



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**Committee for Education**

**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(Hansard)**

**Teacher Education Review: The Way  
Forward**

**21 March 2012**

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Education

### Teacher Education Review: The Way Forward

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)  
Mr Mike Nesbitt (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Michaela Boyle  
Mr Jonathan Craig  
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson  
Mrs Brenda Hale  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Mr Conall McDevitt  
Miss Michelle McIlveen  
Mr Daithí McKay

**Witnesses:**

Mrs La'Verne Montgomery	Department of Education
Mr Paul Sloan	Department of Education

**The Chairperson:** La'Verne, you are very welcome. Thank you again for coming. Paul, you are also very welcome to the Committee. We will ask La'Verne to speak to the paper, and then we will take questions.

**Mrs La'Verne Montgomery (Department of Education):** Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you the direction of travel for teacher education, on foot of the teacher education review consultation exercise. We met the previous Education Committee in December 2009 to provide a briefing on the proposals in the joint Department of Education (DE)/Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) policy framework document, 'Teacher Education in a Climate of Change — The Way Forward'. The consultation period on the policy framework ended on 8 November 2010. The Education Committee at that time agreed that it would not submit a formal response to the consultation until such time as we were in a position to report on the consultation responses and had framed the direction of travel for teacher education. As you are aware, the change in Minister last year and the new Minister's subsequent articulation of his priorities have provided us with an opportunity to reflect on the outcome of the consultation and to reformulate our approach to teacher education.

The principal focus of the review has been on how best to improve the links between induction, early professional development (EPD), continuing professional development (CPD) and, in particular, how to link those stages of a teacher's career in a coherent way. That is seen as essential if we are to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. In the briefing pack we provided, you will see that, on the

majority of the issues raised, we received positive feedback from the consultees, with the bulk of the responses either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the direction of travel. We have provided you with further detail on the issues that received negative feedback from a few consultees who disagreed or strongly disagreed with some aspects of the direction of travel. As you can see from the briefing pack, we are further reflecting on the points that have been raised, and we will ensure that they are sufficiently explored in the advice that we provide to the Minister on these matters.

As you are aware, the Department has in place a coherent set of policies designed to improve educational outcomes for young people and to address the root causes when pupils are not achieving to their full potential. These policies include the school improvement policy, the literacy and numeracy strategy, the revised curriculum entitlement framework, extended schools and full service school programmes, and will include the special educational needs (SEN) and early years strategies once they are complete. The Department's challenge now is to ensure the effective implementation of these policies by schools.

Schools themselves are best placed to identify areas for improvement and drive changes that can bring about better outcomes for their pupils. The school improvement policy aims to support schools and teachers in their work to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning that pupils face. Action is being taken to link between social disadvantage and educational underachievement through encouraging schools to set high expectations for their pupils and supporting and, where necessary, challenging schools to improve.

The central tenet of Every School a Good School (ESAGS) is to improve outcomes for pupils and young people. The importance of good teaching and school leadership to pupil outcomes is widely acknowledged. Fortunately, there is major agreement about what constitutes effective teaching and leadership, as evidenced by the quality indicators for schools of self-evaluation, the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland's (GTCNI) teaching competences and the national standards for headship.

The main challenges that we face in teacher education are how we recruit the right people into teaching and leadership posts in the right number, how we retain them, and how we increase excellent teaching practice and leadership across the entire system so that every child has an effective teacher and every school has an effective leader. To meet these challenges, we are developing a strategy for teacher education that will consider three aspects: attracting the best people into teaching and school leadership and retaining them; strengthening the professionalism of the teaching workforce; and motivating and managing the performance of school professionals.

I think that we can all agree that education has changed significantly in recent years and continues to change in response to major social and economic pressures. However, the provision of teacher professional development from initial teacher education onwards has not reformed to the same degree. Among the major challenges that schools now address are a much greater diversity in their intake; relatively low levels of attainment, especially in literacy and numeracy; and the growing importance of family and community in educational success.

The previous Education Committee's inquiry into successful post-primary schools serving disadvantaged communities found that high quality teaching and learning and effective school leadership should be central to attempts to address underachievement.

Common themes and messages arising from the responses to our consultation exercise highlighted some concerns in the system around inadequately prepared initial teacher education students and newly qualified teachers. The disjointed nature of teacher education was another theme, as were the issues of leadership, capacity building and succession planning. To address the issues facing teacher professional development, we are considering the following five key priorities: getting the right people; getting the right training; setting the right pathway; strengthening accountability; and building leadership and management capacity. Perhaps I could take a few minutes to explain the rationale for each of the key priorities and give an indication of our proposed direction of travel.

The first priority is getting the right people. It has always been important to attract people to teaching who are highly skilled in literacy and numeracy and who have good academic qualifications. However, it is critical that they also have the disposition to teach in a complex and challenging educational

environment. That includes having wider life experiences, greater emotional intelligence, excellent interpersonal skills, considerable resilience, an understanding of the barriers to learning, and personal qualities to relate well to young people in order to help them to succeed. We are, therefore, reflecting on the current selection process and entry requirements to initial teacher education and will consider the need upon entry for higher academic qualifications in literacy and numeracy; identification of the most relevant criteria for identifying and selecting students; the role of employers in the selection process; how the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) should quality-assure the selection process; diagnostic assessments of students' competence in literacy and numeracy on entry into and exit from initial teacher education; and the gender imbalance in initial teacher education. That is the first aspect: getting the right people.

The second priority is getting the right training. One of the common themes that emerged from the consultation on the teacher education review was that students and newly qualified teachers are being inadequately prepared to deal with issues such as pupil violence, behaviour management, special educational needs, English as an additional language, and health and safety in schools. Concern was also expressed about the lack of cohesion between the content and nature of initial teacher education and the reality of the classroom. The current low and underachieving performance of a significant proportion of our pupils, particularly in the key areas of literacy and numeracy, together with the inspectorate's evidence of incidences of poor lessons given by teachers, would suggest that we need to review the current provision of teacher development to ensure that it is meeting the demands of the 21st century.

