

Introduction

1. A Ministerial commitment was made to review the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) within eighteen months of its establishment. The review was to include among other things, an analysis of the CSSC's effectiveness in delivering on the functions agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive and an assessment of the added value provided to schools within the controlled sector.

2. The Department engaged Business Consultancy Service (BCS) in the Department of Finance (DoF) to undertake the review. The Terms of Reference for the BCS assignment were to:
 - Analyse the effectiveness of CSSC to ensure that it is delivering on the functions agreed by the Executive;
 - Assess the added value provided to the controlled sector by CSSC activities;
 - Review the organisational structure of CSSC to ensure that:
 - a. The organisation is fit for purpose, and is properly structured to enable it to carry out its responsibilities;
 - b. The number of posts required and the salary scales are appropriate to the remit of the organisation;
 - c. The work of the organisation aligns with DE's strategic aims, objectives and priorities as set out in its corporate plan; and
 - d. In relation to other public bodies, any unnecessary duplication of functions is avoided.
 - e. In addition to the above, the Education Authority (EA) undertook a high level review of the grading of posts required and the salary scales within the organisation.

3. The review covered the period until the end of March 2018. The final report was submitted to the Department of Education in October 2018.

Background to the Review

4. In assessing the effectiveness of CSSC, BCS engaged with a number of key stakeholders in the course of the Review and took the views of the Department, employing authorities, CSSC staff and Board members. A survey of schools was also undertaken. Workshops with CSSC staff followed by one-to-one interviews were held to determine the nature of the work undertaken by each function of the organisation, and an analysis of a loading exercise with staff was also carried out.
5. The Review Team has concluded that CSSC, as a relatively young organisation, was still developing its roles, processes and relationships within the education sector. However, it noted that early indications suggest that CSSC has been proactive in its advocacy and representational role. Given the organisation's infancy the Review Team recommended that this Review be viewed as "interim" and a more in-depth review of organisational structure, grading and loading of posts should be undertaken in 2020/2021. However, the Department is minded to keep this date under review.
6. Based on the analysis of effectiveness, added-value and the loading exercise, the BCS Review Team made nine Recommendations. The Department of Education accepts all the recommendations of the BCS Review. Its response to them takes account of the fact that it is a snapshot in time of the organisation and that the recommendations need to be considered in the context of the early life of the organisation.

The Recommendations and Departmental Response

7. **Recommendation 1** *that CSSC should include comparable questions to the BCS survey to ascertain the impact of its activities on schools' understanding of CSSC and interactions with the organisation.*

This has already been actioned. The general view is that CSSC's representational and advocacy role is important in the controlled sector. 66%

of schools considered CSSC to be effective, with a number citing minibus licensing as a strong example of the support the organisation offers. Stakeholders felt that CSSC was strong in this area and were positive towards its proactive research and marketing, as well as its effectiveness in responding to consultations in a timely manner. A substantial number of schools responded “Neither Effective nor Ineffective” when asked about CSSC’s representational and advocacy role. The Review Team recommended tracking the level of neutral responses and suggested including comparable questions to the BCS survey to ascertain the impact of its activities on schools’ understanding of CSSC. The Department concurs and has already provided CSSC with a copy of the BCS questions.

8. **Recommendation 2** stated that *a clearly defined programme of work should be developed and agreed with DE to identify required outputs for ethos development and timeline/resource requirements for this work.*

This has been addressed by CSSC. 64% of schools considered the CSSC effective in its early stage of work on ethos. Schools welcomed CSSC’s role in developing a collective ethos, with a number stating that this is an area that has been neglected in the past. Significant work was undertaken in 2017/18 in creating a baseline and in-depth consultation with schools, churches and community groups. In the interim, a detailed work plan across all its functions including ethos development along with SMART targets was submitted by CSSC and approved for implementation by the department in June 2018. A draft ethos toolkit has since been developed and will be launched shortly.

9. **Recommendation 3** states that *CSSC should develop an action plan to develop its role in identifying and encouraging potential governors to apply for specific roles and should consider more targeted promotion and publicity in this area.*

The Review team found schools had limited experience to date and there was limited evidence of CSSC’s role in promoting and encouraging potential governors to apply (as at March 2018). CSSC did though have a strong presence in the process for governor selection.

10. Stakeholders suggested there was an expectation that CSSC would be more proactive in encouraging and promoting potential governors. The Department accepts this recommendation and will work with CSSC on developing this as part of its future workplans.

