



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Careers Education, Information, Advice and
Guidance: NISCA

20 June 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr Chris Lyttle
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr Pat Ramsey
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Ms Fiona Browne	Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Careers Association
Ms Cathy Moore	Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Careers Association

The Chairperson: I welcome the witnesses. We have Cathy Moore, chairperson of the Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Careers Association (NISCA), and Fiona Browne, secretary of the organisation. You are very welcome. We look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Ms Cathy Moore (Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Careers Association): We provided the Committee with a very succinct briefing paper to give members an awareness of what is happening in schools with careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in Northern Ireland. The previous witness gave you a good and comprehensive overview of career guidance.

I believe you all have a copy of part of the 'Preparing for Success Implementation Report', and the update from March 2011, with the key action points and progress from the joint strategy from the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). That joint strategy is unique; there is no other strategy like it. I know that the Committee looked at careers guidance internationally, as well as in England, Scotland, Wales and the South of Ireland. To have an interdepartmental strategy like this is unique. Very good progress has been made on a lot of the key action points that were highlighted.

Careers guidance provided by the Careers Service Northern Ireland is bought into by each school. Careers education, it is agreed, is provided in-house. That is where there are more inconsistencies across Northern Ireland, when you take into account the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) agenda, economic needs, skills shortages, labour market information, work-related learning and work experience. All those things are supposed to be dealt with in-house. Some excellent practices are happening across the post-primary sector in Northern Ireland. However, there are quite a few inconsistencies. That has been picked up on not just by the joint strategy but by the

Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). When we were here previously, we discussed the inconsistencies and problems that exist with CEIAG in post-primary education. That means further education colleges as well as special education schools, integrated colleges and secondary and grammar schools.

Our role in NISCA is that we are the professional body for careers teachers. I notice that the previous witness referred to career guidance teachers in schools in Northern Ireland. That is not actually the case. Generally, the structure in schools is there is a head of department who is head of careers. In theory, that person should be an appropriately qualified teacher who has a qualification in delivering careers education. However, there has not been such a qualification available in Northern Ireland for at least nine years, possibly more. The joint strategy recognised that gap. Therefore, the head of department for careers is actually a subject teacher in something else, and employed in the school already. It is not very often that you will see a head of careers post advertised in the press; they do tend to be selected internally.

It can be unpopular but, if you recruit internally, the head of careers post is often used as a stepping stone to senior management and principalship. You may have someone who is learning the job, on the job. They may or may not have support from their principal; they may or may not have a qualification in careers; they may or may not stay in the post. An awful lot of continuous professional development (CPD) is required if you are working in careers education in schools. If you do not have the support of your senior leadership team and principal, it is very difficult to fulfil the role. That is something that we touched on, slightly more than briefly, the last time we were here.

The Chairperson: Cathy, I want us to have a discussion about this. You have raised a lot of good things, so do not feel constrained. It is good that we can get certain things out in the open. With no disrespect to any individuals who deal with careers — Chris mentioned earlier that we should have a review into it — I think that there are huge structural problems, and our careers guidance is simply not working. I do not think we are getting the thing right. I am really interested to hear — I am sure the Committee is as well — what we might do to fix it. So fire ahead: tell us some more. We got the bit about career progression. What else do we need to know?

Ms Fiona Browne (Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Careers Association): Before we go on any further, I would like to say that there have been huge leaps and bounds in the whole careers service and the way that it is dealt with in schools. That has come on immensely in the past 10 or 15 years, so I do not want the Committee to think that there has been no progress.

I accept the point that we are not where we want to be or need to be, but there has been huge progress in careers advice over the past number of years. Thinking back to my careers guidance, we were simply handed a UCAS form, and that was it. Therefore, if you look at where we have come from, there has been huge progress. I would like to make that clear before we continue on where we go from here.

Ms Moore: Preparing for Success has highlighted 18 key action points, and they are being worked on. You will see how far along things have progressed since March 2011.

The Chairperson: Is that the 18 key action points that we have in front of us?