We envisage the review, which would be carried out in conjunction with key stakeholders, focusing on pedagogy, which is the knowledge, understanding and application of teaching, learning and assessment. We also envisage it addressing different needs and dispositions, such as the issues of inclusion and special needs; the need to develop an understanding of the barriers to learning and how best to overcome them — that is, the management of learning; the motivation and engagement of the learner; the need to have the ability to address different complex needs; and the disposition of learners in the same setting. We expect the review to consider different models of delivery, including the postgraduate/Masters route; the marketability of transferable skills in initial teacher education degrees beyond the education sector; and training with other professionals.

The third key priority that we have identified is setting the right pathway. It is our firmly held belief that teacher education should be re-conceived as a continuum, spanning a teacher's career and rooted in a competency-based model, rather than, as it is currently constructed, a connected series of distinctive stages of initial teacher education, induction, EPD, CPD, performance review and staff development (PRSD) and the professional qualification for headship (PQH).

The GTCNI's competency framework already provides a common language that enables teachers to engage in professional dialogue about what constitutes effective practice. Therefore, we are considering the creation of a coherent framework for teacher professional development, which would provide continuous, progressive pathways, including capacity building for excellent teaching and visionary leadership.

As part of the proposed teacher professional development framework, we will also consider cost-effective schemes whereby newly qualified teachers who are not in full-time, permanent teaching posts will have access to sufficient teaching experience in order to facilitate further development of their teaching competences and completion of induction or the equivalent phase of the teacher education continuum arising from the creation of a professional development framework.

We are also considering a provisional registration of teachers with the GTCNI until the induction phase or equivalent is completed, followed by active registration with the GTCNI, whereby registration status will be reviewed every five years, say, dependent on evidence of engagement in accredited professional development. Our view is that active registration would ensure that teachers' competences and skills are refreshed through periodic and meaningful professional development, leading to a reinvigorated profession mid-career and better motivated teachers committed to improving outcomes for all learners.

As part of its current review of teacher education, Scotland is considering the development of a new standard for active registration to clarify expectations of how fully registered teachers are expected to

continue to develop their skills and competences. Such requirements for continuing professional development already apply to those in other professions, such as solicitors, doctors and dentists. A single school development service is currently under development, and it is envisaged that, through this support structure, the school development service will facilitate and commission professional development for teachers.

A central principle in the design of that service will be the facilitation of peer support. It will help create more opportunities and space for teachers to work together in sharing practices and research, developing lesson plans and building consensus on what constitutes good teaching practice.

Within the resources set aside for the school development service, it is planned that funds will be ring-fenced for professional development delivered on an area-learning basis, school basis and an individual teacher basis. Those resources will be targeted to the key priorities of literacy and numeracy, school improvement, special education, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Within the proposed teacher development framework, we are also considering the recommendation in the Purvis report that meaningful incentives be offered for excellent principals, emerging school leaders and teachers to undertake, as part of their professional development, placements of two to four years in underachieving schools.

We envisage all teacher education providers, schools and individual teachers working in partnership to ensure that programmes of provision best meet the needs of the schooling system. In that context, we intend to work with the higher education institutes to ensure that they have a role in the early phases of teacher education and in continuing professional development, both as research-based specialists and as coaches, together with teacher tutors and associate assessors, who have a similar mentoring, coaching and recognised role in schools.

The fourth key priority that we have identified is strengthening accountability. One of the key principles that the ESAGS policy is based on is a recognition that, although the Department and its support bodies are accountable for overall standards, it is the school and its board of governors that are accountable for the standards achieved by its pupils. We believe that the proposed creation of a professional development framework of teacher education, as I have outlined, would provide opportunities for continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and would help build teachers' capacity for improving the standards and outcomes of their pupils.

Our current mechanisms for supporting teachers experiencing professional difficulties are cumbersome, slow and ineffective. They are being reviewed by the Teachers' Negotiating Committee to ensure that they sufficiently reflect the teacher competency framework and that the emphasis is on early identification of need, effective intervention and support with a streamlined process protecting the rights of both teachers and pupils. We are also considering a review of the performance review and staff development process in conjunction with key stakeholders.

The final key priority that we have identified relates to building leadership and management capacity. Leadership is central to educational quality, and research evidence from a plethora of studies demonstrates that effective school leadership is viewed increasingly as key to large-scale education reform and to improved educational outcomes.

The previous Committee's report that I referred to earlier recognises that the roles and responsibilities of school leaders are becoming increasingly complex and demanding, requiring principals to have a broad range of skills and attributes in order to carry out their duties effectively. That is likely to be particularly important in schools serving disadvantaged communities. The challenges we face in leadership professional development are similar to those we face in teaching: how we recruit the right people into leadership roles in the right numbers; how we retain them; and how we increase outstanding leadership across the entire system so that every school has an effective leader. In developing our strategy for teacher education, we will, therefore, focus on attracting, developing and sustaining leaders.

With regard to attracting leaders, we are considering the development of a new competency framework for school leaders that will underpin future school leadership development programmes. We are also considering a review of the selection criteria and the process for recruiting school leaders. In

developing leaders, we will ensure that leadership development is an integral part of the proposed professional development framework of teacher education. The proposed framework will help to identify opportunities for progression to middle and senior management, including succession planning, capacity building and sustaining leaders. Evidence provided as part of the 'School Leadership Matters' report suggests that principals work optimally when in a post for a maximum of seven years to 10 years. A fresh challenge is important to sustain and refresh school leaders. Movement of teachers here is limited, with some teachers spending their entire career in one school and, anecdotally, some even spending their entire career in the school that they attended as a pupil.

To increase sustainability, we will consider alternative models of leadership such as co-headship, a strategic principal working across a federation of cluster schools. We will explore the possibility of greater movement of existing school leaders throughout the education system, such as through secondments, mentoring roles and consultancy roles.

To conclude, we are currently considering the five key priorities that I outlined for you today, and, under the direction of the Minister of Education and the Minister for Employment and Learning, we will provide a plan for the implementation of the actions associated with each of those priorities. The Department of Education will oversee the implementation plan and will monitor progress against agreed timescales. We very much welcome the opportunity to discuss with you today the proposed direction of travel regarding the future of teacher education provision in advance of developing the implementation plan. It is our intention to publish the strategy for the way forward for teacher education once the Education Committee and the Employment and Learning Committee have had the opportunity to comment on it. We also hope to engage with other key stakeholders such as the teacher unions and the higher education institutes.