11. **Recommendation 4** *CSSC, along with DE, should ensure that its programme of work in relation to raising educational standards aligns to and supports that of the EA. A strategic discussion should be held between CSSC, DE and EA to define CSSC's role.*

Schools were generally positive regarding CSSC's work with EA in raising educational standards, with 51% of schools stating that CSSC was effective. A substantial number of schools stated that it was too early to comment at this point. While too early to identify any outcomes of CSSC's activities, there was some concern about CSSC's exact role in this arena, with some potential overlap with EA.

12. The BCS review highlights not only questions around the specific role of CSSC in respect of raising educational standards but also stakeholders' concerns about the means by which this role is fulfilled. Given the EA's statutory responsibility in this area, there is a need to consider the role of the CSSC's Schools Support Officers.

13. While the MoU between CSSC and EA may mitigate some of these concerns, the Review Team recommended a more in-depth discussion between CSSC, DE and EA to define its role and to ensure alignment in raising educational standards. The Department accepts that the respective roles and responsibilities of EA and CSSC in school improvement and teachers' professional development require further discussion and clarification. To this end the MoU and Protocol are currently being reviewed to ensure that the CSSC's activities in these areas are consistent with and supported by the EA's annual business plan. The review of the MoU and Protocol is included in the CSSC's 2019/20 programme of work.

14. **Recommendation 5** *A strategic discussion should be held between CSSC, DE and EA to define CSSC's role in representing the controlled sector within the planning of the school's estate.*

CSSC has placed significant emphasis on this area and it takes up a substantial proportion of Schools Support Officers' time. Of those schools who had interacted with CSSC, the majority were positive about its effectiveness. As with educational standards, there were some concerns about the additionality of CSSC's activities to those of the EA. Due to the resource invested in this area, it is important that these concerns are addressed. The Department accepts this recommendation. It will engage with CSSC and EA in a tripartite strategic conversation to ensure additionality. This is also currently being addressed through the review of the MoU and Protocol.

15. **Recommendation 6** *In order to ensure CSSC resources are value-adding, CSSC should obtain feedback from schools after support has been provided.* The Department accepts this recommendation.

Of those who had sought support, 23% of schools would have been unable to address the issue without CSSC support, with 39% being able to address it but to a lesser extent. A substantial proportion of schools stated that they would have been able to address the issue unaltered (38%). There was limited evidence of feedback from schools around the value added from support provided (as of March 2018). As CSSC moves towards an outcomes-based accountability (OBA) approach as a framework for planning, performance and accountability, the measurement of outcomes will be evidence based and added value clearly identified.

16. **Recommendation 7** *CSSC should quantify the resource requirements for each activity within its programme of work and business plan, setting out how it will prioritise activities going forward.*

The Department accepts this recommendation and will work with CSSC to implement it. This recommendation links to Recommendation 9 as regards identifying priorities.

17. Recommendation 8 *CSSC's current status as a Third Party Organisation should be retained.*

The Department accepts this recommendation. In this way CSSC maintains its status as an independent advocate and representational voice for the sector.

18. Recommendation 9. *An in-depth review of CSSC's organisational structure, to include a detailed loading and grading exercise, should be undertaken no later than 2020/2021.*

The Department accepts this recommendation. Before any in depth review takes place, it will be important to identify CSSC's priority actions.

Conclusion

19. The Department welcomes the largely positive review of CSSC. It notes that although a proportion of schools had indicated little experience of utilising the services of CSSC, this should be expected given the infancy of the organisation. A substantial number of schools had limited interaction with their CSSC Schools Support Officer. However, of those that had, the vast majority were satisfied with their Schools Support Officer (93% of respondents).

20. Schools and other representative bodies stated that CSSC has been proactive in developing relationships with the sector, particularly in relation to ethos, area planning and sharing of best practice. In particular, sharing of best practice and ethos development were areas where cooperation was seen to be strong.

21. There is an acknowledgement that the Report was a snap shot in time and many of the recommendations have already been addressed.

22. The Department will continue to work with CSSC in implementing the recommendations and to ensure its continuous organisational improvement.

It will provide guidance on outcomes-based accountability and provide feedback on the CSSC work plan.

23. The Department will work with EA and CSSC to ensure priority areas are identified so that CSSC resources are appropriately targeted. This will be addressed through the alignment of the EA business plan and CSSC programme of work.