



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Review of Initial Teacher Education
Infrastructure: Stranmillis University College

17 September 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr David Hilditch
Mr Chris Lyttle
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Pat Ramsey
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Dr Anne Heaslett	Stranmillis University College
Professor Sir Desmond Rea	Stranmillis University College

The Chairperson: On behalf of the Committee, I welcome Dr Anne Heaslett, the principal, and Professor Sir Desmond Rea, chairman of the governing body. Desmond and Anne, you are very welcome this morning.

Dr Anne Heaslett (Stranmillis University College): Thank you.

The Chairperson: The format this morning is that we have the five interested bodies in front of us. We are giving 10 minutes for each presentation and the rest of the time for questions. The first 10 minutes is over to you.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea (Stranmillis University College): Thank you very much indeed. Good morning, Chair and members of the Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to discuss Stranmillis University College's — I will refer to it from now on as "the college" — response to stage 2 of the review of teacher training infrastructure. I am happy to provide you with a high-level overview of our response and will endeavour to keep it short. The principal and I are also happy to take your questions.

I am assuming that you have had the opportunity, first, to review the paper that the college submitted to you for this morning's session, which will be referred to here as the college's response to stage 2, and, secondly, that you have had the opportunity to peruse the college's submission to the international panel, which was not only prepared by the senior staff and considered in depth by the board but produced in consultation with staff. We involved the senior leadership team. I hope that you found both documents helpful in understanding our position.

In part 2 of our submission to the Committee, you will have noted that the Minister's two-stage approach is referred to. In part 3, the international panel's terms of reference are clearly stated, and part 5 is paragraph 4.2 of the college's submission to the international panel and refers to structures. I imagine that that will be the main concern today. The college asks you to note the first bullet point in particular:

"Moving forward in respect of structures, the Panel may wish to consider:

an all-embracing institute of education on the Stranmillis site".

In part 6, we detail some critical observations made by the international panel. In particular, paragraphs 6.10 and 6.12, as they appear in our document, were noted by the college.

In part 7, the four structural options put forward by the international panel are described. We ask you to note option D in particular, which is a single Northern Ireland institute of education.

In part 8, the response from the college to the international panel's four options is clearly and concisely put.

The college found the international panel's report highly professional, thoughtful, rigorous and challenging. We particularly welcome its emphasis on pluralism and cohesiveness. Critically, the references in the report to social capital and community well-being will undoubtedly present a challenge to civic society, particularly given the critical issues of social division, creating a cohesive community, good relations and reconciliation. Given these issues, it is important that this legislature takes the lead in mapping a sensible way forward, but civic society also has to rise to the challenges and take its part in the process.

The panel believes that initial teacher education has a vital role to play in the achievement of effective shared education, and we share that view. There is an opportunity for all of us with an interest in higher education to work together to achieve a world-class system that has children, students and teachers at its heart and is sustainable now and for future generations, breaking down divisions and helping to create greater cohesiveness and good relations. We acknowledge that moving forward to decide the best option will not be an easy process, but we believe that it is not beyond our capabilities to embrace the changes needed to take teacher education to a new level and serve our children, students, teachers and civic society better in the future.

We are wholly in favour of an all-embracing institute of education on the Stranmillis site in order to sustain a critical community of educational excellence in teaching and research in a shared environment where diversity is welcomed. Embracing diversity in a shared environment is essential if our children are to grow up with fewer perceived barriers that prevent them engaging fully in society, with all of its cultural and religious aspects. Option D of the panel's report aligns most closely with that aspiration — an aspiration that could become a reality if we can share some common ground.

