

*“This inquiry has shone an important spotlight on how policy is implemented and managed. It has highlighted a need to ensure that children’s policy retains sufficient status alongside schools and colleges, which appear to occupy the majority of Ministerial and officials’ time. To ensure better governance and leadership, will need to involve some fairly urgent effort to improve staff morale, which survey data suggests has dropped to a point where only half the staff believe the Department to be well run. In straightened times, qualified staff are the most valuable resource of any Government Department.”*

Graham Stuart MP Chair

Note: This guide comprises the full list of recommendations and conclusions in the report.

Paragraph references are to the paragraphs in the full report.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### Changes to the Departmental Board

1. We believe that regular Ministerial involvement in Departmental Board meetings is a sound feature of the new system, but caution against political involvement in fundamentally Civil Service management decisions. We therefore equally support the retention of an executive management board. We recommend that the Department pursue Sir Michael Barber’s suggestion of further training from the Institute for Government. (Paragraph 16)
2. We believe the increased number of NEBMs could bring significant advantages to the workings of the DfE Board, and applaud the appointment of four skilled and experienced candidates. (Paragraph 22)
3. We agree with Sir Michael Barber and Sir David Bell that political affiliations, including donations to political parties, should not debar an individual from public service. However, we believe that a more open appointment process for NEBMs would have put paid to any accusations of conflicts of interests, and recommend this take place in the future. We recommend, too, that the appointment process be better structured in future: headhunting, whilst clearly appropriate for such high-level posts, should take place as part of a formal interview process, rather than the slightly informal-sounding meetings which were reported to us. (Paragraph 23)

### The Executive Board

4. We accept the explanations offered to us concerning the significant number of changes to the Department’s Executive Board. We applaud the Permanent Secretary’s decision to maintain stability with interim Directors General, but would encourage him to make substantive appointments soon, as he suggested he would do. (Paragraph 30)
5. We understand the Permanent Secretary’s rationale for changing the way in which corporate services functions are managed, but recommend that the Department evaluate fully the likely impact of any structural changes before they are made, considering the number it has already undergone in recent years. (Paragraph 31)

### Evaluating the Board’s performance

6. We support the Institute for Government’s recommendation that Boards should be subject to annual, external evaluation of their performance, and recommend that the DfE implement this. (Paragraph 34)
7. We understand that full Departmental Board minutes cannot be published because of confidentiality and, in the DfE’s words, “the need to preserve the candidness of discussion in a free and frank environment”. However, we believe that, in the spirit of the Government’s drive for increased transparency, minutes ought to provide the public with as much information as possible. Furthermore, we regret the Department’s failure to publish minutes in a timely fashion, as it has promised to do, and urge it to rectify this: summary minutes of the last thirteen months’ meetings should be made available immediately. (Paragraph 36)

### Restructuring the Department for Education and its associated bodies

8. Particularly in light of the recent reshuffle, we urge the Department to maintain focus on the critical children’s policy agenda, and to ensure

these areas receive adequate Ministerial and senior official attention. The DfE should consider appointing a non-executive Board member with specific knowledge of such issues, as it has done for schools policy. (Paragraph 41)

### Executive Agencies

9. We recommend that the Department carry out a full evaluation of the impact of its structural changes, both as a result of shifts in policy priority and of creating new Executive Agencies, after a suitable interval. This evaluation should, critically, have input from staff at all grades and across all DfE sites, and should consider, amongst other issues, the impact of the changes on policy development, on Departmental efficiency (financial, technological and communicatory), on staff morale and workloads, on provision of front-line delivery and customer service (including input from the front line where appropriate), and on the roles and responsibilities of senior managers. (Paragraph 45)

### Working across Government

10. We agree with Zoe Gruhn and Anthony Salz that lead non-executive Board members might play a valuable role in improving cross-Government working, and encourage the Department to pursue innovative ways of improving this at senior and operational levels. (Paragraph 46)

### Engaging with the front line

11. We agree with Sir David Bell and Jon Coles that the Department needs and benefits keenly from front-line input, particularly at senior levels, and believe that more could be done to ensure this, particularly in light of the bringing in-house of so many delivery functions. As a starting point, we recommend that the Government return to our own previous recommendations in this field, including the appointment of chief professional officers and widening opportunities for secondments in and out of the Department. (Paragraph 50)

### Personnel issues

12. We acknowledge that the current economic climate and the inevitable change following the General Election may have impacted on staff survey results in 2011, and we similarly recognise that the DfE has continued to outperform many Whitehall Departments in those results. However, we are concerned at the Permanent Secretary’s view that he is “not dealing with a disaster situation”; with 4 in 5 staff believing change to be managed poorly, and only half believing the Department itself to be well run, this looks complacent. We recommend that the Department adopt a little more urgency in dealing with staff morale, especially given that results have dropped significantly from the 2010 survey. Particularly in straitened times, a Government Department’s people are its most valuable resource. They deserve to be managed effectively and have their views taken seriously. (Paragraph 55)

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