



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR THE ECONOMY

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

4 MARCH 2020

ROOM 29, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

10:00am

Present: Dr Caoímhe Archibald (Chairperson)
Ms Sinéad McLaughlin (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Gordon Dunne MBE
Mr Gary Middleton
Mr John O'Dowd
Mr Christopher Stalford
Mr John Stewart
Ms Claire Sugden

In Attendance: Mr Peter Hall (Assembly Clerk)
Ms Sinead Kelly (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Michael Greer (Clerical Supervisor)
Mr Thomas Manning (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: Mr Stewart Dickson

The meeting began at 10:07am in open session

Christopher Stalford declared an interest as an alumnus of Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and former member of the QUB Senate

John O'Dowd declared an interest as current Open University (OU) student.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

Draft Minutes

Agreed: the Committee agreed the draft Minutes of the meeting on 26th February 2020.

2. Chairpersons Business

The Chairperson informed Members of correspondence from the Finance and Constitution Committee of the Scottish Parliament inviting the Chairperson to a half day conference as part of its 'Inquiry into the UK Internal Market', to be held on Friday 24th April.

Agreed: the Committee agreed that the Chairperson attend the conference.

The Chairperson informed Members of correspondence from the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance seeking a meeting with the Chairperson on the 'UK points based immigration system' policy statement.

Agreed: that the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson meet with the body and any other Members who are available to attend will do so.

3. Oral Briefing by The Open University: Overview

The representatives joined the meeting at 10.11am

Members received a briefing from:

Mr John D'Arcy, National Director, OU; and
Mr Michael Bower, External Strategy and Innovation Manager, OU

The key issues discussed included the growth of the OU over the last decade, funding, working partnerships with a range of sectors, OU reputation for high success rates for students from disadvantaged background, and the advantages to employers and employees of OU courses that upskill employees in addition to full qualifications.

Christopher Stalford left the meeting at 10:47am

Christopher Stalford returned to the meeting at 10.54am

Claire Sugden declared an interest as a current student of Ulster University (UU).

The representatives left the meeting at 11.17am

Agreed: OU to provide a breakdown of where its students are located on a sub-constituency basis, and the number of OU graduates annually over recent years.

4. Oral Briefing by Queen's University Belfast: Overview

The representatives joined the meeting at 11.18am

Members received a briefing from:

Professor Ian Greer, President and Vice-Chancellor, QUB;
Professor Richard English, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, QUB; and
Mrs Jo Clague, Registrar and Chief Operating Officer, QUB

Key issues discussed included the need for a sustainable Higher Education funding model, the healthy balance sheet of the University showing a financially well governed University, objectives for place based funding from Treasury through partnership with Government and industry. Further, widening participation policy, the University as a welcoming institution and place of free speech for all, the impact of current and potential QUB research for the Northern Ireland economy, health sector, and environment issues, and the status of numbers of international students and the cap on local students attending the University.

Gary Middleton left the meeting at 11:18am

Gordon Dunne left the meeting at 11:18am

Gary Middleton returned to the meeting at 11:20am

Gordon Dunne returned to the meeting at 11:20am

Christopher Stalford left the meeting at 11:21am

Christopher Stalford returned to the meeting at 11:24am

The representatives left the meeting at 12.42pm

Agreed: the Committee to receive a copy of the representatives' presentation, further detail of research carried out by the University on funding models in terms of widening participation and further information on the request from businesses for more awareness of students around sustainable development goals, for which students will now have the opportunity of receiving a certificate.

5. Matters Arising

Noted: Members noted correspondence from Hospitality Ulster and the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation that referred to the Committee's discussion, at its previous meeting, on Hospitality VAT and Tourism (Hotel) Tax.

Agreed: to write to Hospitality Ulster, the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation and the Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance to seek their views on Hospitality VAT and Tourism (Hotel) Tax.

Noted: Members noted a Departmental response to the Committee's request, following a First Day Brief on 29 January, for further information on UU and further information on financial support to undergraduates studying in England, Scotland or Wales.

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) providing an overview of its work. The Committee noted that it agreed previously for SONI to be added to the Forward Work Plan.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to send correspondence from the Utility Regulator on the SONI governance review, which the Committee had considered at last week's meeting, to Paul Frew MLA.

6. SL1 - The Mines (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020

Members considered SL1 The Mines (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020.

Agreed: that the Committee is content with the policy implications of the proposed legislation.

7. Correspondence

Noted: Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance outlining plans to ensure there is a transparent budget process. Members noted the Committee has requested a briefing on the budget from the Department for the meeting on 1 April.

Members noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance on an ongoing issue in which businesses having signed up to plasma screen advertising with a company that subsequently collapsed. The Committee noted that it has not received direct communication from any of the businesses.

Agreed: to ask the Department whether there has been any engagement with the affected businesses and what kind of redress there might be for the businesses.

Members noted correspondence from an individual wishing to raise concerns about support from Invest NI to a company that subsequently collapsed.

Agreed: to forward the correspondence to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for its attention.

8. Forward Work Programme

Members considered the revised draft Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: the Committee agreed to the Forward Work Programme.

9. Any Other Business

The Committee considered the UU consultation on the relocation of Health Services courses.

Agreed: the Committee to seek clarification from the University on whether there has been a change to the originally intended location for the courses and, if so, the reason for this.

10. SL1 Renewables Obligation (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

Members considered a Ministerial letter advising of a technical change to the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 to ensure there is no unlawful retrospective effect due to the transition period.

Noted: Members noted the Ministerial correspondence.

11. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 11th March 2020 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 10am.

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:51pm

Dr Caoímhe Archibald
Chairperson
Committee for the Economy

11th March 2020