We are very happy to take any questions that you might have, and we really want to have the opportunity to hear from you, first on your view of the proposed direction of travel and, secondly, on any other issues or areas that you wish to bring to our attention, with a view to it being considered as part of the future for teacher education.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, La'Verne, for a comprehensive review of where we are at with teacher education issues. Before we move to questions, I welcome to the Public Gallery pupils and a member of staff from Antrim Grammar. We are delighted to see you. Antrim Grammar is a school that I have spent a considerable amount of time in over the past number of years. I have a very good working relationship with your principal, and I ask you to bring back our best wishes to him. I am particularly glad to see a pupil who is with you today who spent some time with me on work experience. We are so pleased to see you again, and I hope that you enjoy your time with us. To all who have come, I hope that you enjoy this experience and that it does not put you off politics or put you off the Department of Education.

**Miss M McIlveen:** Two weeks ago, I went to Antrim Grammar and had the privilege of being able to speak to the politics classes. It is pretty timely that we are having this conversation today, because I did my teaching practice in Antrim Grammar. Miss Gibson has some responsibility for me.

**The Chairperson:** Maybe we should ask Miss Gibson to come up and make some comment. This is all very timely, and you are all very welcome.

La'Verne, one of the issues that came out of the special educational needs review was that there was delay because there was such a huge number of responses and the Department was taking a considerable amount of time to look at them. This process has been under way since 2009 or probably even before then. There were only 48 responses. We are now in 2012, and, throughout your contribution, I heard about a review, a review of selection, a review of the competencies and of professional development. If I were a teacher listening to all that was said and reading all that is contained in the teacher education document, I would feel a bit like a nurse. All this change is coming, but I am still expected to make provision for some of the pupils — we could take as an example the pupils who are with us today. How are teachers supposed to cope with all of this?

I will be blunt about this: until today, the one area of education that I could not get my head round, and which I still have challenges about, is early years and the whole plethora of preschool education.

It is such a minefield. I think this is as big an issue, if not bigger. I seriously think that this Committee, along with the Committee for Employment and Learning, has to devise a way of looking at how we are going to respond to this review. There are so many issues that I am very concerned about. I read in the report about the role of teacher-tutors. However, it is only given one line in the report. It says that they will:

*"seek to fulfil the expectations set out for them in the Teacher Education Partnership Handbook."*

That is it. It is not expanded upon or given any more detail. That is all that is there. How will all this be implemented in a way that is to the benefit of teachers, first and foremost, and pupils?

**Mrs Montgomery:** We in the Department are faced with the challenges that you have just articulated around the amount of work involved from initial teacher education right through a teacher's career. It is a huge area, and there is a real need for development. It has not moved on as much as other areas in the education system. That is why we have tried to simplify it as much as possible by identifying the five key priorities. It is a vast area, and there are issues within it that need to be addressed, and we have to be able to do that in a manageable way. That is the reason why we have identified those five key priorities. We have looked at it as teacher education being a continuum from initial teacher education right through a teacher's career. That is why we have identified the right people with the right training, and the right pathway for them to understand where they can go throughout their careers.

**The Chairperson:** La'Verne, having set out your five key priorities, would it not, in some respects, be easier to establish who is going to deliver those? If you look at where we are now, you will see that a variety of organisations, which are funded by the Department, deliver a variety of services. It is not so many weeks ago that we had a situation where a provider wanted to provide services to teachers, but, because the service was being provided free by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the schools felt that they could not take money out of their budgets to go to another provider that was charging them. However, they felt that that was the most appropriate provision that they could get. They were forced to go to CCEA. We have CCEA, the ETI, the education and library boards (ELBs) and the GTCNI. Do we need all that provision?

Would a starting point for the Department not have been to clear the decks and make it simple for the teachers, so that they would have opportunities and have access to the appropriate service? Is this the Department's way of getting rid of the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) across Northern Ireland? I think there is a huge fear that, if we ever get to the point at which there is an Education and Skills Authority (ESA), one of the Department's ideas will be to clear the decks of CASS and that that will make life a lot easier for a lot of people.

**Mrs Montgomery:** One of the issues that we have highlighted is the development of a single school development service, for the very reason that there are a number of providers in the sector, and outside of it, providing professional development to teachers. The rationale behind the single development service is that it would be small with a small, key team whose role would be more to do with securing the provision of professional development rather than the delivery of professional development. It would be a small, core team that would work specifically with schools in an area. It would build up knowledge and a relationship of trust with those schools in an area, where the team would be able to work with principals and teachers in identifying and addressing their needs. In what we term a mixed economy, funds would be set aside that would be accessible for schools to enable them to do what you described. If there is a provider better placed to meet the needs, there would be a facility to enable schools to do that. Schools would not be forced to use a particular provider.

To manage that, the school development service would have to carry out that facilitation role. Of course, there would be an issue around marketability and tendering. Programmes would be tendered for and so forth. That would have to be done in a way that ensured that there was open competition. Certainly, part of the rationale for a single development service is that it should not matter what sector a school is in — primary, nursery, post primary, controlled, grammar, Catholic maintained, grant-maintained integrated (GMI) or Irish-medium — because there would be a single development service.

You mentioned CASS, Chair, and one of the issues around it was that it grew almost like Topsy, in the sense that its staffing levels got to a point at which we had members of staff on permanent contracts

for a considerable time. Part of the rationale behind the single development service would be, for want of a better description, revolving-door employment. Professional practitioners, identified for their excellent practice, would be brought from schools into the school development service for a project or a time-bound period, so that they would be refreshing their skills, and sharing their skills and competencies with schools in an area. Equally, they would return to the school environment. So, that is part of the rationale behind the single service.

**The Chairperson:** This raises many questions, but there has been concern about the role of ETI. We have not seen the 48 responses, which have not yet been published by the Department.

