme which emerged was that EA fixated on the school institutions and perhaps not the child, and some EA staff reported that EA has lost its intimacy with schools since the pandemic. The stakeholder relationship piece for EA must include the child and young person – whilst this can be clearly seen in some services including Youth Services – it is not always apparent that the child is the focus of all EA activities (as evidenced through Business Plans, which appear more focused on internal improvement than child-focus).

Whilst it is a view, one we partially share, there is a perception that EA focuses on the school institutions, there is nonetheless significant feedback that EA is not perceived as supportive of school operations; that EA is almost directing education (which most in the system do not see as EA's role) and furthermore, survey feedback indicates that there is no evidence to suggest that school leaders want some of the support/guidance/help that EA provide or do – simply because EA has never asked them.

24.7 DE and EA relationship

EA is a relatively new organisation and is one of a number of ALBs in DE. EA is by far the largest ALB within DE and that alone affords it a primary position in terms of the scrutiny and oversight that it receives. It is clear the initial foundational years of EA provided a range of organisational issues which the organisation is still trying to deal with and as a consequence of the arm's length relationship, DE as the sponsor department has a responsibility and accountability to see matters right.

Feedback from across both DE and EA suggests that the quality of the relationship between the two organisations has improved. However as an ALB, the effectiveness of the relationship between a sponsor department and its ALB can often be measured in the 'length of the arm' – and that length of the arm is dependent upon the relationship/activity. At formal levels, the arm is quite long in that EA is provided with autonomy and DE and EA engage (from a governance point of view) through quarterly performance reviews, risk registers, business plans, GAR meetings – all recognising EA as a separate and autonomous body. However, the arm can 'shorten' considerably – dependent upon the quality of the relationship between individual directors but also sometimes due to practical needs or where there is a requirement for close policy and operational alignment. It can also be contended that the particular form of government in Northern Ireland can result in continual renegotiation of issues at departmental level, which impacts upon EA business plans.

The overall nature of the DE/EA relationship is also built upon complexity, and as noted in previous sections, complexity also undermines effective performance management. The DE/EA relationship is not unique and in a 2017 report¹¹¹ by Connolly, Martin and Wall on the effectiveness of NDPB relationships with sponsor departments in Northern Ireland, similar themes around scrutiny, oversight and length of the arm featured. However, there are gaps in the line of sight between DE priorities and EA delivery objectives and there is therefore a need to improve communication between the bodies to close that gap. There is a certainty that the 'gap is closing' but requires more work in terms of EA providing more assurance and confidence to DE on its performance and for DE to provide EA with less scrutiny and more autonomy (as defined by its original MSFM). The evolving Partnership Agreement should seek to close this gap further and ensure that the level of scrutiny and autonomy is proportionate.

¹¹¹ Connolly, C., Martin, G., & Wall, A. (2017). Enhancing NDPB accountability: improving relationships with upward and downward stakeholders. Public Management Review



24.8 Conclusion

This review highlights an almost universal consensus that there is a continuing need for EA and that its NDPB status is right – visibly independent from department and government, yet close enough to have the ear of the Minister (when needed).

The activities of the EA impact on an enormous range of people and bodies, and it does try to consult widely. However, there were two clear themes fed back to the Review team: that steps should be put in place to make it easier for stakeholders to communicate with the right people in EA; and that EA can be “obsessed with the process” and needs to be more responsive to needs.

It should go without saying that organisations – such as EA – need to manage their own cost-effectiveness. However, it is not always clear that a strategic approach to cost effectiveness has been in place. The organisation has been consumed with budgetary constraints and annual funding rounds that there still exists a gap today in the perception of the cost effectiveness of the organisation and whether the current model and the current activities are the right ones to be focussing on. Measures of cost-effectiveness also matters at a much more fundamental level in ensuring that the sponsor department and the EA understand the organisation’s impact – we do not believe that the impact of the EA is fully understood..... yet.



25

25. Recommendations

25.1 Introduction

The purpose of this review is to consider the effectiveness and governance of the EA including the extent to which the organisation is delivering against NI Executive/its priorities.

Specifically, this review has set out to consider:

- The EA's capacity for delivering more effectively and efficiently, including identifying the potential for efficiency savings, and where appropriate, its ability to contribute to wider goals such as economic and social wellbeing;
- An assessment or assurance that processes are in place for making such assessments and;
- The control and governance arrangements in place to ensure that the organisation and its sponsor are complying with recognised principles of good corporate governance.

The recommendations presented below are ultimately based on the findings and feedback presented in previous sections which highlight the areas identified that require attention. We have grouped these recommendations into three broad yet interlinked categories:

- **“Complex problems require creative solutions” relates to recommendations around the need to revisit the future form, function and financing of EA.**
- **“EA capacity and capabilities” contains a series of recommendations which focus on improvements required to support organisational effectiveness.**
- **“Demonstrating stronger accountability” holds a series of recommendations around governance, accountability and relationships which we believe will support future EA effectiveness.**

It is our firm belief that EA has demonstrated the capacity to change – that the organisation is emerging from a difficult past and that many of the issues identified in this review can be traced back to matters un-resolved at the time of formation or problems carried forward into the new organisation. These recommendations offer an opportunity to hit the re-set button and refresh the narrative.

25.2 Complex problems require creative solutions

The challenges faced by the public sector are and will remain much more multiplex and intersectional than they have ever been. Multiplex problems require solutions that are holistic and interconnected. This review has identified significant levels of failure to understand the role, purpose or remit of the Education Authority. Furthermore, this review has identified that the baseline costs of the EA are not fully established and therefore there remains a degree of uncertainty on the effectiveness of the current resourcing model.

- **Recommendation One** – Taking an **internal review approach**, DE with the EA need to re-visit a number of key aspects of the original design of EA in order to understand:
 - > Clarity of purpose. In this case, everyone concerned – ministers, the department, the agency itself – all parties should reflect upon precisely what is needed to be delivered. This review highlights that the role of EA is not well understood and the scale and complexity of its functions unwieldy. We fully recognise that one organisation's purpose can be entirely distinct and they can be mixed, but it is crucial to be as clear as possible about the form and its inherent functions. The department holds



an absolutely key responsibility for understanding and defining the purpose and function. But the reality of the turnover of ministers and officials means that in practice the burden often falls on the agency itself, which must repeatedly ensure that its sponsors in government do really understand why the organisation was created and how its purpose is being interpreted. If the wider sector is not clear about EA's purpose, while understanding whose support is essential to its success, it will be vulnerable, regardless of its performance.

- > There is a sense that EA may have suffered from 'mission creep'. Being given extra duties can look like a vote of confidence, however it can distract an organisation from its core function, leave it with multiple tasks requiring very different skills, and simply make it too big and diverse to do its job well. Whilst we recognise that EA itself did not necessarily make the decisions about mission creep, it is the department that decides to extend an organisation's remit. Given the scale, size and complexity of the EA model and the fact that additional responsibilities have been added to it – DE and EA need to reflect upon that form and function to determine the size, shape and focus of the organisation going forward.
- **Recommendation Two** – By undertaking a fundamental review of EA, in re-visiting its purpose, in re-defining the services and provisions it is responsible for, allows the opportunity for DE and EA to then address two fundamental issues:
 - > With a re-defined purpose and clarity on scope and service, there is an opportunity to identify the correct budget for EA that properly allows it to carry out the services and activities identified and redress, for once and for all, the systemic and ongoing annual budgetary pressures and the subsequent issues and pressures manifested as a result. EA suffers from a chronic failure to plan ahead – limited as it is by annual funding cycles (like the rest of public sector in Northern Ireland). However, there is an opportunity, in refreshing the purpose and scope of the organisation to identify the strategic priorities and deliverables that EA should focus on and to put in place funding and budget arrangements to allow the same. This would eradicate many of the causal symptoms identified in this review – all emanating from financial or resourcing issues. If the organisation is re-purposed and 're-financed', it allows the organisation then to focus on those priorities and to be measured accordingly. There is an opportunity to make the budget process more responsive to priorities, conscious of any financial constraints and the provision of same will still dependent upon an agreed budget from the Executive in the mix with competing priorities.
 - > With a re-defined purpose and clarity on scope and service, there is an opportunity to “right size” the structure of the EA. This review has highlighted that the organisation is not right sized, the organisation has not benefited from full organisational or directorate reviews to determine its appropriate service or resourcing model, so questions will always arise on its affordability. If the organisation's budget is re-set and the affordability of what it will cost to deliver on the strategic objectives identified, then there is an opportunity to press the re-set button on the myriad of resourcing issues identified in this review (and in other reports). With a refreshed mandate and, a refreshed budget there is an opportunity to right size the organisation once and for all and get the appropriate structure and workforce model in place.
- **Recommendation Three.** With a refreshed remit and scope, with associated identified strategic (and achievable) priorities and a budget agreed to reflect the delivery of those priorities, the organisation can begin to fundamentally address delivery effectiveness issues identified within this review. We strongly recommend that:
 - > A full-scale **external review** of the EA is carried out to determine on the future structural model of the organisation (aligned to re-purposed strategic objectives and priorities and funding envelope).



There is a sense that EA in its current form is too large – that directorates are too broad and house too many services and activities. This fundamental design flaw reverts back to the original design of the organisation and the sheer scale of EA has allowed functional and geographical silos to develop – despite best efforts to prevent this. Therefore, in reviewing the organisation structure, cognisance must be made of the fact that directorates appear too large, services disparate and silo-ed.

- > The external review of the organisation should examine the opportunity to explore alternative delivery models and the sustainability of more commercial or income generation models. Operational delivery services such as transport and catering are expensive, delivered on single sites, are identified as hard to manage and resource and are key services which should be reviewed to test alternative delivery (regional) models (as well as how this can be potentially done within existing legislation).
- > The external review should take a lead in designing the overall structure and model for the organisation, but every service line that remains within a new structure should be reviewed to determine the most appropriate and sustainable financial delivery model and if there are alternative models (including commercial models), these should be explored, and options appraised. These should be done internally and form key parts of ongoing transformation efforts.
- > The organisation requires a strategic workforce plan with an associated resourcing model for service delivery. This resourcing model will urgently require a pay and grading review. This is a critical aspect of developing a refreshed approach to EA culture and should be seen as a priority. Unless there is internal capacity to undertake this planning, this element of review should be incorporated into the external review of structure and model.
- > This review has highlighted the importance of culture, people and capability and therefore there is a need for the organisation to articulate its vision for these key aspects of organisational life. The effectiveness of the EA model is underpinned by finance and systems, but perhaps most importantly by people. At the moment, EA's approach to HR matters requires attention and HR resourcing issues aside, the organisation urgently needs a human resources strategy, and this should be a key priority for the organisation. Mindful that this review may result in subsequent reviews, which may in turn create changes to the organisational structure of delivery model, there is still an urgent requirement to address HR and people issues identified in this report and the development of a HR strategy, even in an interim format should not be delayed as a result of any other potential reviews.
- > We recommend that EA identifies and takes the opportunities to review and test processes and systems to ensure they adhere to internal and external requirements and meet effectiveness and efficiency tests.
- > Furthermore, this review has identified that whilst EA is making effective progress in addressing and securing a robust approach to information governance, the handling and dissemination of information (inside and outside of the organisation) is not fully developed as yet. This is not simply a matter of technology and integrated ICT systems but more about data quality, standards, protection and sharing. We recommend that EA intensifies and accelerates internal work to create a more effective system of data and information management and usage (particularly in how this integrates with EA performance and reporting).

There is a need for the organisation to move beyond the inherited arrangements (financial and otherwise) and to build upon improvements identified in this review. However, to do so successfully requires a fundamental re-set of the organisation's journey to date and to set a new course more aligned to wider strategic priorities, within a form that can be responsive to its environment and with a budget to allow it to deliver and be measured effectively.



25.3 EA capacity and capability

A recurring theme of feedback in this landscape review has been EA's effectiveness in its environment and how it interacts with its stakeholders and partners. It is fair to say that the quality of those engagements is often contingent upon the individual officer interacting with the parent, principal or outside agency. For many of those stakeholders, that experience may be positive, but our survey and consultation feedback indicate that as a corporate body, EA's effectiveness in stakeholder communication and management is unsatisfactory and more work is required to build trust and confidence with key parts of the wider education system. Whilst there are many examples of good practice, the overall levels of organisational effectiveness are not where they should be at this point in the organisation's existence.

- **Recommendation One** – EA urgently needs to become more child and pupil centric in its approach. Feedback suggests that the organisation is process heavy and that these processes get in the way of a child centric service. There is an urgent need to re-focus on the needs of the child/pupil and as such, EA needs to become more dynamic in response to events, there is a need to tailor its response to the need of the user/stakeholders and the need to continually bring together cross-directorate teams and be agile in response to those needs. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated early signs of more cross-organisational work, however it is patchy and not consistent and EA's organisational effectiveness can only be truly met if it deploys a full cross-organisational response to meeting needs.
- **Recommendation Two** – This requires that underpinning all efforts is a consistent and effective approach to communication. We are aware of a new and evolving approach to communications but going forward, EA needs to ensure a more corporate and transparent approach to communication within EA and outside the organisation. There is an urgent need to ensure that the school system gets reliable information (as opposed to swamping them with disparate information, as is the case at present); there is a need to organise the corporate message to ensure it is consistent and on the 'front foot' as opposed to being re-active and operating from a position of defensiveness.
- **Recommendation Three** – In order to ensure a fit for purpose and child centric approach to service delivery, we recommend that all front line services are reviewed, tested and refreshed to ensure that they are appropriately resourced and skilled and that the processes and systems they use allow them to interact with stakeholders in real time and allow EA staff to provide an improved quality of service and information. Too often EA is criticised for failure to communicate and failure to provide the right information at the right time. There is a need to ensure that front line services are appropriately resourced and skilled to ensure school users and parents are accessing the right information at the right time from the right people. This requires a fundamental review of all frontline activities and the processes/systems to support them.
 - > Whilst we recognise that EA provides many frontline services, we suggest that priority is given to services such as School Improvement services, Education Welfare service HR services, as these services featured heavily in feedback from the school systems and parents.
 - > Furthermore, we believe that initial reviews should be conducted independent of EA so that baselines can be established, and needs identified. We recognise that this has a cost impact, but an external review will not take resource away from existing services which may be under pressure and will provide the capacity for independence and a degree of objectivity.



