



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Education

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Controlled Schools Support Body Working  
Party Briefing

12 December 2012

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Education

### Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party Briefing

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

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)  
Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Michaela Boyle  
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Miss Michelle McIlveen  
Mr Sean Rogers  
Mr Pat Sheehan

**Witnesses:**

Mr Stephen Black	Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party
Mrs Valerie Campbell	Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party
Mr David Canning	Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party
Rev Ian Ellis	Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party
Rev Trevor Gribben	Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party
Mr Uel McCrea	Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party

**The Chairperson:** I welcome the controlled sector support body working group to the Committee. Uel, you have the onerous task of introducing everybody and leading off on their behalf. Thank you for coming.

**Mr Uel McCrea (Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party):** Thank you very much, Chairman and members, for the invitation to address the Committee. As you are aware, the working party was established recently. At the outset, I, as chairman, want to thank your good selves for having the foresight to have a working party for the controlled sector. This is the first time in, I think, more than 30 years that there has been a specific look at the controlled sector and, in particular, support for it. Therefore, on behalf of the working party, I extend my genuine thanks to you.

I will introduce you to the members of the working group. We have Valerie Campbell, principal of Dungannon Primary School, and David Canning, principal of Strabane Primary School. Of course, given the recent announcement, primary schools have had a good press. Stephen Black is from Antrim Grammar School, which is a controlled grammar school. You may be aware of the two gentlemen from the boards of education: Ian Ellis, secretary to the board of education of the General Synod, and, last but not least, Trevor Gribben, secretary to the board of education for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

One of the first things that we as a group wanted was professional support to look at the issue, and we were delighted that the Department agreed with our nominee, Mr Gordon Topping, who is well known

as the former chief executive of the North Eastern Education and Library Board. As you are aware, the Minister agreed to establish sectoral support bodies, including, for the first time, one for the controlled schools sector. It is non-statutory but is funded by the Department of Education.

Our task is to examine its role, function, constitution and cost and to produce a robust business case. We set about that task in October and have met on four occasions. We have already drawn up a draft statement of the vision, values and ethos of the controlled schools support body, which, as chair, I think is very important. As the working party, we believe that in establishing a group such as the controlled schools support body, there needs to be parity of esteem and equal treatment for schools in the controlled sector. Trevor Gribben will give a little bit of background on the working party.

**Rev Trevor Gribben (Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party):** Chairman, thank you again for your invitation. I want to refresh members on the history of how we got here, although I will not take you too far back. When the Protestant Churches — the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church — transferred their schools, they got what were called legal transferring rights, which we have spoken of on other occasions. The transferred schools have formed the core and foundation of what has become known as the controlled sector. A few other bodies transferred schools in those days; for instance, the Mill in Sion Mills. The transferors were actually former mill owners, not Church people. Nonetheless, those schools and their successors have come to be the controlled sector. It is a sector with church-relatedness and with a warm, open Christian ethos running throughout.

When the first Education and Skills Authority Bill in draft form came before the Assembly — indeed, when it came before the Education Committee in the previous mandate in particular — it became apparent to many in the controlled sector, particularly the transferors, that the sector was, in a sense, losing out and was perhaps being taken for granted. It was not given the profile, support or coherence that it needed. There began a series of discussions in which the transferors and others engaged with every political party. We want to acknowledge the openness that we received from every political party across the spectrum to seek to understand the needs of the controlled sector and the transferors in it. We pay credit to the political agreement that has been reached. We welcome the clear statement by the Minister that he wants to see a strong controlled sectoral body to give voice and coherence to the sector that, as regards the number of schools involved, is the largest sector in Northern Ireland. Thank you for squeezing six of us around the table, but this is a visual representation that this is the largest sector that you will meet today. What is one extra seat among friends?

The controlled sector has particular issues. First, we are a diverse sector. The sector is not just the transferors or the transferring Churches; we have many different views and many different types of schools in the controlled sector. People have said to us, as a sectoral body, that that presents huge difficulties. However, the reverse is true: it is our strength. The diversity of the controlled sector is open to all young people in Northern Ireland. We have particular problems, which have been highlighted, in the underachievement of Protestant working-class boys, and we have read the reports and affirm their conclusions. There is a lack of desire in some parents who send their children to the controlled sector to value education. Therefore, we need to help communities to value education, and the sectoral bodies see that as a key role.

We see moral and ethical issues as important, and we are open to promoting shared education. Indeed, we argue that the controlled sector is an example of shared education in many places in Northern Ireland.

Finally, Chairman, we want to highlight what we might call legacy issues. That is a well-worn phrase in Northern Ireland, but we believe that there are real legacy issues in the controlled sector. For the past number of decades, the education and library boards have not been able to be an advocate for the controlled sector because they have had to be neutral in legislation for all schools. The controlled sector has not had a voice; it has not had that coherence built in it; it has not had the affirmation that other sectors have had. Therefore, the sectoral body does not just have to do what it has to do; it has to work hard at the legacy issues. We look forward to that challenge, and we welcome the political support of the Committee and the Minister in facing that challenge.

**Mr David Canning (Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party):** Good morning. I would like to take a few moments to explain our work plan and our progress to date. As our chairman said, we have met on four occasions. We came together for the first time on 10 October 2012, and that was when we discussed our remit and how we would function with departmental officials. On 26 October, we commenced in the form in which you see us today to work towards establishing our support body

for the controlled sector. We are new to the task in hand, and many of us are doing this in addition to our day job.

We have established the issues that we need to address, and we have agreed a work programme to take us forward. A timetable has been set, and we have dates set in place to facilitate the production of the business case that the Department requires from us for our sectoral body. In relation to the — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* — where it talks about — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* — ethos, and the — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* — will be telling you more about that. I just want to — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* — already been circulated to all the controlled schools and interested bodies with which we work. We have also been working towards establishing the governance of the support body: its composition, numbers, role, executive, structure and, of course, funding. Stephen will address you on the nature of the body, but some of the matters that we will be talking about are on the agenda for our next meeting, which is later today, so you will appreciate that we are in the early stages.

