



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION**

### **Minutes of Proceedings**

WEDNESDAY 22 APRIL 2020

Teleconference / Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr William Humphrey MLA  
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

**Present by Teleconference:**  
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA  
Mr Robbie Butler MLA  
Ms Catherine Kelly MLA  
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA  
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

#### **Apologies:**

**In Attendance:** Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

**In Attendance by Teleconference:**  
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)  
Mr Ian McAdam (Clerical Supervisor)  
Mr Ed McCann (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 12:37pm in open session.*

#### **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

#### **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson and Committee Members recorded their thanks to front-line professionals in the education and childcare sectors and also to families adhering to social distancing rules during the covid-19 outbreak.

The Chairperson advised Members that Mr Bradley had nominated Mr Humphrey or Mr Newton to exercise his proxy in the event of a Committee division.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of its meetings held on 15 April 2020.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **5. CCEA - Coronavirus Examination Arrangements – Oral Briefing Session**

The Committee noted a paper from the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) setting out examination guidance for schools, pupils and parents.

Officials joined the meeting by teleconference at 12:40pm.

Mr Justin Edwards, Chief Executive, CCEA

Ms Sharon King, Head of Regulation, CCEA

Officials briefed the Committee on new temporary GCSE/A-Level examination arrangements developed in response to covid-19 restrictions.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

*Mr Newton left the meeting at 1:55pm.*

*Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 2:00pm.*

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their attendance.

### **6. Department of Education - Coronavirus Response – Oral Briefing Session**

The Committee noted written correspondence from the Department including its 17 April 2020 Situation Report on the coronavirus response and written responses in respect of the use of the schools' estate and progress in respect of the Emotional Health and Mental Well-being Framework.

Officials joined the meeting by teleconference at 2:04pm.

Mr Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary, Department of Education

Mr John Smith, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education.

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department's response to the coronavirus.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

*Mr Bradley left the meeting at 2:35pm.*

*Ms Mullan left the meeting at 2:37pm.*

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to CCEA:

- welcoming its introduction of a teacher and schools' helpline for examinations and suggesting that an additional helpline be put in place for pupils and parents;
- seeking an update on the proposed financial support arrangements for examination invigilators, markers and moderators;
- seeking sight of the other covid-19 examination options that CCEA had put before the Minister; and
- seeking information on the covid-19 examinations appeals procedure.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information on the Continuity of Education programme board.

*Agreed:* The Committee also agreed to write to the Department seeking:

- further information on the Case Management System for vulnerable children; and
- clarity relating to the definition of a vulnerable child in particular in respect of the position for disabled children or children in the statementing process.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity in respect of the reported pausing of Educational Psychology assessments as part of the statementing process and the consequent impact on school admissions. The Committee also agreed to seek clarity regarding where the authority lies to enrol children with statements in school.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking confirmation that educational materials have been provided by Special Schools and shared with parents.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further definitive figures in respect of distance learning engagement by school pupils.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification regarding programmes supporting the supply of IT hardware to children and schools during the covid-19 crisis and the associated funding.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department for an update on the funding for boarding and preparatory schools that it had previously sought from the Department of Finance.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the roll-out of the £12m childcare package.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking contact details for the Association for Quality Education (AQE), the Post Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC) and GL Assessment.

## **7. Department of Education – 2020-21 Budget – written briefing**

The Committee noted a Department of Education templates setting out revised budget pressures; a Department of Finance briefing paper indicating the additional allocations that were sought by and made to departments owing to covid-19; and an Assembly Research and Information Service paper entitled: 'Assembly Committees- Coordinated Budget Scrutiny'.

## **8. Correspondence**

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted correspondence from a school principal regarding school trips cancelled due to the covid-19 outbreak.

8.3 The Committee considered a response from the Education Authority regarding Youth Service provision.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write again to the Education Authority again seeking an explicit assurance that the consultation associated with the new funding arrangements was inclusive and that organisations offering criticism of the new proposals would not be subject to funding restrictions as a consequence.

8.4 The Committee noted a response from the Department on the extension of tenure for some Education Authority Board members and progress made by the Education Authority in respect of the Special Educational Needs statementing process.

8.5 The Committee noted a response from the Department regarding the suggested partial waiving of school fees owing to covid-19 restrictions.

8.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department on the use of the School Enhancement Programme (SEP) in supporting new health related provision in Special Schools and associated timescales.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to use its Wednesday meetings for formal updates from statutory bodies and to arrange informal meetings otherwise.

## **10. Any Other Business**

*Agreed:* Further to previous correspondence, the Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Department of Health seeking a joint oral briefing on the £12m childcare package.

#### **11. Date, Time and Place of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 29 April 2020 at 9.30am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings and by teleconference.

*The meeting was adjourned at 3:27pm.*

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**29 April 2020**