Ms Moore: Yes. The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning launched Preparing for Success jointly with the two Ministers, and they invited principals from the post-primary sector. Some principals sent their heads of careers instead, which was not really what was needed; it was the principals who needed to be there. However, if you look at the key action points, you will see that a lot of them are in progress. The Committee has touched on skills shortages, economic needs, labour market information and careers information, and a lot of those things are being dealt with. Preparing for Success was innovative in that it was the first strategy of its kind, and it was supported thereafter by the Education and Training Inspectorate, which published quality indicators for good CEIAG in schools and colleges.

Since the launch of the joint strategy, the ETI has been inspecting careers education and guidance as part of any inspection. Therefore, the fact that inspectors must also inspect careers when they are doing literacy inspections in schools has significantly pushed this up the agenda. Schools have taken notice and have come on in leaps and bounds. There is some very good practice in the post-primary sector, but it is inconsistent. A lot of the problems stem from how the school might be run, but principals will listen to the ETI if it comes in.

The Chairperson: What would you like us to take forward for you? I do not want to put you in a compromised position, but, for the Hansard record, the Committee really appreciates the fact that you have come along to talk to us. We understand that you are supportive of the professionals in the business and of the initiatives that have been taken forward. Nevertheless, the Committee has said on previous occasions that we have concerns about the inconsistency and about whether we are making the most effective use of resources. Therefore, you are here at the Committee's behest, and you are required to assist us. If it makes any difference to anybody else listening, this is the Chairman of the Committee speaking.

Tell us more. Tell us what we need to know so that we can ask the questions. I am happy to bring in colleagues very shortly, but I want to get a bit more from Cathy and Fiona. Is there anything else that we need to get on the table to talk about?

Ms Moore: Yes. "Resources" is the key word. It takes resources and allocation of financial resources to run an effective CEIAG programme in a school.

Schools do not pay to bring in careers guidance from the Careers Service, but it costs money to allow children to participate in work-related learning activities, entrepreneurship, employability and STEM. Careers teachers or anyone involved in delivering career or work-related learning require quite a lot of continuous professional development, and they are required to work in area learning communities and attend meetings. Although the funding is there at the moment from the Department of Education under the guise of the entitlement framework, we believe that that funding will run out in 2013. A lot of the funding has already run down or run out for STEM initiatives running through education. A lot of very good work has been done, especially in the past three or four years. There has been money in the pot from the Department of Education, and it has been earmarked under the entitlement framework fund for careers activities and STEM activities, but that pot is diminishing and disappearing.

Schools generally have reduced budgets. This is the second year in the four-year cycle. Anecdotally, from speaking to our members working in careers, they are being pulled out of timetabled careers guidance back into their primary subject due to redundancies in the school. Schools are working with much smaller budgets and with fewer staff to deliver the same number of subjects to the same number of pupils. Careers guidance is being squeezed out.

The Chairperson: It might be appropriate for the Committee to write to the Committee for Education to see whether it could inquire about the budgets and the issues that have been raised. Do I have members' agreement to do that?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Let us take a few questions.

Mr F McCann: I asked a question during the previous session about how we deal with the subject of careers with people who are in schools that may not have the educational attainment level of other schools. A couple of schools spring to mind where many young people, rather than looking at careers, fall through the cracks and end up on job training schemes and the like.

As you heard, we had a document presented earlier, which seemed to suggest that there are some shining examples. I picked up from the document that Scotland may have got its act together on how to deal with that. I listened to what you said, and although you are working on a strategy, there is a pot with ever-diminishing resources and you may not have the people to deliver a strategy anyway because they have been pulled into other elements of their school career. It gets a bit depressing when we do not have a strategy that can deal effectively with those schools.

There was an issue in Barry's constituency a few weeks ago when the owner of a major engineering firm said that there was too much emphasis on qualifications for third-level education in the school in that area. I am sure that, if there were a concentration and focus on schools at secondary level where there may not be the educational attainment, people would be encouraged to train for that type of work. There does not seem to be anything to deal with that issue.

