



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Research Paper

30th August 2016

Caroline Perry

Programme for Government: Education

NIAR 209-16

This research paper considers the Department of Education's role in the current and previous Programmes for Government (PfG). It discusses the extent to which the Department met its commitments for the 2011-15 PfG, and considers the indicators and measures in the draft PfG for 2016-21.

Paper 45/16

August 2016

Research and Information Service briefings are compiled for the benefit of MLAs and their support staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public. We do, however, welcome written evidence that relates to our papers and this should be sent to the Research and Information Service, Northern Ireland Assembly, Room 139, Parliament Buildings, Belfast BT4 3XX or e-mailed to RLS@niassembly.gov.uk

Executive Summary

Introduction

This research paper considers the Department of Education's (the Department's) role in the current and previous Programmes for Government (PfG). It discusses the extent to which the Department met its commitments for the 2011-15 PfG, and considers the indicators and measures set out in the draft PfG 2016-21.

Programme for Government 2011-2015

The Department had eight key commitments within the 2011-15 PfG, and each commitment included annual milestones or outputs. Table 1 below discusses the extent to which the Department achieved its commitments on achievement and pre-school. Subsequently, Table 2 considers the remaining commitments on shared education.¹

Table 1: PfG commitments 2011-15 on achievement and pre-school provision

Commitment	Milestones/ outputs for 2014/15	Target achieved?
Increase the overall proportion of young people who achieve at least five GCSEs at A*-C including maths and English	66% of all students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes: 66% of students achieved the measure
Increase the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve at least five GCSEs at A*-C including maths and English	49% of students with free school meal entitlement (FSME)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No: 41.3% of students with FSME achieved the measure
Improve literacy and numeracy levels among all school leavers, with additional support targeted at underachieving pupils	No specific target; refers to implementing a programme to improve literacy and numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not directly measurable Range of policies in place The Signature Programme reported positive outcomes, although the extent of value added is not clear
Ensure that at least one year of preschool education is available to every family that wants it	No specific target; refers to reviewing pre-school admissions and taking actions as necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not directly measurable In 2015/16 of eligible children, 92% had a funded pre-school place 292 applicants dropped out of the process after stage one; 16 were unplaced at the end

¹ The Executive withdrew a further commitment to establish an Education and Skills Authority

As Table 1 above shows, the Department achieved its objective to improve GCSE outcomes for pupils overall, but failed to meet its target for disadvantaged students by 7.7%. The targets on improving literacy and numeracy and pre-school were not directly measurable. However, it is notable that 8% of eligible children did not attend DE-funded pre-school, and that almost 300 applicants left the process after stage one.

In line with the overarching aim of the PfG 2011-15 of building “*a shared and better future for all*,” a number of commitments related to shared education, as illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: PfG commitments 2011-15 on shared education

Commitment	Milestones/ outputs for 2014/15	Target achieved?
Significantly progress work on the plan for the Lisanelly (now Strule) Shared Education campus	Complete procurement process and initiate first phase of construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement for phase 1 complete and construction began in 2015– further procurement ongoing
Establish a Ministerial advisory group to bring forward recommendations to advance shared education	Report due 2012/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes: report published April 2013
Ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015	To achieve the commitment’s objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 2015, 7,765 pupils (2.5% of the school population) had participated in shared activities
Substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015	To achieve the commitment’s objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on a small response rate in a departmental survey, 59% of schools in 2015 shared facilities, compared to 28% in 2013 (these figures require caution)

As Table 2 above illustrates, the Department achieved its aim of beginning construction for phase one on the Strule Shared Education Campus, although the procurement process continues for other parts of the site. In addition, the Department achieved its commitment for a ministerial advisory group on shared education.

However, evidence suggests that the Department has not achieved the commitment to ensure that all children have the opportunity to take part in shared education programmes, with only 2.5% of the school population having participated by 2015. The data on schools sharing facilities is not adequately robust to assess whether the Department succeeded in increasing this practice.

Programme for Government 2016-2021

The draft PfG for the period 2016-2021 adopts an outcomes-based approach, presenting a cultural change for the public sector. It details “*generational*” ambitions to

address societal issues, with an emphasis on effects and impacts rather than on programme delivery. However, it does not provide defined targets, which could present challenges for accountability and transparency.