**Mrs Montgomery:** Not yet.

**The Chairperson:** I have some of them, and one of them was concerned about what the role of ETI would be in relation to CPD. The document talks about ETI monitoring, providing advice, reviewing, evaluating, but never, in any way, putting in place a reprimand, something that is involved in dealing with a serious issue. I could take you to a school today that has serious problems. It has had all sorts of inspections, and everybody says that it has a leadership issue. OK; what are you doing? What can you do, with respect, to take out or deal with such a problem? I am not saying that we should have a Gestapo for education. Teachers are professionals. However, if we have bad MLAs up here, the electorate bucks them out. There is a way of dealing with it. It seems that, in other professions, you are shifted, moved or whatever. This does not instil any confidence in me that we will have an education system where teachers are confident that there is support and help there, but, equally, that an identified major problem will be dealt with. ETI's role is to monitor, provide advice and evaluate — the problem will persist.

**Mrs Montgomery:** That role would not be for the inspectorate. The inspectorate is there to —

**The Chairperson:** In fairness, why should it not be for the inspectorate?

**Mrs Montgomery:** The role is effectively for the employer to deal with. It is a role that, obviously, through the board of governors, is supported by the employing authority. I referred to the unsatisfactory process that is being reviewed. The focus needs to be on identifying an issue as soon as possible and certainly not waiting until an inspection takes place.

**The Chairperson:** After this question, we will move on to other members because you could really expand this one all day. If you were to take the rationale that you are using, and ESA became the employing authority, it would no longer be the board of governors —

**Mrs Montgomery:** Well, the board of governors would be delegated responsibility —

**The Chairperson:** But then ESA would want to have its cake and eat it. We are being told that ESA is about to become the single employing authority. Therefore, it becomes the single employing authority: it becomes the policemen and the organisation responsible. How can one board of 20 people know everything that is going on in 1,200 schools across Northern Ireland? They could not — just in the same way as a board of governors cannot know, on a day-to-day basis, because they are all volunteers, and they are totally dependent on assessment and evaluation. My personal view is that the inspectorate should be outside the Department of Education. The chief inspector should not be sitting on the management board of the Department of Education. They should be outside inspecting the Department and the schools and seeing whether they all match up. However, there seems to be absolutely no stick here to deal with the underperformance of teachers.

**Mrs Montgomery:** The unsatisfactory process is being reviewed. The difficulty is that we should not be waiting until an inspection makes a discovery. There is an issue about early identification and early intervention. The issue is not to get rid of that teacher or that leader; it is about supporting them and getting them to a point at which they are effective again. We are focusing on the time frames. The time frames that we operate under are too long for the teacher who is in the process and the pupils who are working alongside that process. We are working very closely with the unions to try to get that process shortened in the interests of pupils, as well as looking after the rights of teachers.



**The Chairperson:** Can you give us a specific report on what the Department is doing on that? It would be useful to inform the Committee.

**Mrs Montgomery:** Yes. Would you like me to do that now?

**The Chairperson:** No.

**Mrs Montgomery:** You would like it in writing? Certainly.

**Miss M McIlveen:** I apologise for the fact that I will have to leave in the next couple of minutes. My question follows on from Mervyn's point and the fact that it was revealed that respondents were not, in the main, averse to being held accountable. That is quite a telling comment. Is it accountability or is it criticism? I know that we are all human and that we probably do not like criticism. However, given our profession, we have to develop a thick skin and just take it.

I have had dealings with a variety of schools over the past few weeks, and I was told that teachers have more protection than pandas. I am beginning to realise that that is quite true, particularly in and around accountability, especially if you have a criticism of a head teacher who happens to be the secretary to the board of governors and the conflict of interest that there may be in and around that. Will you be looking at that role?

I declare an interest as a member of two boards of governors where the leadership and the schools are excellent. However, that said, there are still issues with some schools, particularly around the fact that the principal is so close to the board of governors in those instances.

**Mrs Montgomery:** We are not looking specifically at that issue. Indeed, my colleague Katrina Godfrey is responsible for issues around governance in the Department. However, it is not a requirement for the principal to be the secretary to the board of governors. Nevertheless, it is normal practice and in most schools you would find that that is the case. However, it is not a requirement. The secretary to the board of governors could be one of the other members of the board of governors. The governors have to have a very effective working relationship with the principal because they are the day-to-day manager of the school, but they also need to have that critical friend or that ability to be able to challenge the principal and, in doing so, would need to be provided with information, data sources, and so forth. That was one of the issues that we emphasised to governors in the recent round of governor seminars in January and February. That should not have been the first time that the information we were providing through the presentation was given to governors. We were effectively saying, "If you have not seen information of this nature before, go back to the school and ask the principal to provide you with it, so that you can then ask the right questions in order to be able to understand what it is that the principal is presenting. Do not be afraid to ask those challenging questions".

**Miss M McIlveen:** There is clearly a duty on boards of governors to have a scrutiny role around the leadership of the schools. The fact that the inspectorate's report found the quality of leadership and management in one out of 10 post-primary schools to be inadequate or unsatisfactory begs the question: where were the boards of governors of those schools?

I am going to quickly move on to a couple of your comments about gender imbalance. I know that it is about attracting more males into the profession. However, there is a different imbalance when it comes to leadership, where males, as opposed to females, have the majority of roles. I suppose this goes back to our role around the idea of quotas, positive discrimination, and so on. People should be in such roles because of their ability as opposed to their gender.

**Mrs Montgomery:** Certainly. I said that we are planning to look at the selection criteria for entry to initial teacher education. We certainly do not have any type of positive discrimination in relation to gender at the moment. We are working with the higher education institutes and the GTC to, perhaps, dispel some of the myths around gender stereotypes and so forth. We want to work with the careers services in schools in order to be able to attract young men into education as teachers. You are quite right in saying that the gender imbalance then shifts when it comes to leadership roles. What is

encouraging is that there are more females coming through the PQH process. However, interestingly, some of them said, when asked and pressed a little bit further, that they did not envisage themselves becoming principals or vice-principals. They see the PQH as another development opportunity as opposed to another stage in their career. As part of the review of leadership development, we are looking at the barriers to females taking on leadership roles. As I said, we would have to review the criteria that we currently use to select leaders in order to see whether there is active encouragement.

**The Chairperson:** Before we go on to the next question, I would like to know whether the Department has concluded that there is a role for the GTC in Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Montgomery:** Absolutely, yes. The GTC registers all teachers who teach in Northern Ireland. You must be registered with the GTC. It will be getting further powers in relation to competency and conduct. We envisage a role for the GTC around active registration, whereby teachers would be required to prove that they are continuing to refresh their professional development on, as I suggested, a five-yearly basis by building a portfolio of evidence to indicate how they are doing that.