I will refer directly to part 8 of Stranmillis College's response to the four options. First, regardless of the option, Stranmillis would invite St Mary's University College to join it on the Stranmillis site and send a message to the wider world that, in embracing a shared future, it is possible to protect a distinctive faith-based mission within a larger multi-faith institutional context. Stranmillis University College takes seriously the concern of nationalist and republican MLAs about maintaining employment on the St Mary's site. Here, I refer to the deliberations of this Committee in the past and those of the Assembly. It will not be lost on all MLAs and the wider populace of Northern Ireland that the essential logic of the international panel's four-option approach could — indeed, perhaps should — be applied to the whole of higher education. It is about collaboration and complementarity, and it is surely not beyond the wits of both universities to facilitate what we advocate by at least ensuring some higher educational presence on the St Mary's site, thus guaranteeing continuing employment. That is our position. We take seriously the point that some of you made.

If, at this point, the reader or listener refers back to part 5 above, on the submission of Stranmillis University College to the panel, and puts it alongside part 7 above, on the four options put forward by the international panel, it will be apparent that the college's first option, which is an all-embracing institute on the Stranmillis site, most closely approximates to option D of the international panel: a single Northern Ireland institute of education. Difficulties are acknowledged by the international panel in respect of option D. You might want to refer later to what they refer to as the will to make it happen: in other words, it is within the remit of higher education institutions to make this a reality, if they so desire. Despite the difficulties, Stranmillis is ready, willing and able to enter into discussions with all

the other institutions to make it a reality. If you want a centre of excellence, this, in our view, is the way to go about it. It is worth mentioning that option D is also in line with the development of institutes of education in the Republic of Ireland, as outlined in, 'A New Vision of Education for All the Children of Ireland: Incorporation of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Mater Dei Institute of Education and Church of Ireland College of Education into Dublin City University'. I suggest that the Committee Clerk obtain copies of this document. If you want to borrow it from us to take copies for members of the Committee, we would be happy that you do so. So option D is also in line with developments in the Republic of Ireland.

Ultimately, it is our view that there is a need to focus on the benefits of the options for students and teachers and to work together to achieve long-term sustainability in teacher education in Northern Ireland. If we do this by half measures, it will create prolonged uncertainty, which is not good for students, teachers or, indeed, for Northern Ireland as a whole. We urge everyone to work together to ensure that such uncertainty is minimised as we move forward. We at Stranmillis believe very strongly that, if measures are taken that fall short of option D, we will be sitting here in 10 years' time talking about the same old problems of fragmentation and lack of complementarity, having missed opportunities to work through any issues and strengthen our position in Northern Ireland as world-class in our field of teacher education. Most importantly, we will have lost opportunities to show our children that we have moved on as a society and are committed to shared education. We have to ask ourselves whether we can continue to do this and, at the same time, compromise the effectiveness and efficiency that could be achieved through sharing our resources, knowledge, skills and research capability. The sum of our parts could be used to the greater good. Other jurisdictions — Scotland, in addition to the Republic of Ireland — have already questioned this and reached their own conclusions. The question is this: are we prepared to lag behind and run the risk of doing our teachers and students a disservice, or are we willing to move teacher education to a new level, as the international panel is willing us to do? In conclusion, we at Stranmillis are very happy to sit down and discuss the international panel's four options with the other institutions — the institutions that you are meeting today. Indeed, we have already invited St Mary's to such a discussion.

Members, we are pleased to take your questions.

The Chairperson: Desmond, thank you very much.

Your direction is obviously option D. Do you believe that there is an openness of mind on the part of the Minister and the Department to listen to the stakeholders, or is there a will being played out?

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: As you all know, this was a two-stage approach. When I took up the role, I read the minutes of the Minister's appearance before the Committee. When you asked him where he was coming from, his response was that he had given you his analysis, he had proffered his way forward as he saw it and he could not persuade you at that stage. He went on to say that he was going to move forward on the two-stage approach.