The Department will play an important role in working to deliver Outcome 14: “*we give our children and young people the best start in life.*” It has overall responsibility for four indicators, and will likely contribute to many others. Table 3 below provides a brief overview of these indicators and a number of potential issues.

Table 3: Brief overview of Department of Education indicators in the PfG 2016-21

Indicator	Measure	Examples of potential issues
Improve educational outcomes	% of school leavers achieving at level 2 or above including English and maths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited scope of the measure may not indicate value added • Concerns around the breadth of accountability measures and the extent to which they take account of all learners
Reduce educational inequality	Gap between % of school leavers and % of FSME school leavers achieving at level 2 or above including English and maths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns around the use of FSME as a proxy measure • The limited focus of the measure, with no reference to other groups facing educational inequalities (e.g. boys, Protestants and students at non-grammars)
Improve the quality of education	% of schools where provision for learning is good or better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) inspections: ETI is not statutorily independent, employs a risk-based approach, and there are concerns around its approach to assessing value added • Lack of pupil or parental input on quality
Improve child development	% of children who are at the appropriate stage of development in their immediate pre-school year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on a new 3+ Health Review to be conducted in DE-funded pre-school settings • Pre-school is not compulsory and not all children attend • Lack of baseline data to measure improvement • Lack of measures relating to the availability, quality and outcomes of pre-school education

The PfG includes a number of other indicators for which the Department does not have overall responsibility, but may contribute to. These include:

- Improving support for looked after children;
- Improving the skills population of the population;
- A number of indicators on reconciliation and respect;
- Indicators in regard to justice (the Department is now responsible for educational provision for young people in custody); and
- Increasing quality of life for people with disabilities.

Conclusion

The Department achieved some, but not all of its commitments from the previous PfG. In addition, some commitments were not directly measurable, preventing an accurate assessment of its achievements.

The new outcomes-based approach of the PfG 2016-21 may have implications for transparency and accountability. There are also a number of potential issues with many of the measures associated with PfG indicators, for example, their scope and robustness. Further areas for consideration might include:

- The failure to meet the previous PfG target on disadvantaged learners, and how the Department plans to meet the *Count Read: Succeed* target of 65% of FSME pupils achieving the measure by 2019/20;
- The value added by the Signature Programme on literacy and numeracy;
- The effectiveness of the Department's actions on shared education;
- The availability and quality of pre-school education across Northern Ireland;
- The robustness of the data collected for the PfG, for example, in relation to schools sharing facilities and the lack of baseline data for some indicators; and
- Indicators that have not been included, for example, in relation to implementation of recent legislation such as the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Contents

Executive Summary3

Contents

1 Introduction9

2 PfG 2011-15: overview9

3 PfG 2011-15: Department of Education achievements9

4 PfG 2016-21: overview 15

5 PfG indicator: improve educational outcomes..... 16

6 PfG indicator: reduce educational inequality..... 18

7 PfG indicator: improve the quality of education.....22

8 PfG indicator: improve child development.....24

9 PfG 2016-2021: other relevant indicators26

10 Conclusion30

1 Introduction

This Briefing Paper considers the previous Programme for Government (PfG) 2011-15, discussing whether the Department of Education (the Department) achieved its commitments. It also explores the draft PfG 2016-21, looking at each of the outcomes and indicators most relevant to the Department.

2 PfG 2011-15: overview

The previous PfG outlined 83 commitments with the overarching aim of building “a *shared and better future for all*.” The Department of Education had eight commitments within the PfG 2011-15, contributing to five of its priorities:²

- Growing a sustainable economy and investing in the future;
- Creating opportunities, tackling disadvantage and improving health and well-being;
- Building a strong and shared community; and
- Delivering high quality and efficient public services.

Each commitment included milestones or outputs for each year from 2012/13 to 2014/15, providing measureable outcomes for some of the commitments. Other commitments are more difficult to measure as they did not include specific targets.

3 PfG 2011-15: Department of Education achievements

This section considers each of the Department’s commitments in turn, noting whether it achieved the targets and milestones detailed within the 2011-15 PfG.

Improving GCSE outcomes

The PfG 2011-15 included a commitment to improve GCSE outcomes. This was set out in two parts: the first to improve results for all school leavers, and the second to improve performance among disadvantaged students, measured using pupil entitlement to free school meals (FSM).