I would like to reflect briefly on the role that we consider appropriate for the support body: it needs to be a strong advocate for the controlled sector; it should assist controlled schools to develop a unique ethos; and it should assist the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) in providing support to governors and providing support to ESA in raising educational standards. We also believe that the body should manage its affairs effectively and efficiently so as not to be a strain on the public purse.

There is another issue that we believe is vital for the establishment of parity of esteem for the body. Our relationship with ESA will be different from the other bodies because they will own their own estate. We accept that ownership of the controlled sector should rest with ESA. However, that does not mean that it needs to perform the planning role for that sector. That role should rest with the support body, as it does with the other support bodies. That would help the sector to get parity of esteem.

Someone else will have this remit and give you a bit more detail, but that support body would, of course, be non-statutory but funded by government. It would need to be a legal entity. Therefore, we are going about establishing a charitable company limited by guarantee. That appears to be the best option because that will enable the support body to carry out its business effectively while protecting its members and clients.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, David. I thank you, as the principal of a primary school, for your work. Trends in international mathematics and science study (TIMSS) and progress in international reading literacy study (PIRLS) have been much in the news in the past few days. Those are new phrases for educationalists and politicians to use, so — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]*

**Rev Ian Ellis (Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party):** I have been asked to speak for a couple of minutes on vision, ethos and values — three of the more vague and abstract concepts.

**The Chairperson:** No reflection on why you were asked to do that, Ian. *[Laughter.]*

**Rev Ian Ellis:** At our first meeting, we had a go at coming up with a vision statement, and this is what we have come up with as our working definition of the vision of the controlled sector body:

*"The body supports controlled schools in providing high-quality education for children and young people to enable them to learn, develop and grow together within the values of a non-denominational Christian environment."*

We have tried in a sentence to encapsulate the work of the body, principally about promoting high-quality education but also saying something about the context in which that happens. We have agreement that that is around a non-denominational Christian environment. The census figures yesterday indicated that, in Northern Ireland, there is a strong impulse among parents to have their children educated in that context.

Ethos is quite vague and nebulous to pin down. I personally think that ethos should be experienced. If a school is meant to have an ethos, it should be noticed by pupils, parents and staff. Quite an important role of the body would be supporting the ethos that is shared in our school group. Above all, schools should be places where things happen and where things are experienced. They should be places of inspiration for young people and places that reflect the Christian faith and values while recognising the faith and values of others. They should be places where there is an opportunity to

contribute to a young person's spiritual and moral development. They should be places where high-quality learning takes place, places where we encourage a sense of belonging to a community with a certain character and identity, and places where there is respect for diversity and an understanding of difference.

Those are abstract concepts, but we think that that encapsulates something of what we are working towards in generating and sharing an ethos for our controlled schools. As the group develops, we hope to pin those down more firmly as aims and objectives, but that is where we are at the moment. We also want to include an emphasis on pastoral care and a strong element of support for special needs. All of that is needed in a good, high-quality teaching environment. As a group, our sense was that that is best contributed to in a non-denominational Christian context. That is where we are with vision and ethos.

**Mr Stephen Black (Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party):** First, I have been asked to talk a bit about the nature of the body. As envisaged in the Bill, the controlled schools sectoral body, as David said, will be a non-statutory body, providing public services; it will be funded by the Department of Education and may be able to access money from other sources. There are various ways in which that can be established: it has to have a legal entity, established under law, which will be recognised by the courts. Following a great deal of research and looking at what other sectoral bodies have been doing, we feel that the way to take that forward is as a charitable company limited by guarantee. We believe that that is very similar to what is being pursued in another sectoral body.

Representatives from the group have met the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). We have talked about how we might develop our articles and memoranda of association to establish the company and also to see clearly how the company could operate. We have also discussed with NICVA the committee structure that we would put in place for the body and its charitable nature, and NICVA seems to see no issue with our being able to illustrate the public benefit of the sectoral support body in taking that up.

As a sectoral group setting that up, we will need legal support. We want to thank the Department very much for the support that it has given us so far, but we will need additional legal support to pursue the setting-up of a charitable company limited by guarantee.

As Trevor said, the controlled sector represents a very diverse sector, and all stakeholders will have to be reflected in the group, including teaching staff, governors, transferors and representatives from business and the community. Equally, you have to take account of the different types of schools in it: primary, post-primary non-selective, controlled grammar, nursery and special schools all have to be reflected. Therefore, the body will be of quite a significant size.

Taking all that into account, it is essential — [*Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.*] — Trevor said about legacy issues, that the body be established as soon as possible. Even if there is a delay in the Education Bill, it is important that the body be established. We feel that, in respect of parity with other sectors, that is a major point when we look at the area-based planning process and look at what has happened in the Catholic sector and the funding that was directed towards that process. In the controlled sector, there is a feeling that we have not necessarily had the same support or direction through the process, and we are keen to see that. Therefore, it is important that the body be established as soon as possible.

**Mrs Valerie Campbell (Controlled Schools Support Body Working Party):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am coming from a very practical point of view as the principal of a primary school and the value that this body will have to primary schools. As Trevor said, primary schools have not had a voice in the past, and this body will give them that voice. We felt, as a committee, that it was very important to establish the role of the body. Given that we have the Department of Education, the education and library boards, the Education and Skills Authority, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and C2K and all the other bodies that influence schools, we wanted to be sure that we had the role of this body established. The clue is in the title: the draft name is the controlled schools support council, and the key word is "support" for schools. That is where we see the role of the council. It will be a representational role for schools. We hope that the council will take the collective views of the controlled sector, and having done that, will present a collective voice to whichever bodies need to hear it. It will be given effectively and cohesively about education issues. We do not see the council replacing the management role of the education boards or ESA. It will act as an advocate for controlled primary schools and will be a supportive body to all those who study, work and govern in those schools, including pupils, staff, governors, parents and the community at large.

