



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Employment and Learning

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Review of Initial Teacher Education  
Infrastructure: University of Ulster

17 September 2014

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Review of Initial Teacher Education Infrastructure: University of Ulster

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

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

**Witnesses:**

Professor Richard Barnett	University of Ulster
Dr Samuel McGuinness	University of Ulster

**The Chairperson:** I welcome Professor Richard Barnett, vice chancellor, and Dr Samuel McGuinness, head of the school of education designate. Thank you for coming along this afternoon.

**Professor Richard Barnett (University of Ulster):** Thank you, Chair. It is good to see you all once again.

**The Chairperson:** It is over to you, Richard.

**Professor Barnett:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We have met before. I am Richard Barnett, vice chancellor, and I will introduce Sam McGuinness. Sam is head of our school of education, and I do not think you have met him before. He has a teaching background, and it is important in our ethos of teacher education that people have actually done it themselves. He has been involved in education. He was a chemistry teacher and was a former head of Cookstown High School and Limavady Grammar School. He has joined us as head of education. I will go through the presentation with you, and Sam and I will answer your questions.

We welcome the opportunity to meet you. This is an extremely important issue that you have before you, because, fundamentally, it is about providing the best opportunity for all our young people. I commend the report that the expert panel has produced. It is an excellent report, and it is excellent because it starts with principles about what it is that should be in teacher education that provides a world-class education for our students. It is important for all of us to focus on those principles. To be blunt, if we start the conversation about institutions, whether it is about the University of Ulster, Stranmillis, Queen's or St Mary's, we will miss the point. That should be a consequence of the

application of the principles; there should not be a focus on the institutions. If we start with the institutions, we will fail our young people.

We welcome the report. It mirrors much of our submission. It starts with principles and follows those principles through. We also commend the report in the sense that it outlines the weaknesses in our present system. It does not cover one area that we think is important, but I will come to that. With regard to moving forward, the issue you have before you is a Belfast problem. There is not a problem in the north-west, and issues in Belfast should not delay us moving forward elsewhere.

We believe that it is important that initial teacher education and continuing professional development are considered as a whole. The review supports that. It talks about the three Is — initial, induction and in-service. We cannot emphasise strongly enough our belief that they must be integrated. If you consider initial teacher education without combining the other, you will be going off at half-cock, and you will not serve our young people well.

There is CPD, but it is amazing that teaching has always been unique as a profession. Once you are qualified, you can go through your career with no systematic professional development. What would you say if your son, daughter, grandson or granddaughter was ill and went to see a doctor who was in their fifties but had had no proper training since they had qualified in their twenties? That is the system that we have. We put our young people in the hands of such people. Many teachers do, and they are excellent teachers, but there is no requirement from a professional body of teaching. Unless we consider the two together, we are not providing the best possible service.

Teacher education must be based on an equal partnership between the providers and the schools. That is reflected in the report. The provision based in the provider and in the schools — the clinical education — must be given equal weight. We believe that those involved in teacher education, especially the assessment in schools, must have teaching qualifications. That is a principle that we follow through. We do not farm out the assessment of teaching practice to part-timers, for example. There is a need for teacher education to be research-based, and that research must be about pedagogy and learning. There is, no doubt, important research in education about the future of the education system and the sociology of education and all of that, but that is secondary to education about effective learning. There is a need for our teacher education to be pluralist, and that is recognised in the report. That can be and is achieved throughout the world in various ways. We also believe that there can be a concurrent entry and a consecutive entry PGCE or B Ed route.

I will not go through our submission, which you have, but you will see the five principles that the expert panel set out as those that should govern the organisation of teacher education. We fully support those principles. It is about taking those principles and worked them through and what that means for how we structure teacher education. We agree with the identification of the present weaknesses in our system.

There is one omission in the report, which is the important 16 to 19 education group. That is partly in the FE sector and partly in the school sector. We are the only provider of a PGCE for the FE sector, and there is a lot more work to be done there in how the FE and schools work together. The importance of vocational versus academic is an issue. The 16 to 19 agenda is something that you should consider. Consideration needs to be given to how that is developed further from early years.

We agree with the report that the provision of pluralist teacher education is fundamental. It can be achieved in different ways. Currently, we are the only provider that is recognised by all the traditions. There is not a problem in that, nor is there a problem in achieving that. The Catholic Church has no problem with what we do. We do it by jointly teaching some classes. Other places do it by ring-fencing part of the curriculum for the traditions, so that can be done. We agree that the status quo is not an option. We also agree that there should be some overarching body to look at where teacher education is going.

