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Lear

Assessment of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages - Application of the Charter in the United Kingdom – 4th Monitoring Report

- a) **Report of the Committee of Experts on the
Charter**

- b) **Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers
of the Council of Europe on the application of the
Charter by the United Kingdom**

September 2014

FOREWORD

The Council of Europe published a report in January 2014 on the findings of the Committee of Experts on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the application of the Charter.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is an international convention designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages. The Charter came into force in the north of Ireland in 2001. It provides a set of objectives and principles which apply to Irish and Ulster-Scots (Part II of the Charter). Additionally, it contains detailed undertakings to support Irish (Part III of the Charter), particularly in the area of education provision. Its overriding purpose is to protect and promote regional or minority languages as a threatened aspect of Europe's cultural heritage. A copy of the full Report can be accessed via the following link:

http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/language-cultural-diversity-r08/european_charter.htm

My Department is committed to meeting its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and has considered the recently published Council of Europe report. The purpose of this document is to outline the action undertaken by my officials on how the Department meets its obligations under the Charter.

JOHN O'DOWD, MLA
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

Introduction

The Department of Education (DE) has obligations under Part II (Article 7) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and those articles of Part III (Articles 8 and 10) for which DE has either a specific responsibility or a collective responsibility with other Departments.

The chapters of the report, relating to the work of DE, are shown on the following pages (in bold italics) along with DE's responses as to what actions it has taken to meet its obligations under the Charter. A number of paragraphs and sub-paragraphs highlighted in bold underlining are those obligations chosen by the UK Government.

If you require further information or wish to comment on this document please email Private.Office@deni.gov.uk

Chapter 3: The Committee of Experts' evaluation in respect of Parts II and III of the Charter

3.1. Evaluation in respect of Part II of the Charter

Article 7 - Objectives and principles

Paragraph 1

In respect of regional or minority languages, within the territories in which such languages are used and according to the situation of each language, the Parties shall base their policies, legislation and practice on the following objectives and principles:

c. the need for resolute action to promote regional or minority languages in order to safeguard them;

Paragraph Number 39

Ulster Scots

As well as the strategy mentioned at paragraph 35 above, there have been positive developments for Ulster Scots. During the on-the-spot visit, the Committee of Experts was impressed by the work done by Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch (Ulster-Scots Agency) to broaden the acceptance and the use of Ulster-Scots in everyday life. The NGO representatives flagged the need for qualified teachers in order to be able to revitalise Ulster-Scots within mainstream society in Northern Ireland.

DE Response:

Under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages DE is obliged to provide appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots at all appropriate stages. This has been effected by structuring the revised curriculum to facilitate teachers and schools. DE has provided funding for the production of Irish-Medium and Ulster-Scots resource materials for teachers/schools.

DE has also been presented with a report entitled "Languages for the Future – NI Languages Strategy" which contains recommendations on the teaching of Irish and Ulster-Scots and is considering available resources to decide how best to take forward the report's recommendations relating to education.

3.2. Evaluation in respect of Part III of the Charter

The paragraphs and sub-paragraphs that are highlighted in bold underlining are the obligations chosen by the UK.

3.2.3. The Irish language

Article 8 – Education

Preliminary Comment

Paragraph Number 206, 207, 208

In the third evaluation report, the Committee of Experts was encouraged by the positive approach of the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to the recommendations made in its review of Irish-Medium education. The Committee of Experts hoped that the result will be a coherent strategy for education in Irish, across all stages of education and positive measures to implement it.

The fourth periodical report does not contain any information in this respect.

During the on-the-spot visit, representatives of the speakers said that the Review was welcomed by many in the Irish-speaking community as an opportunity, however limited, to meet some of the needs of the Irish-Medium education sector. Nevertheless, it was a matter of concern to the speakers that issues raised in the review had not been addressed on a systematic basis in the intervening period.

DE Response:

The purpose of the review was to ensure that Irish-Medium Education is fully and appropriately supported as an integral part of the education system and contributes to the building of a shared future for all of our citizens based on equality.

The vast majority of the recommendations contained in the Review have been fully or substantially implemented. The current position is that of the 24 Recommendations, 15 have been implemented, with a further seven showing substantial progress.