We hope that the new council will also support schools, parents and governors as they respond to moral and spiritual issues that might arise. In the past, they did not have a body to advise them or to help them to respond to those issues. The council will also hope to provide support for staff relating to ethos, religious education, collective worship and assembly. Especially with the cultural diversification that we now have in Northern Ireland, this will be an increasing role for schools and an important issue for them to face. For example, the council may be able to provide training for staff or chairs of boards of governors in collective worship. It may be able to provide workshops in religious education and the direction in which that should go or just point schools in the general direction of resources for religious education or related subjects.

The phrase that has been used a great deal at our committee meetings is that the council should be a critical friend to schools, especially on standards, early years and special needs, which are constantly in the news and constantly on the minds of boards of governors and the staff of schools. We want the council to be a critical friend to support and to help schools to work through those issues.

Those are some key messages. Trevor spoke about legacy issues, which the committee feels are very important, and David spoke about the estate management, especially with area-based planning. Irrespective of the progress of the Education Bill, we feel that the controlled schools support body should be established as soon as possible to give a voice to controlled schools as quickly as possible.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much. I declare an interest as a member of the board of governors of Ballymoney High School, which is a controlled secondary school. I thank all those who have come here this morning for the contribution that they have made to education over the years. Valerie, I include you in the issue that was raised in regard to TIMSS and PIRLS, which is good news. In Dungannon, there are particular challenges and issues in relation to the Polish and other communities that have settled there. That has brought its own challenges, and we have seen the figures on the census. On a personal level, to those whom I and this delegation have worked with over the years, thank you for the way in which you have engaged with this issue. As one who was educated in the controlled sector, it has been a big issue for me, personally, to ensure not only that the controlled sector has a voice, but that it has an organisation that can represent it fairly. I see that as very positive. Sometimes, other voices are perceived to be louder and are heard out there. Personally, that is something that I want to see progressed in a way that is beneficial to the sector.

That having been said, let us move to issues that arise from the establishment of the body. One, which was mentioned earlier, is that the controlled sector is not like any other sector; it is very diverse. It is diverse from preschool, primary school and right up through the sector. It includes special needs education because there are no maintained or Irish-medium special needs schools; they are all in the controlled sector. That has affected how the controlled sector has been funded, and that issue needs to be examined. Given that diversity and the role of the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) and all the other components, are you happy that you will be able to create a body that fairly, accurately and respectfully brings them all together into one body? Sometimes, the fear is that, as we have seen in other representative bodies, they are not always as representative as they think they are. It would be a mistake for the body to replicate that situation.

**Mr U McCrea:** You are absolutely right: we are conscious of being a very diverse group. However, as I said, that is one of the controlled sector's strengths. You might ask how on earth Uel McCrea chairs such a group with Stephen Black from the grammar sector beside him.

**The Chairperson:** That is a great thing.

**Mr U McCrea:** Absolutely. The commonality is that we in the controlled sector want what is best for children. If we keep that in mind, regardless of their intellectual, social or other background, we will ensure that the controlled sector has a high-quality education service for all children and all types of schools that are represented in it.

One thing that we have not referred to but which we have certainly mentioned in documents that have already been circulated is that we particularly want to take on board the views of the various representative groups in the primary, special needs, nursery, post-primary — both secondary and grammar — sectors. One thing that we have clearly established is communication. We have done it already by the electronic method — by newsletter. However, nothing is better than face-to-face contact. In our plans, we hope that, in the new year, one thing that will be high on our agenda is for us

to meet those sectors on a reasonable basis so that everyone feels that they have an opportunity, that we are listening, and that ownership can be from all arts and parts of the controlled sector.

You are absolutely right, Chair, that that is one thing of which we are conscious. Our ethos represents a historical link with the Churches, particularly in the primary sector. However, in our secondary and grammar sectors, the link is perhaps not quite as strong. We, therefore, have to take on board professional advice from stakeholders from all schools. We hope that that would be — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* — evident in how we approach contact with all schools and that it would be open to principals and, indeed, boards of governors and their chairs to have their say as we move forward in our working programme.

**The Chairperson:** I see that as one of the values of group's work; the fact to which you referred when you made reference to Stephen. Stephen's school, which has won many prestigious awards, and your previous school in Ballyclare, which is similar, offer different types of provision, yet they are controlled schools. Stephen's is a controlled grammar, and yours is a non-selective secondary. There is diversity in type, but there is also diversity in provision. The education system generally needs to take on board the fact that that diversity is healthy and can be very beneficial to pupil outcomes.

We could fill this room with report after report about disadvantage and the tale of underachievement. It has been an issue, and Trevor alluded to it. In our constituencies — in the Protestant community and the Roman Catholic community — we all have areas where there are challenges to the outcomes and opportunities for young people. With you as a body and in the system that we have, how much more can we do to address that issue? I do not want to go into specifics, as that is unfair. However, we are aware of areas where, at the moment, there is a very good breadth of provision for the majority of young people, and that is being enhanced by plans or proposals, but there remains a hard-core smaller element of young people. I hope that I am not being disrespectful to them, because as I have said often in the Committee, I have a son who will never be a pupil with five grades at A\* to C, but he has other skills and a very strong work ethic. How do we harness and provide for those young people? It is a big issue, particularly in the controlled sector, where we have seen, historically, schools that have gone into decline and have ended up with small numbers and whose future, according to the professionals, is untenable.