The first stage was the recruitment of consultants to look at the economics. Eventually, Grant Thornton was appointed, and, no doubt, the Committee has studied its report. It is, I think, true to say that its findings vindicated the Minister's analysis as he saw it and as they saw it. The Minister said that, on the back of that, he was moving to stage two, which related to the international panel. He appointed a very capable chairman — a Finn — who is a professor at Harvard, three professors from England, one from the Republic of Ireland and one from Scotland, and he was very aware of developments in Northern Ireland. We met them and found that they listened.

I should say that our board is a new one: from two weeks ago, six of the 10 are new. However, the response that you got today has the endorsement of that board in addition to the endorsement of the previous one. We have been through the report, and the board, as I said, found it a good and challenging one, and we have responded to that challenge. We reiterated to the Minister that we understood that the two-stage approach signalled a level playing field, and it is in that spirit that we approached it. Therefore, in answer to your question, we believe that he has to be in listening mode, bearing in mind the time, effort and money expended in the process, the two-stage approach, to date.

The Chairperson: You said that your current and previous boards gave your response their full endorsement. Anne, what are the feelings of staff?

Dr Heaslett: Under Sir Desmond's chairmanship, there has been engagement with our senior academic leadership team and our staff. The aspiration to have an overarching institute that

represents teacher education at Northern Ireland level is a vision around which there is a great deal of support. As professionals in the field, we all recognise that the fragmentation that we have been struggling against in the current environment is holding us back. Very often, as we sit round as colleagues across all institutions, we feel that every higher education institution (HEI) involved in teacher education has great staff. Each of us in our own way has developed areas of expertise in scholarship and research; we have outstanding students; and we attract the kind of students to whom Professor Sahlberg and his team referred. However, the problem we have is that our energies are split. If we want to build a strong teacher education infrastructure that is not just sustainable but can, as we have tried to point out, develop as one of the best in the field and stand proud against national and international standards, we need to find some way of coming to a situation in which we plan and go forward at a Northern Ireland level.

In Stranmillis, we work collaboratively with colleagues and institutions in the Republic of Ireland, as do many of our colleagues in other institutions. We must think about how, in the future, our teacher education in Northern Ireland will interact, North and South, as well as across the wider UK and internationally. We want teacher education to be sustained and developed, and we know that we must find a way of achieving complementarity and overcoming the disadvantages of the current fragmentation to build that vision for the future. So, in that respect, the vision of moving in the direction that Sir Desmond outlined is shared. As he said, we know that the challenge of moving along the road towards that vision will have many challenges and cannot be achieved instantaneously, but there is a lot of support for the overarching vision.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: May I elaborate a little in response to that question? I insisted from the very beginning that staff be involved in the process and in generating the submission to the international panel. As the principal said, all members of the senior leadership team were asked to contribute. We divided up areas of work, and they produced papers on those. The report itself had the endorsement of that panel, which is roughly representative of the institution. The structural aspects of it were then presented to the staff as a whole before the submission was made to the international panel. So, it seemed to me that the important lesson was that there should be involvement of staff, and I believe that we went out of our way to do that.

The Chairperson: Finally, Sir Desmond, one issue raised was that option D scores lowest in practicability because of the unwillingness. Your pitch for option D is very much on the basis that the single institution be sited at Stranmillis. If option D was not based at Stranmillis, would you still be as supportive of it as a way forward, considering all the other benefits that you saw in it?

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: Let me read the reference from the panel's report. It states:

"Of all the options, however, it scores the lowest on practicability, as the setting up of a single organisation to deliver teacher education in Northern Ireland would require a significant degree of willingness on the part of the institutions involved to embrace the opportunity for teacher education in Northern Ireland to liberate the resources for investment that would become available through such a partnership and thereby to create a system that would rank among the best in the world, a system capable of responding to the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland and of playing a key part in realising its current ambitions."