Only two recommendations have not made significant progress. These relate to the development of Irish-Medium Primary Education through a Federation Model. As time has progressed, educators have been able to develop and share best practice across Irish-Medium primary provision through structures less formal than a Federation Model as originally envisaged in the Review. This approach is proving successful in terms of the purpose of the Review to create and maintain sustainable Irish-Medium Primary Education.

The ongoing implementation of the recommendations continues to contribute significantly to the vibrancy and success of the Irish-Medium sector at pre-school, primary and post-primary stages.

Paragraph 1

With regard to education, the Parties undertake, within the territory in which such languages are used, according to the situation of each of these languages, and without prejudice to the teaching of the official language(s) of the State:"

Pre-school education

a i to make available pre-school education in the relevant regional or minority languages; or

ii to make available a substantial part of pre-school education in the relevant regional or minority languages; or

iii to apply one of the measures provided for under i and ii above at least to those pupils whose families so request and whose number is considered sufficient;

Paragraph Number 209, 210, 211

In the third evaluation report, the Committee of Experts considered the undertaking partly fulfilled and encouraged the authorities to make efforts to improve the provision of Irish-Medium pre-school education.

The fourth periodical report does not contain any information concerning this undertaking. During the on-the-spot visit representatives of the Irish speakers drew attention to an instance when the establishment of an Irish-Medium pre-school had been refused because there were places available in English Medium pre-schools.

As a result, the Committee of Experts considers that the obstacles hampering an adequate offer of Irish-Medium pre-school education remain and that the undertaking is only partly fulfilled.

DE Response:

Recommendation 2 of the review of Irish-Medium Education is as follows:

The existing policy on funded pre-school provision should be revised in light of the unique combination of the obligations arising from the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the recognised benefits of pre-school education and the statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium Education, to allow registered, Irish-Medium providers with sufficient children to enter the existing funding programme even where unfilled English-Medium provision is available in the area.

This recommendation was accepted by the previous Minister for Education and has been implemented fully in the consideration of development proposals relating to Irish-Medium pre-school provision since 2009.

In 1998 there were 192 funded Irish-Medium pre-school places, all of which were either in the voluntary or private sectors. At the time of the publication of the Review of Irish-Medium Education in 2009, this number had risen to 558, 123 of which were in the statutory sector.

Since 2009, 9 Irish-Medium nursery units have been approved. The number of children attending Irish-Medium statutory pre-school provision has increased from 122 in 2008/09 to 338 in 2013/14. The latest figures for 2013/14 indicate that 805 children attend funded Irish-Medium pre-school provision, 338 of which were in the statutory sector. DE is unaware of the location of the pre-school referred to in Paragraph 210 above. This was anecdotal evidence gathered by the Committee of Experts.

Through the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) DE is part-funding an Irish-Medium Education Early Years Specialist post in Altram to provide specialist support to the Irish-Medium Sector in Sure Start and in the wider early years sector to address:

- issues regarding barriers to accessibility in relation to the Developmental Programme for 2-3 year olds; and
- the quality of service within the wider range of early years programmes.

In the development of the Sure Start Programme for 2-3 year olds, specific mention was made that projects should facilitate Irish-Medium where possible. Several sessions of the Programme for 2-3 year olds are now facilitated through the medium of Irish. In 2013/14, the final year of the agreed three year funding, DE contributed £22,000, which is half of the funding for the post with the rest provided by the HSCB through the Early Years Development Fund.

DE is currently working with Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and Altram to take forward a research project on the educational outcomes of pre-school Irish-Medium Education as outlined in the Review of Irish-Medium Education and included as an action in the Learning to Learn framework. It is envisaged that the project will be completed in the summer of 2014.

DE is also implementing a further action in Learning to Learn that will create a number of pilot Early Years Education Support Clusters to raise standards by making greater use of the teaching expertise in nursery schools and units, special schools, expertise across other relevant providers and early years specialists. One of the clusters is intended to be Irish-Medium specific.

In 2009/10 and 2010/11 DE funded the development and implementation of the 'Certificate in Irish Immersion Education: Early Years', led by Altram. This training course for Irish-Medium early years practitioners aims to enhance their linguistic competency and understanding of materials and environments to deliver appropriately to children learning a second language in an immersion setting. This certificate course is accredited by the University of Ulster. Course materials and a leader's handbook were also funded under the DE grant.