**Mr U McCrea:** Some of our colleagues will want to chip in here, and I certainly do not want to dominate things. On that point, of course we are saying that we would be a supportive body. However, I imagine that we would also be a challenging body and look at good practice in the controlled sector. You have already referred to good practice in the controlled sector, but so often there is a perception — perception is everything — that the controlled sector's good practice rarely gets a platform. Other sectors are looked at, and, perhaps, one of the reasons for that was the fact that there was no specific voice or advocate for the controlled sector.

The working party would be keen to see a highlighting of good practice and a sharing of good practice in the controlled sector. That is very important, and you are aware of that, Chair. So often, people at ground level say, "We are doing that sort of work", but it is never highlighted and put forward as an exemplar of good practice. I think that a support body will have a very important role in identifying and sharing good practice. In doing so, it will raise the aspirations of folks in the controlled sector, and that is very important.

Some of our colleagues might want to further develop those thoughts. It cannot be just us alone: these are big issues for us. It is not only schools alone; it is for our community leaders and, indeed, your good selves as politicians to address the issue. There is a will and a zeal that we can tap into in the controlled sector. People will recognise and realise that, yes, we have an important role to play, and we are going to play it together.

**Mr Black:** To go back to your question, Mervyn, one of the big issues in the controlled sector and one of the big tasks for the controlled sector is, in a sense, to raise the value of education in that sector. If you look at what has happened in other sectors, you see that greater value has been placed on education in those sectors and communities. They have been able to establish a body of that nature and to involve the community in the group that drives that. I think that we can move a lot of the way towards trying to emphasise the importance of education in our sector and through that and through the sort of things that Uel talked about — using good practice, seeing what is going on in good schools, and so on — can make a difference in that way. In the controlled sector, there certainly has not been the profile for education that there is in other sectors. I think that we need and want to be able to push that forward.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** May I add to that? We need to learn from the good practice of other sectors. Building esteem for education is vital in the controlled sector. As I said at the start, it is the majority school sector in Northern Ireland. We need to build the value of education with parents and the community. We also need to affirm teachers in the controlled sector who sometimes feel as though they are the Cinderella. The key thing we also need to help to develop is leadership. We need to support leadership. Other sectors have done that very effectively by working on a sectoral basis and buying in support from various bodies to support leadership, and we want to do that too.

**The Chairperson:** — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* What discussions do you feel are necessary, important and appropriate to have with the body and Stranmillis, given that the great majority of teachers in the controlled sector are educated at Stranmillis? I am not asking you to comment on its future; that is for another Department and another day. However, if the supply chain to schools is, by and large, Stranmillis, do you need to do a piece of work in that area in order to see whether more needs to be done on the vital relationship between teachers, schools and the body?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** I will say a wee bit on that. I think that you are quite right. In our discussions, we mentioned that we want to develop relationships and discussions with the teacher providers in Northern Ireland, namely Stranmillis, Queen's and the University of Ulster. I think that they, too, are keen to set up stakeholder bodies themselves so that the sectors are represented. I know that, for example, the School of Education at Queen's recently set up an employers' forum, which, at the minute, includes the boards but, in the future, should include sectoral support bodies. So, there is that strengthening.

I also want to say — we mentioned this last week when we were here speaking as transferors — that governance support is very important in raising standards. We would like to think that one of the key roles we have, as a support body, is providing some support for governors in training them for their role to bring through to governance level good practice and what is expected of a school and the desired outcomes for it. So, we see support for governors as a firm part of our work.

As regards the reach and representation of the body, it has to include parents and community representatives. As to who might be on the body — we are not the body, but the working group — it needs to have a diverse membership of professionals — that is, the teachers — parents and the community, so that we pick up and engage with communities where there is poverty of aspiration. So, you are right that it is about making links with teacher education deliverers, but it is also about linking with our key stakeholders, parents — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]*

**Mr Kinahan:** Thank you. I am very pleased to see you here today, and I am even more pleased to see a controlled sectoral body being set up. We need to see that as soon as possible, because so much change is coming. You have touched on half my questions. My biggest concern — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* — is how little consultation goes on with teachers and, in particular, parents. We have been told that we should look at parental choice, but no one is really talking to parents. Have you thought through what mechanism — other than the governors, because how you will pull all of them together is a different matter again — will be used to consult parents and ensure that they are always listened to? There does not seem to be something there in the system.

**Mr U McCrea:** That would be an issue for us to look at. There is no doubt in our mind that it is the partnership issue: the parents along with the professional voices. Parents do have representation on governing bodies, and we are keen that parents would be on the body eventually. Prior to that, we will take on board how we contact parents and keep them abreast of the things that we will develop through the working party and, hopefully, the support body.

**Mr Kinahan:** I will take that a step further. You talked about governance. Will you comment on the statutory side that is coming through? When we met the Primary School Governors Association, there was a lot of ill feeling — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* — extreme discomfort in having a very statutory role and yet the direction is wrong. How do you see yourselves taking that forward?

**Mr Canning:** What we have been talking about to date is to recognise the role of governors on the ruling body, as it will be, of the support body, and to provide governors with a recognised role and places there. It will span the entire sector: nursery, special, primary, non-selective and selective post-primary schools. We want to see governors in there, from the beginning, working with us on a par.

When we talk about raising standards, one of the most important foundations — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* — is that people, first of all, value what is there, recognise that it is something they have a stake in and is useful to them, and that — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* — in shaping. That is why we want to bring governors in — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]*

**Rev Ian Ellis:** I think that your question, Danny, is how do we reach the parents. I think that is what you are really getting to. We are at the early days of that, but our way into that is through the schools and to go to our schools and say, "Look, what is the best way of reaching your parent body to speak to them about how important a controlled-sector support body is?" Our best way in is probably through the schools.

We have to go out, as the Chair said, in the new year and win hearts and minds. We are quite aware of that. It is a new organisation, a new creation. We will have to try to establish credibility and authenticity. As we look at the various papers we are trying to write, the key question for us is this: when the various stakeholders read that, do they say, "That is a body that I can identify with. That is a body that I can see can bring benefit to my school, my child or this community"? We want them to say that. We do not want them to look at the papers and say, "That is just another boring old body that will not do anything." We want them to say, "Yes, this looks an effective organisation that we would like to be part of."

