

ULSTER TEACHERS' UNION RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

1. The Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU) is the only professional teacher organisation based solely in Northern Ireland. It has a membership of approximately 6,500 and recruits teachers and principals from nursery, primary, secondary (including grammar) and special schools.
2. The UTU represents the interests of Northern Ireland's teachers in a variety of forums. It has equal representation with the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) and the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) on the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council. This is the body that brings together all five recognised teacher bodies in the province to negotiate salaries and conditions of service matters for teachers in Northern Ireland.
3. The UTU welcomes this opportunity to be involved in shaping what will be the most significant reorganisation of public services in many years. It will, however, restrict its comments in the main to those issues that affect the education service. Teachers are very much involved in all aspects of public life but it is felt that there are other opportunities for teachers who wish to make comment on the rest of the consultation document either individually or through other organisations or political parties to which they may belong.
4. The UTU would wish to state at the outset that it has fundamental concerns about the proposed reduction in the level of public involvement in the governance of public services. While UTU recognises that there needs to be rationalisation of service delivery nevertheless the system that emerges must have sufficient accountability to the local electorate. The people of Northern Ireland must feel that there are locally elected representatives who are accessible in the event they wish to query or influence the practices of any public body.
5. The UTU welcomes the fact that democratic accountability is listed as one of the ten characteristics which the future system of public administration should fulfil. UTU also believes that it is essential that the system should be responsive to the community, that there is equality of treatment and that there is a quality service that meets the needs of all, including those groups in society which may be particularly vulnerable.
6. The UTU believes that any proposed changes must be equality impact assessed to ensure that the changes are not going to impact unfavourably on any of the categories listed under Section 75 of the Belfast Agreement. This must be done in a holistic way taking into account the interaction of the various changes.
7. The UTU also believes that there is opportunity to examine and re-assign responsibility for functions between sectors. For example, many of the functions currently administered through the Education budget should be the responsibility of the Health budget.
8. In any proposed future change it is vital that it is managed effectively and in partnership with the appropriate trade union organisations.

9. The UTU believes that it is essential that any proposed change to the Education service take place sooner rather than later. The Education and Library Boards have recently gone through a period of unprecedented difficulty in relation to under-funding of the service. It has already impacted on the support services to schools and has created a high level of uncertainty about what the future holds.
10. The Education and Library Boards have already begun to co-ordinate their services but there needs to be a clear picture of what lies ahead in terms of the new picture of educational administration in Northern Ireland. The UTU would support an early move to a new central body to incorporate all the existing education bodies. This would create the conditions for equality of service throughout Northern Ireland and do away with the current high costs of duplication of services.
11. As stated previously, the UTU does not intend to make comment on the proposed reforms of Local Government or Health and Social Services, but it wishes to suggest that there needs to be some mechanism built in to deal with the interface areas, such as between Health and Education. This could look at issues such as special needs of pupils eg physiotherapy, speech therapy, etc. The RPA document does not consider the recommendations of the 2003 Green Paper “Every Child Matters”. This could be an opportunity to bring together the educational and health issues of special needs pupils under an umbrella of Children’s Services and not continue as a demand lead requirement on the education budget.
12. The UTU concurs for the most part with the aims listed at page 77 of the consultation document. It has concerns about the use of the words “children and young people” in the second bullet point as it believes that in an era where lifelong learning is promoted as the norm an education service should be about fulfilling the needs of all age groups, not just the young.
13. The UTU is concerned that there is no mention of teachers in the aims. The UTU believes that in order to achieve the desired outcomes one of the aims should be to ensure that there is a well-motivated workforce whose health and well-being are of integral importance.
14. The UTU has reservations about the aim stated at bullet point 5, page 77. Standards of achievement cannot continually rise. There is a natural limit to achievement and the UTU notes with concern the current debate about the lowering of exam thresholds to create a perceived improvement in standards. While the UTU would wholeheartedly endorse the aspiration that every individual should be encouraged to perform to his or her potential it strongly believes that the public should not be encouraged to continually look for higher and higher grades.
15. The UTU fully supports the aim of providing “seamless support” but would be interested in working in partnership with government to explore what delivery mechanisms would best fulfil this aim. It is imperative that whatever systems are put in place must be fully funded on a long-term basis to ensure that there is stability in schools.

