



Northern Ireland  
Assembly  
Committee for Education  
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS  
WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER 2015  
ROOM 21, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

**Present:**

Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)  
Sandra Overend MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Chris Hazzard MLA  
Danny Kennedy MLA  
Nelson McCausland MLA  
Maeve McLaughlin MLA  
Robin Newton MLA  
Seán Rogers MLA

**In Attendance:**

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)  
Paul Stitt (Assistant Clerk)  
Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)  
Kevin Marks (Clerical Officer)  
Eilis Haughey (Bill Clerk – item 1 only)

**Apologies:**

Jonathan Craig MLA

*Proceedings commenced in private session at 9:39am.*

**1. Shared Education Bill – Committee Stage – informal deliberations – written briefing**

*Assembly Bill Office joined the meeting at 9:39am.*

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in respect of:

- an amendment relating to shared campuses;
- the measures to be used by the Department to identify socio-economic deprivation in the context of the Bill;
- the compliance of the Bill with Human Rights legislation; and
- contacts with the Department for Employment and Learning regarding involvement of Further Education Colleges in Shared Education.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the relevant Departmental response to the Committee for Employment and Learning, for its information.

The Committee also noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; the Integrated Education Fund and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education on issues relating to the Bill.

The Committee considered procedural advice relating to the Committee Stage of the Shared Education Bill.

The Committee considered possible amendments to the Shared Education Bill.

*Nelson McCausland joined the meeting at 9:50am*

*Maeve McLaughlin joined the meeting at 10:02am*

*Robin Newton joined the meeting at 10:03am*

*Nelson McCausland left the meeting at 10:46am*

*Proceedings moved into public session at 10:48am*

*Assembly Bill Office left the meeting at 10:48am*

## **2. Shared Education Bill – Committee Stage – informal deliberations – DE briefing**

*Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10:49am.*

Faustina Graham, Director of Collaborative Education and Practice, Department of Education; Suzanne Kingon, Head of Irish Medium and Integrated Education Team, Department of Education; Joanne Maxwell, Shared Education and Community Relations Team, Department of Education; and Jacqui Durkin, Director of Area Planning, Department of Education briefed on the Shared Education Bill.

*Danny Kennedy left the meeting at 10:58am*

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

### **Clause 1: “Shared Education”**

The Committee considered submissions which suggested that a new clause be inserted in the Bill which would set out the purpose of Shared Education in terms of: the promotion of educational attainment; support for a shared future; underpinning reconciliation; improving community cohesion; linking to Area Planning and the delivery of effective and efficient education.

*The Committee informally agreed that it would not pursue an amendment to incorporate a purposes clause in the Bill.*

*The Committee informally agreed to pursue an amendment that would incorporate a new clause in the Bill that would require the Department to review and report on Shared Education, every two years, highlighting related*

*improvements in: educational attainment, community cohesion, and attitudes to Section 75 groups while also commenting on the efficient use of resources including the optimal use of IT infrastructure and progress in respect of sharing in education.*

*Nelson McCausland rejoined the meeting at 11:02am*

The Committee considered submissions in respect of the definition of Shared Education including the suggested redrafting of the definition in order to: reference Section 75 groups; utilise the wording proposed by the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG); or revise the 'reasonable numbers' and 'religious belief' wording.

The Committee noted Departmental assertions that the MAG definition or wording referencing Section 75 groups may restrict the scope of Shared Education projects or limit the participation by the widest possible range of schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek a Ministerial assurance at Consideration Stage on the interpretation of the 'reasonable numbers' wording in respect of schools or areas with low numbers of children from a minority community.

*Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting at 11:07am*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification as to how schools identify pupils' religious belief or community background.

*The Committee informally agreed to pursue an amendment which would replace the wording 'religious belief' with 'community background', subject to further clarification from the Department.*

The Committee considered submissions suggesting that the Bill be amended in order to include references to Integrated Education in the Shared Education definition.