We have what I believe anyone would agree is a superb site in south Belfast, which is an area that is fully representative of the city of Belfast. There is an excellent site there, but the answer to your question is yes: if government, in its wisdom, decides that it will be somewhere else, the logic of what we are arguing would be that, as an institution, we would have to accept that. That would be the honourable and the only approach that one could take, but it would be foolish to underestimate the reality and the buildings devoted to education already on that site. You know better than I do that public money is scarce. Others, who are ancillary to education, are interested in coming onto the site, and we are having negotiations with them. You have to weigh up the cost benefit of alternatives.

Dr Heaslett: The report makes a point about the importance of our taking that first step. It is about joint planning as providers. Sir Desmond talked about resourcing issues. There is a critical point in the initial stage. It is interesting, because the same point was made in the discussions that we had over the long period of development of the as yet unpublished Department of Education report on teacher education: teacher education requires an overarching planning body that can begin to look at what is developed and what is provided in Northern Ireland as a whole. We can then put into discussions Sir Desmond's points about resources and cost-effectiveness. The critical point about shared planning is incredibly important in trying to move the process forward.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: At the end of the day, people are more important than buildings. First, the issues of a divided society and the importance of sharing and of a shared society are the most significant issues for all of us around the table. Secondly, as the report also underscores, there is a sizeable problem of underachievement, particularly among males, so it is about the real educational issues. It is those, not buildings, that are significant.

Mr P Ramsey: Good morning, Sir Desmond and Anne. I will go back to a point that the Chair made earlier about the present position of Stranmillis. In the past, there was no consensus from the college. We were getting mixed tones and mixed messages, as, I am sure, you will appreciate. There was concern that the governors and the college lecturers were not united in the way forward. Are you giving us the certainty that there is consensus in the college collectively on the position paper that you have presented and on the options?

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: I believe that the answer to that question is yes. People have bought into the structures that we put forward originally. They are not necessarily, if I may say so, everybody's, but there is agreement on the content of our submission to the international panel. In responding to the report, particularly to option D, I was careful to take the previous board through the report page by page. The new board has unequivocally endorsed the paper that you have received. Do not forget that our board is made up of 10 non-executive laypeople: two are from the trade union side, and one is the president of the student council. We have sought to do our best to get that consensus.

Mr P Ramsey: That is fine. I have gone through your preferred option. Certainly, Committee members are probably of the opinion that we want to protect the history, ethos and integrity of Stranmillis and St Mary's as institutions. Do you think that that protection is enshrined in option D to ensure that people —

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: Yes. I was interested to read the document from the Republic of Ireland, which ensures that the ethos of both institutions is preserved and encouraged but that there is also an element of sharing in the curriculum. That is a good thing. Where the board and I are coming from is a respect for the ethos not simply of what we would expect as an institution but what we would seek to get across to St Mary's. I have told you that I have extended an invitation to meet representatives of St Mary's. That is the next stage. I will assure them that, in moving into this, there will be respect for each institution but an element of sharing that would be achieved by consent. Before we enter into discussions with the universities, it would be much better if Stranmillis and St Mary's can achieve a consensus in arguing the sort of case that I have put to you today on behalf of the institution.

Mr P Ramsey: I share a lot of the language that you have used, Sir Desmond, such as "world class", "non-fragmented" and "complementary". Do you not think that the federal model would also achieve that?

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: The new board has not gone through the other three models in depth.

Mr P Ramsey: I find that strange.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: I have taken on six new board members in the last two weeks. That is the reality. The old board went through all the options.

Option A is, as you know, a loose pooling together. We also looked at option B and option C, which is the option that you are referring to. Basically, it has an overarching body that would move strategy forward. As far as we are concerned, those options are suboptimal.

Your colleague asked me about carrying people with us, and you also pursued that issue. I want to carry them with us. I have answered the question honestly about the three options. We have to look at them in depth, and, if the Committee wants a written submission, we can make one. That means that I have carried them and that we have looked at those in depth and will come forward in respect of them.

Mr P Ramsey: You clearly feel that you have good reasons for not going through the other three options.

I am keen to hear about shared education coming together. However, the process has been going on for a long time —

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: Correct.