The GCSE targets are taken from the Department’s literacy and numeracy strategy, *Count Read: Succeed*,³ and refer to the proportion of pupils and disadvantaged pupils achieving the threshold measure of five GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and maths.

² Northern Ireland Executive (2012) *Programme for Government 2011-15* Belfast: Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Note: the final priority was “*protecting our people, the environment and creating safer communities*”

³ Department of Education (2011) *Count, Read: Succeed* Bangor: Department of Education

Table 4 below indicates that the Department achieved its target to improve GCSE outcomes of all pupils, with 66% achieving the threshold measure in 2014/15. However, it failed to improve performance among disadvantaged students to the target level (41.3% achieved the measure, against a target of 49%). In addition, *Count Read: Succeed* sets a further, long-term, target for 2019/20, of 65%+ pupils with entitlement to FSM achieving the threshold measure.

Table 4: Commitment to improve GCSE outcomes

Commitment	Target achieved	Target milestones/ outputs 2014/15	Actual outputs 2014/15
Increase the overall proportion of young people who achieve at least five GCSEs at A*-C or equivalent, including GCSEs in maths and English, by the time they leave school.	Yes	66%	66%
Increase the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve at least five GCSEs at A*-C or equivalent, including GCSEs in maths and English	No: 7.7% gap	49%	41.3%

Improving literacy and numeracy levels

The PfG contained a commitment to “*improve literacy and numeracy levels among all school leavers, with additional support targeted at underachieving pupils.*” This commitment did not set specific targets. Instead, it stated that the Department should develop proposals to improve literacy levels in 2012/13, and implement and monitor the programme in the subsequent two years.

Policy and initiatives

The Department states that it already had a number of policies and programmes to contribute to the PfG targets, including *Count Read: Succeed; Every School a Good School*; benchmarking data; programmes such as Sure Start and Extended Schools; and programmes addressing underachievement in disadvantaged areas.⁴

Delivering Social Change Signature Programme on improving literacy and numeracy

One of the programmes aiming to target underachievement in disadvantaged areas was the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMdfM) Delivering Social Change Signature Programme on improving literacy and numeracy.

⁴ Information provided by the Department of Education, August 2016

This programme involved employing recently graduated, out of work, teachers to provide tuition for children in primary and post-primary schools who were not likely to achieve even basic educational standards. The Programme aimed to:⁵

- Increase the number of primary pupils, particularly those entitled to FSM, achieving at or above the expected level at the end of Key Stage 2 in literacy and numeracy;
- Increase the number of post-primary primary pupils, particularly those entitled to FSM, achieving at least a grade C or above in English and maths; and
- Provide employment opportunities for 230 recently graduated teachers.

Across the two years of the programme, 2013/14 and 2014/15, a total of 18,653 pupils received support from 293 schools, at a total cost of £15.7m (£1.9m from the Department of Education).⁶

Outcomes of the Literacy and Numeracy Programme

A 2015 Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) evaluation found “highly effective” practice in supporting pupils at risk of underachievement in the majority of schools inspected.⁷

The Project Manager at the Education Authority (EA) prepared reports on the outcomes of the Programme. They reported positive results, with 76% of supported primary pupils achieving Level 4 in Communication in English at Key Stage 2, and 65% of post-primary pupils achieving a grade C or above in GCSE English. It states that pupils identified for support had not been expected to achieve these results.⁸

However, the report raises a number of questions around the extent to which reported improvements in outcomes were directly attributable to the programme (value added). These include:

- A lack of clarity around the criteria used to select pupils who were not likely to achieve the expected level (this was up to each individual school), and a lack of robust baseline data;
- Data on Delivering Social Change (DSC) intervention schools and non-DSC schools were collected only one year prior to the programme (making analysis of longer-term trends difficult);⁹

⁵ Northern Ireland Executive (2015) *Delivering Social Change Literacy & Numeracy Signature Programme: Year 1 Interim Report* Belfast: Northern Ireland Executive

⁶ Northern Ireland Executive (2016) *Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme: Year 2 Final Report* Bangor: Department of Education

⁷ Education and Training Inspectorate (2015) *An Evaluation of the Implementation of the Delivering Social Change: Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme* Bangor: ETI

⁸ Northern Ireland Executive (2016) *Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme: Year 2 Final Report* Bangor: Department of Education

⁹ Information provided by the Department of Education, August 2015

- The report highlights large increases in the proportion of pupils with free school meal entitlement (FSME) achieving the GCSE threshold measure, but does not appear to take account of factors such as the expanded FSME eligibility criterion from September 2014 and wider year-on-year improvements in outcomes among pupils with FSME;
- The non-DSC schools used as a comparison to show improvement over time are grammar schools (whose performance tends to stay relatively static); and
- A lack of comparison to other interventions.

