

Response to Education Bill Consultation November 2012

1. The legislation as it stands does not deliver what was originally promised; maximised delegated autonomy for schools
2. ESA will become the employer of everyone involved in delivering education in schools and will be granted the power to intervene/interfere in the appointment and the dismissal of staff. The failure to define 'specified' leaves an open door for this to happen, in spite of any reassurances given by The Minister.
3. The bill does not address the issue of the need to devolve more of the education budget to the front line. Will the new structure envisaged by the bill deliver value for money for the taxpayer? The minister has already admitted that the financial savings associated with the establishment of ESA have already been made. How then will it benefit the pupils and staff in our schools?
4. It provides for bureaucrats to be given wide ranging powers over schools (e.g. section 22). The bill will move us towards a more centralised system rather than a devolved system, creating the biggest command and control education employer in Europe ie we will move in the opposite direction from other educational systems.
5. We believe that schools are best run by locally and centrally accountable school leaders and governors rather than bureaucrats and politicians. The bill, in our opinion undermines the voluntary principle which lies at the heart of the success of the voluntary school model. There has been a deliberate attempt to introduce a system where the emphasis is on the Department through ESA having command and control of all aspects of education in contrast to the current policy in England and Wales of encouraging decentralisation and a greater proportion of the educational budget reaching schools.
6. The critical power that has been lost in the draft Education Bill is the ability of voluntary schools to employ all of their own staff. Section 3 of the draft Bill states that ESA will be the employer of all staff in grant-aided schools. Voluntary schools have consistently argued that the failure to include an opt-out provision for those schools which have always employed their own staff, would change the essential nature of such schools.
7. The Association view is that additional responsibilities now taken on by ESA raise a serious question about the extent to which the establishment of a single education authority will actually result in savings and greater frontline support. ESA will become the largest education authority in Europe employing some 50,000 people including 20,000 teaching staff.¹ A bureaucracy of that size will continue to swallow up a large slice of the education budget so that the percentage share of the budget which directly benefits the children in the class room in Northern Ireland is likely to remain significantly smaller than that in England.

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