Where does that lead us? It leads us to favour the two-centre option. As the panel says, it:

*"would represent significant progress in relation to the quality criterion of best international practice ... would strengthen research and create a coherent framework of provision across Belfast ... scores well on the diversity criterion".*

It is not as efficient, clearly, as a single centre, but it would be much more effective, in the sense that, with a two-centre model, we could have one in Belfast and one in the north-west. Teacher education in schools is a partnership. You cannot have an effective partnership if, to work with your partner, you

have to travel 90 miles from Belfast out. With CPD, you cannot have an effective partnership unless there is a geographic location nearby.

Therefore, we believe that there should be a two-centre model — one in the north-west and one in Belfast — and it should be proportionate to the populations in those areas for B Ed and PGCE numbers. We have outlined the fact that geography matters in teacher education. It is not something that you can do at a distance, because it is a partnership. The providers are in the schools every day, and you cannot do that effectively if you are travelling miles.

What about the other options? The single-centre option would not be effective, because we would not be serving our young people well. We would be disadvantaging our young people in the north-west, because they would be second-class citizens relative to others. If the single centre were in the north-west, we would be disadvantaging people in Belfast and the eastern part of the Province. The panel says that the collaborative partnership does not score highly on anything. It does not score as highly as the other options on potential for progress, nor does it move us towards having a world-class system. The panel said that, relative to the other options, the federation model adds to bureaucracy, is not practical and would be difficult to achieve. Those are the words of the expert panel.

We are clearly of the view that this is an excellent report. We followed the principles through, and we favour a two-centre model, with one centre in Belfast and one in the north-west.

**The Chairperson:** I have asked the other groups who have made presentations today this same question. Given your engagement with the panel, do you think the Minister has approached the process with an open mind, or is there a preconceived outcome?

**Professor Barnett:** Like us, the Minister is meeting the providers. We met the Minister, and he wanted to know our views on the report. I told him what I have told you: it is an excellent report that starts with principles. He did not set it out; it was the panel that went that way. It did not come up with an easy solution. He agreed that it was an excellent report and is seeing where the principles take him. I do not think that he has made up his mind. He may have done. I cannot read his mind.  
*[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson:** Did you raise the 16- to 19-year-olds issue with him? What was his response?

**Professor Barnett:** Yes. He recognises that it is an issue. The FE sector comes under the Department for Employment and Learning and the sixth forms come under the Department of Education. We provide the teacher education through DEL for the FE sector, but there is no link, and the 16-19 issue needs to be addressed.

**The Chairperson:** You obviously favour the two-centre model. Would you still favour a two-centre model if the University of Ulster were not a part of or one of those centres?

**Professor Barnett:** What follows from this, as far as I am concerned, is a two-centre model. When nursing was revised along these principles, they decided on a two-centre model — one in the north-west and one in Belfast — and different providers were asked to compete for it. I would be happy with that — either to compete for all of it or for one centre. That would be fine.

**Mr Ross:** I must say that the different rationale put forward by each of the people giving evidence today has been very interesting. You stated in the letter that we received that the two-centre model was not as efficient but was more effective. I was wondering whether you could go into a little more detail on why you believe it would be more effective. You talked about the geographical reasons. I asked the witnesses from Queen's University the same question before you arrived, and they rubbished the idea that that was a particular issue. They said that they favoured option D but that they would keep a physical presence at St Mary's. They were clearly trying to keep onside people who are particularly passionate about St Mary's. They said that they were open to the idea of a physical presence, perhaps across Northern Ireland. They said that education and training in the health arena can be delivered across the whole Province from one centre. I wonder why you believe that this would be more effective with a two-centre model.

Perhaps this is a little bit cynical, but you are the university that has a footprint right across Northern Ireland, with different campuses. Geographically, you are perhaps best placed to be able to deliver a two-centre model, but from the University of Ulster. I wondered whether that had been part of the reasoning behind your determination that you need a two-centre model.

**Professor Barnett:** In answer to the second part of your question, Alastair, I go back to the fact that the principles means that it comes down to a two-centre model. From reading the report, I think that there are not so many negative things said about the two-centre model as are said about the other options. There are more negative comments in the report about any of the other models than there are about the two-centre model. So, on that, I go back to the issue that, if it is a two-centre model, at the end of the day the University of Ulster could run the lot, might not run any of it, or might run one and another university, or somebody else, the other. I am open to that. This is starting from what is best for providing teacher education.