Supporting pre-school provision

A further commitment was to “*Ensure that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.*” Again, the PfG did not include specific targets. Instead, it stated that the Department should identify reasons why parents do not avail of places; implement the Review of Pre-school Admissions; implement changes to encourage parents to take up places; and review progress.

Pre-School Education Programme

The DE funds one year of non-compulsory pre-school education through the Pre-School Education Programme, to children in their immediate pre-school year.¹⁰ The EA manages the application process and is responsible for ensuring that there is adequate pre-school provision in local areas through the Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAG).¹¹

In the 2015/16 school year almost 24,200 children had a funded pre-school place: 92% of Northern Ireland’s eligible population.¹² Just over a third (36%) of these pupils are enrolled in voluntary and private setting, with 38% in nursery classes in primary schools. Other provision includes nursery schools and reception classes.

Department of Education statistics indicate a steady increase in funded pre-school enrolments over the past ten years, broadly in line with population estimations. The greatest increase in enrolments has been in the voluntary and private sector, with limited increases in the statutory sector.¹³

Data from the Department of Education indicates that in 2016/17, 96% of applicants were offered a place at stage one of the two-stage process, with 87% of applicants

¹⁰ Eurydice (2015) *United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) Early Childhood Education and Care* [online] Available at: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-Northern-Ireland:Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care

¹¹ Information provided by the Department of Education, August 2016

¹² Department of Education (2016) *Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland, 2015/16* Bangor: DE

¹³ Department of Education (2016) *Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland, 2015/16* Bangor: DE

offered their first preference. A total of 292 applicants dropped out of the process at stage one, with 16 applicants unplaced by the end of the process.

Progress work for Lisanelly Shared Education campus

The PfG also committed to “*significantly progress work on the plan for the Lisanelly Shared Education campus as a key regeneration project.*” In 2014/15 the target milestone was to complete the procurement process and initiate the first phase of construction.

The procurement process for Phase 1 of what is now known as the Strule Shared Education Campus was complete by the end of 2014/15. This relates only to the construction of Arvalee School and Resource Centre and the site-wide demolition of existing buildings. Construction of Arvalee began in March 2015 and is due for completion in August 2016. Demolition finished in February 2016.

With regard to delivery of the rest of the campus, a contract for an Integrated Consultant Team to design and manage this phase (Phase 1) was awarded in November 2015.¹⁴

Further contracts for site preparation works are expected for award in October 2016, with procurement of a contract for main building works due summer 2017. A further contract on grass pitches will also be required.¹⁵ The Campus is expected to open in 2020.¹⁶

Establish a Ministerial advisory group on shared education

A further commitment in relation to shared education was to “*establish a Ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendation to the Minister of Education to advance shared education.*”

In July 2012 the Minister for Education, John O’Dowd MLA, established the advisory group, and the group published its report on April 2013.¹⁷ The Minister accepted some of the recommendations, noting that others would require further consideration.¹⁸

Ensuring access to shared education opportunities

The third commitment in relation to shared education was to “*ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015.*” The milestones were to define objectives in terms of participation in shared education programmes, put measures in place and achieve the overall commitment objective in 2014/15.

¹⁴ Information provided by the Department of Education, August 2016

¹⁵ Information provided by the Department of Education, August 2016

¹⁶ Minister for Education response to an Assembly Question by Mr. Daniel McCrossan, 22nd February 2016

¹⁷ Connolly, P., Purvis, D., O’Grady, P.J. (2013) *Advancing Shared Education* Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast

¹⁸ Department of Education (2013) *Advancing Shared Education: Ministerial Statement, 22 October 2013* Bangor: DE

However, by 2015, just 7,765 pupils¹⁹ had participated in a programme of shared activities, representing 2.5% of the primary and post-primary population in 2014/15.²⁰