Ms Moore: First, it is a matter of getting that information across. We talk about careers information and labour market information. However, it is getting that information across to people who are working on the ground with pupils so that they can pass that information on and point out the skills gaps. The labour market information hub and working with parents will be key. First, people in the

schools have to know that there could be gaps and opportunities in certain areas. Sorry; what was the second part of your question?

Mr F McCann: I have probably forgotten. *[Laughter.]* Teachers are being pulled away from giving careers advice, so any strategy that comes in is probably not worth the paper that it is written on because people are focusing on other things, rather than careers advice. I talked about the engineering company that said that there was too much focus on qualifications for third-level education, and that there would be people who would like to be trained up. That company has the jobs — certainly for apprenticeships.

Ms F Browne: I think there is a feeling in society today that — whether rightly or wrongly — the value is in third-level education and having that degree. The Government put forward the target of 50% of people being educated to that level a number of years ago. I do not think society needs half of the population to have degrees, but it seems that that is the goal now. We get an awful lot of pressure from parents, because that is what they want their child to do and that is where they see progression. They do not see a lot of value in starting at the bottom with an apprenticeship, training up and learning the job. A lot of the pressure on us comes from parents who want something better for their children, and they see that as the degree route.

Ms Moore: There is a lot of information coming through from Oxford Economics and DEL's analytical services. What they are saying in the programme for 2020 is that pretty much 50% of those future jobs are going to be higher-level professional or degree-related careers. You have that information coming through on one hand and local employers on the other. For 16-year-olds, it is very difficult to secure an apprenticeship, because they are competing with people who are older and have better employability and work-related learning skills, which draws back to what you can do within work-related learning to make young people employable in statutory education. Work-related learning activities take form in many guises. Work experience is only one of those. If those activities are being squeezed out due to lack of funding in the secondary sector, we have a problem, because local employers might say that they have 16- and 17-year-olds who do not know how to fill out an application form or interact and who have poor literacy. Obviously, that will bring you back to your NEETs strategy and literacy and numeracy. That is obviously going to be a comprehensive strategy, working on quite a lot of different strands.

Mr F McCann: Just to —

The Chairperson: You need to be quick, because there are a few people asking to speak.

Mr F McCann: It is just a comment.

The Chairperson: Sure.

Mr F McCann: I believe that education is the greatest thing in the world in terms of people attaining and achieving their ambitions through third-level education. That bit of paper means everything in life, especially if you are looking for a job here or if you go abroad. However, we also have to factor in the fact that there are large numbers of people who will not go on to third-level education, and they cannot be left behind. If you are tailoring a careers strategy, it has to include the people who do not go on to third-level education. We can all have an aspiration that we want 50% of people to go through to third-level education, but we have to face the fact that, in the real world, that is not going to happen, and that we have to cater equally for the other 50% who may not want to move on to that.

The Chairperson: OK, Fra. We got that point. Thank you.

Mr Buchanan: I have one brief question. I notice the 18 action points, and I see that some of them are achieved and some of them are in progress. How do you measure the success of those action points? Action point 5 states:

"Over 100,000 school age learners each year are now participating in employability and work related learning programmes which aim to promote creativity and innovation".

How do you actually measure that? Have you a mechanism for measuring the success of those action points?

Ms Moore: They are monitored and evaluated at a high level by the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning — it is a joint strategy. We do not have access to that kind of information as careers teachers, but those who composed the strategy are monitoring it and the two Ministers at the top would receive briefings from civil servants in the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning. I am afraid it is a very difficult question for me to answer. You would need to bring together those who put the strategy together. Apologies.

Mr Buchanan: Fair enough. That is OK.

Mr P Ramsey: Good morning; you are very welcome. I sense, as the Chair indicated earlier, that it is a delicate area for you, because others would come in and be very clear and concise on where the responsibility lies. We are taking the language you are using — inconsistency. However, 45,000 young people across Northern Ireland leave post-primary schools as NEETs. Fra's questions do link in: there has to be a way to synchronise the strategy that evolves out of NEETs. There has to be long consideration and it should involve the schools. We should write to the Department, Chair, to get the evaluations. You are clearly telling us that there are inconsistencies, and a number of schools are failing young people because they are not putting enough priority on careers.