- **Recommendation Four** - Advances in technology have enabled us to collect far more data and process it at speeds that were impossible as little as four years ago. That acceleration of pace places corresponding pressure on the principle of effective data governance and management. This review has identified that EA is a serial collector of data and information and has almost created an internal information industry. Unless that information is useful, integrated and real-time – it is not effective. EA needs to ensure that it has in place an effective and integrated approach to data and information management and collection and to integrate that data/information to inform and support better decision making.
- **Recommendation Five** – We referred in previous sections to the relationship complexity of the EA operating environment and how it is our view that the current landscape perpetuates a cycle of leaders heavily involved in multiple and often low value meeting culture. Stakeholder management is a critical element of leadership within EA, however there is a need in re-defining the purpose and scope of the Authority to refresh that partnership approach and to re-examine the organisation's leadership capability. By this we mean, leadership across the whole organisation and not by title. Leaders within EA are not always given enough space to lead – almost by definition leadership involves making choices, rather than being solely an agent for decisions made elsewhere. Excessively tight control, and the co-existence of multiple levers of central control, easily corrode the capacity to lead and in a highly centralised model such as EA, the capacity to change is limited. We strongly recommend that for EA to successfully make the changes required for the next stage of its journey it needs to become a learning organisation and there is a need to quickly embed an Organisational Development strategy to define and support leadership capacity and capability in the organisation.

25.4 Demonstrating stronger accountability

Strong accountability matters – and when it works, it benefits everyone. It enables people to know how the Government is doing, and how to gain redress when things go wrong. It ensures that ministers and civil servants are acting in the interests of the people they serve. Accountability is a part of good governance and can increase the trustworthiness and legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the public.

We have identified improving levels of accountability within EA and in relation to accountability axis with other organisations – primarily DE. There is however work to be done in moving towards a more streamlined approach to accountability to support a more integrated flow from the Minister through the Department and into the EA, so that the roles and responsibilities (under accountability arrangements) are clear and assurance is full.

Recommendations therefore include:

- **Recommendation One** - Accountable Officers should ensure that when the new partnership agreement between EA and DE is being drafted that sponsor teams work with EA to make roles and responsibilities as clear as possible, discussing the wording in the framework document to ensure a shared understanding.
- **Recommendation Two** –DE should seek views from the EA Board Chairperson and Board members on how DE manages its relationship with the EA and in turn how EA manages its relationship with the DE and the Minister, putting in place any recommendations to improve those relationship, that might arise as a result of those reflections.



- **Recommendation Three** – Assurance. It is our view that relationships need to be underpinned by a systematic approach to assurance. We believe that there are two broad aspects of assurance which DE and EA need to address:
 - > assurance that EA is performing satisfactorily against the objectives, targets and performance measures agreed by Ministers – the ‘controllability’ dimension of accountability and the starting point for ‘controllability’ is establishing what success looks like for EA.
 - > assurance that the body is meeting the requirements of legislation and guidance – the ‘transparency’ and ‘responsibility’ dimensions of accountability.

The recommendation follows that DE and EA should ensure that EA has in place a well-developed performance framework that sets out Ministers’ priorities within the overall Programme for Government outcomes, defines as clearly as possible how success will be measured and ideally covers expectations over several years. This performance framework should be a central feature of EA’s Corporate Plan and should be aligned with a medium-term financial plan and the projected budget. Furthermore, Accountable Officers (in both organisations) should require that sponsor teams and senior sponsors who report to them are using the templates and following the guidance and require that any decisions not to follow the guidance or template are clearly documented for the corporate record.

- EA is sponsored by a team (Education Governance Team and DE Finance). This can work well provided that the team has the capacity and capability to carry out both the policy and the sponsorship work, and that the urgency of demands on the policy side do not crowd out the systematic attention required for effective sponsorship. It is important to recognise that effective sponsorship takes time, and that there is a substantial amount of work required to be an effective sponsor. It is our understanding that the DE model is reliant upon others (i.e. directorate policy leads) for scrutiny matters and therefore the EGT largely becomes a co-ordinating function as regards to EA’s sponsorship. **Recommendation Four** therefore suggests that DE should review the capacity and capability needed in its teams to ensure that relationships are being managed well with EA and consider how best to organise that – through policy teams or a sponsorship hub, for instance – to ensure that there is a proper focus on sponsorship activity and a strong link with policy development. In reviewing the capacity and capability, it will be important to have nominated people who can provide support to the Departmental Accounting Officer and EA Accounting Officer.
- **Recommendation Five** focuses on the governance arrangements within EA and the structure and composition of the EA Board. In refining the governance arrangements and refreshing the relationship between the sponsor body and EA, this review has identified that the EA Board is a large and multi-representative body. The effective functioning of this body is not necessarily through design – it is at the behest of the individuals selected by outside agencies to represent their interests. The idea of corporateness needs strengthened, the skills base of the Board needs strengthened, and the independence of the board needs to be promoted. At present, in its current form the EA Board is not independent, does not have the full skill set it requires and is too large. We are also mindful that within a Northern Ireland context, board independence is linked to effectiveness, but close proximity to politicians in NI can often negatively impact upon this.
 - > Recognising the constitution of EA Board is set in primary legislation, we nonetheless recommend a full review of the Board to determine the appropriateness of the current model (even if it tests that legislation).
 - > We recommend the idea of creating enhanced accountability arrangements between the Minister and the Board (as suggested above).



- > In recommending changes to the skillset present on the Board, we recommend that any review of board composition consider the addition of co-opted or non-voting members (such as experts in particular fields) to augment board expertise.
- > In line with more general movements towards board behaviours and standards of public office, we would recommend that in the next phase of board development, consideration is given to how the existing Code of Conduct can be enhanced/applied and ensure an *modus operandi* for board members and enhance performance and board effectiveness.

25.5 Conclusion

In scoping out these recommendations we have tried to ensure alignment to the broad themes emerging from our fieldwork and consultations. We have tried to keep recommendations at a reasonably strategic level, as the findings could produce multiple operational and detailed recommendations. We have tried to focus on the key issues which we believe, if implemented, will make significant improvement. We do not believe that EA (nor DE by extension) will get any benefit from EA being under constant review, however we do strongly believe that there is a need to internally reflect on the focus, direction and funding arrangements of the organisation and that this needs to be followed by an external independent review to help shape the structure of any subsequent EA delivery model.

Some structural changes are, in our view, necessary and indeed urgent. But they will achieve nothing without the wider changes we propose, for instance to governance, scrutiny, accountability, leadership, culture, values and performance management. In short, there is no point in designing a new structure without also putting in place the systems, processes and people that will be needed to make it work.



26. Conclusion

We believe that this review of EA can only be an assessment of the organisational effectiveness from 2018. Up to that point the organisation was operating under interim management and structural arrangements. It is only since the appointment of the current Chief Executive Officer in December 2018, that the organisation has begun to function as a regional unitary body. It is a fair assessment that in the three and half years since that appointment, EA has progressed at a significant pace and that the pace of change and reform continues. Whilst the organisation should, from a design and functional perspective, be up and running almost 7 years since formation, in reality EA is only beginning to find its feet.

The organisation has endured significant, and at times, hostile internal and external scrutiny since its formation and it is clear that the organisation could have been more responsive or proactive on occasions and in that regard it has not helped itself.

However, there is a recognition that there are a number of fundamental issues which impact upon the effectiveness of the EA delivery model:

- The challenging funding landscape and a recognition that perhaps EA does not have the correct resources to deliver on its remit (though this does require additional work to definitively define the scope of EA's work and the associated resourcing requirements).
- The complex and unwieldy legislation and founding documents do not provide the EA with the authority to fulfil its remit.
- The organisation needs to quickly establish baseline costs and resourcing models for all services to create a whole budget/resourcing model for the organisation.
- There is an urgent need to address people issues – the creation of a people strategy, an adequate and harmonised pay structure, the investment in capacity and capability.
- The organisational structure and determining the right size/shape of the organisation including the options of alternative delivery models for identified services.
- Establishing credibility with the school system to ensure they feel supported.

“In today's diverse dynamic and connected world, how well the public sector tells its story and assures the public it is meeting its expectations is as important as how well the public sector manages itself and delivers services”¹¹². As we have noted throughout this review, EA has not told its story well and as a result tends to be judged by the failures or unresponsiveness of the delivery model. There are many examples of good practice in EA, examples of innovation and creativity – including Youth Service and the Digital Admissions Service for example – however, EA has struggled in a form that has not allowed it to fully deliver or to realise full organisational effectiveness. Some of this can be attributed to form and function, some can be attributed to the financial envelope provided and more can be attributed to lack of ability to quickly respond to the needs of the stakeholder.

In a post-crisis context, public sector bodies are coping with the ongoing consequences, including making themselves more effective under fiscal pressure. Organisations, such as EA need to balance existing commitments while ensuring fiscal sustainability, fairness and landscape awareness. This involves fostering innovation, and resolving trade-offs between short-term gain and long-term needs and responsibilities. This also requires EA to restore trust, by strengthening transparency and accountability, and improving responsiveness to stakeholder needs.

¹¹² Ryan, J. (2019). Does public accountability even matter if the public sector is performing well? Policy Quarterly 15 (4, November): 8-13.



Fundamentally though one of the most challenging aspects for EA that this review has identified is that the problems we have found are inherent in the systems, processes and culture of the EA as it stands. They are interdependent and mutually reinforcing – and therefore they demand equally interlinked solutions. This ultimately reverts to culture and there is an urgent need for EA to invest in developing a one culture (and structure) which is responsive to its environment and can enable the transformation in service delivery which is required.

26.1 Acknowledgements

We would like to record our thanks to everyone in the Education Authority and Department of Education for their support in arranging and facilitating this review. We are deeply grateful for the readiness with which people have responded to our demands on their time and to our requests for information. The frankness and cooperation that we have encountered have been exemplary in an exercise that we hope will have been of significant benefit to all.



Appendix 1 – Survey and Fieldwork Data



1. Approach

A key aspect of this landscape review was to consult extensively within the school and education system in order to understand the impact and effectiveness of the Education Authority delivery model. Consequently two key methods were used to collect direct feedback from the wider education system.

a. Survey

Baker Tilly Mooney Moore circulated eight surveys to key stakeholder groups via Department of Education and Education Authority social media accounts in addition to direct distribution by email.

Stakeholder Group	Survey Respondents
1. Employees: Teaching Staff	162
2. Employees: Corporate Staff	489
3. Employees: Education Workforce	675
4. Principals	38
5. Board of Governors	28
6. Parents	322
7. Your Experience 2022 (Pupils)	58
8. Wider Community	7

Please note: Key used throughout all surveys is detailed below where green represents agreement/effectiveness and blue, disagreement/ineffectiveness:

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■ N/A

Surveys were devised for each segment and each segment survey had a customised survey template designed around their needs, interaction or involvement with EA. Where standard questions were asked, these have been collated to demonstrate 'whole' system responses to EA effectiveness, otherwise the analysis below explores each segment survey responses.

b. Focus Groups

In order to test emergent survey data and to explore emerging themes a range of focus groups and one to one consultations were carried out. We were particularly keen to speak with the school leadership and therefore approached the Chairs of Area Learning Clusters (in the post primary and primary sectors), Chairs of nursery and special education sector groups for meetings. Those identified spokespersons were provided with an overview of the consultation and asked to seek feedback from the sector/cluster they represented. At the one to one meeting, the nominee then fed back views on behalf of the colleagues they represented within their sector/region.

Furthermore, focus groups were facilitated with key employee groups within EA, who might not have accessed the surveys. Therefore volunteers were sought from Classroom Assistants group, Catering and Cleaning staff and from Transport staff. A number of focus groups were facilitated with these groups to explore the questions asked in surveys and findings added to the survey data.

In addition, we were keen to ensure that the voice of the young people was included in the review and therefore almost 170 young people from a range of schools, communities, regions and years were invited to a facilitated feedback session with one of our team. These sessions explore the pupil experience of education in Northern Ireland.



It should be noted and highlighted that in addition to these sessions, this review incorporated widespread and significant engagement with trade unions and sector representative bodies (as noted in the consultation schedule), so that the findings of the review provide – as far as possible – as 360 degree perspective of the effectiveness of the EA at present.

Generic levels of understanding of EA

- All stakeholders were asked to indicate their levels of understanding of the role and function of EA. Results from all groups of stakeholders (below) indicate there is a significant lack of understanding of the role and function of EA by all stakeholders, notably only 8% of parents/pupils agreed or strongly agreed the role and function was understood by them, 41% of principals and teachers understand the role, 37% of governors and 20% by partners in the education and wider system.