**The Chairperson:** Is there an argument for registration having robust processes for identifying and supporting underperforming teachers as a key component, so that teachers know exactly what it is they are registering for, and that the processes are robust enough to deal with underperformance?

**Mrs Montgomery:** Underperformance, in the first instance, must be dealt with by the employer. That is the employer's role. It would come to the GTC after the internal mechanisms had been exhausted.

**The Chairperson:** I do not want to labour the point, La'Verne, but the Department gets hung up on the issue of the employer. DE pays the bill. You can put any technical term on it, but the taxpayer of Northern Ireland is paying, albeit the money is handed out from the centre to a variety of schools that technically and legally are the employer. However, if you were running a company in which people were not performing, the board of directors of that company, which pays the wage bill, would have every right to have a robust process to deal with that issue. ESA ain't gonna solve the problem; it seems as though it continues to go on. While it continues, we all have schools in our constituencies that have major performance issues. Some of it is down to the issue of leadership. We are not doing enough quickly and robustly to deal with that issue, which is why we have what are deemed to be failing schools in some places. That is not the right way for the Department to proceed.

**Mrs Montgomery:** It has been very helpful to have this discussion today about our ongoing negotiations with the teacher unions about reviewing that process. We can certainly reflect the Committee's views. We have been working at this for a considerable amount of time, and there needs to be a final push to get the process over the line.

**The Chairperson:** Before we go to Jo-Anne, I welcome — I hope that I get this right — St Comgall's Senior Citizens' Club. You are very welcome to the Education Committee. If there are any retired teachers among you, I apologise for being critical of the profession. I have no doubt that you were excellent in the way in which you dealt with your pupils. You are very welcome. I trust that this gives you an insight into what the Committee does. We have in front of us today two senior representatives from the Department of Education to deal with a document entitled 'Teacher Education in a Climate of Change'. We are here to ask them questions, as you can see. We trust that you enjoy your time and the rest of your day at Stormont.

**Mrs Dobson:** La'Verne, you spoke about getting the right people and about the importance of attracting people to teaching who are highly skilled in literacy and numeracy. It is very concerning that there is no general rule or qualifications required for literacy and numeracy teachers for primary or post primary. As you know, by contrast, in August, the further education colleges will require their literacy and numeracy tutors to be educated to degree level or above. What are your views on that? The Department has no plans to review that requirement. Do you not feel that it would help to achieve the Programme for Government (PFG) target for raising standards in literacy and numeracy if that were in place?

**Mrs Montgomery:** We are reviewing the entry requirements for initial teacher education. We propose a specific requirement around literacy and numeracy, and that it be effectively assessed on entry to initial teacher education and subsequently assessed on exit. You are referring to the fact that, when a school makes an appointment to a literacy and numeracy co-ordinator post, it does not stipulate a specific criterion. Currently, on entry to initial teacher education, there is a requirement — Paul can correct me if I am wrong — to have a C or above in GCSE English and maths, but not degree level. We propose further assessment on entry to and exit out of initial teacher education. It is for boards of governors to effectively decide on the criteria for appointing a literacy and numeracy co-ordinator. Part of the issue is that, if they were to stipulate a degree in maths for a position in a primary school, for example, they may struggle to appoint someone. That is probably the issue. We need to start with initial teacher education and set the standard there so that the system can respond.

**Mrs Dobson:** Therefore, the standards would improve.

I will ask another quick question. Following the 2007 merger of the further education colleges, which went from 16 institutions to six, each college instigated internal training and they had so-called champions: teachers who trained staff in areas, including IT, in the classroom. Have you looked into this training for primary and post-primary schools? That would be a successful method of training and it would be more cost-effective than employing consultants. Has the Department considered that option?

**Mrs Montgomery:** That is exactly the process that we have been looking at as part of the single school development service. There would not be a large team within the service; the service would focus on facilitation, identifying best practice in the system and ensuring that it is shared across an area or from one area to another.

**Mrs Dobson:** It just worked so well in the further education colleges. So, that will be adopted?

**Mrs Montgomery:** Yes.

**The Chairperson:** Following on from Jo-Anne's point, what consideration has the Department given to the whole issue of teacher education and the proposed abolition of DEL? Will that have an impact on some of the focus of this document?

**Mrs Montgomery:** This document is a joint framework, so we are working with DEL colleagues and the DEL Minister on it. There are certain things, such as the review of the selection criteria for initial teacher education, which would be for DEL to lead on. Obviously, any decisions taken on the dissolution of DEL will have an impact on this, but will not be to its detriment. Wherever those functions go, we will work with them.

**Mr Craig:** La'Verne, I listened with great interest to what you had to say. One of the things that has always puzzled me, and you are now starting to look into the issue, is how you, quite rightly, identify weaknesses in teachers. At the minute, there seems to be no formal agreement as to how that assessment is done. Senior management gets a lot of criticism that it is falling down, not identifying that and not addressing it. Management must make an effort to address it. The only way you can fully address it is to go in, sit in the class and see how things happen and how it all pans out for the teacher.

To be honest with you, it is all carrot. There is no stick in the system. If you identify weaknesses, all you do is identify areas for retraining or improvement in the individual teacher. However, there is massive resistance within teaching to doing that. How is senior management meant to identify weaknesses and address them if it is not allowed to do something as simple and basic as listen to a person teaching? How do you get around that issue, or is it part of the negotiations that are going on?

**Mrs Montgomery:** Certainly, one of the key roles of a school leader is to monitor teaching in the school.

**Mr Craig:** Until he actually does it, and then the unions are jumping all over the place about it.

**Mrs Montgomery:** A lot of it is to do with how that is managed. Sometimes it is to do with relationships within the school. Where we have very positive examples of how this is managed, it is all open and transparent. The principal, the leader, is very clear on how that process will be managed and how he will involve the teachers in that process, so that there are no hidden agendas and nothing to be afraid of. The process itself, as currently constructed, can have many barriers and loopholes in it. We can have situations whereby a teacher's work is identified as inadequate or unsatisfactory. If that happens, they first move into an informal process of development. At the end of that period they may have improved, but if not, they move into a formal process, which can take, potentially, another school year. So, we are seized of the fact that it is taking too long to get a teacher through the process of becoming effective. That is where we are in negotiations with the teacher unions. We are saying that this needs to be done in a timely fashion.