*The majority of Members informally indicated that they were unlikely to support amendments of this kind, however the Committee informally agreed that it would give further consideration to an amendment linking Shared and Integrated Education as part of a sharing continuum.*

The Committee considered submissions that suggested that Further Education Colleges, Early Years providers and communities be included as 'relevant providers' of Shared Education.

*The Committee informally accepted that the 'relevant providers' definition was sufficiently widely drawn so as to ensure the inclusion of all appropriate organisations and educational settings. However the Committee also informally agreed to give further consideration to an amendment which would explicitly identify Further Education Colleges as a 'relevant provider'.*

## **Clause 2 Power to encourage and facilitate shared education**

The Committee considered submissions suggesting that a wide range of additional organisations be included in the bodies listed in the Bill as having a power to encourage and facilitate Shared Education.

*The Committee informally agreed to pursue an amendment which would add: the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland; Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; and the Controlled Schools Support Council in the listed bodies as set out in the Bill.*

*Maeve McLaughlin rejoined the meeting at 11:42am*

*Chris Hazzard left the meeting at 11:45am*

The Committee considered submissions suggesting that the Department and other bodies be given duties rather than powers in respect of the encouragement and facilitation of Shared Education. The Committee also considered submissions which argued that DE's powers should extend to the progression of schools from sharing to formal integration.

*The Committee informally agreed to consider amendments which would place a duty on the Department to encourage, facilitate and possibly promote Shared Education.*

*The Committee informally agreed that it would not pursue amendments which would alter or introduce powers or duties in respect of the progression of schools from sharing to formal Integration.*

The Committee considered amendments which would specify powers or duties in respect of Shared Education including the screening of all policies.

*The Committee noted Departmental assurances that the proposed legislative provision provided necessary flexibility in respect of Shared Education and the requirement of screen all policies would amount to a significant financial and administrative burden. The Committee therefore informally agreed that it would not pursue related amendments.*

## **Clause 3 Commencement of duty of Education Authority in relation to shared education**

*The Committee informally agreed that it was content with Clause 3, as drafted.*

## **Clause 4 Short title and commencement**

*The Committee informally agreed that it was content with Clause 4, as drafted.*

## **Miscellaneous**

*The Committee informally agreed that it would support a Departmental amendment which is designed to provide support for shared campuses.*

*The Committee noted recent developments in respect of ongoing industrial action relating to Levels of Progression and Shared Education. The Committee therefore informally agreed that it would not support amendments relating to the assessment of educational attainment associated with Shared Education.*

*Robin Newton left the meeting at 11:52am*

*The Committee informally agreed not to pursue amendments relating to resourcing for Shared Education.*

*Robin Newton rejoined the meeting at 11:56am*

*The Committee informally agreed not to pursue an amendment relating to the equality and human rights compliance of the Bill.*

*The Committee informally agreed not to pursue amendments relating to the further development of Integrated Education.*

*The officials left the meeting at 11:59am.  
Proceedings were suspended at 11:59am.*

*Proceedings were resumed at 12:06pm with the following Members: Peter Weir, Nelson McCausland, Sandra Overend, Robin Newton, Maeve McLaughlin and Seán Rogers.*

Sandra Overend recorded her concerns and dissatisfaction in respect of the compressed nature of the timescales for the Committee Stage of the Shared Education Bill and the Committee's consequent limited opportunity for scrutiny.

### **3. Apologies**

Apologies are as indicated above.

### **4. Chairperson's Business**

#### **4.1 Strule Shared Campus**

The Committee noted references in recent Assembly written answers to an informal consultation process in respect of the branding of the Strule Shared Campus in Omagh.

#### **4.2 Sexual Assaults in Schools**

The Committee considered recent Assembly written answers advising of new arrangements for collecting statistics on sexual assaults in schools.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write again to the Department seeking further information on this subject and clarification as to how current and previous practices supported its child safeguarding policies.