That is about us winning hearts and minds. We have to use the schools as our way to make those contacts. That is what is in our mind at the moment.

**Mr Kinahan:** You have our support; good luck.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** Somebody's BlackBerry or mobile phone is still on and it is causing disruption. I do not have mine with me, so it is not me for a change.

**Mr Sheehan:** Thank you all for coming along today. In your opening comments, Uel, you said that you hoped that there would be parity of esteem and equality of treatment. David, in his presentation, mentioned the fact that this support body does not own its estate and the other sectoral support organisations have control over the planning of their estate. Have you any other examples where you feel that there is not parity or equality?

**Mr U McCrea:** I suppose, again, area planning, Pat. The education and library boards — I am still vice-chair of the North Eastern Board — had to show absolute equality in how they treated the various schools and types of schools. There was no one necessarily in there arguing from the point of view of what is best for controlled schools in the area plan. A lot is to do with perception; I appreciate that, Pat. The perception then, perhaps among the professionals — principals in particular — was that really no one was speaking up for a coherent, well-managed and organised area plan involving controlled schools. That is why the working party is suggesting that, even though ESA owns the schools, in order to have parity of esteem, the support body needs to have an active role in the planning of the estate for controlled schools. That would be very important.

The second thing would be —

**Mr Sheehan:** I am just going to stop you there: have you had any discussion with the Department around that issue?

**Mr U McCrea:** I think that we may have discussion in the near future. I am looking to our professional officer, because we are meeting on Monday. My brief is to pursue that matter with haste, so that the working party can, hopefully, move along those lines. That has been keenly sensed in recent years, simply because area planning was to the fore. If you talk to principals, and perception is everything, you discover that they felt, "Well, we are at the bottom of the pile here." Other sectors have managed to establish not only funding but, apparently, officers to look into the needs of that sector and to come up with, in some cases, visionary plans. Where is the controlled sector?

I do not want to be too specific, but some of the colleagues whom I talked to also felt that if ESA wants to "close schools", it will be in the controlled sector because we do not have a voice. No one is

sticking up for us; no one is looking at the estate as far as controlled schools are concerned. They are looking at issues such as falling numbers. Controlled schools are an easy target. That would not necessarily be our view as a working party, but that is the perception that is often rehearsed in conversations.

**Mr Sheehan:** Do you feel that the fact that this group has been established will help you to make progress on that issue? Have you had any indication from the Department what its view on involvement in planning will be?

**Mr U McCrea:** Not specifically about planning, except to say — and should I swallow? — that the Department has been very agreeable and facilitating about our establishment of the working group and seems to see a great deal of merit in establishing such a group and in moving forward to the establishment of a support body. I am hoping that, no sooner than Monday, we may well find that it is agreeable to consider the extension of the support body into the area of planning. Certainly, it has been very supportive on other things relating to the setting up of the working party.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** In answering Pat as well, I confirm what Uel said. As we network with controlled schools — often, in Northern Ireland, perception is everything — the perception is that in the current area-planning process, which has been published for secondary schools and will soon be published for primary schools, certain sectors have been funded with public money for additional staff to help their sector to get an input into area planning but the controlled sector has not been represented. That is why there is a strong feeling that area planning needs to slow down until this body is up and running and can provide a voice for controlled schools. That is a sensitive point to make but one that has been reflected to us.

Your Committee's own evening on area planning, which we greatly welcomed, was a great evening. So, we are saying that the Committee is wonderful as well as the Department. *[Laughter.]* We were sitting at a table with representatives from a wide diversity of controlled schools, and every single one of them felt that their school and their sector had not had parity of treatment in area planning, because there had not been that voice. We want to say very clearly that we feel that the sectoral body can be the voice.

Pat, you asked for examples on parity of esteem. Through current sectoral bodies, other sectors have been able to seek funding and buy in support for additional leadership training for their senior leaders. The maintained and integrated sectors have got government money to buy in training through the regional training unit. Controlled schools could not do that. We hope that the sectoral body will be able to see the needs of the controlled sector and put forward a business case to say that it needs funding to raise standards in whatever. Up until now, because education boards had to be neutral for all schools, they could not do it specifically for controlled schools.

We welcome the Minister's commitment that this will be a strong sectoral body and that it will be established. We welcome that political agreement, but we want it to be able to actually do the job, and the legacy issues in leadership, in advocacy and in area planning have to be addressed.

**Mr Lunn:** It is good to see you all again. I cannot see Trevor — *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson:** You will probably survive.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Us Trevors need to stick together.

**Mr Lunn:** Would all this goodwill for the Department and the Committee have anything to do with the season of the year? *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson:** Be fearful when all men speak well of you.

**Mr Lunn:** I will join in, because I am delighted to see that this body is being established. I say that for the record. It is good to see the work that you have done so far. I am looking at your vision statement. I do not think that you lifted it from the integrated sector, but it must be mighty similar. That is a good thing. You have a lot in common.

**The Chairperson:** It is plagiarism. Trevor knows a lot about plagiarism.

**Mr Lunn:** Now —

**The Chairperson:** The other Trevor, not you. *[Laughter.]* On a Sunday, when he goes to preach. He knows what I mean.

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Just for the record, I will be taking legal advice.

**Mr Lunn:** I am just not going to go there.

There is nothing in the vision statement that anybody could object to. It is A1. I hope that you stick with it the way it is, because it is fine. You could have written 20 pages on the same thing, but that is it summed up.