Ms Moore: Exactly.

Mr P Ramsey: As a result, I wonder what instructions are coming from the Department. It is also the case that a lot of those schools are under such financial pressure that they are deciding where the priorities lie and are looking at teachers rather than —

Ms Moore: Yes.

The Chairperson: Pat, you made a suggestion, and Cathy mentioned a conference that not every head teacher went along to.

Ms Moore: They sent their head of careers, who already knew the information. That was just —

The Chairperson: The Committee may write to find out about that. Was the conference organised by the Department of Education?

Ms Moore: It was a joint event between the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. They are always trying to get principals together to get the message to them.

The Chairperson: If it is a joint thing, I suggest that I request a list of the people who attended the conference and find out how many were principals. Let us just see who went and who did not and then decide how we will deal with that. With your agreement, Committee, we will do that.

Mr P Ramsey: This issue is hugely important. Chris Lyttle made a very valid point: we have capacity issues now. We have been discussing young people, their difficulties, marginalisation and lack of educational attainment, and we would have had the capacity to commence a Committee inquiry into careers. However, I do not think the time frame is on our side to do that.

The Chairperson: We might. Chris will want to speak, but —

Ms Moore: As many people as possible can try to keep this issue high on the agenda, but it will slip because schools are driven by league tables and statistics, and they will put their resources into educational attainment. The evidence of such is a GCSE, A level or equivalent. However, the outcomes of CEIAG are much softer.

Mr F McCann: I raised this earlier. When a school is allocated a budget, is a section of that allocated to careers advice?

Ms Browne: It is up to the principal.

Ms Moore: That is part of the problem.

Mr P Ramsey: It is not just the principal but the board of governors with regard to prioritising financial plans. The seven fundamental principles that you listed are absolutely correct but are not being met for thousands of students and pupils in post-primary schools. Who ultimately is responsible? You say that there is a dual role between DEL and the Department of Education.

The Chairperson: We got the question, Pat.

Mr P Ramsey: Who gives the directive, for example, to ensure that those standards are met and are consistent?

The Chairperson: Right, we got the question.

Ms Moore: There is no legislation; is that not correct? There is no legislation on this exactly around CEIAG. So, the Department of Education can strongly advise and encourage all schools to buy into CEIAG and listen, and many do. They can also use the ETI, because principals will listen to it. Other than that, this is part of —

Ms Browne: I feel that accountability lies with the principal of the school. It stops there.

Mr P Ramsey: We have a responsibility first of all to get a briefing from our own Department or Minister on the action points and what responsibility he is taking. We should also be writing to the Education Committee to see what action it is taking about the thousands of children who we are failing. It is now obvious that we are failing them because the models of good practice are not being exercised across Northern Ireland. It is very simple.

Ms Moore: Yes, it is inconsistent.

The Chairperson: I need to bring some other folk in now. I will come back to Chris's question about whether we have time. We might have time to do an inquiry, but we will deal with that at the end and discuss the right way to take it forward.

Mr Douglas: Thank you, Cathy, for your presentation. When I think about successful schools, I think about Ashfield Boys' High School and Andy McMorrán. For me, that man had enthusiasm, commitment and passion for children. You said that the role of head of careers can sometimes be a stepping stone for a person's career. There must surely be some sort of job description for that, because it is not just a matter of taking a teacher who wants to go up the ladder. It should be someone who is passionate about it and has a bit of experience of the links and networks. Is that not the case, Cathy?

Ms Moore: There is a job description. It depends whether it is advertised externally or internally and how schools deal with how they appoint people to posts.

Mr Douglas: Are you saying that it can be internal or external?

Ms Moore: Yes.

The Chairperson: I take the point that it is very hard to keep up to date with careers. You need someone —

Mr Douglas: That is what I mean, Chair.