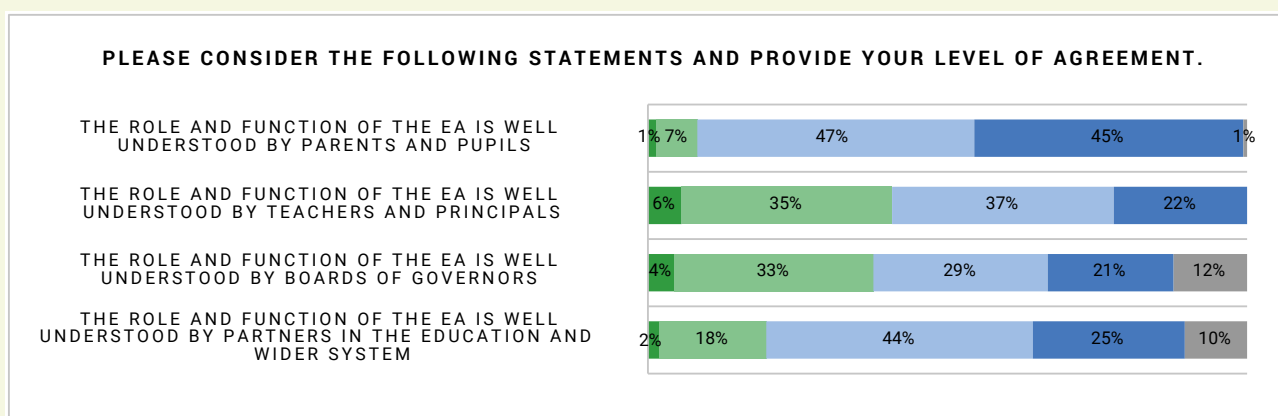


Fig 1. Understanding the role and function of EA

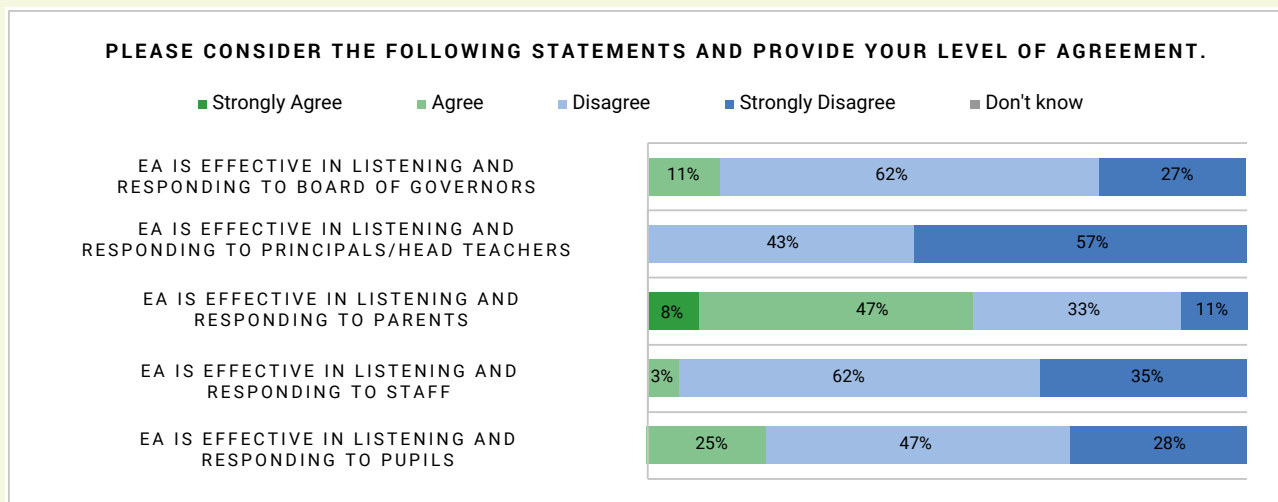


Fig 2. EA's ability to listen to its stakeholders (Head Teachers' response)

- A feature of this review is EA's capacity to interact with and listen to its partners. The table above identifies Head Teachers and Principals views on EA's capacity to listen. This set of questions considered EA's effectiveness in listening and responding to a variety of stakeholders and to understanding their individual needs (and subsequently responding effectively to them). Over 50% reported that the EA was effective in listening and responding to parents. Effectiveness in listening and responding to the remaining groups were significantly lower with 25% and 11% for Pupils and Board of Governors respectively, but only 3% of those principals participating agreed or strongly that EA was an effective listening organisation.



Survey Key Findings: Teaching Staff (n=162)

- When asked to identify and rate the quality of existing EA services and programmes, Teachers rated the following services as the most effective. Percentage of respondents rating the service effective or very effective:
 - > Education Library Service (56%)
 - > Music Service (52%)
 - > Pre-School Education Programme (38%)
 - > Education Psychology Service (38%)
 - > Youth Service (29%)
- Teachers were asked to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the support received by them from EA. The table below indicates that
 - > 71% of Teaching staff do not believe EA makes an effective contribution to the strategic priorities of education;
 - > 86% of Teaching staff do not believe that EA provide them with appropriate information to deal effectively with the challenges they face in their job;
 - > 95% do not know who to speak to in EA if they have a concern;
 - > 76% of Teaching staff do not believe EA is effective in providing development support to them
 - > 85% of Teaching staff either disagree or strongly disagree that EA listens and responds effectively to teachers.

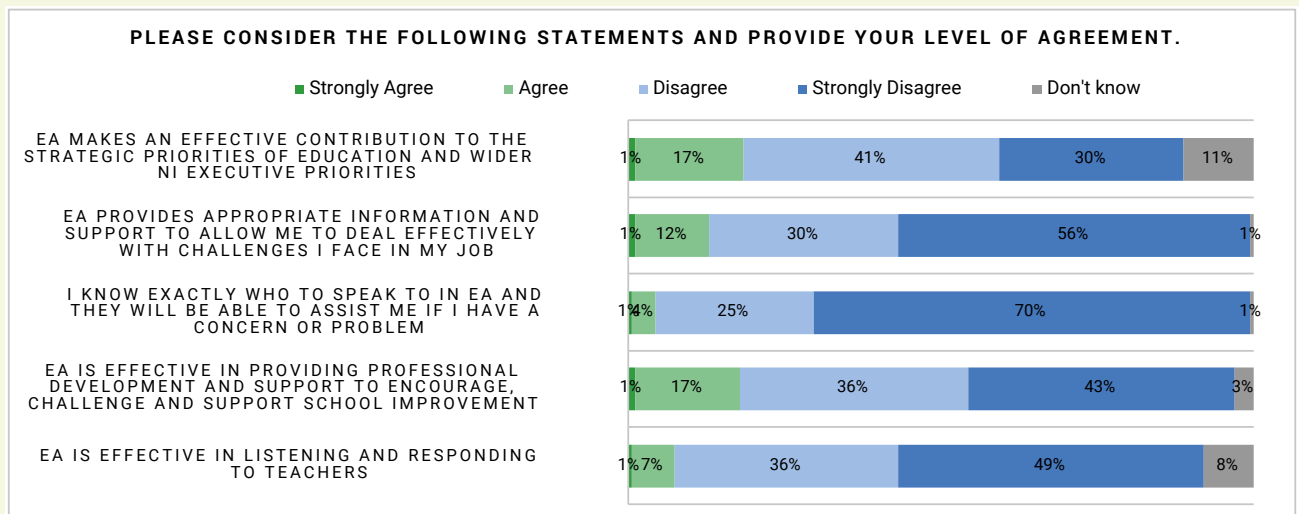


Fig 3. Teachers feedback on EA performance

- In the free response sections, Teachers were invited to provide responses. Some illustrative examples are included as direct quotes:
 - > "I would like to see a return to the days were the EA provided training and courses for teachers. Where young teachers felt supported. Where Educational Psychologist's actually had time to assess all children. Where enough people were employed to deal with matters in a timely and fair manner. "
 - > "Too many replies are 'every school should do their own thing/make their own choice'. Tell us what to do and the playing field is even! Too much paperwork involved in SEN provision. Don't know who works in Literacy now. Difficult to find time to look at the sea of resources online."
 - > "EA need to work in the ground more closely and listen to issues that cause most concern day to day"
 - > "The EA being formed was supposed to streamline services and make them more efficient- if anything this has had the opposite effect"



Survey Feedback from the Education Workforce (n=675)

This survey was sent to all EA employees – school based and non-school based (including all corporate and head office staff/support).

We asked the Education Workforce to consider a number of statements relating to the EA function and role. Responses were split with similar % (within 5%) of agree and disagree across four statements highlighted in the table below.

The majority of respondents (64%) disagreed that it was easy to get access to the right people/information in EA when they have a query. 54% also disagreed that the EA is effective in listening and responding to the concerns of all colleagues who work for the Authority and providing appropriate support to all.

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total in agreement	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total in Disagreement	Total Don't Know
The role and function of the EA is well understood by everyone who works in the workforce	8%	44%	52%	36%	11%	47%	1%
I understand how EA works and who to go to if I have a concern or problem	9%	39%	48%	37%	15%	52%	0%
It is easy to get access to the right people/information in EA when I have a query	4%	27%	31%	40%	24%	64%	6%
EA is effective in providing professional development and support to encourage, challenge and support all aspects of the pupil experience	5%	39%	44%	31%	13%	44%	12%
EA is effective in listening and responding to the concerns of all colleagues who work for the Authority and providing appropriate support to us all	3%	32%	35%	37%	17%	54%	11%
EA provides me with the resources to carry out my job effectively	5%	42%	47%	35%	13%	48%	5%

Fig 4. Education Workforce feedback on EA effectiveness

- Education Workforce were asked to rate thirteen EA services and programmes. The following were rated as the most effective. % of respondents rating the service effective or very effective:
 - > Education Library Service (54%)
 - > Education Welfare Service (43%)
 - > Education Psychology Service (42%)
 - > Pre-School Education Programme (42%)
 - > Pupil Support Services (37%)



- 675 survey respondents from Educational workforce were asked how effective is the EA general provision.
 - > 61% stated that EA was very effective or effective in providing balanced and reliable meal service,
 - > 60% safe and clean premises.
 - > It is noted that 51% stated that the EA was ineffective or very ineffective in providing well maintained school buildings.

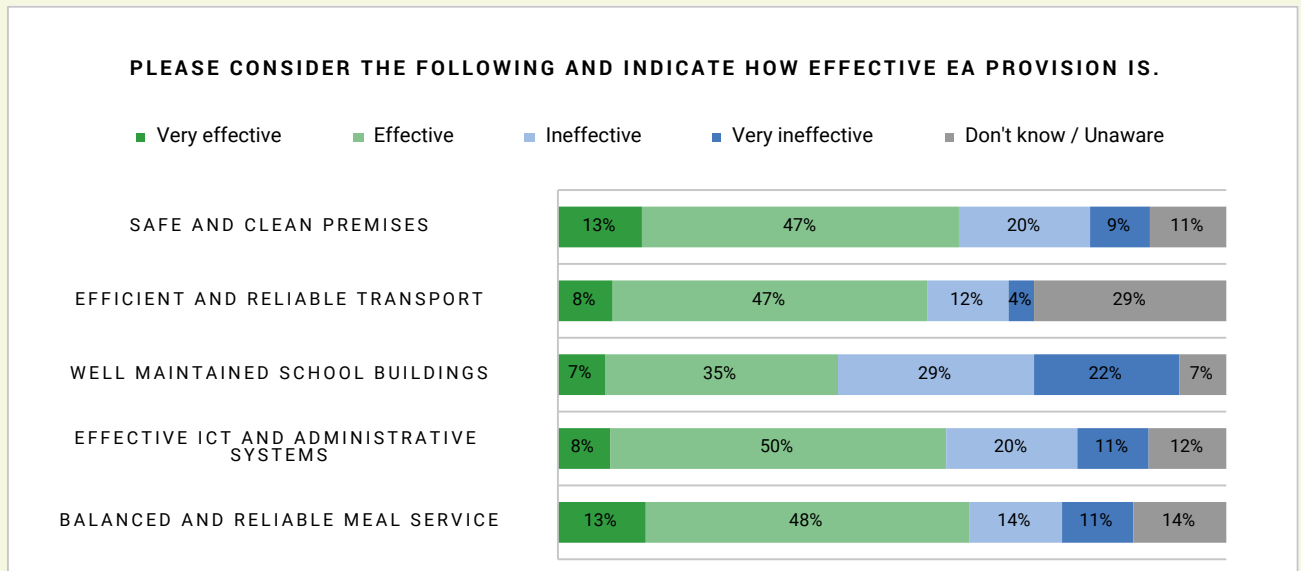


Fig 5. Education Authority Workforce Feedback

- In the free response sections, EA workforce were invited to provide responses. Some illustrative examples are includes as direct quotes:
 - > “Poor service to be honest, too bureaucratic with too much attention being paid to ticking boxes in a civil service style and not enough focus and resources spent on the children/pupils especially SEN pupils”
 - > “From my experience in school during covid is that Principals have been left to make decision on their own and guidance has either been too late or too vague from the EA. Information was never released to schools before the general public knew. I feel more support for schools was and is still needed”
 - > “From the school perspective for trying to get contact in EA about information for Human Resources or Finance, it is absolutely near to impossible to get answers or advice out of anyone.”
 - > “Excellent consistent communication regarding current regulations and guidance”



Survey Feedback from EA Corporate Staff

EA Corporate Staff (i.e. staff who are not school based) were also invited to participate in surveys. Key responses include.

- 56% of EA Corporate staff believe that relationships between EA and school are good.
- 61% of EA Corporate staff either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were kept well informed about EA's direction.
- 66% of EA Corporate staff either disagreed or strongly disagreed that communication between EA leadership and staff is good.