Primary education

***b i to make available primary education in the relevant regional or minority languages; or
ii to make available a substantial part of primary education in the relevant regional or minority languages; or
iii to provide, within primary education, for the teaching of the relevant regional or minority languages as an integral part of the curriculum; or
iv to apply one of the measures provided for under i to iii above at least to those pupils whose families so request and whose number is considered sufficient;***

Paragraph Number 212

In the third evaluation report, the Committee of Experts considered that the undertaking was fulfilled, but that there was a need to plan strategically for the projected growth in demand, and in many cases to take urgent action to improve the infrastructure, including the allocation of funds and the development of special educational needs provision for Irish-Medium primary education.

DE Response:

To fulfil its commitment to facilitate and encourage and in order to plan strategically for the projected growth in demand, since 2009 DE has spent £8m in relation to capital investment in Irish-Medium Education. In addition, new school projects in the Irish-Medium sector which the Minister announced on 25 June 2012, Coláiste Feirste (free standing post primary Irish-Medium School - estimated cost £11.9m) and on 22 January 2013, Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin (free standing Irish-Medium primary – estimated cost £3.8m). A further two Irish-Medium projects were included in the Minister's announcement. In addition, since its inception in 2010, over £1.5m of the allocation in the Accommodation Fund has been used to assist in the provision of accommodation for Irish-Medium primary schools which have not yet been vested into the schools estate and which are therefore not eligible for capital investment.

DE remains committed to working with the Irish-Medium sector to improve the standard of special educational needs provision to enable every young person to fulfil their potential at every stage of their development.

DE funding, totalling £525k, has been provided in the last four years (2010/11 – 2013/14) to support work on strengthening special educational needs identification, assessment and provision in Irish-Medium schools.

Many positive outcomes have arisen from this work including:

- Developing the confidence and knowledge of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and teachers in the Irish-Medium sector in relation to the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of special educational needs through SENCO and teacher training programmes;

- Developing the confidence and knowledge of principals and senior management in the Irish-Medium sector in relation to the Code of Practice through training for principals and senior management;
- Developing confidence and knowledge of principals and teachers in the Irish-Medium sector in relation to working with children with special educational needs, in the specific context of immersion education, through development of an Irish-Medium special educational needs Resource File;
- Developing curricular and assessment tools (in Irish), relating to numeracy and literacy, for the Irish-Medium sector to support early identification and intervention for children with special educational needs and monitoring of pupils progress;
- Identifying areas of good practice regarding special educational needs in the Irish-Medium sector through the production of case studies and dissemination to the Irish-Medium sector;
- Publishing an Ulster-Irish edition of Progress in Maths for each Irish-Medium school.

There is also evidence from school inspections that the special educational needs capacity building programme has led to notable improvement in the Irish-Medium sector, including an increased awareness around special educational needs issues and enhanced knowledge among practitioners and SENCOs.

Furthermore, the latest Chief Inspector's Report (2010-2012) refers specifically to Irish-Medium SENCOs sharing good practice, including more effective approaches to early identification and interventions.

Paragraph Number 213

No information has been provided by the authorities in the fourth periodical report. The representatives of the speakers drew attention to the fact that in their view the developments required to promote Irish-Medium education under the 2009 review had not been implemented and there was still a need for proper resources, training and funding.

DE Response:

The majority of the recommendations in the 2009 review relating to proper resourcing, training and funding have been implemented. The ongoing implementation of the 2009 review continues to contribute significantly to the vibrancy and success of the Irish-Medium Sector at primary stage. This is evidenced in the NI School Census statistics. In 2008/09 there were 2,729 children in the Irish-Medium Primary sector and by 2012/13 this had grown by 12% to 3,055. Figures for 2013/14 show that growth is accelerating and stands at 3,256 or 19% above the 2008/09 Irish-Medium Education primary school numbers.

DE ensured the provision of an Irish version of the statutory computer-based diagnostic assessment tools in mathematics and also the development of bespoke tools for the diagnostic assessment of literacy in Irish.

The purpose of the Review is to ensure that Irish-Medium Education is fully and appropriately supported as an integral part of the education system and contributes to the building of a shared future for all of our citizens based on equality.

The vast majority of the recommendations contained in the Review have been fully or substantially implemented. The current position is that of the 24 Recommendations, 15 have been implemented, with a further seven showing substantial progress.