The teacher has to feel that there is no stigma attached to their work being found to be unsatisfactory. It must be recognised that throughout a career, any teacher, at any time, could find themselves in the situation of not being as effective as they previously were, for lots of different reasons. The emphasis has to shift; this is about identifying that there is a need and acting on it by putting in whatever support is required as quickly as possible. We must monitor and re-evaluate that as quickly as possible, so that the teacher and all of the pupils involved get a quick turnaround, and we quickly establish whether the support is having the effect that it should. That is where the management side of the negotiations sits. We have come a long way with our teacher union colleagues. However, the stumbling block at the moment is getting those time frames in a way that they are protecting the children as much as they are protecting the rights of the teachers.

**Mr Craig:** You hit the nail on the head. Teachers are well and truly protected in all of this process: the children are not. I asked for the procedures because I have heard so much in this Committee about how you deal with senior management, how you can remove a bad manager and how you can deal with a bad teacher. Once you look at the procedures, one thing becomes abundantly clear: it will take almost two years to deal with an incompetent teacher. Under the system, it will take almost three years to deal with an incompetent manager. I am glad to hear that the Department is now taking that issue seriously. That applies if retraining is unsuccessful. I think that, with a headmaster, you have to make three attempts, so we are talking about it taking almost three years, and three reassessments, before getting to the stage where you decide that the person involved is not up to the job.

**Mrs Montgomery:** That, in effect, is where the negotiations are at the moment. Teachers and leaders themselves tell us that it is not doing anyone any good to prolong that process and that it is in everyone's interest that it is done in as short a time as possible, both for those engaged in the process and for the pupils who work with the teacher.

There is even a difficulty around the terminology of "unsatisfactory" teaching process. There is a stigma around that. We are shifting the emphasis to say that this should not be something that a teacher should be afraid of. The purpose is early identification and to put in place effective support, with the belief and hope that they will come out of that process a more effective teacher. It is not about sacking teachers or leaders. However, if required, that should be done in a way that benefits the entire system.

**Mr Craig:** I also noted your comments about co-sharing school leaders. Do you envisage that as something that might resolve many of the running cost issues of some rural schools, where pupil numbers have dramatically dropped? I can think of one instance in my neck of the woods, where, between them, the principal and vice-principal take up one third of the school's entire running costs. Frankly, that is not in any way sustainable. Would co-sharing be a potential solution for such situations?

**Mrs Montgomery:** It could certainly be a saving. Some of it is to do with where someone is on the leadership scale and so forth. However, the issue would be around ensuring that you have a more effective leader whose skills and aptitudes are used to the betterment of a number of schools, rather than just one. As part of area-based planning, the Minister has asked for solutions for an area that will be innovative and not necessarily within the constraints in which we currently find ourselves. From our

perspective, we want to ensure that the systems are in place to support that innovative approach to managing a number of small schools in an area.

**Mrs Hale:** Thank you, La'Verne, for the report, point 17 of which refers to training. Is there a place just after the initial training where we qualify our SEN teachers before they go into schools? Having worked in special needs for the past 10 years, I know that teachers are doing training on the job and are having to cope with larger and larger numbers of children who have autism, attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia in a mainstream system, whether that is in a moderate learning difficulties unit or a severe learning difficulties unit. What worries me is that, while those teachers are basically training on the job and are away on courses, there are children who are falling through the net. Teachers are going into the classroom not fully equipped to deal with all of the different issues that are coming through.

Jonathan and Mervyn both brought up the point about poor teachers. While teachers are being supported and evaluated through a weak period of teaching, I have had children in my constituency who are suffering hugely and are having to change primary schools. Children who are six or seven years old are having to leave their friends and familiar environments to go to new schools in the hope that parents can find better teachers. I am concerned that the gap for evaluation needs to close. While we are supporting the teachers, who is supporting the children?

**Mrs Montgomery:** The first point that you made about special educational needs is one of the issues that came through in the consultation process, in that there were concerns that there were newly qualified teachers who were not sufficiently skilled in managing the reality of the classroom. One of the ways in which we have attempted to address that is through a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) SEN pilot that is running jointly between Queen's University and the University of Ulster. It has been running over the past few years and has been very successful, dealing specifically with special educational needs. The review that we propose on the content of initial teacher education and the different models of delivery would look at those specific issues. It has to be recognised that, for example, in the year-long PGCE, approximately half of which is spent on teaching practice in classrooms, there is not a lot of time for those practitioners to spend in a classroom with their tutors.

**Mrs Hale:** Having done the PGCE, I know that it runs from September to May. That is not even a full year.

**Mrs Montgomery:** Yes, exactly. We are very aware of the fact that teachers who come out of training are classroom-ready but still have a lot of development to do. That is where the continuum of professional development needs to be seen as a coherent, continuous process rather than those different stages of ticking a box and going through another hoop.

As your colleagues said already, it is in everyone's interests that identification of inadequate or poor teaching is done as early as possible, that effective support is put in place and that that is monitored and evaluated as quickly as possible. That is the issue that we are addressing currently with the teacher unions. As I said, today's discussion has been very helpful, and we will be able to take that back to those discussions.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Thank you, Paul and La'Verne. Can you make a quick comment on how you are trying to achieve before I ask what you are trying to achieve? You talked about achieving what you are trying to achieve with no stigma to teachers, but I have to suggest to you that the one thing you will never protect a teacher from is the pupils. In my experience, they will sniff out a bad teacher very quickly.

The first three of your five key areas are the right people, the right training and the right pathway. I am struck that, in the document, the word "right" appears in each case in inverted commas. That suggests to me that you are tacitly admitting that there is no such thing as the right people, training or pathway or, if there is, it is beyond the definition of the most literate and articulate official in your Department.