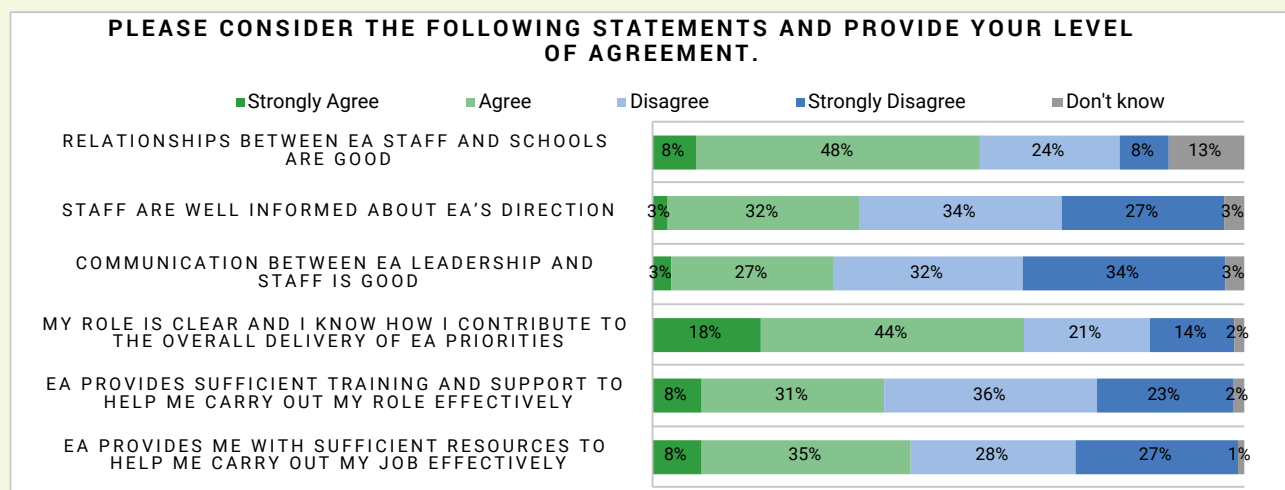


Fig 6. EA Corporate Staff Survey Results

EA Corporate staff were asked a set of further questions and key responses included

- 78% of EA Corporate staff either disagreed or strongly disagreed that EA is effectively resourced.
- Whilst decision making may not be clear to the majority in the EA Corporate staff, the vision and values of the organisation are clear.
- However, 63% of EA Corporate staff agree or strongly agree that EA is committed to modernising services and a further 59% agree or strongly agree that the organisation is committed to positive outcomes for staff and pupils.

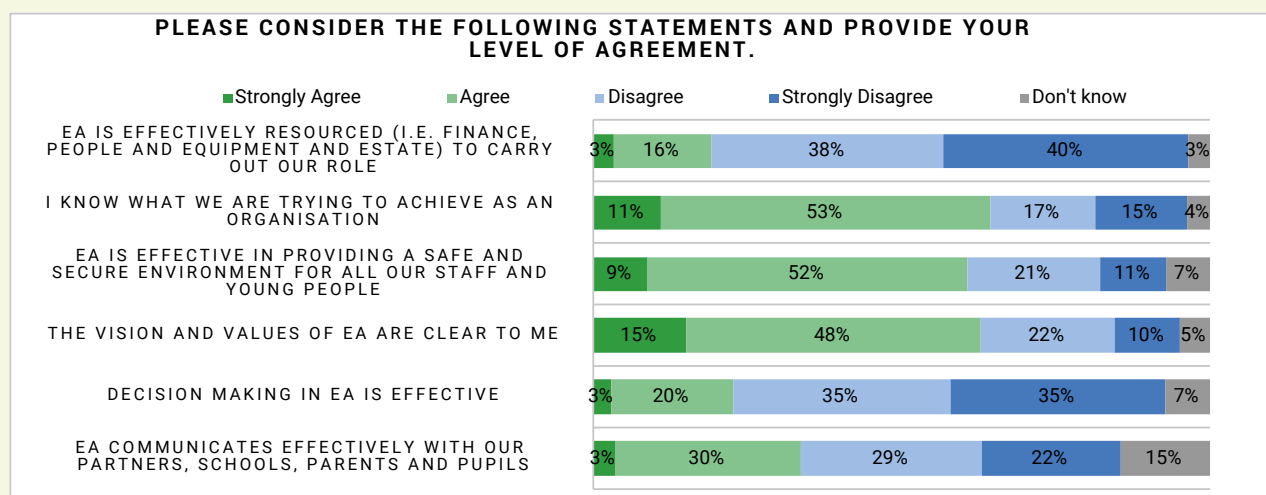


Fig 7. EA Corporate Staff Survey Results (2)

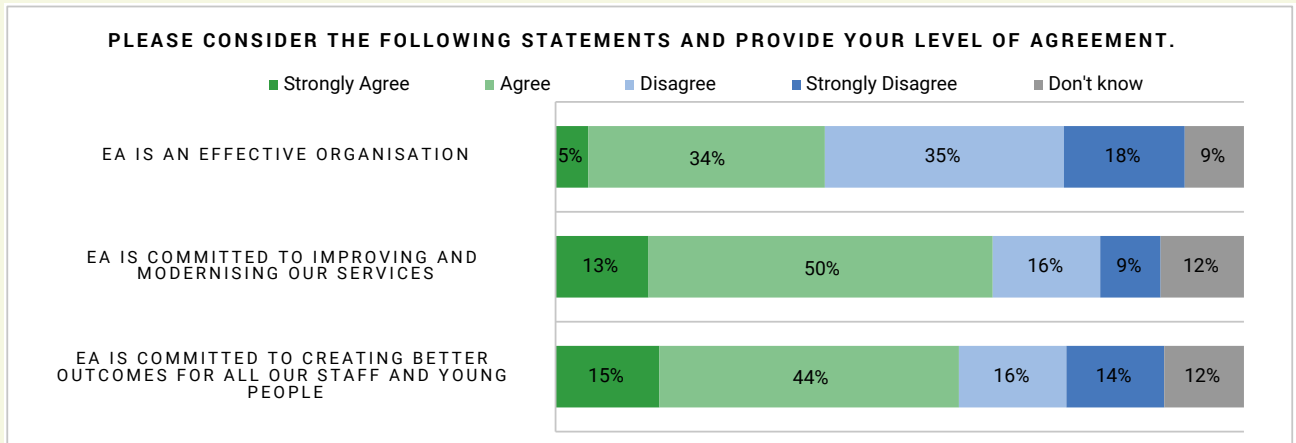


Fig 8. EA Corporate Staff Survey Results (3)



Survey feedback from Principals and Headteachers (n=38)

Noted limited response by Principals and Headteachers.

- Principals and Headteachers were asked to rate thirteen EA services and programmes. The following were rated as the most effective. % of respondents rating the service effective or very effective:
 - > Education Library Service (53%)
 - > Education Psychology Service (53%)
 - > Music Service (47%)
 - > School Development Service (32%)
 - > Pre-School Education Programme (27%)
- Principals and Headteachers were asked if it was clear what the EA's role and responsibilities are – 59% reported that it was not clear to them.
- When asked about knowing exactly who to speak to with queries and the effectiveness of guidance support in their role, 66% strongly disagreed and a further 32% disagreeing with the statement.
- Critically, and reinforcing consultation feedback 97% of those participating in the survey disagreed or strongly disagreed that EA provides them with appropriate information and support to deal effectively with challenges in their jobs.

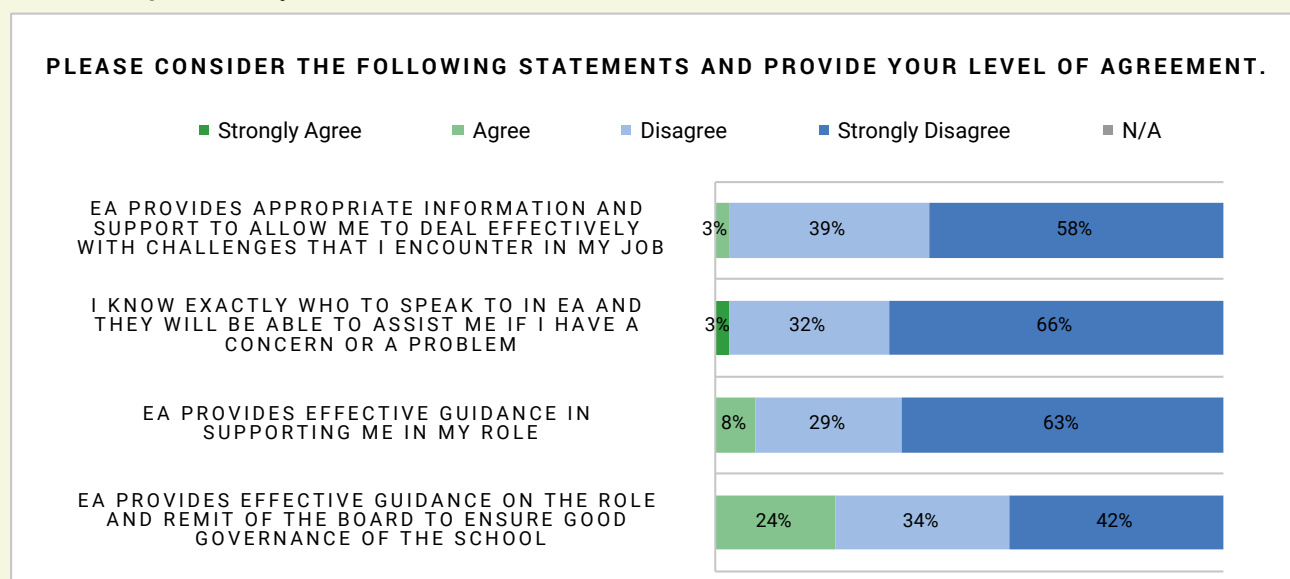


Fig 9. Principal feedback on effectiveness of EA support

- A critical aspect of consultation was determining the level of EA's understanding of the school pressures and performance issues. In this set of questions, 95% of respondents strongly disagree with the statement that EA took their workload into account when developing and implementing policies and procedures. 84% strongly disagreed that EA avoids placing unnecessary burdens on them or their school.

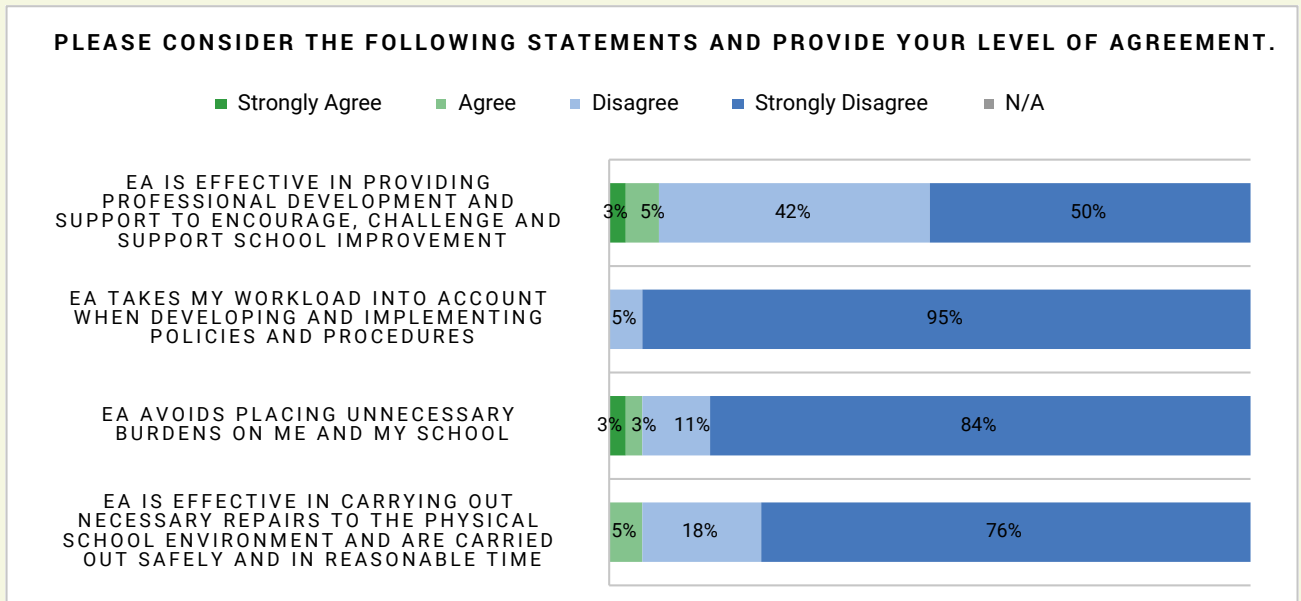


Fig 10. EA levels of support and understanding

- Open questions to Principals and Head Teachers highlighted the bureaucratic nature of EA and the impact on School Development Planning, School Improvement and Special Educational Needs. It is noted that around 20% of respondents provided a positive response highlighting good support, sufficiently responsive, excellent staff, identified improvements e.g., Teachers' training programme on leadership.

In addition to the survey feedback, Principals and Board of Governor surveys were supported by one-to-one consultations with Principal representatives from Area Learning Clusters, Learning Sector Groups and Sector Representatives from Post Primary, Primary, Nursery and Special Education sectors. The feedback can be themed as follows;

- The quality and consistency of EA communication with the school system is on the whole poor. Not only is it often difficult to get through to the organisation, but the quality of the advice provided varies dependent on whom you are talking with. This presents significant challenges for school leaders when making operational decisions, as the advice provided by EA – often HRLS, is conflicting and has to be re-checked.
- Whilst many school leaders were keen to point out that staff designated to support their school – e.g. school improvement – were extremely helpful and courteous – school leaders had a sense that these individuals did not have the time nor resource to give the school the time that they needed. Some schools highlighted that their Area Learning Community Coordinator was very effective but that the quality of what you get from EA depends on the quality of the people, with some schools citing that the higher up you go there is less understanding of the issues.
- There is widespread dissatisfaction with EA's approach to tendering and payments. Despite 'new' systems and people – invoices are not being paid and suppliers chasing schools for payment – schools are now taking the role of debt collectors and some suppliers not delivering anymore until they get payment.
- This dis-satisfaction extends into the invoicing and Oracle system which is an administrative burden for schools, as they experience delays in processing and payment and no access to account managers.
- In terms of the levels of support EA provides to school leaders, many leaders represented the views of their colleagues stating that they felt isolated and unsupported by EA. Their working day was characterised by email after email update, but the 'relationship' with EA is perfunctory and the communication feels box



ticking as opposed to interest in the school or outcomes. There is a broad sense that EA is not listening to school leader concerns and the relationships are transactional and one-sided.