Only two recommendations have not made significant progress. These relate to the development of Irish-Medium Primary Education through a Federation Model. As time has progressed, educators have been able to develop and share best practice across Irish-Medium primary provision through structures less formal than a Federation Model as originally envisaged in the Review. This approach is proving successful in terms of the purpose of the Review to create and maintain sustainable Irish-Medium Primary Education.

The ongoing implementation of the recommendations continues to contribute significantly to the vibrancy and success of the Irish-Medium sector at pre-school, primary and post-primary stages.

Paragraph Number 214

In light of the lack of information from the authorities and the critical remarks from the representatives of the speakers, the Committee of Experts is not in a position to conclude on the fulfilment of this undertaking. It urges the authorities to take concrete steps so that the growth in demand can be met and to report on the situation in the next periodical report.

DE Response:

The majority of the recommendations in the 2009 review relating to proper resourcing, training and funding have been implemented. The ongoing implementation of the 2009 review continues to contribute significantly to the vibrancy and success of the Irish-Medium sector at primary stage. This is evidenced in the NI School Census statistics. In 2008/09 there were 2,729 children in the Irish-Medium Primary Sector and by 2012/13 this had grown by 12% to 3,055. Figures for 2013/14 show that growth is accelerating and stands at 3,256, or 19% above the 2008/09 Irish-Medium education primary school numbers. These are the highest growth figures for any sector in the north of Ireland. The evidence of the School Census shows that Irish-Medium Primary Education is now in a much stronger position than at the time of the third evaluation report when the Committee of Experts considered that the undertaking was fulfilled.

Secondary education

c i to make available secondary education in the relevant regional or minority languages; or
ii to make available a substantial part of secondary education in the relevant regional or minority languages; or

***iii to provide, within secondary education, for the teaching of the relevant regional or minority languages as an integral part of the curriculum; or
iv to apply one of the measures provided for under i to iii above at least to those pupils who, or where appropriate whose families, so wish in a number considered sufficient;***

Paragraph Number 215

In the third evaluation report, the Committee of Experts considered the undertaking partly fulfilled, in light of the fact that there was in some cases insufficient provision to meet the demand.

DE Comments:

The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) continues to seek Irish-Medium examiners / markers but it has proved challenging to find personnel with sufficient expertise in Irish.

Officials continue to liaise with their counterparts in the south on this matter. The Minister has sought the support of the Minister for Education and Skills in the south for joint working between CCEA and the State Examinations Commission (SEC). CCEA also continues to work with the State Examinations Commission in the south on the recruitment and retention of Irish-Medium examiners. In addition CCEA has engaged with 4th year students completing an Irish-Medium teaching degree to pre-register details as examiners. A recruitment campaign is in progress for the summer 2014 series of examinations.

The Minister for Education acknowledges that there is currently a gap in the strategic development of post-primary Irish-Medium provision in the north.

In order to bridge this gap, the Minister for Education established an Advisory Group to consider the issue and advise him on options for the way forward. The Minister has tasked the Advisory Group to look in detail at how to deliver viable and sustainable Irish-Medium post-primary education that is high quality, meets the needs of the pupils and commands the confidence of parents. The Group submitted its final report and recommendations to the Minister on 28th April 2014.

The Minister for Education attended the inaugural meeting of the Group and since then, the Group has met on 14 occasions. The Group has also had extensive meetings with key stakeholders including parents and School representatives.

An independent review of the Common Funding Scheme which determines how funds are allocated to schools was completed in 2013. Following a public consultation, the Minister for Education decided to make a number of changes to the Scheme. These include an increase in the Irish-Medium Curricular Support factor for Post-Primary schools and Units from 0.014 to 0.2 of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit cash value with effect from the 2014-15 financial year.

During the consultation process, points were made about the need for an increase in support to assist Irish-Medium Post-Primary schools and Units in delivering the Curriculum.

DE's curriculum policy at post primary level is underpinned by the Entitlement Framework (EF), promoting a multiplicity of pathways to further study, training or employment by enabling pupils to access a broad range of subjects within an area learning community. The EF does not have the potential to serve pupils in Irish-Medium settings as effectively as those in English-Medium settings and, consequently, Irish-Medium Post-Primary schools face a greater challenge in delivering a wide range of courses. There is not sufficient funding available to supply teachers with the teaching materials required to teach the curriculum.