To answer the first part of your question, I will hand over to Sam. Sam was headmaster of Limavady Grammar School. Sam, when it comes to the whole partnership and to developing the best possible teaching profession for our young people, would it be best for Limavady Grammar School to have a local centre with which you could work in partnership day in, day out or to have people popping up from Belfast? The idea that it should be in Belfast and you pop out now again or use a part-timer locally, is just —

**Dr Samuel McGuinness (University of Ulster):** The geographic argument is strong, not just for initial teacher education but if you then extrapolate it into CPD. I do a lot of work on CPD, leading to leadership and headship qualifications. We are about to launch a new headship qualification next week, and the cohorts exist for that. However, even as I do that and as I draw people in, the first question that they ask is, "Where are you going to teach it? Are you going to teach it in Magee or in Belfast?" I have people coming from Hazelwood Integrated College and from St Pat's College in Bearnageeha, and they say, "I finish school at 3.30 pm. I need to move to the twilight sessions, and the location needs to be close to me". I teach those sessions.

Similarly, up in Derry, I have a Magee cohort going. The geographical argument applies not just to initial teacher education but to the rest of it. A strong strand in our argument anyway is that we need to take it. I was delighted that Sahlberg and his committee lifted that and said that this goes beyond ITE and into the rest of it, as the vice chancellor said. You could not be in any other profession and escape CPD for the rest of your life. It is a terribly important argument, and it is growing. Schools want CPD. The situation with the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) — you will be aware that that has virtually gone — means that schools are coming to us and asking whether we can help them. I hope that that answers the question.

**Mr P Ramsey:** Good afternoon. You are very welcome. I am sorry that I had to skip out of the meeting for a few minutes. Clearly, I would be wrong to dismiss the two-centre model, because it would have a huge advantage for my constituency. However, I would like you to flesh out the argument a wee bit and put to you questions that we put to Queen's.

Under the model that is proposed, do you think that there would be any dilution of the ethos of faith-based education, particularly at St Mary's?

**Professor Barnett:** pat, you are going back and starting with institutions rather than delivering the principles of a pluralist education in which we protect the traditions of each faith. We do that in our school at the moment with the PGCE. At the moment, if you get a first-class honours degree in maths and have a passion for teaching in primary school, the only place that you can train in a PGCE is at the University of Ulster. Otherwise, you would have to do a four-year degree somewhere else. So, we are the only provider of PGCE primary for graduates who want to go into that. That is the only route in. They come to us and do a course that all the traditions are happy with. We do it that way. Bishop Farquhar, who was the chaplain there, set it all up with the faith groups, and they now look at it and convene it. They do not have a problem with what we do.

Pat, whatever we have, it is important that we have a pluralist tradition in teacher education and that the different traditions are protected. They can be protected in different ways. We do it by teaching part of the curriculum together, and, elsewhere, people protect part of the curriculum for that faith-based part of the education. The report states that it is important that we protect and support that in our system going forward. There is learning, shared education and learning together, which is crucial. If we do not get that, we are missing something with shared education. So, there is shared education, but, within that, there is respect and protection for the tradition of different faiths. That can be achieved. It is achieved in numerous places. I cannot see why it cannot be achieved in this small place.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I am reassured to hear that. I have asked others this same question: have there been any discussions with Stranmillis or St Mary's about the University of Ulster's preferred option?

**Professor Barnett:** Not officially. I meet Anne, Sir Desmond and other people at various things, but we have not discussed things formally, no.

**Mr P Ramsey:** In going forward, do you not see the optimum value in having a good discussion with them to have them on the same page as you, if that option comes out as being the preferred one?

**Professor Barnett:** We are happy to talk to anybody about this. The report came out in June. We have looked at it and done our response. We are happy.

**Dr S McGuinness:** Can I pick up on that? Even though it is a two-centre model, an overarching group will run it and, of course, all parties will be involved, if it goes that way.

**Mr Lyttle:** You have, to a certain extent, touched on my question in response to Pat. The report states:

*"we maintain that all programmes of teacher education, irrespective of the tradition to which they adhere and within which they operate, should make provision for students of different faith and none to engage with each other across existing lines of social division, through at least the shared use of premises, where possible, through mixed classes, through shared teaching and other forms of social engagement, which bring students from different faith traditions into full participation in forms of activity that increase mutual understanding."*

Do you think that that approach is a positive way forward for teacher education in Northern Ireland?