- Many school leaders felt that EA had created 'an administrative monster' which school leaders were tasked with delivering on behalf of EA. Many felt that 'accountability' had 'gone mad' but in reality the processes and systems were actually driving accountability but creating bureaucracy. As a result, many schools in the consultations noted that they had converted part time administrative posts into full time roles to cope with the additional administrative burden.
- Whilst many school leaders recognised EA's difficult financial position and welcomed ongoing moves for efficiency; many questioned EA's definition of efficiency, as many leaders felt that EA was not effective in its use of resource highlighting that the pursuit of efficiency did not require up to 8 emails a day to different people in the same school saying the same thing.
- There were a number of school leaders who quoted EA correspondence to them suggesting that the first paragraph of the letter or email patronised them, the second paragraph gave them more work to do and the final paragraph patronised them again, reinforcing perceptions that EA is not a listening organisation.
- School leaders were particularly dissatisfied with correspondence (often letters) coming from EA without a signature or named individual as the signatory. This means that the school has no point of contact or cannot pursue a line of query if it wished. This reinforced the perception that EA was not engaging with the school system.
- Other school leaders and governors shared that they felt that EA was very dismissive of what they were saying, that EA employed "absolutism" – it was their way and no alternative options provided.
- School leaders reported that EA suggest that in the new education system, school leaders should have the 'freedom' to make decisions and be empowered at local levels to make the right decisions for their pupils, however, many school leaders suggested that EA provided no 'protection' when things didn't go well and that they were often left isolated and alone to resolve issues.
- There was no clear sense on what EA's vision was – school organisations felt that EA 'lurched from year to year' and almost lacked confidence in its own ability to deliver. This lack of confidence feeds into the wider system as other parts of the system become aware of that and creates instability in the whole system, which is clearly not effective.
- Schools often feel side-lined by DE and EA with reports from many school leaders that both organisations blame the other for failings or when things go wrong. As a result, both DE and EA are not providing leadership to the system and often appear to duplicate each other as both communicate into the system and at times directly contradicting each other.
- On a more positive note, COLOs have been seen as a positive development for schools, if overdue and there is a sense that some of their concerns are being heard in this setting.



Board of Governors (n=28)

Noted limited response by Board of Governors which has to be a caveat in making any analysis of data provided. However from the responses provided, we can derive the following insight

- Board of Governors were asked to rate thirteen EA services and programmes. The following were rated as the most effective. % of respondents rating the service effective or very effective:
 - > Education Welfare Service (50%)
 - > Education Psychology Service (43%)
 - > Education Library Service (43%)
 - > Music Service (36%)
 - > Pupil Support Service (36%)
- Respondents were asked a series of questions on the levels of support and guidance they received on their roles. Positive responses were provided regarding EA guidance on the Board member and Chairperson roles with 71% and 64% respectively. Only 29% strongly agreed or agreed that the EA provides effective guidance on the role of the EA in supporting the Board of Governors' school. Notably only 32% of Board of Governors agreed that they feel confident in their role and feel supported by the EA. More broadly - albeit with a limited response rate - the responses from individual board members indicates lukewarm levels of support both at individual and school levels.

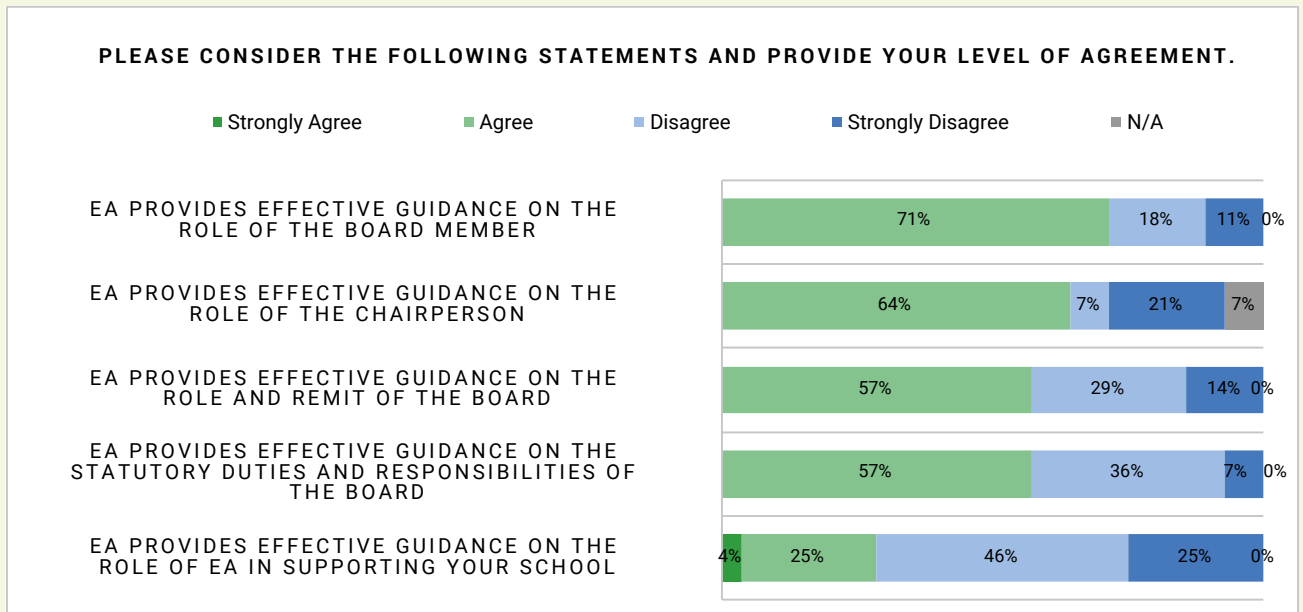


Fig 11. Board of Governors – effectiveness of EA support

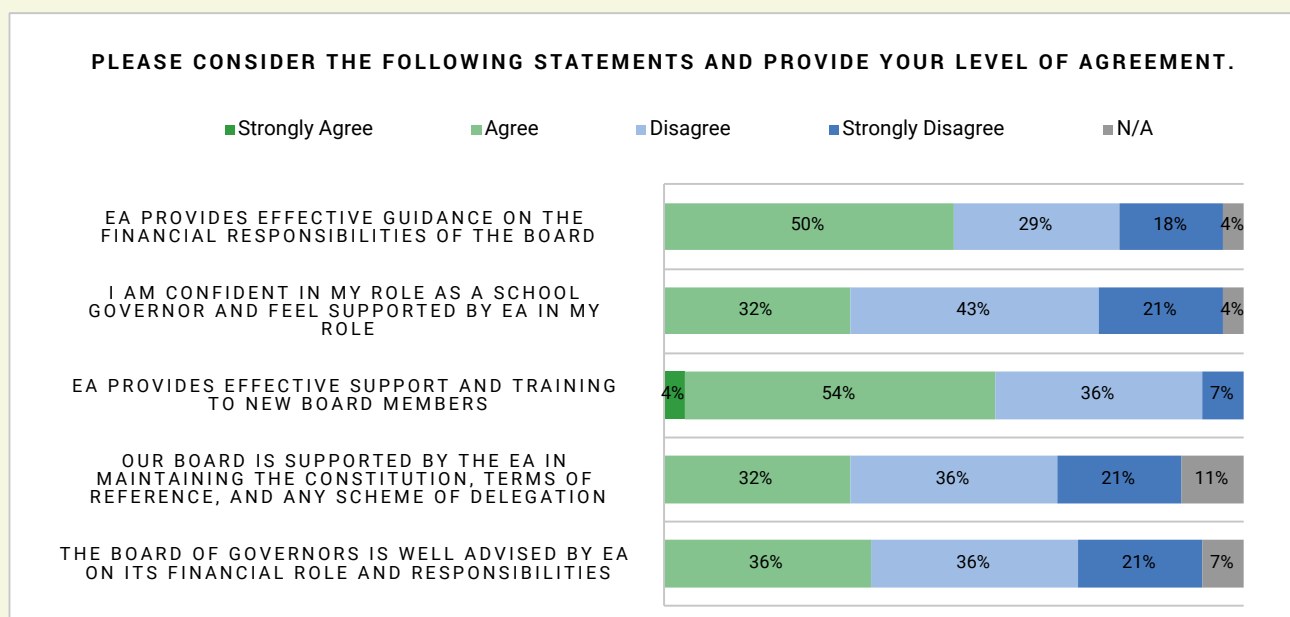


Fig 12. Board of Governors – effectiveness of EA support

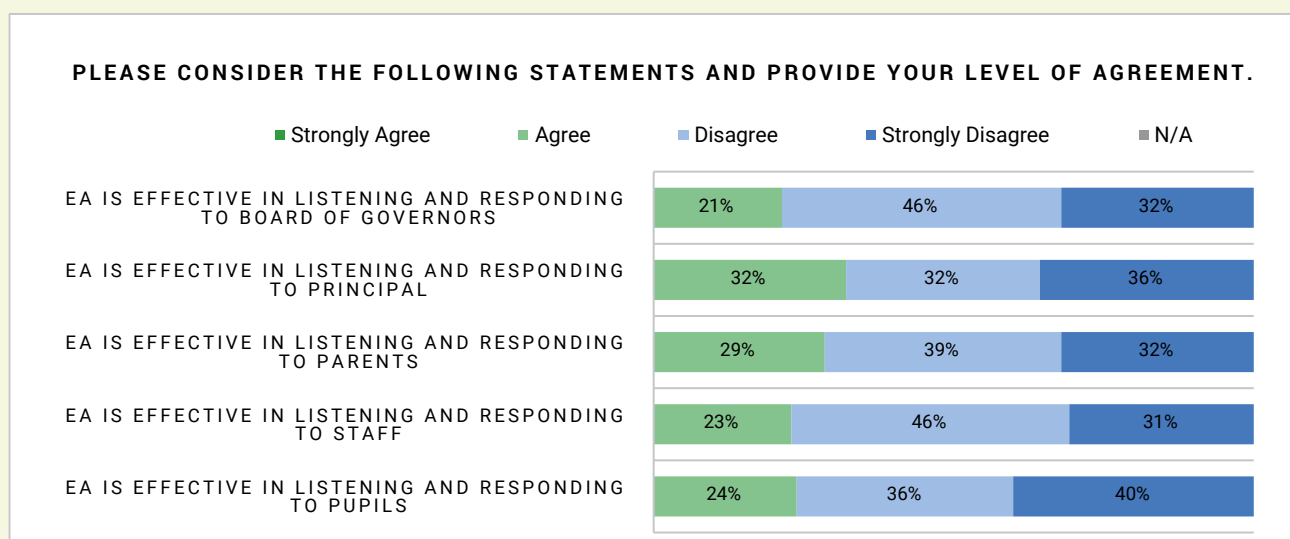


Fig 13. Board of Governors – effectiveness of EA support

- Figure 13 above, provides responses received on the effectiveness of EA as a listening organisation. Less than one third of Board of Governors respondents agreed that the EA was effective in listening and responding to key stakeholders. However, an interesting observation is that Governors rate EA’s listening capacity higher than Principals (see Figure 10).
- In the free response sections, Governors were invited to provide responses. A typical example of a free response is quoted below:
 - > “As volunteers Governors are very much left out on their own and very little assistance is offered by EA, unless of course an issue arises. Since EA has been formed it is very hard to get in contact with the relevant section/people and often, due to what seems a high turnaround of staff, that person has moved on if you need to speak with them at a later date. This has been a major issue in my school and is very frustrating and time consuming for the Principal who has to constantly chase up queries. Training courses for Governors are available but it is often hard to get registered especially if you are also working and have other commitments.”



Parents (n=322)

Parents responded who had children in pre-school and primary settings (61%) and post primary settings (39%).

- More broadly, parents reported higher levels of satisfaction regarding admissions process and policies, pastoral support and academic support in comparison to the physical state of the school and school meals.