The Chairperson: Good point, Sammy.

Mr McElduff: My concern is about the absence of information to students and young people, particularly in border communities, about options in institutes of technology. For example, I am told that you can start and finish a degree in Dundalk Institute of Technology, but people in Newry, which is 20 minutes away, do not know that. It has a student population of 5,000, and 50 come from counties Armagh and Down, which are the nearest counties. If Careers Service is all about serving the best interests of the young people, why is that a secret and why is that information being withheld from them? Last week, a young lady from Omagh was trying to get into a social work course at Queen's,

and it was very competitive and oversubscribed. It emerges that that course is available in the Dundalk Institute of Technology, which is well within her reach. However, it is like pulling hen's teeth trying to find out that information. Why is that?

Ms Moore: There is no decent central database of courses in the South of Ireland. For UK higher education institutions, you have UCAS, which has a course search facility, allows you to apply and track, and has advice for parents, teachers and students. It is well used and well regarded. The equivalent for the South of Ireland is the Central Applications Office (CAO) — www.cao.ie — and it is through it that people apply to courses there. It has a simple course search mechanism, but there is very little advice. It is a very different kind of organisation to UCAS.

There are also many course finders and advice on courses on higher education institutions across the UK and many brilliant websites that are free resources. There is no equivalent for universities and higher education institutions in the South of Ireland. They tried to get one off the ground — studyinthesouth.ie — but it did not happen. There is a big gap in the market, because you need a website that outlines the different types and levels of courses, where you can do courses, and where they will lead to. There is an abundance of that for UK higher education institutions, but it is really difficult, as practitioners who work in schools, to get decent information on the universities.

The Chairperson: OK. We got the point that they do not have much.

Mr McElduff: Dundalk Institute of Technology went on an exercise to bring that to the attention of schools and pupils in and around County Down and County Armagh. From a situation where the entire population of students from Down and Armagh is currently 50, the institute has received 227 applications this year on foot of the exercise that it embarked on. Letterkenny is just over the road for students in Sligo, Letterkenny and Dundalk as it is for students in south Fermanagh, Strabane and Derry, and it could be the solution for the young person.

Ms Moore: Indeed.

The Chairperson: I have no problem with that. I worry that, wherever they are doing the courses, they are doing the wrong qualifications. There are jobs out there, but we do not have enough people to fill them. We also have people who have worked really hard to get a qualification and now they are saying, "Where is my job?". That, to my mind, seems to be an issue. I have no problem with where people go —

Mr McElduff: The employability bit is what you are emphasising.

The Chairperson: I just think that there is an issue there.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you for your presentation. It is always really helpful to hear from you. A lot of the issues are probably as much for the Department of Education, if not more so, than DEL. However, any good careers service will have partnerships with Departments of learning, Departments of economy and employers. It seems that some schools are doing that very well, and it is important to say that. However, you have said that there is inconsistency, and varying levels of priority are being given to the importance of careers information and guidance. I do not know what can be more of a priority than ensuring the employability of our young people.

We have mentioned inquiries. Maybe there is work to be done jointly with the Education Committee. How can we tackle that inconsistency or those varying levels of priority? You mentioned that the Department of Education is looking into a qualification for careers teachers. Are there not already qualifications for careers teachers?

Ms Moore: Not in Northern Ireland. Historically, there was a qualification provided by one university, a qualification provided by another university, and there was one provided jointly. There was generally always one available, and it was quite well funded, but it disappeared about, I think, nine years ago, and there has not been anything since. There is quite a high turnover of staff moving in and out of heads of careers posts. So, when we look at our members across Northern Ireland, we see that there are at least 50% of current heads of careers without a careers qualification.

Mr Lyttle: How are we preparing teachers to deliver careers education?

The Chairperson: It seems to me that there are so many questions that we do not know the answer to. The right way forward is for someone to hold an inquiry.

