

## **Written Evidence to the Committee for Education on the Education Bill**

NAHT (NI) concerns and queries regarding Education Bill (2012)

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Legislation/Bills/Executive%20Bills/Session-2012-2013/niabill14-11-15.pdf>

### **1/ Clause 2 (5) “encouraging and facilitating... education provided in an Irish Speaking school”**

NAHT (NI) supports the development of Irish medium schools in response to parental choice and consequently supports this clause; however a similar clause in relation to integrated education (previously Article 64, of the Education reform Order, 1989) has not been included in this legislation. It is NAHT(NI)'s belief that parental choice is a fundamental tenet of our education system and consequently faith schools, integrated schools and Irish medium schools should be equally protected in this legislation.

### **2/ Clause 12 (4) Salaries of Staff: administrative arrangements**

The rationale for granting powers to a Board of Governors of VGS/ GMI schools to terminate any arrangements for ESA to pay salaries is unclear. If the intention behind this clause is to allow for increased local autonomy then the power should be extended to all schools.

### **3/ Clause 14 (2) ESA to provide training and support for teachers in grant aided schools.**

NAHT (NI) welcomes the implicit extension of training and support to Nursery Schools contained in this clause.

### **4/ Clause 14(4) Documents, training and advisory or support services provided by ESA ...are to be provided free of charge.**

Staff development is a crucial component in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools. This is recognised within the Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) scheme operating in all schools. Teachers and school communities annually identify their learning needs. These needs are frequently unique to the teacher and/or the school. It was often the case that these training needs were not fully provided for by the CASS and RTU services organised by the ELBs. These services offered a set menu of training which may or may not meet the needs of individual schools and teachers. Currently, schools do not have the delegated resources to provide bespoke training and opportunities are lost for staff improvement; yet at the same time schools are increasingly accountable through inspection for ensuring that teachers receive relevant and appropriate staff development. It is unfair to increase

school accountability without increasing delegation of decision making and budgets to schools.

Schools should be empowered to make decisions about the training that teachers need. To do this the budget for staff development must be delegated to schools. Such a move is entirely in keeping with the DENI and Government policy of maximising local autonomy and decision making in schools. On this, the Education Bill runs counter to education policy.

Clause 14(4) prevents the ESA from charging schools for training and support services. Rather they are to be “provided free of charge”. Superficially this appears generous to schools but it really only serves to perpetuate the relationship that now exists between ELBs and schools i.e. the CASS service and RTU do not charge for services, rather the finance is retained by the ELBs and their services are provided “free”. Schools have no choice but to take what ever is on offer, as the money for training and services is not delegated to schools.

If ESA is to provide services “free of charge” then it, too, must retain the finance for this at centre, it cannot delegate it to schools. The old relationships will continue and schools will lack authority and control of their own training and development needs. As “Every School A Good School”, is implemented and schools become ever more accountable for their own self-evaluation the old central control model cannot remain; schools need to control the resources necessary to ensure adequate, appropriate and relevant staff training and development. In a system that supports maximised autonomy and local control of schools current arrangements should not be perpetuated into the new ESA. There is an opportunity to give schools control of their own development, it should not be missed.

NAHT (NI) is not proposing that ESA should not provide services and it should be noted that schools will generally choose to use services provided by ESA but the relationship should be that of customer (school) to supplier (ESA).

The OECD report “Improving School Leadership” (2008) which analysed 22 international education systems, including NI, recommends increased school autonomy. Such autonomy is based on resource control at a local level – the proposed clause 14(4) runs counter to this.

The training budget, if delegated to schools, will give schools local control of training; they will be better placed to match the training provided in individual schools to the needs of teachers in those schools. School leaders and teachers will be much better placed to meet needs identified through school self-evaluation and staff performance review. The potential, positive effects for children’s education will be greatly enhanced compared to the discredited, centrist approach in current use.

**NAHT (NI) proposes that Clause 14(4) be deleted from the bill and replaced by a clause delegating finance for training and services to grant-aided schools.**

**5/ Clause 13 (5+6) “ESA may from time to time make bye-laws...”**

The granting of powers to “authorise persons employed by ESA to enforce the bye laws and to take all steps and do all acts and things necessary for that purpose” is of major concern to NAHT (NI). What is envisaged by this new power and will there be an onus

on school leaders to act as quasi police officers? Previous legislation has not granted such powers in relation to schools to ELBs (albeit bye- laws could be created for libraries)

**6/ Clause 38 Board of Governors to promote “high standards of educational attainment”**

Should this not be “educational achievement?” The difference being that attainment is an absolute score and takes no account of context whereas achievement is recognised as a measure of both final attainment and progress. Children with low levels of prior attainment or indeed those with specific learning difficulties may not attain as highly as other children, however their rate and level of progress may well exceed that of other children. This is undoubtedly an achievement for both the child and the school and should be recognised as such.

**7/ Clause 51(3) CCEA may co-operate with another body...whether in the UK or elsewhere.**

Education reform Order (1989) limited cooperation to within UK. Is there any hidden agenda behind this extension?

**8/ Schedule 1 Membership of ESA**

The omission of representation for Voluntary Grammar Schools, Grant Maintained Integrated schools and Irish medium schools is unfair to these sectoral interests.

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**National Association of Head Teachers**

**Aidan Dolan (Education Director)**

[aidan.dolan@naht.org.uk](mailto:aidan.dolan@naht.org.uk)

**07801367056**