In recognition that these schools face a multifaceted challenge, the Minister decided that, whilst all other Irish-Medium support factors are to remain as they currently are, the curricular support for Irish-Medium post primary will increase to assist units in meeting the needs of their pupils.

Paragraph Number 216

No information was provided by the authorities in the fourth periodical report. During the on-the-spot visit the Irish language organisations expressed concerns that within the Department of Education there was a reluctance to facilitate and encourage Irish-Medium education, especially at secondary level, in a way which might lead to the creation of more free-standing Irish-Medium schools.

DE Response:

The ongoing implementation of the 2009 review continues to contribute significantly to the vibrancy and success of the Irish-Medium sector at post primary stage. This is evidenced in the NI School census statistics. In 2008/09 there were 645 pupils in the Irish-Medium Post Primary sector and by 2012/13 this had grown by 19% to 769. Figures for 2013/14 show that growth is accelerating and stands at 831 or 29% above the 2008/09 Irish-Medium Education post primary school numbers. The large bulk of the increase relates to post primary Irish-Medium Education Units for which pupil numbers rose from 132 in 2008/09 to 228 in the 2012/13 census and 267 in the figures for the 2013/14 census. The evidence of the school census is consistent with the DE discharging its duty to facilitate and encourage Irish-Medium Education and responding to parental choice.

To fulfil its commitment to facilitate and encourage and in order to strategically plan for the projected growth in demand, since 2009 DE has spent £8M in relation to capital investment in Irish-Medium Education. In addition new school projects in the Irish-Medium sector which the Minister announced on 25 June 2012 Coláiste Feirste (free standing post primary Irish-Medium School - estimated cost £11.9m) and on 22 January 2013, Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin (free standing Irish-Medium primary – estimated cost £3.8m). A further two Irish-Medium projects were included in the Minister's announcement.

The purpose of the review was to ensure that Irish-Medium Education is fully and appropriately supported as an integral part of the education system and contributes to the building of a shared future for all of our citizens based on equality.

The vast majority of the recommendations contained in the Review have been fully or substantially implemented. The current position is that of the 24 Recommendations, 15 have been implemented, with a further seven showing substantial progress.

Only two recommendations have not made significant progress. These relate to the development of Irish-Medium Primary Education through a Federation Model. As time has progressed, educators have been able to develop and share best practice across Irish-Medium primary provision through structures less formal than a Federation Model as originally envisaged in the Review. This approach is proving successful in terms of the purpose of the Review to create and maintain sustainable Irish-Medium Primary Education.

The ongoing implementation of the recommendations continues to contribute significantly to the vibrancy and success of the Irish-Medium Sector at pre-school, primary and post-primary stages. The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) continues to seek Irish-Medium examiners / markers but it has proved challenging to find personnel with sufficient expertise in Irish.

Officials continue to liaise with their counterparts in the south on this matter. The Minister has sought the support of the Minister for Education and Skills in the south for joint working between CCEA and the State Examinations Commission (SEC). CCEA has engaged with 4th year students completing an Irish-Medium teaching degree to pre-register details as examiners. A recruitment campaign is in progress for the summer 2014 series of examinations.

The Minister for Education acknowledges that there is currently a gap in the strategic development of post-primary Irish-Medium provision in the north.

In order to bridge this gap, the Minister for Education established an Advisory Group to consider the issue and advise him on options for the way forward. The Minister tasked the Advisory Group to look in detail at how to deliver viable and sustainable Irish-Medium post-primary education that is high quality, meets the needs of the pupils and commands the confidence of parents. The Group submitted its final report and recommendations to the Minister on 28th April 2014.

The Minister for Education attended the inaugural meeting of the Group and since then, the Group has met on 14 occasions. The Group has also had extensive meetings with key stakeholders including parents and School representatives.

Paragraph Number 217

Furthermore, the Irish language organisations confirmed the lack of adequate teaching materials and the shortage of qualified teachers as a recurring challenge to be met by the authorities and the relevant NGOs.

DE Response:

In setting the initial intake figures for the Higher Education Institutions for 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years DE determined that 46 teacher training places must be set aside for the Irish-Medium sector.

8 of these places are in the Post-Primary PGCE Courses (4 at QUB and 4 at the UU). The remaining 38 are in the Primary BEd (18) and Primary PGCE (20) both of which are delivered by SMUC.