Mr P Ramsey: — a fierce long time, and it surprises me — correct me if I am wrong — that Stranmillis and St Mary's have not had a discussion to date.

Dr Heaslett: What has happened between Stranmillis and St Mary's is less about talking and more about action. Since I last appeared before the Committee, we have done significant and substantial work with our colleagues in St Mary's. We have jointly undertaken what is probably one of the biggest development projects to have been funded by the Department of Education: the SEN literacy development project. That project is on such a scale that it is one of the biggest that the Province has ever engaged in. That has been done jointly, and Professor Peter Finn and I are the joint chairs. We have rotated our meetings between the two colleges, but, more significant is the impact that that joint project will have on Northern Ireland schools, and we are developing professional practice in the area of literacy to at least two members of staff in primary schools across Northern Ireland. Through the project, we have demonstrated that we are not Belfast-centred, because we have developed a very significant hub delivery mode whereby we have delivered the project through schools acting as hubs. Geographically, we go into centres across the Province so that staff do not always have to travel to Belfast. In so doing, the interim inspection report shows that the project is having a significant impact on the professional development of the teaching profession and on the commitment to develop good practice in schools and to raise the achievement and aspiration levels of our primary-school children.

What I would say to the Committee by way of reassurance is that St Mary's and Stranmillis have taken action. We had our very successful CREDIT project, which is coming to an end, where, again, there was joint development. That was also a very significant project, because it had a unique feature: it used a highly innovative practice whereby the teams — it was a joint project between Stranmillis and St Mary's — delivered professional development to teachers across phases of education, with primary and post-primary teachers being taught together. It also involved teachers from all school sectors in Northern Ireland. We have not been discussing or producing reports about the way forward, but I think that what Stranmillis and St Mary's have done in practice is worthy of note. Those two projects, particularly the literacy project, have had an educational impact on the Province that is and will continue to be significant. Those are presented as two very strong, innovative examples of working together. There has never been any dissension. Professor Finn and I have been joint chairs of the literacy project, and we had two excellent members of staff from each college helping to lead the CREDIT project. I give the Committee an assurance that, while we have not been engaging in round-table discussions, in practice, we have been delivering on sharing.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: May I say that, in terms of the timescale, the international panel report was produced in the first week in July? On the back of that report, a meeting was immediately held in our institution for our board to discuss it. We have moved, in the last number of weeks, to invite views from the new board, which we are waiting on to come on board. Hopefully, we will then enter into discussions. The invitation has gone to St Mary's.

Dr Heaslett: Sir Desmond is correct. Obviously, we have six new board members. Essentially, a new board started in the college from September, so there has not been discussion about the options. The senior staff have been leading lots of informal discussions with our staff and having our own debates and discussions about the different options. We know that, at some point, we will be asked by our governing body to give consideration so that a more formal paper can go through the process from staff to governors. That is where the point that I made earlier comes in. One of the very strong points to emerge from that discussion is that, in order to start the journey, the vision is important. It is important that all of us have a shared vision for teacher education, but we recognise that we have to start to move in that direction. That is why I made the point earlier, and I re-emphasise it, that joint planning —

Mr P Ramsey: Anne, you have been very clear on the collaboration that is taking place, but that is not what I was asking about. I was asking about initial teacher training and whether there have been any formal discussions. You and Peter Finn are clearly having discussions: you jointly chair committees and work together. It was not in July that the subject came up, Sir Desmond: it has been coming up for years in the Chamber, this Committee and outside the House.

I am disappointed that the board of governors has not been discussing the options. It is very clear, even from what Anne said, that you have been looking at only one option. You have not had a fully fledged discussion on all the options to come to a clear decision on the direction that you want to go in.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: Basically, I have put the case to you that, with the principal option that we put forward, it was immediately obvious that it approximated to option D. You could argue that, given that we had put that to the international panel, the panel had taken it on board. Therefore, we can say to you, "That is the option that we are presenting to you today", and we have done that.

