

22 November 2005

ANGELA SMITH WELCOMES MODERNISATION OF EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

Greater direct access and more efficient services are the foundations for a new Education Authority.

Welcoming today's announcement by the Secretary of State, Angela Smith, Education Minister said: **"The Review of Public Administration has been driven by the need to improve the delivery of public services. Within Education, our challenge is to provide better and more streamlined services to children and young people, teachers, Principals and, of course, Boards of Governors.**

"The existing structure is unwieldy, with five Boards and numerous support bodies. It is also a costly system with much duplication. At a time when there are ever increasing demands on services and competing priorities for finite resources, it is critical that we reduce this administrative burden and free-up valuable resources for frontline services in schools."

Commenting on the changes, Angela Smith said: **"The new, single Education Authority will replace the five Boards and bring together all the existing support functions under one roof. This centralises and streamlines services and means more direct access for the public."**

The Minister said that the Education Authority will also become the sole employing authority for teachers and support staff: **"I know that it has been said that this will undermine ethos in schools. This is not the case.**

Ethos will be protected under the new system, because the fundamental role of Boards of Governors will not change.”

She also announced that although youth services will remain with the Department, new District Youth Networks would give District Councils a stronger role in the provision of local youth services.

Commenting on the new role of the Department of Education, Angela Smith said: **“The Department too will change. It will focus better on policy development. As such, it will be transferring some of its existing functions to the Education Authority.”**

Under the new arrangements, the Department will have more direct engagement with those who work on the front-line, as well as parents and young people. A new, statutory Education Advisory Forum will provide a formal, direct link between the education sector and the Minister: **“As well as including sectoral interests, I am determined to strengthen the voice of the wider education community. Parents, young people, teachers, as well as Governors have so much to offer and their advice is crucial in matching policies to need. We are beginning work immediately to determine how best to capture this,”** she said.

In conclusion, the Minister said: **“The changes I am announcing today are substantial and will have implications for staff in all parts of the education service. Despite the unavoidable upheaval, I know that we can continue to rely on their professionalism and commitment as we work towards a better system that puts the interests of young people at its core. I remain committed to working closely with everyone in the education and youth sector towards this common goal.”**

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Also today, the Minister will hold an initial meeting with representatives from funded education bodies and union's to discuss the new education structures.

The new education arrangements are being planned to take effect by April 2008.