16. While the UTU fully endorses the support for those responsible for the delivery of “front-line education services” it has concerns about whether or not there is a full appreciation of how this can be achieved. In the recent education funding crisis it was claimed that there would be no detrimental impact on “front-line services”. In reality the cuts to the Education and Library Boards budgets impacted negatively in terms of support services to schools and this affected the ability of teachers and other education service staff to maintain the level of “front-line” service.
17. The UTU welcomes a more flexible approach to the use of education facilities provided that this does not put additional pressures on principals or teachers in terms of workload or responsibility. Any future move to extended use of schools must be fully consulted upon with the teacher unions.
18. The UTU believes that what is missing is a clear vision of what the education service is about. Without a clear vision statement the aims listed, while individually laudable, do not give a clear enough steer on what we want the education service of the 21st century to be.
19. The UTU wholeheartedly concurs with the rationale for change. It acknowledges that with the advent of new technology we can now communicate much more easily and there is not the same need for separate administrative centres on the present geographical basis. The UTU would however suggest that there is a need for a retention of a number of local offices in whatever new system emerges to provide local services where required.
20. In terms of the principles enunciated in section 6.4 the UTU would have no difficulty in generally supporting them. There are, however, some concerns about the language used. Again there are references only to young people when education should clearly be a service for all age groups. Teachers have great difficulty with the terms “delivery” and “customers” which do not sit easily with the ethos of schools.
21. The UTU believes that responsibility and accountability should be a two-way process. Just as teachers are responsible and accountable so parents, and indeed, pupils, should and must be responsible and accountable. At present there seems to be an emphasis on what parents can expect of schools but perhaps there needs to be a new focus on how schools and parents can work together in the best interests of the pupils. Many parents already subscribe to the latter philosophy but there is a significant and growing minority of parents who do not.
22. If this principle is to be achieved then there also needs to be a focus on the accountability of the Department of Education. Many of the criticisms levelled at schools should more properly be directed to the Department of Education which is responsible for the level of funding provided to schools. Schools can only work within the policy framework the Department of Education lays down. If the current funding policies are inadequate then there should be a mechanism built in whereby, in the absence of local political accountability, the Department of Education can be held to account.

23. The UTU has for many years been concerned about the total fragmentation of the education system in Northern Ireland. The Review of Public Administration gives a golden opportunity to radically rationalise the existing system and move to a new educational era.
24. For too long the limited budget allocated to Education has been sub-divided into too many different pots. The UTU believes that in times of financial stringency it is no longer justifiable to support the current level of duplication of administrative structures. Nor is it any longer justifiable to fund the number of sectors within the system. In a limited budget it makes sense to rationalise as far as possible the provision within a geographical area. At secondary level the post-primary review is already pointing towards rationalisation of provision and this is to be welcomed provided that the change is managed sensitively.
25. The UTU believes that the time is right for a radical rethink of the entire structure of the education system. The UTU believes that the consultation document does not go far enough in its proposals for rationalisation of the structure and can see no justification for retaining anything other than one all-inclusive body for the education sector. This body would carry out all the administrative functions suggested, including payment of teachers' salaries.
26. This single education body should be governed by a group of elected representatives who are locally accountable. It should contain representatives from local government, the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council, the trade unions, the business community and further and higher education. The UTU believes that there is no justification for retaining the concept of Department of Education appointed nominees since they are accountable to no one.
27. The UTU has carefully examined the proposals for the separate body to deal with the curriculum and teacher support. The UTU supports such a body's existence, but only under the auspices of the previously discussed single Education Support Body, so that it is accountable to elected representatives.
28. The UTU has also taken the view that the Examinations and Assessment body should come under the umbrella of the new Education Support Body, again to minimise fragmentation and also to ensure accountability. Since the Department of Education is ultimately charged with ensuring overall standards of accountability there should be no difficulty in ensuring that the fact that the Examinations Body is part of the Education Support Body does not compromise its independence.
29. The UTU believes that all schools should be administered centrally by the new Education Support Body, not just existing controlled sector schools but all schools that currently receive funding from the Department of Education. This would do away with the need for current levels of funding to peripheral bodies and provide a central administrative system for the voluntary grammar schools thus eradicating the current duplication of services in these schools.
30. The UTU recognises the need for diversity and differing ethos in an increasingly pluralist society. However, bodies such as CCMS, GBA, NICIE and Comhairle

na Gaelscolaíochta and the Transferrors' Representative Council should only continue to exist in an advisory capacity, but the level of funding for such bodies would need to be carefully examined. UTU would suggest that they should no longer have an administrative role or any direct involvement in the day-to-day running of schools.

31. The UTU would suggest that the FE and HE sectors should be administered by the new Education Support Body. This would provide a more cohesive and streamlined approach to all aspects of the life-long learning process. There is also a rationale that at Departmental level the functions of DE and DEL could be merged.
32. The UTU has also considered the role of the Department of Education and believes that it should be able to be considerably rationalised since most of its functions should be passed on to the new Education Support Body. One function that the UTU believes should be retained by the Department of Education is the administration of teachers' pensions. The UTU would most definitely not wish to see this function privatised as it has been in England and Wales.
33. The UTU feels that the Inspectorate should not be set apart as a separate body from DE. The role of the Inspectorate should complement the role of the DE overall in ensuring that standards in schools are maintained and provide an advisory role in terms of development of educational policy. In recent years teachers have welcomed the more supportive and facilitative role adopted by the Inspectorate and it would be most unfortunate if this positive relationship between schools and the Inspectorate were to be destroyed by any radical change in direction.
34. The UTU has always fully supported the establishment of a professional body for teachers and welcomed the setting up of the General Teaching Council. The UTU believes that it has a very important role to play in self-regulation of the profession and in advising the Department of Education on a framework for initial teacher training and continuing professional development.
35. The UTU has for some time been very concerned about the absence of a strategy to deal with Teacher Health and Wellbeing. The UTU would suggest that an independent Teacher Welfare Service needs to be fully funded in order to deal with the increasing problems teachers face in terms of their health, many of them stress-induced.
36. The UTU agrees that there should be an independent seven year review undertaken with a report made to the Department of Education. This would be an important additional layer of accountability that could be built in.
37. The UTU has no strong opinion on where the headquarters of the new Education Support Body should be located since today's technology makes communications possible from a distance. The UTU, as previously stated, would support the retention of a regional presence and the logic would be for the regional facilities to be organised on a similar pattern to the new local government facilities.

