

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Education

LANDSCAPE REVIEW OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY (EA) – BAKER TILLY MOONEY MOORE FINAL REPORT – JUNE 2022

Published on 22 June 2022

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Education): This statement is in relation to the Final Report of a “Landscape Review” of the Education Authority (EA). This is the first such review of the EA since the organisation was established in 2015.

Arising from the ‘Public Bodies: a Guide for NI Departments’ (2008) and the ‘Tailored reviews: Guidance on Reviews of Public Bodies’ (Cabinet Office, November 2016) guidance, there is a need to periodically review Non Departmental Public Bodies to ensure they remain the best way to deliver the services for which they are responsible. The then Public Accounts Committee (PAC) reported on Special Educational Needs on 25 February 2021 and also recommended an independent review of the EA to assess its effectiveness.

The purpose of the Review was to consider the overall operation and governance of the EA, and the extent to which it is effectively able to deliver against stated Executive and Departmental priorities. The Report examines the extent to which the organisation is well governed, and observes whether there are high standards of transparency and efficiency.

Following an open public tender, a contract for the Review was awarded to Baker Tilly Mooney Moore in October 2021. They are a consultancy firm with extensive experience and expertise in conducting reviews of this nature. The Review commenced in November 2021 and took six months to complete.

In making their assessment, the consultants drew upon extensive desk research and analysis and engaged with a wide range of EA stakeholders to inform their findings and recommendations. I would like to thank those who participated, including schools, boards of governors, teaching and non-teaching workforce, parents, pupils, partner bodies and representative organisations.

The Report will be published in full on both the Department of Education and EA websites and a copy will be laid in the NI Assembly Library.

The Report makes thirteen recommendations which are focused on the themes of (i) the future form, function and financing of the EA; (ii) improvements required to support organisational effectiveness; and (iii) governance, accountability and relationships which will support future EA effectiveness. In particular, the Report highlights a number of key issues including the need for EA to improve communications and responsiveness; to better meet the expectations of the EA’s many stakeholders; and crucially, the importance of making education services more child-centric.

The Report identifies the enhancements made to governance within the organisation in recent years; the improved approach to strategic planning and performance; strong alignment with the draft Programme for Government and my Department’s priorities; and notes examples of good practice and emerging innovation.

These improvements were considered against the backdrop of the organisation’s relatively recent existence and significant period operating under interim arrangements; the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the increasing and diverse needs of our children and young people.

Furthermore, it is clear that progress has been made across a number of key EA services areas, with highly skilled and committed staff working to provide a range of important services to customers,

notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges. My Department and the EA are fully committed to working together to progress the issues identified in the report, and to shape the continuing improvement of the EA.

DE and EA officials are already developing implementation plans to respond to the issues informed by the report's recommendations. Some activities are already underway, notably the development of a Partnership Agreement; Education Information Solutions (EdIS) Programme; Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategic Development Programme; and an organisational development and learning strategy.

I acknowledge that it will take time to complete the actions within these plans, however I wish to assure members that addressing these issues is a priority for both my Department and the EA in order to improve outcomes for our children and young people.