**Professor Barnett:** Yes, that is one of the principles, Chris. As I said, we fully support it. This is an excellent report, done by international experts in teacher education. They have looked at the best practice worldwide in teacher education and have come through with this set of principles. I think that it is incumbent on us all, as I said, in the best interests of our people going forward, to take those principles and say, "How do we deliver them here?" There are different ways in which they can be delivered, but our discussions have to start with those principles that they have set out. As I said, it should not be with institutions. That is putting the cart before the horse, or whatever phrase you want to use. It is about the principles and working them through. That is a fundamental principle of world-class teacher education. It would be odd if, in this part of the world, with our history, we discard one of those key principles of world-class teacher education.

**Mr Douglas:** Thanks very much for the presentation. Richard, you emphasised the importance of continuing professional development. I think you said that, once people gain a degree, that could be them for life.

You also said that CPD for teachers is also location-specific. Can you expand a wee bit on that?

**Professor Barnett:** That is the point that Sam was making. CPD in general is going to be a part-time activity. You are going to be released for an afternoon or a day, or you are going to do it in the evening. Where there is a true partnership between the provider and a school, it can be done on the school premises, with the provider coming to the premises. If you have effective CPD in that face-to-face way, how is that going to happen?

The other thing is that, with the two-centre model and true partnerships with schools, you have development in leadership, not only administrative leadership to go on to be a departmental or deputy head. Where is the effectiveness? We have some of that, but it is patchy.

You also get subject leadership. Where is the teaching of mathematics going? A fundamental problem in our schools is how to teach maths. There is a lot of best practice out there on how to teach maths, so you would have a subject leader in maths teaching. You can do that in communities between the providers and the schools. You cannot do that by popping over the Glenshane Pass one way or the other. I said earlier that a single centre was efficient, but it is hardly efficient for the person who has to go up and down all the time. There is a lot of dead time in travelling, so that is why CPD is local. That would be the key issue.

**Mr Douglas:** When the Open University was here earlier, it talked about its distance learning model for ITE. How do you view that as a system?

**Professor Barnett:** That is part of it. We would do some distance learning, but all of this is not a case of either/or, Sammy. It has to be both. You can do a lot of the stuff online, but who are you face to face with? It is that combination of doing both. It is done partly online and partly face to face. Who is it that you are going to have the face to face with? If we have our school of education and professionally qualified teachers in there involved in the initial teacher education and the CPD, you will be face to face with those people rather than with people coming in part-time whose primary job is doing something else. Which of those is the stronger?

**The Chairperson:** Thank you very much for your time.

**Professor Barnett:** Chairman, it would be remiss of me at this point if I did not say that the university is deeply concerned about the cuts that you, collectively, are imposing on the sector. In-year, we get a £3 million cut, so we get a grant letter one day and a week later we get a grant letter to say that it is cut by £3 million. That is a bizarre way of carrying on government.

I agree with John O'Dowd that education should be protected, so I really do not understand. If you think that education is to be protected, why is it protected if it happens to be in one Department but not in another? The consequence of this is that universities here now are getting £1,000 less per year per student than if we operated in England. You want us to train a world-class computer scientist or engineer with over £3,000 less than a university in England.

Without fail, foreign direct investment (FDI) firms come here because of our world-class education system. You will not see a consequence in the short term of what you are doing, but in the longer term we will not be competitive. When an FDI firm comes to west Belfast or the north-west, are you going to say, "Yes, we are world-class but, actually, we do it on the cheap here"? You are not investing in the future, and what you are doing with these cuts has serious consequences. I would be failing the higher education sector if I did not say this: £1,000 less per student now, yet we are supposed to achieve the same results as universities elsewhere. It is not sustainable. On your watch, you are undermining one of our best assets.

**The Chairperson:** Richard, your point is well made. If you reflect on the Hansard report of last week's briefing from the Minister and on his responses and the reactions of members of the Committee, you will see where we all stand and the collective view. You will also see the Minister's opinion of the cuts that are coming forward. I encourage you to have a look through the Hansard report of the engagement that we had.

**Professor Barnett:** I appreciate that, and I appreciate that the Minister has sought to protect higher education, because the cut to his budget was bigger than his cut to us. He appreciates that. That is the situation —

**Mr Lyttle:** The Minister voted against it.

**Professor Barnett:** It is on your watch, collectively; it is not the Minister but you collectively. The Assembly could do something about it if you do not agree with it — collectively.

**Mr Flanagan:** What do you want us to do, Richard?

**Professor Barnett:** Politics is about choice, and you have made a particular choice, which is to cut investment in our young people. There will be consequences.

**Mr Flanagan:** You said that we can do something about it: what do you recommend that we do about it?

**Professor Barnett:** I am not the elected official, OK? I am here to represent —

**The Chairperson:** OK, Richard. Your point has been made.

**Mr Flanagan:** We are all agreed that it is Stephen Farry's fault.