38. The UTU is very strongly of the opinion that the Education Support Body should have responsibility for the entire schools estate. New schools or replacement schools should have community links and care should be taken over the procurement process to ensure that control of the fabric of the education service remains with the Education Support Body. All procurement practices should be open and transparent and there should be no further privatisation of workers within the education sector.
39. The UTU feels that there needs to be some consideration given to the manner in which appointments are made to Boards of Governors of schools to ensure that there is sufficient expertise to carry out their function. The UTU believes that special attention must be paid to improving the current appointments process. In many cases appointments of teaching staff are made by Governors who have little real knowledge of what is required. Consideration should be given to a more professional system of staff appointments, perhaps through a central appointments procedure overseen by the Education Support Body.
40. The UTU also believes that this is an ideal opportunity for a revision of the funding mechanism to schools. The current LMS system has proved onerous and ineffective. While schools would wish to retain some element of control over spending there is a very strong argument for removing the staff salaries element of the delegated budget and having central control by the Education Support Body, particularly if it will also be the paying body. The current LMS system encourages competitiveness between schools, not the collaboration that is suggested should be fundamental to the new system. This will be of particular importance as we move into a revised post-primary structure where it will be necessary for schools to work together and possibly share pupils.
41. The UTU has for some time had concerns about the serious under funding of the School Meals Service which has led to questions about its contribution to the concept of healthy eating. The UTU believes that the Review gives an ideal opportunity to transfer the School Meals Service to the Health Service where it more logically lies. The UTU would wish to see uniformity of delivery and quality throughout the schools in Northern Ireland.
42. Another facet of the current curriculum that may sit better under the remit of the Health Service is extra-curricular sport. In some schools coaching services are already being bought in from external providers and the UTU believes that this may provide an answer to the workload problems teachers currently face. The time teachers give in organising after-school activities might be freed up to allow teachers time for planning and preparation, with the associated costs of such health-promoting activities being taken from the Health budget.
43. The UTU feels that the Music service should be retained and fully funded within the Education budget. It should be centrally co-ordinated by the Education Support Body and all pupils should have equality of access to this service.
44. The Youth Service should, in the UTU's opinion, remain an integral part of the Education service. To remove this function to local government would be to undervalue its role in educating young people in the wider sense.

45. The UTU believes that the principle of equality of opportunity for all within the education service should be of paramount importance. It welcomes the e2s programme being rolled out by the Department of Education as one means by which equality of opportunity can be promoted. The UTU sees the Review of Public Administration as an excellent opportunity to further the aims of e2s by removing some of the administrative barriers that may exist. The UTU would certainly not want this Review to in any way interfere with the timetable for progress of the post-primary re-organisation plans.
46. Another element which the UTU believes should be transferred out of the Education budget is school transport. The cost of providing transport to schools is a tremendous drain on an already over-stretched budget and the UTU believes that the current system must be reviewed to reflect the evolving school system. Funding of school transport costs may be something that could be transferred to the Social Services budget.
47. The UTU welcomes this opportunity for change in the current structures and practices but would call on those who are managing the change to consult fully with the trade unions representing education sector workers before introducing new practices. The unions are very willing to assist in the management of change and should be viewed as partners in progress, not as obstacles to progress.
48. The UTU believes very strongly that the principles of fairness and equality should underpin the management of the change process and that no employee should have any less favourable terms and conditions of service as a result of this reorganisation of services.
49. The UTU feels that it is important that public employees are kept fully informed at all stages and that there are open and transparent processes for all new appointments. The principle of no compulsory redundancy should be applied and there should be early negotiation on “exit mechanisms” for those workers who do not wish to remain within the new rationalised structures. There should be no diminution of existing arrangements for redundancy and redeployment.
50. The UTU would like to have seen a stronger commitment within the proposals to the concept of a “shared future”. Northern Ireland is rapidly becoming a multi-cultural society and the UTU believes that the education system needs to ensure maximum integration of all communities at all levels. The FE and HE sectors have always been able to cater for the needs of all – perhaps this review is the ideal opportunity to promote further integration of the young people of Northern Ireland who will influence the future peace of our country.

Avril Hall-Callaghan
GENERAL SECRETARY, ULSTER TEACHERS' UNION