The Department advises that it has taken a number of actions to increase shared education, although most of these came at the end of, or post-dated, the PfG period. These include:²¹

- *A Framework for School Collaboration* (November 2014);
- The *Sharing Works* policy (September 2015);
- The Shared Education Act 2016;
- The £25m DSC Shared Education Signature Project (2015/16-2018/19); and
- Peace IV funding: due to commence in 2016/17 with a target of 19,200 pupils by 2018/19 and 144,000 by 2020/21.²²

Increase sharing of facilities

The final commitment in relation to shared education was to “*substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.*” The milestones were to define the objectives in terms of sharing facilities, put measures in place, and in 2014/15, to “*achieve overall commitment objective.*”

The Department notes that its *Sharing Works* policy helped to shape and drive the expansion of sharing programmes; however, this was published towards the end of the PfG period in September 2015. As noted above, a number of other actions post-dated the PfG period. The Shared Education Campuses Programme launched in January 2014. The Department advises that in its School Omnibus Survey:²³

- In 2013 of the 593 schools that responded, 28% said that they had shared facilities; and
- In 2015 of the 450 schools that responded, 59% shared facilities.

It is important to note that a large proportion of schools did not respond, therefore these figures may not be representative. Consideration could be given to the robustness of data collection in this regard.

¹⁹ Information provided by the Department of Education, August 2016

²⁰ Department of Education (2015) *Enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland, 2014/15*
Bangor: DE

²¹ Information provided by the Department of Education, August 2016

²² Please note: A UK withdrawal from the EU may influence the availability of this funding

²³ Information provided by the Department of Education, August 2016

Establishing an Education and Skills Authority (withdrawn)

The last commitment was to make the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) operational in 2013. However, the Executive agreed to withdraw this commitment from the PfG.²⁴ Nonetheless, the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014²⁵ provided for the Education Authority (EA), which came into operation on 1st April 2015 (although the EA differs from the original plans for the ESA).²⁶

4 PfG 2016-21: overview

The draft PfG 2016-21 presents a cultural change for the public sector. It adopts a new approach, focusing on outcomes and setting out “*generational*” ambitions to address societal issues. The emphasis is on impacts and effects on people’s lives, rather than on programme delivery. A further key change is that the PfG provides scope for organisations beyond government to contribute to plans and actions. It includes:²⁷

- Indicators to demonstrate the nature of planned changes; and
- Measures to provide evidence of progress.

The consultation for the draft PfG ran from the 27th May 20 until the 22nd July 2016. While the draft PfG does not detail timeframes, Table 5 below provides an indication of the possible timescales for the PfG process.

Table 5: Indicative timescales for the PfG process

Action	Date
Development of departmental action plans	By end August 2016
Executive agreement on departmental action plans and draft PfG	By end September 2016
Consultation on departmental action plans and draft PfG	3 rd / 4 th October 2016 – 28 th / 29 th November
Executive considers revised PfG	By end 2016
PfG laid in Assembly	By end 2016
Assembly debate and vote	Early 2017

²⁴ Department of Education *Programme for Government - Department of Education commitments* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/programme-government-department-education-commitments>

²⁵ Legislation.gov.uk *Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014* [online] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/12/contents>

²⁶ Education Authority *About Us* [online] Available at: <http://www.eani.org.uk/about-us/>

²⁷ Northern Ireland Executive (2016) *Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21* Belfast: Northern Ireland Executive

The draft PfG details fourteen outcomes.²⁸ The Department of Education will have a key role (among other departments) in achieving Outcome 14: “*we give our children and young people the best start in life,*” although it is also likely to contribute to other outcomes. It notes:

*This outcome is about ensuring that all of our children grow up in a society that provides the support they need to achieve their potential. This includes good health, a secure family and community environment including an adequate standard of living, education, opportunities for cultural and artistic expression, opportunities to make a positive contribution to society, physical exercise, space to play, and protection from harm and violence.*²⁹

The PfG sets out the role of the Executive in achieving this outcome, including:

- Supporting families to care for children;
- Providing high-quality education, including pre-school education;
- Supporting opportunities for play, recreation and creativity; and
- Ensuring the involvement of children and young people in developing those services.

In contrast to the 2011-15 PfG, which detailed specific and measurable outputs, the draft 2016-21 PfG framework document does not specify the extent of change or the timescales for it.

