

## **Meeting of the Education & Research Group**

**13 June 2006 at Aviemore, Scotland**

### **Present**

Alec Thomson	(Chairman) Fife Council
Christian Bach Iversen	North Jutland County Council
Bruce Manson	Fife Council
Fiona Jurk	Dundee College
Kjell Arnestad	

### **Apologies**

Nanna Skovrup  
Bernard Godding  
Judith Robinson  
Siri Nedland  
Dominique Robertson  
Thomas Spriet  
Martyn Livermore  
Hans Meves

At the start of the meeting Ann Brown explained that it is always difficult for group members to attend a meeting of the ERG at the time of the General Assembly. It is a long period for delegates to be away from their desks in order to attend an ERG meeting, which has to be outside the main programme. It is also difficult for regions and counties to send more than one officer to the Assembly.

#### **1. Minutes of the meeting of 14 March 2006 (previously circulated)**

The minutes were accepted with no amendments.

#### **2. Matters arising**

There were no matters arising that were not on the agenda for this meeting.

#### **3. Update on the future of the ERG – feedback from the NSC Strategic Committee meeting held in April 2006 – group members reactions**

Alec Thomson reminded the group that, at its March 2006 meeting, the NSC Executive Committee recommended there should be a merger of the Education & Research Group (ERG) and the Economic Development Group (EDG). This had been discussed at the meeting in March in Fife of the ERG. The conclusions of the discussions from the meeting of the ERG politicians and the subsequent ERG group meeting were sent to the NSC Secretariat.

In order to make plans for the event of a merger between the two groups the ERG politicians Alec Thomson and Christian Bach Iversen together with Kevan Lim, the vice chair of the EDG, had held a meeting earlier in the day.

Alec Thomson reported that the politicians' meeting had been useful. There was agreement that not enough thought had been given to the proposed structure. Of the existing 6 thematic groups only the ERG and the EDG had been selected for merging. Kevan Lim's own position was that the proposals were not radical enough,

and should have advocated a greater reduction in the number of thematic groups, but that this was not a view shared by the majority. The co-ordinators' function was crucial to the operation of the groups, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for public authorities to release their staff to do the work of a thematic group co-ordinator.

Discussion followed, and there was support from the ERG for the view that the NSC should firstly consider its purpose and aims, and then decide on the best structure to fulfil this. There seemed to be little thought given to why these particular two groups should merge.

The alternative proposal put forward in the Ipswich meeting of the Executive Committee was for ad hoc groups to form as and when necessary. Ann Brown reported that there was a body of opinion within the NSC that this would lead to a loss of core membership and attendance at meetings would fall.

Alec Thomson said that there was a need for meetings to be held swiftly to identify office bearers and the co-ordinator. The purpose and objectives of the combined group should then be addressed. The workplans of the two groups would be scrutinised to look for overlaps, and decisions reached about what areas of work were feasible. A meeting of the politicians from both groups was being planned for the week beginning 11 September 2006.

The point was made that the eventual co-ordinator needs to put enough time resource into this work at the outset.

Bruce Manson suggested that there was also an issue for politicians, and that they might be advised to ask their authorities for an endowment at the beginning of tenure of office to provide the capacity for the work which they would have to undertake.

Kjell Arnestad made the point that it might have made more sense for the Education & Research and the Culture & Tourism groups to merge.

Alec Thomson reminded the group that this was the decision of the NSC Strategic Committee.

The group felt that they are working too much in isolation, what has been achieved is not sufficiently well publicised throughout the NSC, for example the progress made by the group towards embedding the Lisbon and Gothenburg Agendas into its work is probably largely unrecognised. Education is all about the knowledge economy and the Lisbon goals depend on this.

Alec Thomson brought the discussion to a close and told the group that further information would be available after the General Assembly.

#### **4. ERG Workplan 2006 – progress report:**

- a. Meetings of the politicians group  
This had been dealt with in item 3.
- b. Meetings involving the ERG Co-ordinator  
Ann had met with the co-ordinators of the EDG and the C&T group in relation to the Food Event and with the Environment group in relation to the proposed North Sea Schools network.
- c. Promote and encourage professional and social inclusion of young people  
(led by Nord Pas de Calais).

Ann reported that this was under way and that the person in Nord Pas de Calais who was responsible for co-ordinating this work is Claire Basile. The person who would normally attend ERG meetings is Thomas Spriet.

Claire has received completed grids from Dominique (Fife Council), Martyn (Norfolk County Council), Siri (... Council), Fiona (Dundee College).

Claire has asked Ann to make a request for more input from other regions. A seminar for partners will be held in October (5-8 October 2006). Ann will send out more details next week.

d. Promote Lifelong Learning

i) Mobility action to be led by Fife Council Bruce Manson reported on progress. Fife will re-submit its proposal for funding from the EC under the 2006 Year of Mobility action. Fife is "quietly confident" that they will be successful this time round, as a good reaction had been received as a result of the previous attempt.

This proposal has two strands:

- to look at how migrants are received and provided for by Council services, and how these might be improved.
- to provide actions to better equip young people to compete in the European employment market.

This will also include some research into the effect of demographic change on provision of services.

ii) Demographic change (provisionally led by Educational Centres Association – depending on funding available)

Ann had been given an update by Bernard Godding. The Educational Centres Association (ECA) is now involved in a number of projects which incorporate a focus on demographic change and its wider aspects. This includes intergenerational learning which is a European project, and active learning for active citizenship which is a UK government initiative. ECA is also involved in a conference in Austria on learning and communities.

It might be possible for the ECA to run a seminar for the NSC.

e. NSC Food Conference 2006 (led by Dundee College and ERG Co-ordinator)

Fiona and Ann reported that the preparations for this event are going well. Two high-profile speakers have been secured and an interesting programme has been developed. This was distributed to those present.

Everyone was asked to register for the Food Event, on the NSC website, before 1 July. Publicity for the event was being shown in the hotel foyer and a promotional video was to be shown at the NSC Executive meeting and the Annual Business meeting.

Fiona asked for it to be minuted that Ann had worked very hard on the preparation for this Event.

Ann reported that Dundee College was putting a great deal of resources into the Food Event, providing venue space, two conference lunches and all conference facilities.

f. North Sea schools network for international environmental sustainability project (led by Suffolk County Council and ERG Co-ordinator).

This will begin with a group of schools and local authorities around the North Sea learning from each other and exchanging ideas about sustainability and care for the environment. Suffolk County Council will put in a bid for Socrates funding to enable schools to make comparisons and for children to exchange ideas. It will look at how children can be involved in decision making about their own schools and communities, and how they promote sustainable approaches and care for the environment among the local population.

One primary and one secondary school from each country around the North Sea is to be sought to participate in the project and a preparatory meeting will be held in Suffolk on 19-20 October 2006. Ann will circulate further details.

5. Any other business

There was no other business

6. Date of next meeting

Assuming that the decision is taken by the Annual Business Meeting of the NSC on Friday to merge the ERG and EDG, the next meeting would be a meeting of the new joint group (Innovation and Education Group).

In this case it will be held at some point following the joint meeting of the politicians of both groups, which will take place during the week beginning 11 September at Schiphol (Amsterdam airport).

Further details of the next ERG meeting, or any other arrangement, will be sent out as soon as the details are known.

The meeting closed at 16:30.

Ann Brown  
19 June 2006