



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**Committee for Employment and Learning
Room 416
Parliament Buildings**

**Tel: +44 (0)28 9052 1448
cathie.white@niassembly.gov.uk**

**To: Kathy O'Hanlon
Clerk to the Committee for the Office of First Minister and deputy
First Minister**

**From: Cathie White
Clerk to the Committee for Employment and Learning**

Date: 21 January 2016

Subject: European Priorities

At its meeting yesterday, the Committee for Employment and Learning considered a draft response to a request from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding its European Priorities and agreed to forward the attached response.

I should be grateful if you would bring this to the attention of your Committee.

Regards,

**Cathie White
Committee Clerk**

Enc

EUROPEAN COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2016 – COMMITTEE PRIORITIES

Committee: **Committee for Employment and Learning**

Background

On receipt of the request by the Committee for the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister for its forthcoming EU priorities debate the Committee requested a paper from Assembly Research and Information Service on the European Commission Work Programme and scheduled a briefing from the Department and RaISe in its forward work programme.

Agreed Priorities from the 2016 European Commission Work Programme

New Skills Agenda for Europe

The Agenda aims at promoting skills development through, including the mutual recognition of qualifications, supporting vocational training and higher education and reaping the full potential of digital jobs. The New Skills Agenda will promote life-long investment in people, from vocational training and higher education through to digital and high-tech expertise and the life skills needed for citizens' active engagement in changing workplaces and societies. Following a search of the available information it has not been possible to identify what actions the Agenda will take.

The proposal was only adopted on the 27 October 2015, and no additional information is available yet.

New Start for Working Parents.

This proposal involves a set of measures to better address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and support the participation of women in the labour market. The main reason behind the initiative is to address the low participation of women in the labour market by modernising and adapting the current EU legal and policy framework to allow for parents with children or those with dependent relatives to better balance caring and professional responsibilities. The Commission will invite the Social Partners to assess the current directives on Parental Leave, Fixed-term and Part-time work to see if they can be updated. A public consultation will be also be carried out. In addition, the Women on Boards Directive should be adopted in 2016.

This issue of measures to better address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents has been discussed in Committee as part of its legislative scrutiny of the Work and Families Act.

The Committee continues to monitor this issue and request updates from the Department.

Labour Mobility Package.

This initiative consists of: A Communication on labour mobility : This will be designed to support mobility across the EU; A targeted revision of the Directive on the posting of workers : The Posting of Workers Directive (Directive 96/71/EC) covers a wide range of issues such as maximum work periods and minimum rest periods, minimum paid annual leave, minimum rates of pay, and equal treatment between men and women; and, The revision of Regulations on social security coordination: Based on previous CWP data, the purpose of the initiative is to increase the chances of jobseekers to reintegrate in the labour market and ensure that mobility does not have a negative impact on their social security rights, namely long-term care and unemployment guarantee.

The proposal appears to still be at an early stage of the development.

This issue has been a Committee priority since 2014 and it has wrote to the Department for further information.

The Committee continues to monitor this issue and request updates from the Department.

Other EU activity planned for 2016

Until the end of the mandate the Committee for Employment and Learning will continue with its EC scrutiny in 2016, which will include briefings on the European Social Fund, ESF 2014-2020 and Horizon 2020.

The Committee will consider any European Union Memorandum's identified by Assembly Research and Information Service as relevant to the Committee and consult with the Department on what action it will be taking in relation to these.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY ON 2015 EUROPEAN PRIORITIES

Promoting integration and employability in the Labour Market.

A package of measures to support Member States in getting people, especially the longer term unemployed and younger people, into work and developing a skilled workforce. This will include measures to follow up on the implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative, a proposal for a Council Recommendation on integration of the long-term unemployed, as well as measures to promote skills development.

It must be noted that the support provided under the Youth Employment Initiative is not applicable to NI as the NI youth unemployment rate is below 25%.

The UK Government has stated in regards the proposal that: it is for individual Member States "to decide on their own policy direction to meet individual countries' skills needs".

The Committee asked the researcher to provide the Committee with further information on whether Northern Ireland is a NUT 2 or NUT 3 region and what regions of the UK can avail of the Youth Employment Initiative funding.

Labour Mobility Package

See the Committee's current priorities for 2016

The Committee received updates from the Department on the issues.

Mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy

Improved and updated Europe 2020 strategy, drawing lessons from the first four years of the strategy and ensuring it acts as an effective post-crisis strategy for growth and jobs in Europe.

The proposal appears to still be at an early stage of the development.

The Committee wrote to the Department seeking further information on this issue and highlighting the possible job opportunities for Northern Ireland if the Department can ensure that the right skills are available in the local labour market.

Trade and Investment strategy for Jobs and Growth

This initiative involves a comprehensive review of the EU's trade policy strategy, and in particular its contribution to jobs, growth and investment. The review will cover all aspects of trade policy, including bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral negotiations as well as autonomous measures. It will include policy orientations in all these areas for the next five years.

The proposal appears to still be at an early stage of the development.

The Committee received updates from the Department on the issues.

European Agenda on Migration

The European Agenda on Migration is intended to develop a new approach on legal migration to make the EU an attractive destination for talents and skills, as well as to improve the management of migration by intensifying cooperation with third countries, fostering burden sharing and solidarity and fighting against regular migration and smuggling. The agenda includes a review of the Blue Card Directive, the EU-wide work permit for highly skilled workers.

The Committee received updates from the Department on the issues.

Recast and Merger of three Directives in the area of Information and Consultation of Workers.

This is the recast and merger of three Directives following a fitness check (a check to ensure Regulations remain fit for purpose) published in July 2013 in order to address some of the issues raised by a Commission Staff Working Document (and improve the operation of the Directives).

The three Directives are:

- Directive 98/59/EC on collective redundancies;
- Directive 2001/23/EC on transfers of undertakings; and
- Directive 2002/14/EC establishing a general framework relating to information and consultation of workers in the EC.

The Committee received updates from the Department on the issues.