

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Education

SECONDMENT OF A PERMANENT SECRETARY TO POST OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Published on Thursday 21 March 2024.

Mr Givan (The Minister of Education): I wish to update MLAs on an agreement I have reached with the Education Authority (EA) to second Mr Richard Pengelly to the post of Chief Executive Officer to replace Sara Long when she vacates the post on 12 April 2024.

The Board of EA and I agree that the Authority is facing a period of unprecedented challenges and requires a senior leader with the necessary skills and experience to build on progress to date and take forward transformation of the organisation.

Following careful consideration, we have agreed that the new Chief Executive should be an established and experienced senior leader with credibility in delivering transformational change in complex and multi-disciplinary organisations. An individual with the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges currently faced by the EA, and a proven track record of working with public sector Boards and senior leaders to deliver front-line services.

To that end, I concluded that someone of the standing and with the experience of a Northern Ireland Civil Service Permanent Secretary would be a suitable and appropriate appointment. Following consultation with the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and with her agreement, I proposed Mr Richard Pengelly for secondment to the role. Earlier this afternoon the Board accepted my proposal and agreed to the secondment of Mr Pengelly as Chief Executive Officer for a period of three years commencing on 15 April 2024.

The Education Authority is facing significant operational challenges, not least in terms of the delivery of Special Educational Needs provision. While I recognise that it will take time to address such issues, in the context of ever-increasing demand and constrained public finances, Mr Pengelly has the experience and skills, working with the EA Board, to deliver much needed change.

The Education Authority is one of Northern Ireland's largest public sector employers and has responsibility for the delivery of education services across the region. The Chief Executive Officer is Accounting Officer for an annual budget of circa £2.5b and is principal adviser to the EA Board on all policy, governance and financial issues. Over the coming weeks I will be working with the Board and Mr Pengelly to agree a number of key priorities for the Education Authority as we seek collectively to address the challenges facing the education system in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, and on behalf of the Assembly, I wish to take this opportunity to thank Mrs Long for her leadership over the past five years and to wish her well as she takes up her new appointment. Mrs Long has faced many challenges, not least in the context of the unprecedented demands placed on the education system because of the Covid pandemic.

Members will also want to join me in wishing Mr Pengelly every success as he assumes his new responsibilities.