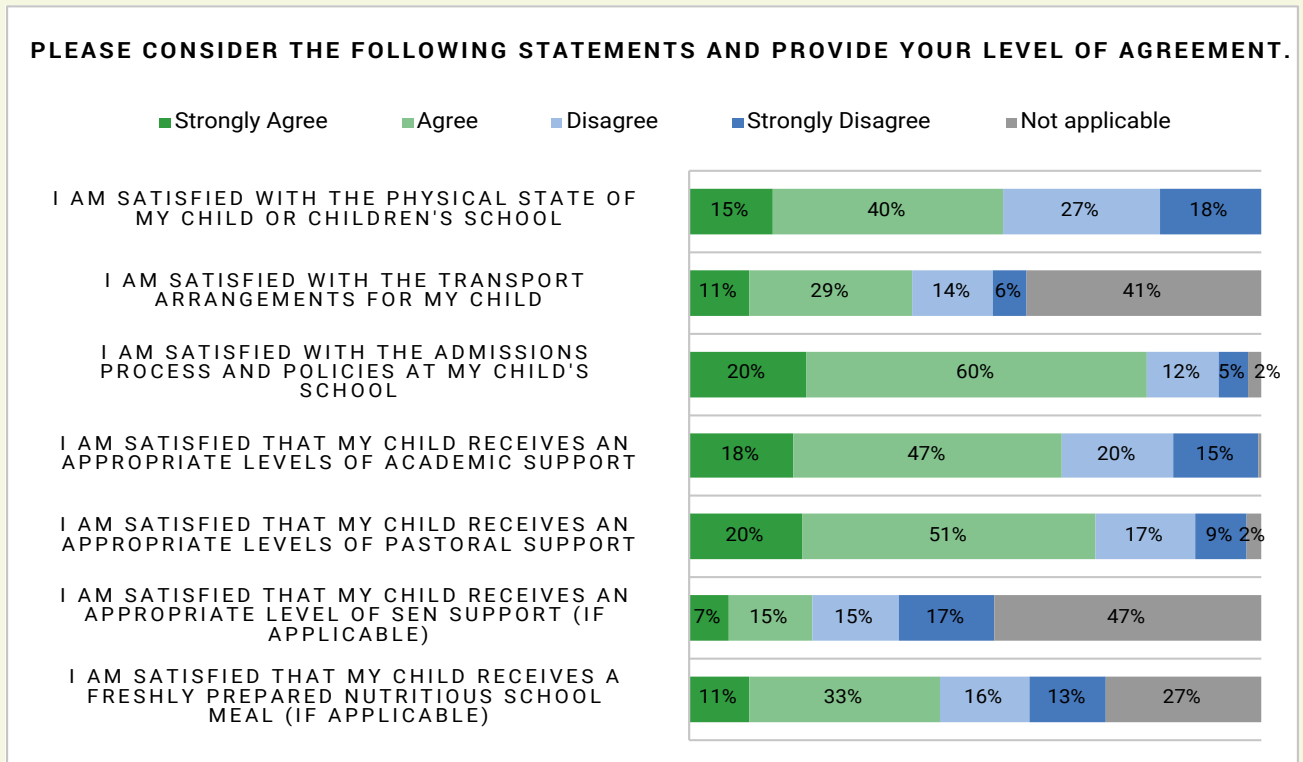


Fig 14. Parent satisfaction levels on EA support/services

- In relation to more broader understanding of EA's role and responsibilities, 57% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that fully understood the role and function of the EA. The majority (90%) believe that the school's financial position has a direct impact on the school curriculum and provision whereas only 35% agreed that they are aware of the school's financial position.

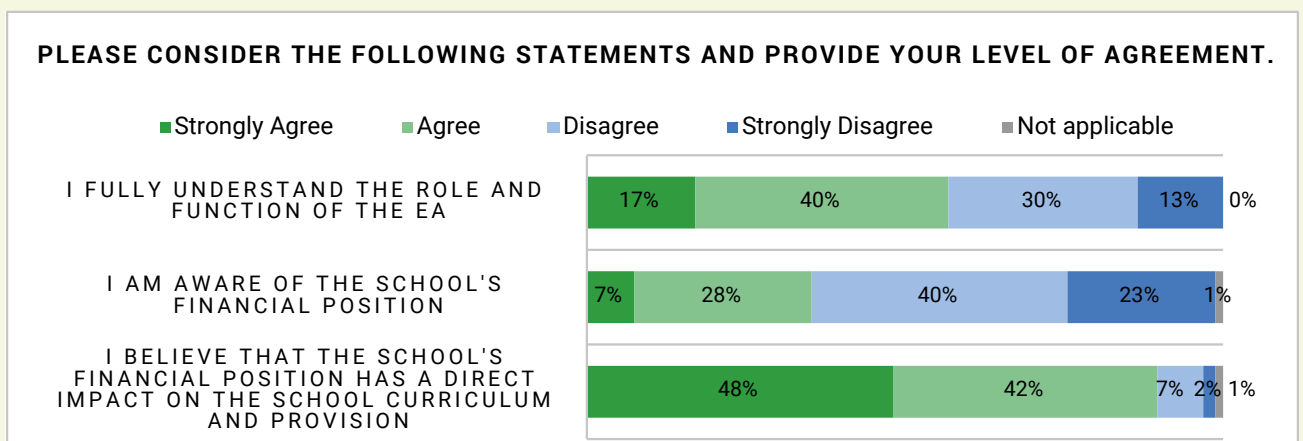


Fig 15. Parents understanding of the role of EA

In free response questions, 16% of respondents commented on the financial support of schools and limited funding and the impact on children. A core of respondents have identified a perceived lack of SEN strategy, diagnosis and a sense that SEN children are being ignored. Some parents also raised the issue of antiquated procedures and policies that do not reflect 'every child matters' ethos. On the other hand, some parents did raise the "incredible support throughout lockdown".



Young People (n=58)

- Responses from young people was generally positive with 92% of survey respondents agree that they feel safe at school, 84% can ask for help in classes, 90% are happy about how they travel to school. Only 63% were aware of the EA.

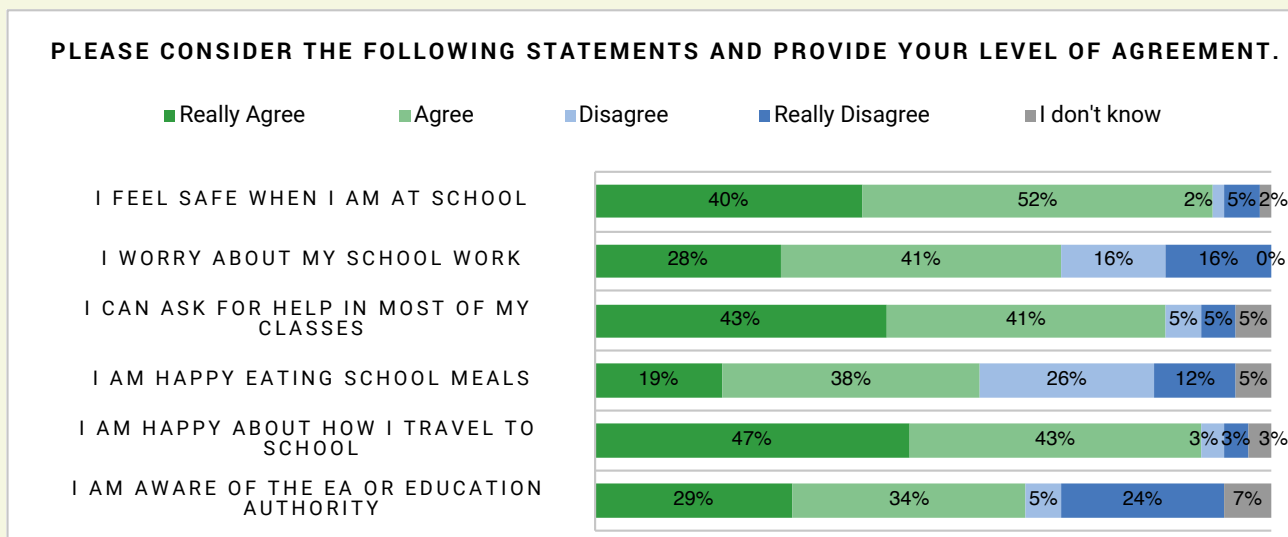


Fig 16. Young people's view

- 91% agreed that the classrooms and corridors were clean however this reduced to 64% when asked about the bathrooms. 78% agreed they had opportunities to attend after-school clubs and 81% have the ability to study a range of subjects. Only 40% agreed that they have career advice that makes them feel good about the future (it is noted that this could be due to the inclusion of primary school age children in this survey).

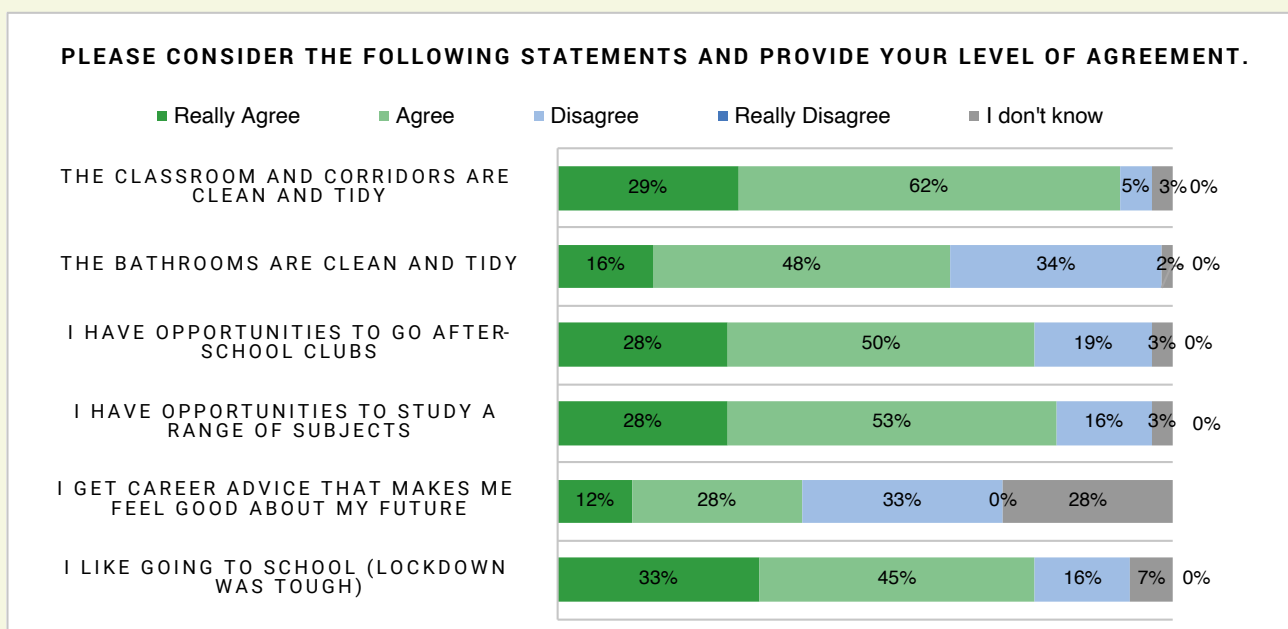


Fig 17. Young people's views

A number of facilitated focus groups were held with pupils across a range of schools and colleges in Northern Ireland. The purpose of these focus group sessions was to get more detailed feedback and to explore some of the survey questions with pupils to learn firsthand of their experiences. We have collated the responses below based on the key questions/themes explored.



1. How do you get to school normally (walk, bus, car, bicycle, train)?

The majority of students either walk or get a lift into school. For those who get a taxi the general consensus was that all taxis are generally on time, if not early. School buses are also mostly on time, but tend to get very busy the closer to the school it gets, with no seats available and large numbers of students having to stand in the aisle.

2. How safe do you feel when you are in school?

The vast majority of students said they either feel safe or very safe in school. The only negative comments came from a number of the younger year 9 students in two of the schools who said that some of the older pupils in the school try and scare, intimidate and occasionally physically hit out at them as they walk past.

3. Do you worry about your schoolwork?

The majority of students said that they do not worry too much about their work in school. The main comments were around homework. This included having too much homework to do in the evenings, not having enough time to do it because of other family commitments, not fully understanding what and how to do their homework, not having someone at home who could be of any help to them - so they would then worry about getting into trouble with a teacher.

4. Are you able to ask for help from teachers or others if you need help with something?

Only one student stated that they do not have anyone in school they would be comfortable asking for help, they said they speak to a parent instead for advice. All other students said there is someone in the school that they felt safe and trusted to talk to. On a number of occasions this was not a teacher but a member of the youth service or a school counsellor for advice. All students were complimentary of the support they get while in school from the youth service.

5. Is your school (classrooms), clean and well maintained?

Feedback on the cleanliness of classrooms was the same across all schools. Classrooms are generally clean and tidy and the bins are emptied daily. Cleaners are seen in the corridors during teaching hours and going into classrooms after. Almost all students commented that there is chewing gum stuck on the underside of the desks and most desks have graffiti on them.

6. Are the bathrooms kept clean and tidy?

Again, feedback on the cleanliness of the bathroom was the same across all schools. The consensus was that the bathrooms and toilets are not of a good standard. The girls' toilets would be slightly better than the boys but comments from all four schools included locks broken or missing from the doors, no seats on some toilets, toilet roll missing at times, wet floors, soap dispensers empty or broken and general odor and cleanliness of the bathroom to be poor.

7. If you access school meals – are they good quality?

Around half of the students bring a packed lunch. Feedback from the rest was very mixed, even within the same school and year groups. The majority of students gave either negative or neutral feedback on this but some did say the food was fine, and a couple agreed that it was quite good most of the time.

8. Do you get access to non-curriculum support (e.g. careers advice, library services)?

Across all of the students who provided feedback none were complimentary about the level of careers advice or the library service within their school. None used the library unless it was timetabled for them and most did not know if they could go and use the library at other times. A small number of students said they did not know if they had a library in the school. Feedback on careers advice across all age groups was limited from either no guidance being provided (that they remember) or it being limited to an online survey for vocation matching. Feedback on school counsellors and the youth service was very complimentary.



9. Are there opportunities for students in your school to get involved in sports, clubs, or other school activities outside of class?

All of the schools offer a number of additional activities both sports related and other, including drama, music, homework clubs, art and cookery. None of the students said they have an opportunity to do athletics or swimming.

10. Are there chances for students in your school to talk with a teacher one-on-one?

The vast majority of students said they could talk with at least one of their teachers one-on-one if needed. Only one student said they would not. Most feel they can ask and the teacher will get them to stay at the end to have a chat. All of the students said they would **not** be confident in approaching all of their teachers as they feel some would not give them the time they need or on occasion be dismissive.

11. How interesting are most of your school subjects?

All of the students stated that as a minimum they found at least one or two of their subjects interesting or 'quite interesting'. None agreed that they found all of their subjects interesting and only a few said 'most' are interesting.

12. What impact has Covid-19 restrictions had on your education and development?

While most of the students said that they did not mind being at home during Covid – as they did not have to be in school, some were very clear that they would have preferred to be in school. Every student agreed that in some form they missed out on learning and education, it had a negative impact on them, or they felt held back and are still playing catch up now that they are back in school.