Consideration therefore could be given to the implications of this lack of defined outcomes for accountability and transparency.

PfG 2016-2021: Department of Education key indicators

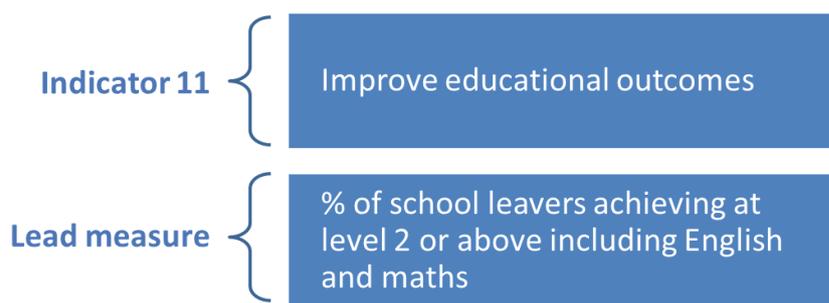
The PfG framework details four indicators for which the Department of Education has overall responsibility. The following sections consider each of the indicators, and highlight a number of potential areas for consideration.

5 PfG indicator: improve educational outcomes

The PfG document highlights the link between educational outcomes and life opportunities, economic success and health, and notes the particular importance of numeracy and literacy skills.

²⁸ Northern Ireland Executive (2016) *Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21* Belfast: Northern Ireland Executive

²⁹ Northern Ireland Executive (2016) *Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21* Belfast: Northern Ireland Executive

Figure 1: Indicator 11 on improving educational outcomes

Level 2 refers to GCSEs at grades A*-C, as well as equivalent qualifications (could include NVQ level 2; Higher Diploma; and Functional Skills level 2).³⁰ In 2014/15 two-thirds (66%) of school leavers achieved level 2 including English and maths, and there has been a year-on-year increase since 2008/09 (when 58.4% achieved this).³¹

Limited scope

The OECD reports that the targets used to evaluate the education system in Northern Ireland have limited scope. It notes that while student achievement information is a valid outcome measure, such outcomes are often linked to a range of factors outside government's control, and therefore cannot be simply attributed to government action.³²

Evidence suggests that internationally, countries frequently complement performance data with a wide range of education indicators, based on demographic, administrative and contextual data collected from schools. It also notes that international benchmarking is increasingly common.³³

Indeed, the PfG approach measures only the educational outcome of students achieving level 2 or above. It does not include value added measures, which can take account of students' prior achievement or socio-economic background (a key factor in educational outcomes), allowing for measurement of the value the education system has added.

Concerns around equivalent qualifications

The 2013 CCEA review of A levels and GCSEs highlighted concerns around the profile and use of equivalent or vocational qualifications, and around acknowledging the range of learners within the education system. It stated that:³⁴

³⁰ Gov.uk (2016) *Compare different qualifications* [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/compare-different-qualification-levels>

³¹ Data provided by the Department of Education, February 2016 and Department of Education *School Leavers* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-leavers>

³² Shewbridge, C., Hulshof, M., Nusche, D., Stenius Staehr, L. (2014) *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Northern Ireland* OECD Publishing

³³ OECD (2013) *Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evaluation and Assessment* OECD Publishing

³⁴ CCEA (2013) *Review of GCSE and A Level Qualifications* Belfast: CCEA

- There is a need for expansion and greater recognition of non-general qualification pathways to reflect the diversity of learners;
- There is a lack of awareness of the availability and benefits of qualifications other than GCSEs and A Levels;
- Some stakeholders do not give qualifications other than GCSEs and A Levels the “*currency or recognition they deserve*”;
- Accountability measures should be broader and considered holistically; and
- There is a need to develop alternative level 2 qualifications in literacy and numeracy to complement GCSEs, with different delivery and routes of assessment.