I want to ask you about the membership of ESA in terms of the ESA Bill. I will read from the Bill to refresh everybody's memory:

*"4 shall be persons appearing to the Department to represent the interests of transferors of controlled schools, appointed after consultation with persons or bodies appearing to the Department to represent such interests;"*

It seems to me that you are on about a six-month timescale here. Well, so is the Bill. When do you think that you will be able to express a view, or can you do it now? Do you think that that is a satisfactory criterion for what you would like to see in the Bill with regard to your representation on the ESA board?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** If we are to declare an interest, I will declare my double-jobbing interest here as a transferor representative and also as one who has been appointed to this working group to bring in the central support body.

I suppose that it is transferors, and perhaps I would need to say that it is transferors, and other colleagues might want to speak. We firmly believe that our seats, as proposed in legislation, are a continuance of our legal rights, which were given at the time of the transfer of schools. We do not see the transferors seats on the ESA board as somehow simply representing a sectoral interest. We see them as a continuation of legal rights and assurances given by the Government of Northern Ireland at the time of the transfer of schools. That is embedded in the 1986 Order, as we know because we have been there before as a Committee; it is embedded in the legislation that went before the 1986 Order; and our view was that it needed to be in ESA.

So, we do not see those four seats simply being there because there is a sector. We see them as a continuance of legal rights. That having been said, and I think that others will bear testimony to this, the transferors have often been a voice for the controlled sector when there has not been a voice elsewhere. Therefore, transferor representatives on the ESA board will, first and foremost, work for the well-being of all schools, all children and all education, but, because they come from the controlled sector, they will reflect the views of that sector. We do not see transferors being there representing a sector. We see them as a continuance of legal rights. There is a slight nuance in that answer, Trevor, but the chair and others who are not transferors might want to add to that.

**The Chairperson:** Before we move on, I just want to say that I have received a note telling me that there is a lot of mobile phone interference and much of the Hansard report will be lost unless all phones are turned off and not on silent. I do not want anybody going away and saying that there was a conspiracy not to have the voice of the controlled sector heard, so I have done my duty. This is a difficult room, and I apologise for that. We have had problems in the past with the reception in it. Sorry for that interruption.

**Mr Lunn:** Does anybody else want to comment?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** The only other thing that we might add to that is that there will be occasions when the controlled sector body may have to challenge ESA and may have to speak up for controlled schools against decisions that ESA would make. So, the controlled sector body needs to have a remove from ESA, too, so that it can be an independent voice and speak for the sector. If it were closely tied in with ESA, that would be very difficult to do.

**Mr Lunn:** If you come up with alternative wording, we would welcome it at some stage, and it would help our deliberations. From the wording of the Bill as it stands, it seems that we have come a long way. I can remember all the fighting and the previous discussions that any transferors could be on the board at all, so we overcame that, and now you appear to have four. You have gone from none to four, so I am sure that you will not be complaining. It does appear to say four transferors rather than four members of the sectoral support body. Do you have any thoughts on that? I do not want to open a wound here.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** Trevor and I were here as transferors last week, and one of the points that we made in our submission was about strengthening the Bill around consulting with sectoral support bodies about various points in the Bill as you consider it. We made some suggestions last week about where the body could be consulted around, for example, preparation of schemes of management and schemes of employment, preparation of development plans, and schemes for newbuilds of schools where the sectoral body would be directly consulted. We also suggested strengthening that a bit and "paying due regard to", which was a phrase that we used last week. When we were here with our other hats on last week, we suggested places in the Bill where you could strengthen it so that the sectoral body would be consulted with on matters relating to the sector as a whole.

**Mr Black:** From the point of view of schools that transferred into the sector in another way, it is important that whoever is representing the sector is representing the whole sector. We have tried to make that clear in all that we have said today. We do recognise that there is diversity in the sector. We recognise that the schools were transferred into the sector in different ways, and it is important that that is seen within the group that is seen to represent the sector.

On your other point, you complimented the vision for the group and said how much it was related and was very similar in many ways to the integrated sector. One of the things that is missed very much is that there is a considerable sharing of education already going on in the controlled sector. There are schools such as my own, which takes in people from 26 different primary schools across all sectors. There is already considerable integration in the controlled sector that is often ignored in the greater debate.

**Mr Lunn:** I have just one more point. I am still going back to the clause in the Bill, because there is going to be line-by-line scrutiny, and people are going to come up with things that nobody else dreamt of and interpretations of lines in the Bill. It happened the last time and it will happen again. To me, that clause refers to the interests of transferors of controlled schools and people being appointed who appear to the Department to represent such interests. It is actually quite clear; is only referring to the transferors. I would be a wee bit surprised if you did not come up with something. I am not saying for one minute that the transferors could not represent the interests of controlled schools. Of course they could, but I look forward to the discussion about those particular four lines. It will be interesting to hear from you in due course.

**Mr U McCrea:** You have given us food for thought. In fairness to the working group, it was not originally in our brief at all. We were not looking at the ESA Bill. For us, it was about providing an effective, relevant support service for the controlled sector and to assist ESA in raising overall educational achievement. We have not had that debate or discussion within the working group, in fairness.

**Mr Lunn:** You will have it now. *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson:** It is probably an issue for TRC to come back and comment on.

**Mr U McCrea:** I think that is a fair comment.

**The Chairperson:** One of the things that has come out of what you are saying — and it may be something that we do not appreciate as much until we see the body that is in front of us — is that one of the strengths is that you have TRC and the other component parts of the sector all in one body, whereas, in a few moments, we will hear from representatives of two organisations that represent the maintained sector. That is something that we will discuss with them. We will ask whether they see them all coming together in one body. Sometimes, there is a cat and mouse game that goes on: that is an issue for the trustees, or the boards of governors or whatever. It is not only in the maintained sector; you get it across different types of schools, whether they have trustees or whatever. That is valuable for us to note as well.

**Mrs Dobson:** First, I praise the initiative of distributing the newsletters on the work of the group. It is very important to get the information out to schools. It is critical that they have it, so well done on that. It would be useful if you continued to provide the Committee with a copy of your newsletter.