We can say to you that the other options are, as far as the board is concerned, suboptimal. I said that we had not looked at them "in depth", but we read the report and could see that they were suboptimal. I have also said to you — you cannot have it both ways — about talking to staff. Staff have only come back from their holidays, and the report came to us at the beginning of July. We will take it to them as well. That answers the question about —

Mr P Ramsey: I appreciate that, but it is clear that, in relation to the four options, you have been projecting and promoting option D as your model.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: Correct.

Mr P Ramsey: However, when the four options were recommended by the panel and brought forward by the Minister, they were not discussed with staff and — correct me if I am wrong — were not tabled for formal discussion with the board of governors. Is that accurate?

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: No. The contents of the report were before the board of governors. You are quite correct that they have not been discussed with staff in depth, but option D was.

Mr P Ramsey: I appreciate that. However, I was asking a follow-on question to the Chair's question. I do not want to hear some time next week that staff are contacting us to say, "By the way, Sir Desmond is not correct because nobody talked to me about the four options". I am only making that point. We are trying to get common ground —

Dr Heaslett: As Sir Desmond said, the report came out in July, and staff, at various times over the last couple of months, have been on holidays. However, the senior management team has held at least three round-table discussions with our staff on an open-invitation basis. We clearly need to do more of those, because staff were on leave. We have had at least three such discussions, and there will be more of them.

In those informal round-table discussions, as we start to formulate our views, there has been a reflection by senior staff and staff and discussion of the pros and cons and the strengths and weaknesses of each option, taking it as read, as Sir Desmond said, that option D is optimal. We have started that process, but now that the academic year has officially started, we will do more of that work. I want to reassure the Committee that we have already made a start.

Mr P Ramsey: Could it be the case that, as a result of the discussions and consultation that you are carrying out, your preferred option could change?

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: I can give you only the view that I picked up from the board. Do not forget that I have had only one meeting. We held the first meeting of the board this week, so you have to give us space. If you want me to take people with me, they have to have that space. I think that it is unlikely that they would see the other options as anything other than suboptimal, but they might. In that case, I will make a written submission to the Committee informing it accordingly, but you have to be fair with the timescales.

Mr Douglas: Thank you for the presentation. I will get one thing out of the road. I thought that the statement at paragraph 8.2 was strange. To be honest, I resent the statement, and I will tell you why. Committee members went to St Mary's and were very impressed with what was going on there, particularly the importance of the building to that area, which is one of the most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland. However, paragraph 8.2 states:

"Stranmillis University College takes seriously the concern of nationalist and republican MLAs about maintaining employment on the St Mary's site."

I have asked questions about jobs, as have others.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: I take that on board.

Mr Douglas: I wanted to say that.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: I understand that. However, I am saying that we take it seriously.

Mr Douglas: I know your background and the work that you have done in east Belfast on a voluntary basis, and you will be very aware of the nature of disadvantage in that area.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: Correct.

Mr Douglas: I appreciate that work. I am saying that because you must be aware of that when you say that you would invite St Mary's University College to join you on the Stranmillis site. What message would that send out to the people of west Belfast, if you are talking about moving — I know that you are not talking about moving everything — to one of the most prosperous areas of Northern Ireland? If this were happening on the Newtownards Road or the Woodstock Road, I would be as much opposed to it as the people in Stranmillis College.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: Basically, I am saying that I do not think that you can look at this problem in terms of teacher education and the different institutions apart from looking at the whole of higher education. In my view, complementarity has to be built in across the totality of the system for the different campuses and the different curricula that are available on those campuses. I am saying that another academic area in the context of that complementarity could go onto the St Mary's site and assure employment on that site. It would be a legitimate academic area, with students going in and out daily and, roughly speaking, the same number of staff. That is what I am arguing for. I am saying that it is not beyond the wit of man to ensure that your concern and, in particular, the concerns of SDLP or Sinn Féin members about employment on that site in west Belfast. I share that, not least because I am from west Belfast.