While the overall ITE intake figures have been reduced by 32% since 2005/06 intakes for the Irish-Medium sector have increased by 109%, since 2007/08.

Every year DE undertakes a teacher vacancy return to help inform demand for teachers. The return seeks information on the number of vacancies filled at a set date in November each year, and also provides detail on those vacancies still to be filled. Across the north there was only 1 outstanding permanent teaching post to be filled in the Irish-Medium Sector at November 2013. This was a Principal post in the primary sector.

CCEA has a comprehensive and ongoing Irish-Medium support programme in place which produces educational resources for teachers and pupils.

Under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages DE is obliged to provide appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots at all appropriate stages. This has been effected by structuring the revised curriculum to facilitate teachers and schools. DE has provided funding for the production of Irish-Medium and Ulster-Scots resource materials for teachers/schools.

DE has also been presented with a report entitled "Languages for the Future – NI Languages Strategy" which contains recommendations on the teaching of Irish and Ulster-Scots. DE is considering available resources to decide how best to take forward the report's recommendations relating to education.

Paragraph Number 218

The Committee of Experts also received information about the successful judicial review case relating to transport to the Irish-Medium secondary school Coláiste Feirste, brought against the Department of Education which had refused to provide free school transport. Despite winning the case, however, Coláiste Feirste still suffers from lack of free school transport.

DE Response:

Any pupil attending Coláiste Feirste who was eligible under DE's school transport policy has been provided with assistance for transport. The pupils referred to in the case reviewed by the High Court had been transported to the school by bus prior to the case being heard and the cost was borne by their Education and Library Board.

Eligible pupils under the legislation are not necessarily entitled to “free school transport” but are provided with assistance for transport. Assistance may take the form of a seat on a bus or other vehicle, but can mean that a monetary allowance is provided in lieu of transport. Additionally, parents of eligible pupils may be required to contribute to their child’s journey up to, but not exceeding, the relevant distance criterion. Currently, all eligible pupils attending Coláiste Feirste attract assistance with transport – the majority travel by buses funded by DE through the Education and Library Boards.

Paragraph Number 219

The Committee of Experts concludes that the undertaking remains partly fulfilled and encourages the authorities to strengthen the position of Irish-Medium secondary education including providing free school transport.

DE Response:

In its response to the reconsideration of the High Court judgement DE introduced an enhanced package of measures from the 1 September 2013 for those living at distance from the school, including designated transport on three routes. This is for a trial period of two years. All other eligible Irish-Medium pupils continue to receive assistance with transport in line with DE Circular 1996/41, with those living at distance and not on a transport route, receiving enhanced support specific to the Irish-Medium sector.

Additionally an Independent Review of the Home to School Transport scheme, the first for 17 years, commenced in December 2013 and is due to report its findings around September 2014. Transport to Irish-Medium schools is specifically mentioned in the Terms of Reference and will be considered within this Review.

The Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) continues to seek Irish-Medium examiners / markers but it has proved challenging to find personnel with sufficient expertise in Irish.

Officials continue to liaise with their counterparts in the south on this matter. The Minister has sought the support of the Minister for Education and Skills in the south for joint working between CCEA and the State Examinations Commission (SEC). CCEA has engaged with 4th year students completing an Irish-Medium teaching degree to pre-register details as examiners. A recruitment campaign is in progress for the summer 2014 series of examinations.

The Minister for Education acknowledges that there is currently a gap in the strategic development of post-primary Irish-Medium provision in the north.

In order to bridge this gap, the Minister for Education established an Advisory Group to consider the issue and advise him on options for the way forward. The Minister tasked the Advisory Group to look in detail at how to deliver viable and sustainable Irish-Medium post-primary education that is high quality, meets the needs of the pupils and commands the confidence of parents. The Group submitted its final

report and recommendations to the Minister on 28th April 2014.

The Minister for Education attended the inaugural meeting of the Group and since then, the Group has met on 14 occasions. The Group has also had extensive meetings with key stakeholders including parents and School representatives.

Basic and further training of teachers

h. to provide the basic and further training of the teachers required to implement those of paragraphs a to g accepted by the Party;

Paragraph Number 220, 221, 222

In the third evaluation report, the Committee of Experts considered the undertaking partly fulfilled and encouraged the authorities to secure a supply of teachers to meet the demand for Irish-Medium education.