I know that some of my points have been touched on. First, are you concerned that the sectoral support bodies will not have a statutory role? How do you envisage the relationship working in practice between the controlled sector support bodies and schools and other sectoral support bodies? Do you believe that there could be times when the Department and ESA could put sectoral support bodies in an awkward position, in effect giving them a piggy-in-the-middle role between the schools? What are your views on that situation arising?

**Mr U McCrea:** OK; there are a number of questions there. First of all, we take on board the point about communication with you. We will share future newsletters. In fact, the second one is in the process of being finalised, and, hopefully, will be later today when we meet.

Statutory and non-statutory was a big issue the last time around with the proposed ESA Bill. In fairness, I think that the best way forward was to regard it as a non-statutory body but with statutory functions. That seems a wee bit ambiguous, nevertheless, it appears to be a good way of moving forward with the role of the controlled sector to assist ESA in raising standards, but yet have an advocacy role, and so on, for the controlled sector. Again, we did not debate that. We have assumed that that is the best way forward. We have not discussed whether there is an alternative route forward along the lines that perhaps your question suggested.

**Mrs Dobson:** Will you be discussing that?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Perhaps I could answer that, Jo-Anne. We are clear that we want legislation to go as far as possible to maximise the position of the controlled sectoral body.

As the transferors said last week, we see no reason why the name cannot be in the Bill rather than those deemed to represent and maximise it. There is an obligation to consult and take due regard of and to maximise in legislation the role of the sectoral support body. We want to find creative ways — as, I am sure, the Committee does as well — to maximise that legislative underpinning of what is a non-statutory body. We gather that is the Department's policy. That is what is in the Bill. We are not challenging the fact that there are non-statutory bodies, but we want to maximise the legislative underpinning of those bodies; perhaps that is a good way to put it.

**Rev Ian Ellis:** I will have a go at answering the second part of your question, Jo-Anne, which was about working with other support bodies. We have looked at our remit, and one of our key roles will be to meet other support bodies to discuss shared education in particular, where we can, perhaps, come together to look at areas to see whether there is potential for developing something in a shared way. We can also discuss shared practice, pick up on what was good from other sectors and talk about whether we can transfer that across to our sector.

A big part of the role, particularly of the officers of the body, will be to meet other support bodies regularly not just to network but to share good practice, particularly around the potential for education together.

**Mrs Dobson:** What are your views on the arrangements in the Bill for tribunals, which could, obviously, deal with staffing disputes as well as management issues in schools? What role do you envisage for the controlled sector support body in helping schools when they are faced with the daunting task of tribunals?

**Mr U McCrea:** Again, that is an issue that we have not discussed. We have not looked at it in detail at all.

**The Chairperson:** You will be working over Christmas, Uel. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr U McCrea:** I hope sincerely that Gordon has been taking notes behind me. It seems that quite an agenda is being set for us.

The controlled schools want to promote good practice. Obviously, if we get to the stage of tribunals, it is a no win situation. Many of us have had experience of that at board level or school level. It is the last place that you want to be in.

We hope that, through governance and the training that has been suggested, specifically leadership training, we can avoid that as far as possible.

**Mrs Dobson:** But if it did arise?

**Mr U McCrea:** I do not know whether the controlled school body could have any role to play in that. In a sense, that is to do with the governance of an individual school and issues relating to that.

**Mrs Dobson:** So, you would have no role?

**Rev Trevor Gribben:** Jo-Anne is referring to the particular and peculiar tribunal that has appeared in the ESA Bill as opposed to general tribunals that operate in the education world now. It would be fair to say that we have not discussed that. We will discuss it. However, it would be useful for the Committee to hear, and for the Hansard record, that this group was set up only in October. Although we welcome it being set up, it could have been set up six months before October. Whatever the political process came to, there was obviously linkage with other movement in education. A group that is set up in October has to get the body up and going. Also, this is a working group to set up the body. I want the Committee to hear that very clearly because that is very important to us in the public realm. This is not the embryo body; it is a working group to set up the body. Therefore, we, as a working group, who have been asked to do this job by the Minister, do not want to take major policy decisions that the body will have to take when it is set up. That is important for us to say on the record today, but, no doubt, we will look at the issue of those tribunals, which occur when a board of governors is in dispute with ESA about a management or employment scheme, or whatever it is, and we will have to consider what role the body might have, with the note that we are not the body. The first time that the body meets, it will have to set its own policy in some of those areas.

**Mrs Dobson:** So no pressure. *[Laughter.]* Thank you very much.

**Mr Rogers:** With regard to the last point, Trevor, you talked about what role the body might have. Pat more or less asked the same question. The words support and challenge for this very effective sectoral body came across very strongly. Do you see the best place for area-based planning in the controlled sector as being within the sectoral body?

**Mr Canning:** Yes, we believe that would be part of the overall function of the body. If we are going to look at the values or ethos of the body, we need to look at it at a sectoral level. I will turn that around to you: if the other bodies that are in existence were told today that they would no longer have any part in area planning for their sector, you would find that they would immediately say that it is vital to them. That is why I said, in the context of parity of esteem, that the bodies that exist recognise how significant it is to them, and we know that the same is true.

**Mr Rogers:** Thanks.

**Ms Boyle:** I welcome you all here today. Some of you have been here before, but I make no apologies for being parochial in welcoming David, who is from my area.

**The Chairperson:** I knew that Strabane would get a mention. *[Laughter.]*

**Ms Boyle:** I am sure that you were up early and travelled along the Longland Road this morning, and it was not easy.

**Mr Canning:** Ah, the A5. *[Laughter.]*

**Ms Boyle:** I commend you for the work that you do in the controlled sector in the Strabane area, and I am delighted to have you here.

