

**Education Authority Landscape Review Synopsis**

On 22 June 2022) the Department of Education published their landscape review of the Education Authority (EA). The review was carried out by accountancy and business advisory network Baker Tilly Moore and can be found in full [here.](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/landscape-review-education-authority-ea) The Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) contributed to the Review.

CSSC has prepared this synopsis of key findings and recommendations:

**Key Findings**

* There is confusion on the role and remit of EA and more widely across the wider education system.
* Well aligned with the Programme for Government (PfG) and strategic priorities and delivery model are more consistent and sustainable than under the legacy organisations. Notwithstanding improved focus, the prolonged transition from the legacy model is slow. Aspects of EA delivery still rooted to legacy cultures, behaviours and models.
* Significant breadth and range of responsibilities is being delivered within limited resourcing and staffing levels. Result - expectations on delivery quality/levels can be mismatched.
* EA is probably underfunded for the scale of what it is expected to deliver.
* Stakeholder feedback highlights high levels of dis-satisfaction with EA’s approach to procurement and Estate Planning. Suggests more work is required to support and communicate with key stakeholders.
* Initial design of EA in terms of organisational structure does not reflect needs of the organisation seven years on. Lack of HR strategy provides limited definition or articulation of the future vision of the service.
* Feedback suggests that levels of engagement between EA and schools are not effective. General sense that process is more important than supporting a school or principal.
* EA’s ability to communicate and engage with its partners is not satisfactory.
* Decision making is seen as cumbersome and a burden. Feedback indicates that the default position of EA is that it appears to be afraid to make a mistake and is consequently risk adverse, passive and not progressing at the pace required to effect radical change in the system.
* Lack of confidence in EA’s capacity as a partner, a lack of confidence in its capacity to deliver and a sense that EA is not fulfilling a leadership role in the wider education system.
* The reporting structures and governance structures are not clear or transparent to outsiders.
* EA has limited resources to monitor, support and develop boards of governors and to put in place effective school improvement, school effectiveness or school governance interventions.
* The legislation and Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (MSFM) appear to give DE limited levers to hold EA to account. That situation is improving but there is still variance in the expectations of both parties in terms of delivery and working together.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation One** - Taking an internal review approach, DE with the EA need to re-visit a number of key aspects of the original design of EA.

* Clarity of purpose. In this case, everyone concerned – ministers, the department, the agency itself – all parties should reflect upon precisely what is needed to be delivered. This review highlights that the role of EA is not well understood and the scale and complexity of its functions unwieldy. If the wider sector is not clear about the EA’s purpose, while understanding whose support is essential to its success, it will be vulnerable, regardless of its performance.
* Given the scale, size and complexity of the EA model and the fact that additional responsibilities have been added to it – DE and EA need to internally and collaboratively reflect upon that form and function to determine the size, shape and focus of the organisation going forward.

**Recommendation Two** - by undertaking a fundamental internal review of EA, in re-visiting its purpose, in redefining the services and provisions it is responsible for, will allow the opportunity for DE and EA to then address two fundamental issues

* With a re-defined purpose and clarity on scope and service, there is an opportunity to identify the correct budget for EA that properly allows it to carry out the services and activities identified and redress once and for all the systemic and ongoing annual budgetary pressures and the subsequent issues manifested as a result. If the organisation is re-purposed and 're-financed', it allows the organisation then to focus on those priorities and adopt a more measured approach. There is an opportunity to make the budget process more responsive to priorities (accepting the financial constraints in place due to competing Executive priorities).

**Recommendation Three** - With a refreshed remit and scope, with associated identified strategic (and achievable) priorities and a budget agreed to reflect the delivery of those priorities, the organisation can begin to fundamentally address delivery effectiveness issues identified within this review. We strongly recommend that

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Description automatically generatedA full-scale external review of the EA is carried out to determine the future structural model of the organisation (aligned to re-purposed strategic objectives and priorities and funding envelope).