



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

21 April 2021

**Meeting Location:** Teleconference

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA  
Ms Nicola Brogan MLA  
Mr Robbie Butler MLA  
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA  
Mr Justin McNulty MLA  
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

**Apologies:** Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA

**In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:**

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)  
Mr Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Emma Magee (Clerical Officer)



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The meeting commenced at 9:39am in open session

### **1. Apologies**

Apology recorded for Mr Humphrey.

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

The Chairperson informed members that he had put out to consultation a Private Member's Bill proposal on the teachers' exemption from fair employment and treatment legislation.

The Committee noted that the Minister of Education had announced a further investment of £4.83 million for Engage programme funding.

Mr Bradley joined the meeting at 9:40am.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education asking that he make a statement to the Assembly on this funding and encouraging him to do this for future announcements.

### **3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 14 April 2021.

### **4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.



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## 5. Special Educational Needs - Children's Law Centre - Oral briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Children's Law Centre and the Children's Law Centre NI NGO Stakeholder Report - UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The following witness joined the meeting by video conference at 9:42am:

Ms Rachel Hogan, Special Education Needs and Disability Representative,  
Children's Law Centre

The witness briefed the Committee on Special Educational Needs and Disability issues.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Sheehan joined the meeting at 10:05pm.

The Chairperson thanked the witness for the briefing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Children's Law Centre thanking it for the briefing.

## 6. Special Educational Needs - Education Authority - Oral briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Education Authority and the Department of Education's response to the Public Accounts Committee report on Special Educational Needs.

The following witness joined the meeting by video conference at 11:28am:

Ms Sara Long, Chief Executive, Education Authority

Ms Una Turbitt, Interim Director of Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority

Ms Cynthia Currie, Assistant Director, Children and Young People's Services, Education Authority



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The witnesses provided the Committee with an update on Special Educational Needs provision.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Bradley left the meeting at 12:50pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education requesting that the reduction in processing time for Special Educational Needs Statements to 26 weeks at end March 2021 be independently reviewed to give public reassurance; and supporting EA's case for additional resources to address Special Educational Needs and meaningfully underpin the reform process.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority acknowledging its demanding change process, urging it to engage as soon as possible with the Children's Law Centre, and seeking an assurance that no child would remain unplaced by September 2021, especially children with Special Educational Needs. The Committee also agreed to ask for the following information:

- the annual cost of tribunals;
- the number of assessments refused in 2020/2021;
- the current position on unplaced children and a monthly update on this; and
- an estimate of the quantum of additional funding outside the EA budget it will require: to sustain compliance with the 26 weeks' target; to move to 22 weeks; to deal with an anticipated rise in post-Covid referrals; to provide adequate behavioural support; and to eliminate stage 3 delivery delays.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

## 7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing further information on the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI).



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a further evidence session with the GTCNI.

7.3 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding concerns following the publication of CCEA's plans for awarding GCSE, AS and A2 qualifications.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to the correspondent who raised this matter with it.

7.4 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing a table of proposed legislation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education regarding the timetable for consulting on and introducing legislation on flexible school starting age.

7.5 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education providing a temporary modification of Education duties notice made under the Coronavirus Act 2020.

7.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Communities providing an update on the work of the Expert Advisory Panel on Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).

7.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee forwarding correspondence about the use of Applied Behaviour Analysis for the treatment of autistic children.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Health.

7.8 The Committee noted a response from the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service regarding the teachers' exemption in FETO. The Committee noted that it had yet to receive responses from the Executive Office and some sectoral bodies.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Executive Office and the organisations that have not responded.

7.9 The Committee noted a response from the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service regarding Integrated Education.



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7.10 The Committee noted correspondence raised by Mr Humphrey under Any Other Business at the meeting on 14 April 2021 regarding concerns from an individual in relation to autism and mental health. The Committee also noted that Autism NI has provided additional information on this matter.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward this to the correspondent.

7.11 The Committee noted correspondence regarding funding for educational attainment programs.

7.12 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence to Executive Ministers regarding financial support for Exam Invigilators.

7.13 The Committee noted correspondence raising concerns that some post-primary schools in Fermanagh are planning to put their year 12-14 students on study leave.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education asking about the use of study leave.

7.14 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education clarifying the nomination arrangements for Transferors' representatives on Boards of Governors.

7.15 The Committee noted correspondence from a special school principal enclosing a consultation response to the Education Authority's Special Needs Area Planning Consultation.

### **8. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted that the Minister of Education offered to attend the Committee on 19 May and agreed, given concerns about the roll-out of alternative arrangements to exams, to also invite the Minister to attend before then at his earliest convenience.



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**Agreed:** A postponed youth stakeholder engagement event is proposed for 6.30pm on 26 May 2021. The Committee agreed that Members would notify the Clerk of their availability and propose suggested groups for the event.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to consider holding a planning meeting to consider its Forward Work Programme and that Members would write to the Clerk indicating their priorities.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed its forward work programme as amended.

## **9. Any Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

## **10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 28 April 2021 by video conference at 9:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:26pm

**Chris Lyttle MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**28 April 2021**