



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

The Statistics and Registration Services Act
2007 (Disclosure of Pupil Information)
Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

15 May 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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The Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 (Disclosure of Pupil Information) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)
Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson
Mr Chris Hazzard
Mr Sean Rogers

Witnesses:

Mrs Katrina Godfrey	Department of Education
Mr Ivor Graham	Department of Education

The Chairperson: I welcome Katrina Godfrey and Ivor Graham.

Mrs Katrina Godfrey (Department of Education): Thank you, Chairman. Ivor is one of my professional statistician colleagues who works in the stats unit in my directorate. Do you want me to give you a whistle-stop introduction, or do you want to just go straight to questions?

The Chairperson: Very briefly, please just set out the reason why the statutory rule is required.

Mrs Godfrey: Most of that is covered in the paper. The regulations are being made by the Minister of Finance and Personnel with, in this case, the Department of Education's agreement, and, because of their cross-cutting nature, the Executive's approval.

The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) identified a need to access additional information in order to support the creation of more accurate population statistics. That includes pupil information, so the Department of Education was approached. For us to be able to disclose the information that DFP needs, regulations are required, hence the SL1 before the Committee today.

I will briefly make two key points. First, the Department of Education is not the only Department that is being asked to contribute in this way. I understand that the Committee for Employment and Learning considered similar regulations in relation to further education and higher education a week or two ago. Other Departments are involved in various ways. The second point that I thought was worth drawing to members' attention is that very similar regulations allow for the disclosure of similar pupil information in England in Wales, under the legislation there.

In summary, the Department of Education does not have any difficulty with the regulations that DFP proposes. If there are any points of detail that the Committee wants us to flesh out to inform its scrutiny, we are happy to do that.

The Chairperson: Do members have any queries?

Mr Rogers: Since this will alter the stats held about pupils, will the Department inform parents, or is it up to the school to do that?

Mrs Godfrey: It is all information that is already held by schools. It will not require schools to collect any extra data. The only issue that I have identified — you will probably be familiar with this, Sean — is that, when schools tell parents that data may be used for various purposes, this will be another purpose that will need to be added to that form. However, it does not require the collection of information that is not already sitting there. We have been keen to stress that. There is no requirement for a principal or other school staff to go out and gather more information. It is all available, and the regulations are more a case of allowing us to share it for the reasons in the DFP request.

Mr Rogers: Will there be a responsibility on principals to inform parents that the stats are being used for another purpose?

Mrs Godfrey: Yes, and we will have to provide very clear guidance on that and make sure that schools are aware of it. However, it is not adding a new requirement; it is making sure that, when schools tell parents — as they already must — what the information they collect is used for, there is something else that they have to add to that list.

The Chairperson: I know, Katrina, that schools are excluded from the inquiry on historical institutional abuse, but is the Department planning to increase the retention periods for these kinds of records?

Mrs Godfrey: I am not aware of that.

The Chairperson: We could write to the Department for an answer to that. It is a separate issue in a sense. We will write to the Department to ask whether that is the case. Ivor, do you want to add any comment?

Mr Ivor Graham (Department of Education): I think that Katrina has covered it very well.

The Chairperson: Are members content that we write to the Committee for Finance and Personnel to indicate that we are content with and have no concerns in relation to the SL1?

Members indicated assent.