Summary

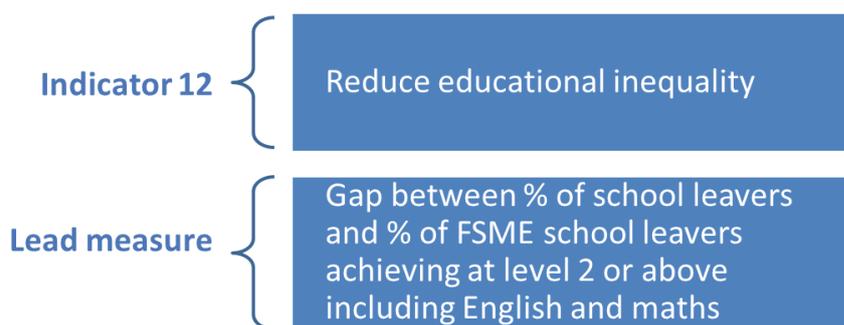
This indicator measures student performance at level 2 to assess educational outcomes. However, on its own its scope may not allow for an accurate assessment of the contribution of the education system, and research has highlighted issues around evaluating outcomes for all learners. Areas for consideration could include:

- The scope of the measure; for example the extent to which it is likely to assess the value the education system has added to student achievement;
- The extent to which the measure for indicator 11 takes into account the range of learners within the system; and
- The rationale for, and implications of, measuring outcomes only at level 2 (and not at other key stages or A level).

6 PfG indicator: reduce educational inequality

The draft PfG notes the “*striking*” gap in educational outcomes between disadvantaged young people and their better-off peers. It states that low educational attainment has implications for young people’s life chances, increasing the risk of unemployment, poverty and poor health.

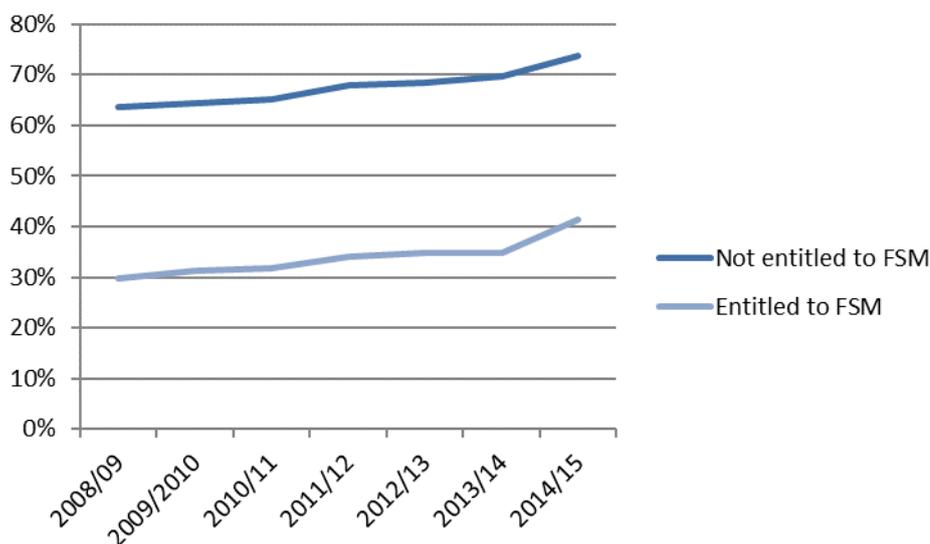
Figure 2: Indicator 12 on reducing educational inequality



In 2014/15, 41.3% of schools leavers with free school meal entitlement (FSME) achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and maths. There has been a year-on-year increase in the number of pupils with FSME achieving this threshold since 2008/09, from 29.7%.³⁵

As Figure 3 below illustrates, the gap in attainment between those with FSME and those without over the past seven years has remained broadly consistent, amounting to around 33% each year, without any clear trend in terms of narrowing or widening the gap.³⁶

Figure 3: Proportion of school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and maths, by FSME



While there was a large increase between 2013/14 to 2014/15, when the proportion of students with FSME achieving this threshold measure increased from 34.9% to

³⁵ Data provided by the Department of Education, February 2016 and Department of Education *School Leavers* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-leavers>

³⁶ Data provided by the Department of Education, February 2016 and Department of Education *School Leavers* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-leavers>

41.3%,³⁷ it is important to note that this coincided with an expansion of FSM eligibility criteria (therefore increasing the number of children with FSME).³⁸

The following paragraphs consider the educational inequality element of the measure. The potential issues this paper has highlighted in relation to indicator 11 also apply to indicator 12.