During the on-the-spot visit the Irish language organisations brought to the attention of the Committee of Experts the information that the need for teacher training remains a matter of concern especially at secondary level. In addition, many schools have reported a reduction of the number of teachers dedicated to the teaching of Irish in their schools.

The Committee of Experts concludes that the undertaking remains partly fulfilled. It encourages the authorities to strengthen their efforts to overcome the shortage of teachers for specialist subjects in secondary education.

DE Response:

In setting the initial intake figures for the Higher Education Institutions for 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years DE determined that 46 teacher training places must be set aside for the Irish-Medium sector.

8 of these places are in the Post-Primary PGCE Courses (4 at QUB and 4 at the UU). The remaining 38 are in the Primary BEd (18) and Primary PGCE (20) both of which are delivered by SMUC.

While the overall ITE intake figures have been reduced by 32% since 2005/06 intakes for the Irish-Medium sector have increased by 109%, since 2007/08.

Every year DE undertakes a teacher vacancy return to help inform demand for teachers. The return seeks information on the number of vacancies filled at a set date in November each year, and also provides detail on those vacancies still to be filled. Across the north there was only 1 outstanding permanent teaching post to be filled in the Irish-Medium Sector at November 2013. This was a Principal post in the primary sector.

CCEA has a comprehensive and ongoing Irish-Medium support programme in place which produces educational resources for teachers and pupils.

Under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages DE is obliged to provide appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots at all appropriate stages. This has been effected by structuring the revised curriculum to facilitate teachers and schools. DE has provided funding for the production of Irish-Medium and Ulster-Scots resource materials for teachers/schools.

DE has also been presented with a report entitled "Languages for the Future – NI Languages Strategy" which contains recommendations on the teaching of Irish and Ulster-Scots. DE is considering available resources to decide how best to take forward the report's recommendations relating to education.

Article 10 - Administrative authorities and public services

Paragraph 1

Within the administrative districts of the State in which the number of residents who are users of regional or minority languages justifies the measures specified below and according to the situation of each language, the Parties undertake, as far as this is reasonably possible:

a. ...

iv. to ensure that users of regional or minority languages may submit oral or written applications in these languages; or

Paragraph Number 226, 227, 228

In the third evaluation report the Committee of Experts considered that the undertaking was partly fulfilled.

No information was provided in the fourth periodical report. According to the comprehensive information provided by the representatives of the Irish speakers to the Committee of Experts, written communication with government departments in Irish receives replies. It does not appear, however, that a systematic approach to handling oral applications in Irish has been introduced across the Northern Ireland administration, and consequently in most cases even the minimum standards required by the Code of Courtesy on the use of Irish and Ulster Scots (see paragraph 354 of the third evaluation report) are not met.

The Committee of Experts nevertheless concludes that the undertaking remains partly fulfilled.

DE Response:

DE facilitates customers who wish to conduct their business in Irish either orally or in writing.

A copy of Charter guidance is available to all staff in DE and staff are regularly reminded of their obligations under the Charter.

DE published a Language policy for Irish and associated staff guidance in 2009. The policy document sets out the administrative services that DE currently offers in Irish and informs those who wish to use Irish how they may communicate with DE through the Irish language. The policy document and guidelines have been circulated to staff and are published on the DE web-site.

DE staff are currently working on an update to this policy which is likely to be published later this year.

c. to allow the administrative authorities to draft documents in a regional or minority language.

Paragraph Number 229, 230, 231

In the third evaluation report, the Committee of Experts revised its previous conclusions and considered the undertaking partly fulfilled because it had been told by representatives of Northern Ireland departments that an increased number and variety of forms were available, but it remained a matter of ministerial discretion as to how much use was made of Irish by individual departments.

No information has been made available in the fourth periodical report. Representatives of certain local authorities reported during the on-the-spot visit on their regular use of Irish. Representatives of the speakers nevertheless drew the Committee's attention to the continued patchy use of Irish pursuant to this undertaking.

The Committee of Experts concludes that the undertaking remains partly fulfilled.

DE Response:

It is DE's policy that all consultation documents, including response forms, are published bilingually in Irish and English and are included on the DE web-site. Press Releases are issued in English and Irish for events relating to Irish language issues or Irish-Medium Education and are also available on the DE web-site. The DE Business Plan is available in Irish as well as English and is published in both languages on the DE web-site. DE proactively produces translations of other documents where they are likely to be of particular relevance, likely to be read and used generally, or likely to promote the maintenance and safeguarding of the Irish language.