Mr Lyttle: I think that goes right to the heart of it. I am not being critical of teachers. Surely, it is wholly unfair of us to expect a teacher to deliver that type of robust framework without any type of additional training to the educational training.

Ms Browne: There will be additional training, but there is no formal qualification.

Mr Lyttle: The key question is this: how do we tackle that level of inconsistency across the board?

Ms Moore: The ETI has quite a lot of power, and it is inspecting the package as part of everything else. There needs to be more of an emphasis on that because the ETI can only get into a certain number of schools at a certain time. The principals listen to the ETI. We keep coming back to the principal and the way that the school is led. The principal has a lot of power. Depending on how the principal runs each school, if they are not taking notice, perhaps we need to look at giving boards of governors more power to hold the principal accountable. I am sorry if that sounds a bit —

Mr Lyttle: Is there a need for more formal requirements to be placed on schools or principals around what they deliver?

Ms Browne: Yes.

The Chairperson: Would it be the mind of the Committee, if time permitted, to take this on as an inquiry, perhaps in conjunction with the Department of Education?

Mr Lyttle: I think that you have to speak to the Education Committee about this. There is a huge amount here that is for the education portfolio.

The Chairperson: I think there is an overlap. I wonder whether it would be appropriate for us to write to the Committee for Education to ask if it would like to join us. You might want to think about that. I do not know that we would need both Committees in their entirety, but it might be that we form some sort of inquiry made up of members from both Committees.

Mr Lyttle: As a point of reference, if I am not wrong, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment had one member act as a rapporteur for an inquiry. There may be a more nimble format for doing that.

The Chairperson: We could write to the Committee for Education and ask whether it had an interest in working with us and in what format. Would it also be appropriate to write to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to enquire whether there would be time for us to do such a thing?

Mr Lyttle: Yes, by all means.

The Chairperson: I do not want to start something, just for it to finish two weeks later with us saying, "Thank you very much." Are members agreed that we will write and ask for some indication of whether we would have the time to properly complete the inquiry that we are planning to take on?

Members indicated assent.

Mr F McCann: Can I just ask one thing? I have been running through everything that has been said. You said that it is urgent that we get something under way as quickly as possible. Given the possible demise of this Committee, sooner rather than later, and given that we are coming into recess, is there not a fine timeline for responses that will impact on our ability to have an inquiry?

The Chairperson: Do you mean that we will not get a response back before we go into recess?

Mr F McCann: Yes.

The Chairperson: We will just have to ask the Committee Clerk to —

The Committee Clerk: We have already written to OFMDFM and have been given a holding reply. We asked for —

Mr F McCann: Could I make a suggestion? We should write those letters, but you, as Chair of this Committee, should take it up with the Chairs of the other Committees at the meeting where all the Chairs come together. You could raise it there.

The Chairperson: OK. We will note Fra's proposal.

It is an issue. I feel quite strongly that careers is not being dealt with. To me, it is not even about individual careers. I know there is an orthodoxy out there that every individual should get the right career for them. However, we also have a responsibility to society. If we are producing too many lawyers and not enough apprentices, we have to get someone who has a strategic vision. It is not just about the post-primary sector but the primary-schools sector. What came across in today's submissions is that, although there is good work in parts, there is no overarching drive. We need to provide that if we want our schools and principals to do that.

Mr F McCann: I do not know whether it is part of this, but it was certainly a worthwhile exercise when Chris, Sammy, myself and Jennifer went to an event, three or four weeks ago, at a school of excellence for soccer.

Mr Lyttle: The Belfast Metropolitan College's football academy.

Mr F McCann: There were 40 young people from deprived areas across the city.

The Chairperson: I cannot understand why I was not asked to that event.

Mr F McCann: They actually said that you were.

Mr Lyttle: You had a diary clash.

The Chairperson: That is right, I did. It was more the football excellence I was going on about.

Mr F McCann: All of us took away the worth of that academy. You had young people there who would not have gone into education but for the love of football. The catch was that, if they want to be trained to a level of football, they also had to do their education.

The Chairperson: I agree, Fra. I think that is absolutely the way that we would want to do it.