**Mrs Montgomery:** Yes, we had a debate as to the appropriateness of the inverted commas. You are absolutely correct; it is open to interpretation. However, we are saying that with the information that we have on the GTC competences, the standards in headship and the ETI self-evaluation process, there are definitions of what makes a good teacher and what makes good teaching practice. We would build our definition of the right teacher and the right people with the right training on that.

**Mr Nesbitt:** So, you do not have them yet. OK.

**Mrs Montgomery:** We are building on it.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Let me take you to point 19, which is about setting the right pathway. I will quote the first sentence:

*"DE is considering the creation of a coherent framework for teacher professional development."*

The Chairperson said that it has been 16 months since the close of the consultation, yet you are still at the consideration stage, and, may I say, not to consider how to create a coherent framework for teacher professional development, but to consider whether you should. Why would you need to consider that? Surely it is a no-brainer. Are you also considering not creating a coherent framework?

**Mrs Montgomery:** No. Perhaps not in the briefing document, but certainly today in the presentation, I said that it is our firmly held belief that a coherent framework should be developed. We have reached a consensus on working with key stakeholders, and the teacher unions and the higher education institutes share that belief. At this point, the use of the language relates to engagement with the DE and DEL Ministers. We operate under the direction of the Ministers, and, at this point, officials are considering the matter. We need to have further engagement with the Ministers to ensure that we are on the right track with them.

**Mr Nesbitt:** So, would I be better to read that as DE is "considering how to create", rather than "considering the creation"?

**Mrs Montgomery:** Yes.

**Ms Boyle:** I want to make a comment and then ask a question. Thank you for your presentation. I want to ask you about getting the right people. I have spoken to some young students who came out of college last term and who still cannot get a job. I believe that anyone who goes into the teaching profession does so because they have a vocation or a calling. Young people are passionate about what they are doing; it is not just about the good holidays and all of the stigma around why people go into teaching.

Those young people told me that nothing prepared them for the extent of the issues that they face when they go into a classroom situation. That brings me back to point 6, which is about getting the right training, and the lack of cohesion between the feedback from students' placements in classrooms and their providers. Something could be done in the interim to help that. Nothing prepares the student for going into a classroom, to see first-hand the extent of some of the problems that exist in some schools in relation to challenging behaviours and social and domestic issues and everything that comes along with those issues.

Point 11 in the review notes that education has changed in response to social and economic pressures, but that:

*"teacher professional development, from initial teacher education onwards, has not reformed to the same degree."*

What verifiable evidence did you obtain during the review to reach that conclusion? What opportunities exist in schools for refresher courses for teachers to help them with social changes?

**Mrs Montgomery:** Each of the initial teacher education providers and the higher education institutes have gone through ETI reviews over the past number of years. The content of their provision has been viewed as good, very good, and, in one case, outstanding. We can take a lot of solace from the fact that what is being provided is of a high quality. The feedback that we are getting from schools is that newly qualified teachers are, on the whole, excellent. The issue that has been put to us is that that is best practice of current practice, and that it does not necessarily reflect the reality of the classroom. As you have said, quite often it is a culture shock when students are exposed to issues that they have not been sufficiently prepared for through the initial teacher education process. That is why we are suggesting a review of the content and delivery models for initial teacher education.

**Mr Lunn:** I noted what you said about the optimum period, particularly for head teachers, of seven to 10 years. We have spent a lot of time — as we usually do — talking about how to deal with the situation of poor teachers and poor headmasters. Now, you may have the problem of how to deal with successful ones. How do you get them to acknowledge that they have reached their optimum at seven years and that it is time to move on? Perhaps you could expand on that a little bit. However, there is no doubt about it that, as we found in our recent report on successful schools in disadvantaged areas, the word written large in all of the conclusions was leadership. A good leader makes a good school. It is not the case across the board, but a lot of our headmasters are legends in education and have probably been in place for 20 or 30 years. Today, the Committee talked about one headmaster from Strangford who has been in post for 28 years — Mr Moore, I think — and we would like to talk to him before he retires. Are you talking about fixed-term contracts? How are you going to get a board of governors to release a highly prized asset?

**Mrs Montgomery:** The optimal figure of seven to 10 years is something that came out of the 'School Leadership Matters' report that PricewaterhouseCoopers was commissioned to do on behalf of the Education Departments both North and South. We have an issue here in that we do not have a lot of movement across the system. A lot of it is anecdotal, but we know where teachers go to get a job, effectively, and sometimes that is the key; therefore, they hold on to that job and stay in that school for their entire career. The situation now is that our leaders are becoming leaders younger and, potentially, will be expected to work longer. Therefore, there is an issue around longevity and resilience. Certainly, the findings of that report suggest that it is about refreshing the leaders and giving them new opportunities to be exposed to different challenges. We are looking at system leaders, seeing where the best practice exists and having that shared across the system.

You are absolutely correct: there are issues around boards of governors and releasing principals and so forth. We are working with the Regional Training Unit (RTU) in relation to leadership development partners where excellent and outstanding leaders have been identified, and they are providing mentor coaching roles for newly appointed principals. That is done with the consent of the board of governors, and they are very happy to do that.

You used the word "legend". The findings suggest that the most effective leaders are those who operate under what is called distributive leadership, where they have leadership roles and functions distributed right across their teaching and support staff and where different teachers have different leadership roles in the school. On occasions, that is remunerated and on other occasions it is not. They are, effectively, teams working together and sharing leadership functions, roles and responsibilities. That is another area for development for leaders.

**Mr Lunn:** You are not contemplating fixed-term contracts.

**Mrs Montgomery:** That is not within the realms of this review. However, you are absolutely right in saying that there are issues coming up through the teacher education review that need to be looked at: for example, the wider school workforce review. We are due to talk to you in the coming months about that review, which will look more at the issue of terms and conditions. We have talked about active registration, whereby teachers would be expected to continue to develop. At this stage, we have suggested that that be on a five-year basis.

**Mr Lunn:** I can understand the desire to challenge head teachers to move on to a fresh challenge, and so on. However, if you equate it to business as, I think, Mike did, you can see that the main reason

why people move on is for promotion and more money. In the context of schools and leadership, I am not too sure whether those incentives will be available, so I will be interested to see how it pans out over a long period.