Chapter 4 Findings of the Committee of Experts in the fourth monitoring cycle

G. Regarding the situation of Irish, many of the difficulties detected in the last monitoring round persist. The Committee's work has been hampered by a lack of information from the authorities, but it seems that even in the field of education, little has been done to implement the recommendations of the review of Irish-medium education referred to in the previous monitoring round.

In the field of administration, the provision as a whole appears unsatisfactory and difficult to assess due to the lack of information provided. There are problems related to the use of Irish in the Northern Ireland Assembly. In media, while the funding of the Irish Language Broadcasting Fund remains uncertain, the collaboration with TG4 has led to a considerable improvement in the availability of Irish language television broadcasting in Northern Ireland. Regulatory complications continue to hamper the wider availability of Irish-language radio broadcasting. In Northern Ireland no Irish language newspaper is published.

DE Response:

The purpose of the review was to ensure that Irish-Medium Education is fully and appropriately supported as an integral part of the education system and contributes to the building of a shared future for all of our citizens based on equality.

The vast majority of the recommendations contained in the Review have been fully or substantially implemented. The current position is that of the 24 Recommendations, 15 have been implemented, with a further seven showing substantial progress.

Only two recommendations have not made significant progress. These relate to the development of Irish-Medium Primary Education through a Federation Model. As time has progressed, educators have been able to develop and share best practice across Irish-Medium primary provision through structures less formal than a Federation Model as originally envisaged in the Review. This approach is proving successful in terms of the purpose of the Review to create and maintain sustainable Irish-Medium Primary Education.

The ongoing implementation of the recommendations continues to contribute significantly to the vibrancy and success of the Irish-Medium sector at pre-school, primary and post-primary stages.

An independent review of the Common Funding Scheme which determines how funds are allocated to schools was completed in 2013. Following a public consultation, the Minister for Education decided to make a number of changes to the Scheme. These include an increase in the Irish-Medium Curricular Support factor for Post-Primary schools and Units from 0.014 to 0.2 of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit cash value with effect from the 2014-15 financial year.

During the consultation process, points were made about the need for an increase in support to assist Irish-Medium Post-Primary schools and Units in delivering the Curriculum.

DE's curriculum policy at post primary level is underpinned by the Entitlement framework (EF), promoting a multiplicity of pathways to further study, training or employment by enabling pupils to access a broad range of subjects within an area learning community. The EF does not have the potential to serve pupils in Irish-Medium settings as effectively as those in English-Medium settings and, consequently, Irish-Medium Post Primary schools face a greater challenge in

delivering a wide range of courses. There is not sufficient funding available to supply teachers with the teaching materials required to teach the curriculum.

In recognition that these schools face a multifaceted challenge, the Minister decided that, whilst all other Irish-Medium support factors are to remain as they currently are, the curricular support for Irish-Medium post-primary will increase to assist units in meeting the needs of their pupils.

1. Ulster Scots still remains absent from public life. However, the Ulster-Scots Agency undertook measures to broaden the acceptance and the use of Ulster-Scots in everyday life. There is a need for qualified teachers in order to be able to revitalise Ulster-Scots within mainstream society. A new Ulster-Scots Broadcasting Fund was established in 2010.

DE Response:

Under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages DE is obliged to provide appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of the Irish language and Ulster-Scots at all appropriate stages. This has been effected by structuring the revised curriculum to facilitate teachers and schools. DE has provided funding for the production of Irish-Medium and Ulster-Scots resource materials for teachers/schools.

DE has also been presented with a report entitled "Languages for the Future – NI Languages Strategy" which contains recommendations on the teaching of Irish and Ulster-Scots. DE is considering available resources to decide how best to take forward the report's recommendations relating to education.

B. Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the application of the Charter by the United Kingdom

4. strengthen its support for the work done by the Ulster Scots Agency and take measures to establish the teaching of Ulster Scots;

DE Response:

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DE has also been presented with a report entitled "Languages for the Future – NI Languages Strategy" which contains recommendations on the teaching of Irish and Ulster-Scots. DE is considering available resources to decide how best to take forward the report's recommendations relating to education.