Mr P Ramsey: No legislation will be tabled this side of the summer around dissolving the Department. In light of that, we should prepare the background for the commencement of a Committee inquiry. I do not see any reason why we should not start that. It will have an impact immediately, through the commencement of it. Taking Chris's point, it is important that we liaise with the Committee for Education so that we are not overstepping the mark. It is important that we do it. There is a good rationale for doing it. I am not taking away from the suggestion of writing to OFMDFM, but I do not think that we will get any response from it other than another holding letter. If we prepare the ground for it and commence it at the beginning of September after recess, I think that we will get four or five weeks out of it.

Mr Lyttle: That is not a bad proposal. I have a collection of OFMDFM holding letters. You might not want to add to those.

The Chairperson: I was only doing it for the record. Are members content to do as Pat suggested?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: We will do that. Cathy and Fiona, is there anything more that you need to tell us? You have given us plenty of food for thought, and we will do it properly now.

Ms Moore: I know that a huge part of the drive from your Committee and your interest in careers has come from hearing from employers on the mismatch in skills. There is an economic drive, and it also comes from looking at the NEET strategy and the wider benefits of CEIAG. It has come to light because of the position of the economy, but there are also social and individual needs. I mentioned that there is a strong evidence base for programmes being effective and making a difference to people's lives. I brought a lot of the reports on a pen drive for you, if anyone is interested. I divided them into the evidence base and business-education engagement, which is another big area. There is a lot of evidence there.

The Chairperson: If you let the Committee Clerk have a look at that, we will see what we can do about it.

Before I close, the Department received a presentation this morning from Oxford Economics about the skills shortage. Were we aware of that?

The Committee Clerk: It is embargoed until 12.00 today. It was e-mailed to you.

The Chairperson: As I understand it, there was a presentation at 8.00 am and another one to the press at 10.00 am.

The Committee Clerk: Is it on corporation tax?

The Chairperson: I do not know what it is on, because I am not at it. I just know that there is a presentation. The statutory basis for this Committee is that the Department has to engage with it on policy issues. Given that we have an interest in skills and economic development, I would like a letter to be written to the Department asking that we be kept informed of such initiatives. This Committee should not have to read of those in the press.

The Committee Clerk: I would need to find out whether that is the corporation tax presentation that was given to us at 9.15 am.

The Chairperson: The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) mentioned it to me. I would like a letter to ask what Oxford Economics was doing and why the Committee does not know about it, unless the Committee does know about it and I have forgotten.

Mr Lyttle: If we are moving to the point of trying to draft terms of reference for any such inquiry, I suggest that we include and liaise with the Northern Ireland Schools and Colleges Careers Association to help us to inform what that would look like.

The Chairperson: Would you be willing to do that?

Ms Moore: We were about to ask whether we could be included.

Mr Lyttle: Great minds.

The Chairperson: You have your champion in Mr Lyttle.

What are you going to tell me I cannot do now?

The Committee Clerk: I just want to check that, given that we are drafting terms of reference for an inquiry into career guidance, are we still writing to the Committee for Education to ask it whether it wants to join us, or are we doing it ourselves?

The Chairperson: Pat's suggestion is that we are going to do it.

Ms Moore: The full term is CEIAG, rather than career guidance.

The Chairperson: Out of politeness, we should write to the Committee for Education to ask whether it wishes to join us or wishes to provide a rapporteur or some such thing.

Mr F McCann: You can raise it at the —

The Chairperson: I will raise it or it can be put on the agenda for the joint Chairs' committee.

The Committee Clerk: Are we still writing to OFMDFM?

The Chairperson: We will write to it. You have nothing better to do. That is a joke, for the benefit of Hansard.

Ms Moore: Thank you very much.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, Cathy and Fiona. That was really useful. We look forward to you engaging with us, and we appreciated your forthright comments. You raised certain issues that I will look forward to picking up again, not least, Fiona, the view that 50% might be too high. All of these things are noted, and we will be in touch with you.