Mr Douglas: Your paper refers to:

"ensuring some higher education presence on the St Mary's site".

Is that what you are talking about?

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: That is right — totally, absolutely.

Mr Douglas: Paragraph 8.1 states:

"Regardless of the Option, Stranmillis would invite St Mary's University College to join it on the Stranmillis site".

Is St Mary's aware of that invitation?

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: Sorry; it will be aware of that invitation from this meeting on. The board and I saw this as an opportunity for us to present to the Committee, and then we would enter into discussions with St Mary's and extend the hand of friendship. It is better that St Mary's and Stranmillis work together not only in strategy terms but in tactical terms and in the discussions that will have to take place. If one was talking about option D for moving forward, it would be better if Stranmillis and St Mary's were singing from the same hymn sheet to try to make it a reality.

Mr Douglas: Do you not think that St Mary's might be a wee bit surprised this morning, if they are watching this meeting, to hear that they are being invited to —

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: That is the reality; I am sorry.

Mr Douglas: I appreciate that you started the whole process in July —

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: As your Committee Clerk well knows, you would have liked to see us much later. We were being told that the report was delayed. It would have been better if this had happened much earlier when staff were around etc. We could have related, through your Chair and your Committee Clerk, to you and to St Mary's at a much earlier date.

Mr F McCann: I have one question on the back of that. I come from west Belfast as well. It is not only an employment issue in west Belfast; there is a lengthy historical connection between St Mary's and the site. It also provides good education. You say that St Mary's and Stranmillis should be singing from the same hymn sheet and that you will do that from this meeting onwards. It is a bit crazy to come here and say that you will do it from here on in. If there was any meeting of minds, you would think that you would come to this meeting and say, "We've met with St Mary's and discussed the options. It is three months since the report was out there, regardless of the holidays. We have a meeting of minds", but you have said to us, "They'll know from this meeting", when St Mary's representatives are sitting outside this room. I do not know whether they can hear us. It probably sends out all the wrong messages.

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: I am sorry if it sends the wrong messages. In a totally genuine way and on the basis of sound analysis, we have put together certain proposals and are happy to talk to them as soon as that is convenient.

The Chairperson: How do you respond to the comment in the international panel's report on the substantial pool of unemployed teachers?

Professor Sir Desmond Rea: It is an interesting area that has been of concern. It is fascinating that we as an institution have developed relationships across the water in certain areas. The principal has argued to the previous board that that work could be encouraged in a purposeful way. As well as that, people have to be prepared to move.

Dr Heaslett: We do not have a totally accurate system for tracking students once they leave. However, we did some work and prepared a paper, which we shared with the General Teaching Council (GTC). In that, we asked the GTC to revisit the way in which the statistical analysis was presented. In recent years, we have picked up a lot of anecdotal evidence. Many of our recent graduates have found employment, but we have found that people with a B Ed degree, for example, might not necessarily go into teaching but into a broadly related field. As part of the preparation for the panel, we put a paper together and submitted it to the GTCNI. It is looking at how the data and statistics are based.

In Stranmillis, because of our partnerships, we encourage our people to think of employment opportunities in Northern Ireland and beyond. I understand the argument about preparing people to deliver the Northern Ireland curriculum. That is a valid argument, but all the leading institutes of teacher education will also be preparing teachers for a much wider marketplace. We have queried the statistics, and we are working through some of them. We have developed the culture in Stranmillis of saying, "It's not just Northern Ireland jobs; it's jobs". Sometimes, we cannot meet the demand when our partners outside Northern Ireland want our graduates. We have to work harder at encouraging people to see and to seize the opportunity. We are not blinded to the difficulties, but there are some issues to come to light.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, Sir Desmond and Anne, for your time and your input. It is much appreciated.