Curriculum for Excellence Management Board Evidence Session

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) welcomes the level of scrutiny which the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Skills Committee has given to the performance of Scotland’s national education bodies. We are pleased that the evidence sessions with the individual organisations are being supplemented with the session on 18th January which will consider the performance of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Management Board (MB) more broadly. This will enable the Committee to consider the decision making process, particularly that which relates to setting the strategic direction for CfE, and how accountability is apportioned.

The RSE has identified the following suggested lines of questioning which Committee members might explore with the MB representatives.

Function

1. What is the function of the MB? Does it exercise strategic direction over CfE?
2. Does the MB have decision-making authority or is its role to support and advise the Scottish Government?
3. What is the relationship among the MB, the CfE Implementation Group and the Assessment and Qualifications Group? How is strategic coherence secured across these groups? Is there an intention to change the functions of any of these groups given the stage that has been reached in CfE implementation?
4. Does the MB scrutinise in advance developments planned by Education Scotland (ES) and SQA?
5. Does the MB have the authority to require ES and SQA to alter their proposals or veto them altogether? Have there been instances where the MB has taken such action? What were the issues?
6. Do the decisions of the MB reflect unanimous agreement among the MB members? How are different and dissenting viewpoints handled within the decision making process?
7. Is it part of the role of the MB to ensure that all aspects of CfE development are coherent, and consistent with each other? Has this been achieved?
8. Does the MB seek to ensure that the cost (both financial and in terms of teacher effect) of different aspects of the development programme is proportionate to their importance?
9. What is the role of the MB in relation to taking forward the recommendations of the OECD report?
Responsibilities

10. Is the MB directly accountable to the Deputy First Minister (DFM) for CfE development?
11. How often does the MB communicate with the DFM? What is the channel of communication?
12. Has the working of the MB been the subject of any independent evaluation?
13. Does the MB seek the views of teachers, parents and others on the progress of CfE? If so, how is this done?
14. Are the MB papers and minutes made publicly available in a timely fashion as it would seem important that those involved in implementing CfE are able to access them?

Composition

15. What is the composition of the MB? Have the organisations represented changed since its inception?
16. What proportion of members is directly nominated by external bodies i.e. those outwith Government, its agencies and the SQA?
17. What criteria have the Government used to determine which external bodies should have the right to nominate members of the MB?
18. Is there an intention to include more independent perspectives, including the input of educational research professionals, on the MB? This would seem to be in line with the OECD recommendation on strengthening the input of independent experts to the CfE reforms.

Successes and challenges

19. Does the MB share the view of the OECD that CfE needs to be ‘clarified’ and ‘simplified’?
20. Does it feel that the actions already taken or announced by Government will meet these needs? If not, what further steps require to be taken?
21. Does the MB regard the articulation between the phase of broad, general education and the senior phase as satisfactory?
22. In particular, is it comfortable with the advice/instruction that has been issued by ES and by some local authorities on the number of subjects that can be studied in S4? How does the MB monitor how schools are structuring the senior phase?
23. Does the MB plan to take any action to establish the extent of the reduction in subject uptake in S4 that has occurred as a result or to consider the consequential impact on young people’s education?
24. Overall, has this issue been well-handled? If not, what measures has the MB taken to try to avoid similar problems in the future?
25. Does the MB agree that aspects of the introduction of the national qualifications have resulted in unacceptable levels of teacher workload? Again, what can be done to avoid similar problems in the future?
26. Has the MB considered the need to evaluate the impact of CfE?
27. What are the implications of the Scottish Government’s school governance proposals for the work of the MB?
28. What does the MB regard as the main successes of CfE to date?
29. What are the main areas in which further progress is needed?
30. Overall, does the MB consider that CfE has realised the vision set out in the original 2004 report from the Curriculum Review Group? If not, what action is now needed?