**The Chairperson:** The only issue I would be worried about is if there were an attempt by someone — I am not saying that this is the rationale of the Department — to get a social mix in our education workforce, given that there is a drive to get a social mix in our schools, by taking teachers out of certain schools and spreading them like confetti over failing schools so that we might be able to get a better outcome. That would be the wrong reason for doing that. I think that we need to put a marker down to show that there is not another agenda at work here. Not that I would ever see a spy under the bed; not that I am a cynic.

**Mr McDevitt:** Thank you, La'Verne and Paul. Sorry I missed part of your presentation. I just want to take you back to paragraph 6 where you talk about the common themes and key messages. You say that the concern expressed in the feedback received from schools, education and library boards, and unions focused on poorly prepared initial teacher education. Yet, you told us that the inspectorate found the quality of initial teacher education to be either good, very good or outstanding. What evidence could those groups offer for describing initial teacher education as poorly prepared?

**Mrs Montgomery:** It is about the culture shock, to which Michaela referred, in the sense of the reality of the classroom today being as diverse as it is. From working with and talking to our higher education institutes, we know that they use schools for teacher practice that the inspectorate has identified as outstanding as well as those identified as satisfactory and adequate, so that teachers in initial teacher education can be exposed to a different variety of issues.

**Mr McDevitt:** Yes, but you used the words "poorly prepared Initial Teacher Education". That is an assessment of the academic preparation. Teacher education is an academic exercise. The placement exercise is a placement exercise. I am just trying to understand what specific evidence you can point to for saying that we have poorly prepared initial teacher education.

**Mrs Montgomery:** It is the evidence that was provided as part of the consultation in relation to the reality — that is the term I use — of the classroom. Effectively, there is only so much that can be done in the time that students are with the higher education institutes, be that through the four-year BEd or the one-year PGCE. We are suggesting that we look again at the content and the pedagogy in relation to preparing students. There is an absolute necessity for academic qualifications but, as much as that, there is a necessity for the young people coming out to have the skills and aptitudes to deal with the complexities in front of them.

**Mr McDevitt:** I understand that. However, the question still stands: what specific evidence were the boards and unions able to point to in order to describe the training as "poorly prepared"? They way I read it, "poorly prepared Initial Teacher Education" means that the courses were not prepared properly — that is what it means.

**Mrs Montgomery:** No.

**Mr McDevitt:** With the greatest respect, La'Verne, that is what it means.

**Mrs Montgomery:** It means that students are being inadequately prepared for some of the issues around behaviour management, diversity, English as an additional language and health and safety issues. It is difficult for the higher education institutes to cater for everything in the time that they have. We are suggesting that we look again at how that time is spent, to ensure that it is as effective as possible. It is probably more the practical end of the training that we would be concerned about.

**Mr McDevitt:** Do you not think that that is a bit of buck passing? It is the job of a school during the probationary period to build up the practical capacity of a probationer teacher. Trevor, Jonathan and I sit on the Policing Board. I am sure that if we got 15 sergeants in the room now and they were asked about the quality of recruits that come into Garnerville, they would say that new recruits can recite all the legislation backwards but do not know how to be police officers. That is why there is a



probationary period. It seems a cop-out to say that a system that is delivering good, very good and outstanding academic training is being blamed because some young teachers are arriving in the workforce without practical experience. Of course they are going to have no practical experience; they are just out of college.

**Mrs Montgomery:** Yes, and we absolutely accept the need for a continuum, for an approach that allows newly qualified teachers to say, "I have come out of initial teacher education. I am classroom-ready, but I still need further development. I need opportunities to be exposed to new experiences. I need to work with a mentor in the school who will help me to develop the skills that have been taken to only a certain level." It is absolutely not, by any stretch, about blaming.

One of the things that higher education institutes have said to us — it is quite timely, if we think of the Titanic commemorations — is, "They were all right when they left us." There is an issue in that newly qualified teachers get access to continuing professional development through induction and early professional development, and they see their development as ongoing and continuous. As I said, we are looking at putting in processes, a system, that will be cost-effective but will enable those not in full-time employment to access further development and complete their induction.

**Mr McDevitt:** The other side of this is whether you have ever asked students and trainee teachers what they think. What is their sense of the training that they receive in the institutions?

**Mrs Montgomery:** There are annual reviews and questionnaires that student graduates complete. The feedback that we get is that they are very happy with the training that they receive at higher education institutes. The issue is how that would be monitored as they progress in their careers.

**Mr McDevitt:** So, we now know for a fact that the inspectorate thinks that the training is to a very high standard, that the students believe that their training is of a high standard, but those who will employ them think that they should come to them as if they had four years' experience.

**Mrs Montgomery:** There may be issues around managing expectations.

**Mr McDevitt:** With respect, do you not think that that should be explicit here? We should be putting the responsibility where it lies rather than giving succour to what seems to me to be an exercise in buck-passing.

**Mrs Montgomery:** We can certainly reflect on that. We definitely would not want there to be any feeling of blame or buck-passing. We really believe that we need to look at initial teacher education, but that this has to be a continuum of professional development.

**The Chairperson:** Time has beaten us, because we have to be out of here, but I have one more question. Way back in the previous mandate, the McCrone agreement and the graduate year was a big issue in Scotland. The Department there was wiped out completely and said, "It is far too costly to do a year's graduate training for young teachers". Mc Crone was being reviewed; that was last year. Has the Department done anything in relation to that? If so, rather than answer now, will you write back to us and give us an update on that? Obviously, we believe that the introduction of a graduate year would deal with many of the issues that Conall and others raised. We would certainly be interested in hearing what the current status of the review in Scotland is, what the Department's view of it is, and how that all interrelates with the workforce review, the teacher education policy document and the teacher training issue. We have not even started today to talk about the location of the education facilities.

Given the five locations that we have and the plethora of provision here, it is no wonder that the situation is difficult to manage. You are dealing with St Mary's, Stranmillis and all those providers. How does all of that come together? It looks as though it is three separate pieces of work. Where do they all meet? Rather than taking time to respond now, you may want to respond to the Committee in writing.

**Mrs Montgomery:** I will certainly do that.

**The Chairperson:** La'Verne, Paul — the next time we will ask you all the questions — thank you for coming. Again, as always La'Verne, thank you for your contribution.