Jo-Anne spoke about the newsletter. I have to say that I have never seen a newsletter that so clearly defines your role. You have alluded to the fact that you are at the inception stage of the working

group, and the newsletter clearly defines what you are setting out to do. All I want to say is that I wish you well, and I would like to be kept informed of the progress that you are making.

**Mr U McCrea:** Thank you very much.

**Miss M McIlveen:** Thank you very much for coming today. I cannot overstate how delighted I am that you are here as a working group working towards the establishment of a sectoral body for the controlled sector. I know that you are all champions for the controlled sector. I know that the Chair will not blow his own trumpet, but I have to say that he has been a champion for the controlled sector and has worked very hard over the past number of years for the cause of the sector. I think that should be put on record.

I declare an interest as a member of the board of governors of two controlled primary schools. I am very proud of that.

Other questions have been asked, and Danny also referred to the role of the boards of governors, but the role of the boards of governors will expand under the ESA Bill and other guidance that will come from the Department. Those roles and responsibilities will be increased. Will a strand of your work focus particularly on boards of governors?

**Mr U McCrea:** Others might want to join in here. We are very much appreciative of the fact that the governors' role is demanding. However, we specifically want — I should not say "the right sort of governor", but we want an expertise that is perhaps often neglected or not identified so easily for the controlled sector. It should be to the fore that we want high quality, and if we are looking for high quality, we are looking for high-quality governors. That means also looking at the community and the business field in the business world. Again, those are my personal comments; they are not the comments of the working party.

So many times, I was envious as a principal. That had nothing to do with the quality of my parent governors, or whatever; it was to do with the range of expertise and experience that some other sectors were able to draw upon and draw in, particularly as the role and responsibilities of governors grew. Do not get me wrong: education and library boards did a fine job of training governors. Nevertheless, there are increased roles and responsibilities now. I imagine that the controlled sector would wish to go out to communities and challenge people by saying, "Look, we want a high-quality education service, and that means people being prepared to serve in such roles and have such responsibilities." I think that would be mirrored right across the sector.

**Mr Black:** Michelle, I think one of the big things is that when you look at the sector and the different types of schools in it, and you look at what is envisaged in the Bill with regard to delegation of autonomy to schools, one of the challenges you will see for the sector is that there will be schools in it that will look for significantly more delegated autonomy than others. Therefore, that training and support will have to be provided to governors in the sector to enable them to address the different challenges that exist across that range of schools and the different levels of autonomy that they will look for in those schools. There is certainly a big issue for the support body in being able to deliver that to governors. A lot of excellent work is going on in boards of governors, but obviously the levels of responsibility for some of those bodies could increase. That will have to be addressed and taken forward.

**Mrs V Campbell:** We have spoken about the voice of the council. I think that the council also needs to be an ear. Although, at the moment, governors are presented with training and the list of training that is available to them, the council needs to be a listening ear to governors, parents and the general community as well as schools in order to take on board their needs and address those issues, whether by sourcing or providing training, or, as Trevor mentioned, funding that training from external agencies. So, that listening ear will be a very important aspect of the council.

**Miss M McIlveen:** Certainly, I understand that governors are volunteers. They give of their time — sometimes, a lot of their time — voluntarily. They can be subject to criticism, particularly when there are issues in schools. Training is also voluntary; it is not mandatory. Is that something that should be looked at?

**Rev Ian Ellis:** In the churches, we work with volunteers all the time. We spend a lot of our time encouraging people to volunteer their time. It is then very difficult to force them to do x, y and z above and beyond what they are willing to commit to. What the body can do is simply encourage strongly,

give reasons why leadership training is important, and try to develop in people that sense of belonging to their school, that they want their very best for the school, and that that will, probably, mean a time commitment that they might not have imagined at the beginning. I think that if we can develop that sense of wanting the best for their school, governors will respond to it, join in and give what they can to make their school even better.

**Mr Black:** To go back to that point, Michelle: with regard to where we sit at present with appointments, for example, people who sit on an appointments committee have to have done requisite training. That is mandatory. Certainly, looking at a lot of schools, when there are mandatory elements, governors will respond to that and will attend the training that they need to carry them out. Maybe, as more autonomy is delegated, we will need to look at whether other elements, as well as those that relate to child protection and — *[Inaudible due to mobile phone interference.]* selection, will become mandatory.

**Mr Canning:** Under the issue of governance, we have looked at some of the things that we would like to do for governors and around identifying and nominating persons as potential community governors, taking into account the ethos of the school and all the following points: responding to ESA on proposed appointments to boards of governors of controlled schools; encouraging appropriate nominees to apply for governors jobs; supporting and training governors, particularly in relation to ethos, RE, collective worship and assemblies; providing advice to ESA in the development of draft schemes of management for controlled schools; providing advice to schools on those schemes of management; and supporting governors in the appointment of senior staff. Those are all areas that we see as critical to the work of the body.

**Miss M McIlveen:** Thank you, and I wish you well in the coming months.

**The Chairperson:** Trevor, will you be brief? We are badly over our time.

**Mr Lunn:** You used the word council quite a bit. Have you settled on a name for the new body?

**Mr U McCrea:** It is in the process of being finally decided. Some of our draft documents, which are of a really high quality, have pointed out this discussion within our group and asked whether we should refer to it as a board. Some within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland would even say a commission, but we had better not use that term. For the sake of argument, we thought at our last meeting that it may be appropriate to use the term council. At the moment, we are the controlled schools support body working party.

**Mr Lunn:** Keep it short. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr U McCrea:** Thank you.

**The Chairperson:** I hope you do not fall into the trap of arguing as though you are a city council or a district council. *[Laughter.]* Thank you very much for your attendance, and I wish you all a very peaceful festive period. Thank you for your contribution, and I look forward to working with you again.

**Mr U McCrea:** Thank you, Chairman and members, and thank you for your support.