13. Has your school and youth support provided you with additional or adequate support during that period?

None of the students were overly complimentary about the support they received when at home. While a small number acknowledge that teachers were doing their best, those who did receive some additional support generally had to get a parent to contact their school to arrange this. Some students said their parents contacted the school but didn't hear back for a few days.

Feedback included a range of IT/Internet access issues, not IT literate so struggling to access Google classroom and Zoom meetings (if used), parents/guardians not able to provide adequate help, not sure how to do some of the work and no one to ask, as well as a general lack of good communication and things not being explained properly.

14. Will the education experience you receive here help you to realise your goals?

Just over half of the students said that their current education experience should help contribute towards their future career goals. The others said they did not think it would and it would be what they do when they leave school that would make the difference. This generally ranged from going to an FE college, going to University or just getting a job and working their way up.

15. Do you feel involved in making decisions about your learning?

Some of the older students said they do feel involved (perhaps with parents) about making decisions about subjects they should be studying and career choices.

The majority of others said they don't feel involved in making decisions about their learning as the teachers are directing the sessions/curriculum and therefore telling them what they have to do.

16. Are you aware of the Education Authority – what it does and how it affects your educational life?

The majority of students stated that they have heard of the EA but were not actually sure what they do. A small number of students correctly gave examples of things that fall within the remit of the EA.



Wider Community Themes (n=7 responses)

A call for responses from the wider community (i.e those not directly targeted or invited to consultation) was issued and placed on various social media platforms. In the call, potential respondents were asked to provide a response on the role, need and effectiveness of the EA.

Seven responses were received and key direct quotes from those include;

- “Very little professional development occurs with teachers and career advisors about current HE from diversity of learning style through to new fields in which almost all teachers have zero experience such as industries careers in Northern Ireland. This has specific impact on students who have struggled to get support in school to achieve their best in academic examinations, from disadvantaged circumstances who have their options are closed off at age 16.”
- “Improve relevant and realistic career information especially in out-of-date grammar school sector and in applied disciplines. Very inaccurate information continues to be provided by schools about universities, careers, future proofing. Can the authority assist if it is beyond individuals to reassess their prejudices? Curriculum in many cases also does not point beyond limited examination to realities of subjects outside school level academic pursuit. HE is also out of touch in some disciplines with school curriculum”
- “EA fund the youth service, but they also deliver services - so effectively the voluntary sector is funded by its competitor. According to Priorities for youth EA should only deliver when voluntary sector cannot but they constantly develop and start large, very well funding projects that are never explored or offered to voluntary sector. Yet voluntary sector get much better inspection results and are more cost effective.”
- “EA needs to avoid duplication of services and resources. Work in partnership with existing organisations, in voluntary and community sector; commission them to deliver services. Invest in voluntary and community sector.”



Appendix 2 – EA Board Membership



Board Member	Date of Appointment	Second Term Appointment	Appointment End Date	Represents
Barry Mulholland	01.01.2021			EA Board Chair
Rev Amanda Adams	01.04.2015	01.04.2020	31.03.2024	Transferors Representative Council
Rev Robert Herron	01.04.2015	01.04.2020	31.03.2024	Transferors Representative Council
Rosemary Rainey	01.04.2015	01.04.2020	31.03.2024	Transferors Representative Council
Frances Boyd	01.04.2020		31.03.2024	Transferors Representative Council
Patricia Carville	01.04.2015	01.04.2020	31.03.2024	NI Commission for Catholic Education
Sarah Kelly	02.07.2018	01.04.2020	31.03.2024	NI Commission for Catholic Education
Gerry Lundy	13.11.2017	01.04.2020	31.03.2024	NI Commission for Catholic Education
Gillian McGrath	01.02.2021			NI Commission for Catholic Education
David Cargo	01.04.2015		Not applicable for Political Reps	Democratic Unionist Party
Jonathan Craig	01.06.2016		Not applicable for Political Reps	Democratic Unionist Party
Nelson McCausland	10.07.2018		Not applicable for Political Reps	Democratic Unionist Party
Dr Andy McMorran	01.04.2015		Not applicable for Political Reps	Ulster Unionist Party
Paul Kavanagh	01.02.2021		Not applicable for Political Reps	Sinn Fein
Frank Maskey	01.02.2021		Not applicable for Political Reps	Sinn Fein
Angela Mervyn	01.02.2021		Not applicable for Political Reps	Sinn Fein
Giovanni Doran	01.06.2016		Not applicable for Political Reps	SDLP
Ronnie Hassard	01.04.2021			Governing Bodies Association
Maurice Johnston	01.04.2020			NI Council for Integrated Education
Kieran Mulvenna	01.04.2019	01.04.2020	31.03.2024	Association of Controlled Grammar Schools
Liam Ó Flannagáin	01.04.2020		31.03.2024	Irish Medium Schools
Trevor Salmon	01.04.2015	01.04.2020	31.03.2024	Independent GRAC Member
Irene Knox	01.04.2019		31.03.2024	Independent GRAC Member



Appendix 3 – EA Directorates



Chief Executive Office	<p>Responsible for the effective management of the Corporate Leadership Team and its EA Board and Committees.; Internal Audit and Communications; Establishment of Corporate Services Function.</p>
Education Directorate	<p>The Education Directorate leads on the implementation of the Ministerial Programme for Government and Departmental policies which drive school and system improvement. The Directorate is responsible for School Improvement: Professional Learning and Development; Strategic Area Planning; Community Planning and Community Use of Schools; School Governance; Shared Education and Sectoral Support; C2k Service; Music Service and Education Library Service.</p>
Children and Young People's Services	<p>The Children and Young People's Services Directorate is a complex multi-disciplinary Directorate which provides strategic and operational leadership in relation to supporting children and young people and schools. The Directorate is responsible for Special Education Operations and Provision; Pupil Support Services; Pupil Welfare Services (including Child Protection); Youth Service and Early Years.</p>
Operations and Estates Directorate	<p>The Operations and Estates Directorate is responsible for Capital Development; Estate Services and Maintenance; Energy Management and Efficiency; Health and Safety; Catering Service; Emergency Management and Planning; Free School Meals and Clothing; Transport Service; Schools Admissions.</p>
Human Resources and Legal Services Directorate	<p>The Directorate is responsible for HR Policies and Procedures; Employee Welfare; Recruitment; Employee Records; Equality Monitoring; Industrial and Employee Relations; Claims and Legal and HR Advisory Services for Schools as well as Corporate Governance.</p>
Finance and ICT Directorate	<p>The Directorate is responsible for Budgetary Control; Management Accounting; Financial Accounts; Financial Planning; LMS; Payroll and Pensions; Accounts Payable; Accounts Receivable; Cash Management; Income Generation; Reprographics; Registry and ICT.</p>



Appendix 4 – List of Consultees



Department of Education
DE Permanent Secretary
Deputy Secretary – Resources, Reform & Infrastructure
Deputy Secretary – Education & Children’s Services
Director of Corporate Services & Governance
Director of Finance
Director of Investment and Infrastructure
Director of Education Workforce Development
Director of Sustainable Schools Policy & Planning
Director of Inclusion & Well Being
Director of Early Years, Children & Youth
Director of Curriculum, Qualifications & Standards
Director of Promoting Collaboration, Tackling Disadvantage
Director of Transport & Food in Schools
Director of the Transformation Programme
ETI Chief Inspector
Strule Shared Education Campus
Chair of ARAC and Independent Board Member
Head of Internal Audit

Education Authority
Chief Executive
EA Chairperson
EA Board Members
Director of Finance
Director of Operations & Estates
Director of Children & Young People’s Services
Director of Education
Director of Human Resources, Legal Services & Equality
All Assistant Directors
All Heads of Services
Representatives from Education Authority Staff (Classroom Assistants, Cleaning Staff, Transport Staff)

Other Arm’s Length Bodies
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
General Teaching Council For Northern Ireland (GTCNI)
Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
Comhairle na Gaelscholaíochta (CnaG)
Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA)

Sectoral Support Bodies
Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC)
Catholic Schools’ Trustee Service (CSTS)
Governing Bodies’ Association (GBA)



Other Departments
Department of Health
Department for Economy
Department of Justice
Department of Finance
The Executive Office

Political Representation
Education Minister
Education Committee

Other Councils, Commissioners and Bodies
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People (NICCY)
Transferor Representatives' Council
Association of School and College Leaders
Teaching and Non-Teaching Unions
Children's Law Centre
Equality Commission
Human Rights Commission
Northern Ireland Audit Office
Health and Safety Executive NI
Autism NI
NI Community Relations Council
Western Health and Social Care Trust
Public Health Agency
PSNI
Regional Community Resilience Group
NI Cyber Security Centre
NASUWT
National Education Union Northern Ireland
Irish National Teachers Organisation
National Association of Head Teachers
Ulster Teachers Union
Association of School and College Leaders
Unite (non-teaching union)
GMB (non-teaching union)
NIPSA
Unison
Prospect
Association of Educational Psychologists



Local Councils
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
Ards and North Down Borough Council
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Derry City and Strabane District Council
Belfast City Council
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Mid Ulster District Council
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Education Stakeholders
Boards of Governors
Principals - Primary and Post-Primary Schools and Nursery Sector
Principals - Special Schools – Special Schools Strategic Leadership Group
Teachers (Primary, Post-Primary, Special and Nursery)
Statutory and Non-Statutory Nursery Units/Pre-School Providers
Early Years Representatives: Early Years Organisations Health & Social Care Boards and Independent Early Years Specialists
EA Youth Services
Education Other Than At Schools (EOTAS)
Pupils/Young People
Parents



Appendix 5 – EA Policy Areas



Current EA Functions/Service/Workstreams which align with DE's policy code areas
SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE: A POLICY FOR SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS
SCHOOL BOARDS OF GOVERNORS
HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT
OPEN ENROLMENT AND TRANSFER
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
CHILD PROTECTION IN SCHOOLS
INDEPENDENT COUNSELLING SERVICE FOR SCHOOLS (ICSS)
iMATTER PROGRAMME
JOINT DE/DoH - STRATEGY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN [LAC]: IMPROVING CHILDREN'S LIVES
EDUCATION OTHERWISE THAN AT SCHOOL (EOTAS)
PRIORITIES FOR YOUTH: IMPROVING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES THROUGH YOUTH WORK
EXTENDED SCHOOLS
COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOL PREMISES
PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT
PUPIL ATTENDANCE
PUPIL PARTICIPATION
EARLY YEARS LEARNING TO LEARN - A FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND LEARNING
CHILDCARE POLICY
FOOD IN SCHOOLS POLICY
SCHOOL MEALS
BOARDING AND CLOTHING ALLOWANCES
EDUCATION MAINTENANCE ALLOWANCE
COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE
NORTHERN IRELAND CURRICULUM
SCHOOL DAYS OF OPERATION AND CLOSURE, INCLUDING EXCEPTIONAL CLOSURE
CLASS SIZES
ENTITLEMENT FRAMEWORK
CAREERS EDUCATION
QUALIFICATIONS AND EXAMINATIONS
ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS
ANNUAL REPORT TO PARENTS
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT POLICY
LITERACY AND NUMERACY STRATEGY
SHARED EDUCATION
COMMUNITY RELATIONS, EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY
STRATEGIC COST BASE REDUCTION NON-TEACHING STAFF (REDUNDANCY POLICY AND PROCEDURE – NON-TEACHING STAFF)
ATTENDANCE OF NON-TEACHING STAFF (WPT)
VETTING AND BARRING OF SCHOOL STAFF
STRATEGIC COST REDUCTION TEACHING REDUNDANCIES
TEACHERS' NEGOTIATING ARRANGEMENTS
TEACHERS' PAY
TEACHERS' TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE
TEACHERS' PENSIONS POLICY
TEACHERS' PREMATURE RETIREMENT
NI EXECUTIVE PUBLIC SECTOR PAY POLICY
EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS
SUPPORT FOR NEWCOMER PUPILS
TRAVELLER PUPILS
CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGY
INTEGRATED EDUCATION: TRANSFORMATION



SCHOOL SCHEMES OF MANAGEMENT
PROTOCOLS FOR THE SELECTION OF CAPITAL PROJECT
SCHOOL BUILDING HANDBOOKS
GRANT RECOVERY/CLAWBACK
DISPOSAL OF SURPLUS EDUCATION AUTHORITY ASSETS
COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER (CAT)
RENTALS AT GRANT AIDED SCHOOLS
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
LOCAL MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS (LMS)
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TEAM

Current EA Functions/Service/Workstreams which do not readily align with DE's policy code areas
INTERNAL AUDIT AND ASSURANCE
EA NETWORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICE
EA IT ASSURANCE SERVICE
EA ICT SUPPORT SERVICE
EA ICT PROJECTS SERVICE
MUSIC SERVICE
IRISH MEDIUM EDUCATION SUPPORT
INTEGRATED EDUCATION SUPPORT
ACCOUNTS PAYABLE
ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE, BANKING & CASH MANAGEMENT AND TAXATION ADMINISTRATION
PAYROLL (AND PENSION ADMINISTRATION)
IFS/FINANCIAL SYSTEMS
EA ONE IMPLEMENTATION
SCHOOLS HR BUSINESS PARTNERS
CORPORATE HR BUSINESS PARTNERS
EMPLOYEE RELATIONS
JNC AND JCF SUPPORT
RECRUITMENT SERVICES RESOURCING
PEOPLE SERVICES
HR BUSINESS UNIT
PAY, POLICY & CONDITIONS
EA SOLICITORS
EA CLAIMS AND INSURANCE UNIT
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING
COMMUNICATIONS
CORPORATE REPORTING FUNCTION
MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING FUNCTION
BUSINESS PARTNER FUNCTION
SCHOOLS OPERATIONS AND FINANCE (SCHOOL CENSUS)
SCHOOLS OPERATIONS AND FINANCE (FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING)
SCHOOLS OPERATIONS AND FINANCE (CFS)
SCHOOLS OPERATIONS AND FINANCE (SCHOOL BUDGETING)
CORPORATE ACCOUNTING
CAPITAL BUDGETING AND ACCOUNTING
EY AND PRIMARY BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT
POST-PRIMARY BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT
SPECIAL SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT
EOTAS PRIMARY BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT
EOTAS POST-PRIMARY BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT
SPECIAL SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT



EOTAS PRIMARY BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT
EOTAS POST-PRIMARY BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT
EXCEPTIONAL TEACHING ARRANGEMENTS
PLACEMENT AND ASSESSMENT PANELS
PARENT SUPPORT
COMMUNITY PLANNING
GIS MAPPING
ONLINE APPLICATIONS (TRANSPORT)
ELIGIBILITY CHECKER (TRANSPORT)
SELECT MY JOURNEY (TRANSPORT)
SBRI SMART SCHOOL PILOT
SEN AND TRANSPORT PROJECT
ROAD SAFETY AWARENESS
PRE-SCHOOL TRANSPORT PROVISION (SEN)
SCHOOL CROSSING PATROLS
ST MARY'S PS (TRAVELLER CHILDREN TRANSPORT)
TRANSPORT OF CHILDREN WITH COMPLEX HEALTH NEEDS
TRANSPORT OF CHILDREN FROM DUAL RESIDENTS
ASSESSMENT OF ROAD SAFETY HAZARDS
FLEET
TRANMAN
COMPLIANCE PROGRAMME (TRANSPORT)
PROVISION OF BUILDINGS AND LAND IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT THERE ARE SUFFICIENT CONTROLLED SCHOOLS
PROJECT MANAGEMENT OF THE PROVISION OF BUILDINGS AND LAND IN ORDER TO SUPPORT OTHER MANAGING AUTHORITIES IN ENSURING THAT THERE ARE SUFFICIENT NON-CONTROLLED SCHOOLS
PROVISION OF BUILDINGS AND LAND IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT THERE ARE SUFFICIENT FACILITIES FOR RECREATIONAL, SOCIAL, PHYSICAL, CULTURAL AND YOUTH SERVICES
PROJECT MANAGEMENT OF THE PROVISION OF BUILDING AND LAND IN ORDER TO SUPPORT OTHER MANAGING AUTHORITIES IN ENSURING THAT THERE ARE SUFFICIENT FACILITIES FOR RECREATIONAL, SOCIAL, PHYSICAL, CULTURAL AND YOUTH SERVICES IN THE VOLUNTARY YOUTH SECTOR
FINANCIAL, CONTRACT AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT OF ALL CONTROLLED, MAINTAINED, GMI AND VG SCHOOLS THAT WERE PROCURED UNDER PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPP)
PREPARATION OF THE EA'S ANNUAL ASSEST MANAGEMENT PLAN
MANAGEMENT AND REVIEW OF EA'S ANNUAL RATES BILL FROM LAND AND PROPERTY SERVICES
MANAGEMENT OF LEASES, LICENCES, WAYLEAVES AND OTHER LEGAL AGREEMENTS IN RELATION TO THIRD PARTY USE OF ASSETS THAT ARE UNDER EA OWNERSHIP (LAND AND BUILDINGS)
DATA PROTECTION WITHIN EA
SCHOOLS' DATA PROTECTION OFFICER (DPO) SERVICE
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
RECORDS MANAGEMENT
COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT
CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
CORPORATE PLANNING
CORPORATE PERFORMANCE
INSIGHT AND ANALYTICS
PROCUREMENT
FACILITIES MANAGEMENT (GENERAL)
QUALITY, SAFETY, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENT
CATERING
PREMISES
CLEANING
GROUNDS



Appendix 6 – Bibliography



The Education Authority provided over 1000 documents to the Review Team. Key documents referenced in this review are highlighted below

Legislation and overarching policy frameworks

- Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 Ch 12
- <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-executive>
- <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/programme-government-pfg-2021>
- <https://www.educationni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/education/Childrenandyoungpeoplesstrategy.pdf>
- The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003
- The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 No. 274 (N.I. 1) PART III. Article 40

Education Authority documents

- Education Authority Management Statement and Financial Memorandum October 2019
- Baseline Assessment Education Authority's Existing Services, Functions and Workstreams. August 2020
- Education Authority – Interim Strategic Plan 2017-2027
- Education Authority – Review of 2018-2021 Business Plans
- Education Authority Financial Recovery Strategy (Draft 4) February 2020
- Education Authority Interim Strategic Plan 2017-2027
- Education Authority – Corporate Planning Framework
- Draft Education Authority Financial Recovery Strategy
- BSC Education Authority Strategic Benchmarking Analysis of A&R Division
- Education Authority Corporate Leadership Team finance reports
- Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) Accreditation Assessment Review May 2020
- Education Authority Corporate Procurement Strategy 2018-2021
- Education Authority Draft Commercial Procurement Strategy 2021-2024
- Draft Education Authority Commercial Procurement Strategy 2021-2024
- Draft Education Authority Procurement Communications Plan
- Memorandum of Understanding between Education Authority and CSSC.
- Education Authority Facilities Management Maintenance Performance Dashboard
- Education Authority's Asset Management Plan 2018.
- Education Authority Health and Well-being strategy
- Education Authority Equality Scheme, inc the EA Gender Action Plan, Disability Action Plan and Equality Action Plan
- Education Authority ER Change Projects Schools and Services
- Education Authority HRLS PSSSP Report
- Education Authority SEND SDP Programme Reference Group
- Education Authority Review of Committee Structure
- Education Authority MSFM April 2019
- Education Authority Standing Orders - April 2021
- Scheme of Delegations and Authorisations Annex A and B 29-03-2021



- Education Authority Corporate Leadership Team Operating Model and Planner 2021 - 2022 June 2021
- Education Authority Authorisation Framework
- Education Authority Performance Improvement Framework March 2021
- Education Authority and DE Directors' Quarterly Accountability Review Meetings
- Education Authority - Independent Review of Governance Operational Arrangements April 2020
- Education Authority Scheme for Governance Risk and Audit Committee
- Education Authority Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) Interim Guidance and Procedure
- Education Authority Interim Combined Legacy Retention and Disposal Schedule
- Education Authority Education Committee Papers
- Education Authority Review of Committee Structure April 2020
- Education Authority Special Board Meeting - 29 March 2021
- Education Authority Appointments Advisory Committee - Meeting 17 May 2021

Department of Education documents

- Department of Education. Transformation Programme Blueprint Paper 2017.
- DE Transformation Programme Funding Position & Long-Term Options
- <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/management-school-buildings>
- Memorandum of Agreement between DE and EA for the delivery of capital works.
- <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/common-funding-scheme-2019-2020-final-draft.pdf>
- An initial analysis of the impact of formula funding and LMS on the management of NI Schools. 1997. Research Report Series. University of Ulster and Department of Education

Cabinet Office and NAO, NIAO documents

- Tailored Reviews: Guidance on Reviews of Public Bodies. Cabinet Office May 2019.
- Role of the Senior Information Risk Owner, Role of the SIRO, IRO, and IAO guidance
- National Audit Office - Central oversight of arm's-length bodies June 2021
- Partnerships between departments and arm's-length bodies: Code of Good Practice
- Institute for Government. It takes Two. How to create effective relationships between government and arm's-length bodies
- NIAO Draft Report to Those Charged With Governance Sept 2021
- Local Management of Schools. Report by the NI Comptroller and Auditor General 2004
- NIAO. The Financial Health of Schools. 2018
- The Partnerships between Departments and Arm's Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice May 2019
- Partnerships between Departments and Arm's Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice March 2019
- Cabinet Office, Partnerships between Departments and Arm's-Length Bodies: Code of Good Practice, Cabinet Office, London, 2017
- Information Principles for the UK Public Sector, 2013.31
- <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/sites/niao/files/media-files/BoardEffectiveness-AGoodPracticeGuide.pdf>



Other

- Gowan, M., Seymour, J., Ibarreche, S. & Lackey, C. (2001) "Service quality in a public agency: same expectations but different perceptions by employees, managers, and customers," *Journal of Quality Management*, vol. 6, p. 275-291
- The Road Ahead for Public Services. PWC
- Comparisons of school spending per pupil across the UK. IFS 2021
- Bevington, J., (2010), 'Healthy Boards, Healthy London'
- Daily, C., M., Dalton, D., R., and Cannella, A., A., (2013), 'Corporate Governance: Decades of Dialogue and Data', *Academy of Management Review*, 28(3)
- Dailey, P., R., (2011), 'Understanding the Culture of Your Board', National Association of Corporate Directors, Directorship
- David Nadler. Building Better Boards [2006]
- https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2021_Annex3_ChapterC.pdf?_ga=2.41680738.1371784033.1650034281-1025501835.1650034281
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/public-expenditure-statistical-analyses-2021>
- Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry. Robert Francis QC. 2013
- Focusing on value creation in the public sector. CIPFA and World Bank (2019)
- Ryan, J. (2019). Does public accountability even matter if the public sector is performing well? *Policy Quarterly* 15 (4, November): 8-13.
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/public-expenditure-statistical-analyses-2021>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-education-and-training>
- Comparisons of School Spending per pupil in the UK. IFS October 2021
- Evans, G. (2021). Back to the future? Reflections on three phases of education policy reform in Wales and their implications for teachers, *Journal of Educational Change*
- <https://www.education.gov.scot/documents/ES-corporate-plan.pdf>
- A comparison of School Institutions and Policies across the UK. Education Policy Institute April 2021
- Major L E, Eyles, A and Machin S (2021). Learning loss since lockdown: variation across the home nations. Centre for Economic Performance
- <https://www.playboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Our-Voices-Matter-Summary-Report-PlayBoard-NI-Nov-2020.pdf>



Appendix 7 – Acronyms



ALB - Arm's Length Body
APSE - Association for Public Service Excellence
ARAC – Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
BSM - Business Services Manager
CBPG - Corporate Business Planning and Performance Group
CEEA – Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CCMS - Council for Catholic Maintained School
CFS – Common Funding Scheme
CIPD – Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CLT – Corporate Leadership Team (EA)
CnaG - Comhairle na Gaelscoliaiochta
COLO - Covid Link Officer Network
CoPE – Centre of Procurement Excellence
CPD - Central Procurement Directorate
CSSC - Controlled School Support Council
CSTS - Catholic Schools Trustees' Service
CYPS - Children and Young People's Strategy
DAO - Departmental Accounting Officer
DE – Department of Education
DETP – Department of Education Transformation Programme
DfE - Department for the Economy
DoF – Department of Finance
DMT - Directorate Management Team
DPO – Data Protection Officer
EA – Education Authority
EACPS - EA Child Protection Support
EAPS - EA Procurement Service
EdiS - Education Information System
EGT – Education Governance Team
ELB – Education and Library Board
EOTAS - Education Other Than At Schools
ER – Employee Relations
ETI- Education and Training Inspectorate
ETS – Education Technology Service
FM - Facilities Management
FOI – Freedom of Information
FTE – Full Time Equivalent
GAR – Governance and Accountability Review Meetings



GBA - Governing Bodies Association NI
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation
GIS - Geographic Information Mapping System
GMI - Grant Maintained Integrated
GRAC - Governance, Risk and Audit Committee
GTCNI – General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
HMRC – Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs
HRLS – Human Resources and Legal Services directorate
HSENI – Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
IAR - Information Asset Registers
ICD - Infrastructure and Capital Development
IMS - Irish Medium Schools
JNC - Joint Negotiating Council
LMS – Local Management of Schools
MEMR - Monthly Expenditure Monitoring Report
MSFM – Management Statement and Financial Memorandum
NDPB - Non-Departmental Public Body
NDNA – New Decade, New Approach
NIAO – Northern Ireland Audit Office
NICIE - Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
NILGOSC - Northern Ireland Local Government Officers’ Superannuation Committee
NIFRS – Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
OBA - Outcomes based approach to delivery
OD – Organisation Development
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PfG – Programme for Government
PFI – Private Finance Initiative
PPP – Public-Private Partnership
PRONI – Public Records Office of Northern Ireland
PSSSP – Public Sector Shared Services Programme
PUG - Principal User Group
RAON - Regional Assessment of Need
RIBA – Royal Institute of British Architects
SAIP - Statutory Assessment Improvement Project
SAR – Subject Access Request
SDWG - Surplus Deficit Working Group
SEND - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities



SISMA - Strategic Investment School Meals Accommodation project

SRO - Senior Responsible Officer

SUG - School User Group

TNC - Teaching Negotiating Council

TRC - Transferor Representatives Council

VG - Voluntary Grammar

VM – Voluntary Maintained

YCNI - Youth Council of Northern Ireland

Baker Tilly Mooney Moore
17 Clarendon Road
Clarendon Dock
Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT1 3BG

T: + 44 (0) 28 9032 3466

www.bakertillymooneymoore.co.uk

Baker Tilly Mooney Moore is an independent member of Baker Tilly International. Baker Tilly International Limited is an English company. Baker Tilly International provides no professional services to clients. Each member firm is a separate and independent legal entity, and each describes itself as such. Baker Tilly Mooney Moore is not Baker Tilly International's agent and does not have the authority to bind Baker Tilly International or act on Baker Tilly International's behalf. None of Baker Tilly International, Baker Tilly Mooney Moore, nor any of the other member firms of Baker Tilly International has any liability for each other's acts or omissions. Arrandco Investments Limited is the registered owner of the UK trade mark for the name Baker Tilly. The associated logo is used under licence from Baker Tilly International Limited.

© 2022