



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Higher Education and Research Bill
Legislative Consent Motion:
Department for the Economy

16 November 2016

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for the Economy

Higher Education and Research Bill Legislative Consent Motion:
Department for the Economy

16 November 2016

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Conor Murphy (Chairperson)
Mr Steve Aiken (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Caoimhe Archibald
Ms Sinéad Bradley
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Alan Chambers
Mr Gordon Dunne
Dr Stephen Farry
Mr Gordon Lyons
Mr Alex Maskey
Mr Mervyn Storey

Witnesses:

Mr Conor Brady	Department for the Economy
Mr Trevor Cooper	Department for the Economy

The Chairperson (Mr Murphy): You are very welcome, gentlemen. Can you perhaps address specifically the point that Stephen Farry raised on the scope of this? Are some of the issues that were raised in the consultee response outside the scope of what we are dealing with in this legislative consent motion (LCM)? Can those views be incorporated to shape our response to the LCM?

Mr Trevor Cooper (Department for the Economy): On the last point, it does, essentially, fall outside. The mechanics and operation of how the format will work will evolve as it is implemented. We will have views and will feed in on that process, but I think that it would fall outside the LCM.

Mr Conor Brady (Department for the Economy): The point that you raised, Stephen, about the particular metrics that are being used to measure the level of teaching excellence is an ongoing discussion. Each devolved Administration, along with Westminster, will have their own view on the appropriateness or otherwise of the metrics. That leads back into the point made by the University and College Union (UCU) on the impact or otherwise that it may or may not have on its members. That is an ongoing discussion that will then feed into years 2 and 3 of the operation of the teaching excellence framework (TEF). As Trevor mentioned at the outset, it does not relate at all to the detail of the legislative consent memorandum as it is drafted. It is a purely technical and consequential legislative approach.

The Chairperson (Mr Murphy): Is there anything else that anyone wants to raise with the officials?

Mr Storey: Can I clarify, either from the officials or the former Minister, how the framework affects the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in its assessments?

Mr Brady: It does not apply to further and higher education.

Mr Storey: Therefore, we do not currently have anything that is similar to ETI in relation to further education.

Mr Brady: That is not to say that there is not an approach that looks at quality assessment. You have an organisation called the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). I cannot speak about it in great detail because it is outside my particular view, which is specifically related to the LCM. If you like, I am sure that we can arrange for something further for the Committee on how quality is assessed in higher education.

Mr Storey: That might be interesting.

Dr Farry: To cross a boundary, as part of the higher education strategy, there was an action point around the improvement of quality assessment of the performance of universities. I imagine that the officials could provide that in written format in the first instance.

Mr Brady: We are happy to do that.

Mr Storey: That would be helpful.

The Chairperson (Mr Murphy): Fair enough. The suggestion is that we draft a report around this and try to incorporate some of the issues. If further clarity is needed around something, you could liaise with the Committee staff. It might give us a time frame issue with getting that into the Chamber. If that is going to be tight, we will consider written clearance by correspondence with the Committee. It might leave us a day or two short of the five-day requirement for clearance, but, if we are running into that difficulty, we will get clearance by correspondence. Are members content that we bring this back next week to have a look at the report?

Members indicated assent.

Dr Farry: I think that the points made should be fairly consensual, but they are points that we should take forward by asking for clarity from the Minister. I do not see any difficulty in that.

The Chairperson (Mr Murphy): Trevor and Conor have both picked up that discussion, so I presume that you will reflect it in your dealings with the Minister.

Mr Cooper: Absolutely.

The Chairperson (Mr Murphy): Thank you very much.