

North South Ministerial Council
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta
Thuaidh Theas
An Chomhrúnaíocht

NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

EDUCATION MEETING

NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH, AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

9 JUNE 2021

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty fourth NSMC Education meeting was held at the NSMC Joint Secretariat Office in Armagh, and by videoconference, on 9 June 2021. The meeting was attended by Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education, Deirdre Hargey MLA, Minister for Communities and Norma Foley TD, Minister for Education. Minister Weir chaired the meeting.

EDUCATION IMPLICATIONS OF UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EU

2. The Council noted the current assessment in relation to education implications of the UK's withdrawal from the EU and welcomed the ongoing engagement and implementation of all necessary measures to ensure that the agreed Common Travel Area (CTA) rights and privileges are protected. Ministers also welcomed the commitments made in relation to the future funding for education programmes and the work that is underway to develop them.
3. Ministers noted the decision of the Irish Government to facilitate continued access for Northern Ireland higher education students wishing to avail of

Erasmus mobilities in another participating country in Europe and reaffirmed its commitment to continued cooperation on education moving forward in the new relationship between the EU and the UK. Ministers also noted the UK Government proposed funding of the Turing Scheme.

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

4. Ministers noted the successful implementation of measures to facilitate the safe re-opening of all schools, following the school closures in January and February 2021 and the continued support provided by teachers to their pupils through the delivery of online provision.
5. The Council noted the role played by education agencies in supporting pupils' well-being particularly those vulnerable from interruptions to direct contact with teachers and the wider education community. The Council was also advised of the response by those delivering programmes in youth and other non-formal education settings.
6. Ministers also noted that both Education Departments continue to liaise and share learnings in the development and delivery of response and supports to schools
7. The Council commended the efforts of all educators and support staff to deliver as normal an educational experience as possible to the 1.3 million pupils across both jurisdictions during the past 18 months typifying the unspoken vocation associated with education.

REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME

8. The NSMC noted the commitment to review the work programme and the plan to convene a meeting of senior officials from relevant departments, co-chaired by the Secretary General and the Permanent Secretary of the Education Departments, to make recommendations for the future work programme.

EU FUNDING

9. Ministers noted the continuing impact of Covid-19 on PEACE IV funded shared education projects and the enhanced use of online technologies to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic.
10. The developments in relation to PEACE IV shared education programme delivery, including proposed extensions, and the positive findings of the

recent PEACE IV shared education impact evaluation, published in April 2021, were noted by the Council.

EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT

11. The NSMC noted that the Expert Panel appointed by the Northern Ireland Minister of Education, under the New Decade New Approach Agreement, to examine the links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background delivered its final report in June 2021.
12. Ministers also noted that research on the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme has been provided as part of the evidence base to the Panel.
13. It was also noted, by the Council, that evidence gathered as part of 'A Fair Start' and the DEIS programme can be used as a basis to develop joint actions under the PEACE PLUS programme.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

14. Ministers received an update from Gary Cooper, CEO of Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) and welcomed the progress being made by the two Education Departments and Middletown Centre for Autism to facilitate and maintain the delivery of the Centre's range of services since the last meeting in 2016.
15. The Council welcomed the efforts of MCA management and staff to remain operational and the continued delivery of elements of their service throughout the period of Covid-19 restrictions.
16. The proposed delivery plan for the Centre, and that the new Board is in place since April 2021 was noted.
17. The NSMC noted that MCA's day to day operations have been largely unaffected by the UK withdrawal from the EU but that matters of data transfer and recognition of professional qualifications remain under consideration.
18. The Council also noted recent developments in the delivery of Special Educational Needs programmes in both jurisdictions.

COOPERATION BETWEEN EDUCATION INSPECTORATES

19. Ministers welcomed the continuing collaborative work of the Education Inspectorates, albeit on-line due to public health advice.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

20. The Council agreed to hold the next NSMC Education meeting in late 2021.

**Joint Secretariat
9 June 2021**

Website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org