#### **4.3 IT's Your Choice**

The Committee noted that the Sentinus programme 'IT's Your Choice' which promotes coding for school children has been reinstated (since October 2015) and is funded by the Department for Employment and Learning and Invest NI.

Members also noted, with approval, the 'Hour Of Code: Northern Ireland Workshops' initiative, aimed at bringing code into schools this week.

#### **4.4 Report of the Commission on Religion in British Public Life**

The Committee noted the 'Living with Difference' Report which recommended that in Northern Ireland, Religious Education should be renamed and broadened to include more religions and non-religious world views and to be explicitly educational rather than having a confessional focus.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its views on this subject.

#### **4.5 ILiAD Research**

The Committee considered press coverage of the 'Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation' (ILiAD) research commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and undertaken by Queen's University, Belfast.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to OFMDFM seeking sight of the final report, when it is available.

### **5. Minutes of previous meeting**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 2 December 2015.

### **6. Matters Arising**

#### **6.1 EU Commission's Work Programme in 2015**

The Committee noted a draft response to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (COFMDFM) request seeking feedback on the Education Committee's scrutiny of the EU Commission's Work Programme in 2015 and its plans in that regard for 2016.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response to COFMDFM.

## **7. Special Schools Provision – Oral briefing**

*Officials joined the meeting at 12:11pm.*

Jacqui Durkin, Director of Area Planning, Department of Education; Dorina Edgar, Area Planning Policy Team, Department of Education; and Dr Clare Mangan, Regional Managing Director, Belfast Region, Education Authority briefed the Committee on Special Schools Provision.

A question and answer session followed the briefing.

*Maeve McLaughlin left the meeting at 12:47pm*

*The officials left the meeting at 12:49pm.*

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Special Schools Strategic Forum to seek feedback from Special Schools' principals in respect of the report and the development of a regional plan.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the progress that has been made in developing consistent financial information for Special Schools and whether as part of the proposed revised model, there is to be a funding formula and a greater level of financial delegation to Special Schools.

## **8. Assembly Research Papers – written briefing**

The Committee noted the following Assembly Research papers entitled 'PISA 2012 Results' and 'Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill'.

## **9. Correspondence**

**9.1** The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

**9.2** The Committee noted correspondence from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People enclosing information on the Marshall Report Implementation Plan.

**9.3** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the 2014-15 Savings Delivery Plan.

**9.4** The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education to a number of Committee queries regarding the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill including details on the use of the Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service and the numbers of children with acquired brain injury.

**9.5** The Committee noted a copy of the Assembly's EU Matters Newsletter.

**9.6** The Committee noted correspondence from the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland enclosing a copy of the Department of Education's Capital Activity Report for November 2015.

**9.7** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel enclosing a response from the Department of Finance and Personnel on the Legislative Consent Motion: Cap on public sector exit payments.

**9.8** The Committee noted correspondence from COFMDFM seeking commentary on the Department's Bill and Transfer of Functions Order.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to COFMDFM in order make a nil response.

**9.9** The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding amendments to the Department of Education's business plan.

**9.10** The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education in response to Committee queries on the use of Levels of Progression as the qualifying criteria for the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Shared Education Signature Project.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the payment of grants to schools as part of the DSC Shared Education Signature Project.

**9.11** The Committee considered correspondence provided by Jim Allister MLA relating to the incorrect disposal of school records.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarification in respect of the enforcement of record-keeping practices in schools in line with disposal schedules and in support of relevant actions in the Marshall Report Implementation Plan.

## **10. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its draft forward work programme.

The Committee noted that it would be undertaking its formal clause by clause scrutiny and final decision-making on the Shared Education Bill at its meeting on 16 December 2015.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme, as amended.

## **11. Any Other Business**



*Proceedings moved into private session at 12:55pm.*

The Committee noted that an embargoed written Ministerial statement on the future of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland had been received.

## **12. Date, Time, Place of Next Meeting**

The Committee will meet again on Wednesday 16 December 2015, at 10.00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12:57pm.*

**Peter Weir**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**16 December 2015**