FSME as a proxy for deprivation

Socio-economic background is one of the main predictors of academic performance at school. Multiple studies over four decades have demonstrated that students from less well-off backgrounds are less likely to succeed at school.³⁹

The Department uses FSME as a proxy measure for deprivation to allow analysis of outcomes for students from different socio-economic backgrounds. The evidence indicates that FSME is an imperfect measure of deprivation, with challenges including that:⁴⁰

- It measures only income;
- It reflects registered, rather than actual eligibility (not all eligible parents apply for FSM);
- The changing eligibility criteria may make comparisons over time difficult; and
- Families close to, but outside, the eligibility threshold may face similar levels of disadvantage.

While FSME is thought to be the best proxy measure currently available,⁴¹ some literature, including the 2013 *Independent Review of the Common Funding Formula*, recommends continuing to investigate possible alternatives.⁴²

Other educational inequalities

The evidence points to significant differences in educational outcomes for a range of other groups. Key groups are highlighted in Figure 4. The Department notes that it also collects data on sex, ethnicity, religion, FSM, SEN, pupil home postcode and school management types.

³⁷ Department of Education *School Leavers* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-leavers>

³⁸ In September 2014 FSM eligibility under the Working Tax Credit criterion was introduced at post-primary. The proportion of pupils with FSME increased from 17.9% of school leavers to 23.7% of school leavers.

³⁹ OECD (2011) *Against the Odds: Disadvantaged Students Who Succeed in School* Paris: OECD Publishing

⁴⁰ Perry, C. (2010) *Free School Meal Entitlement as a measure of deprivation* Stormont: Northern Ireland Assembly

⁴¹ Gorard, S. (2012) "Who is eligible for free school meals? Characterising free school meals as a measure of disadvantage in England" *British Educational Research Journal* Vol.38, No. 6, pp. 1003-1017

⁴² *Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme* (2013) Bangor: Department of Education

Figure 4: Groups with differing educational outcomes in Northern Ireland⁴³

Group	Overview
Boys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls consistently outperform boys at GCSE 70.5% of girls achieved the threshold measure compared to 61.6% of boys (2014/15)
Protestants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catholics consistently outperform Protestants (the gap is particularly large in relation to students with FSME) 33.2% of Protestants with FSME achieved the threshold measure compared to 44.7% of their Catholic counterparts
Students with special educational needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students without SEN consistently outperform their those with SEN 38.3% of children with SEN at stages 1-4 achieved the threshold measure compared to 73.3% of those without SEN (2014/15)
Students at non-grammar schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a large gap in performance between students at grammars and non-grammars 95.6% of grammar students achieved the measure in comparison to 45.3% of those at non-grammars (2014/15)
Minority ethnic groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> White children consistently outperform children from minority ethnic groups 66% of white children achieved the threshold, compared to 63.2% of children from minority ethnic groups (2014/15) Traveller children have particularly poor educational outcomes
Looked after children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looked after children have much poorer educational outcomes 29% of looked after children achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C compared to 82% of the general school population (2013/14)

The Equality Commission reports that there are gaps in data in education in regard to a number of other equality grounds, including sexual orientation, gender identity, political opinion, marital status and dependency status. It highlights educational inequalities beyond attainment, including bullying of particular groups and entry to employment and higher education.⁴⁴

Summary

This indicator aims to reduce educational inequality. However, the lead measure considers only inequality arising from socio-economic status, and uses the imperfect proxy measure of FSME to do so. It is unclear whether government will collect data on

⁴³ Information provided by the Department of Education, February 2016, and Department of Education *School Leavers* [online] Available at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-leavers> Taskforce on Traveller Education (2011) *Report of the Taskforce to the Department of Education* Bangor: DE and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2015) *Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2013-14, Statistical Bulletin* Belfast: DHSSPS

⁴⁴ Equality Commission (2015) *Key Inequalities in Education* Belfast: Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

other measures of inequality. Areas for consideration in relation to this indicator could include:

- Whether the PfG will monitor educational inequality beyond socio-economic background;
- The rationale for focusing on educational equality in terms of attainment, and not in regard to other factors, such as entry to higher education or employment and bullying;
- The suitability of FSME as a proxy for deprivation, and whether the Department is considering alternative measures; and
- How, if at all, the monitoring of data will control or allow for other factors, such as changing FSM eligibility criteria.

7 PfG indicator: improve the quality of education

The framework document emphasises the importance of quality within an education system, and refers to the work of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) on evaluating the quality of education in schools.

Figure 5: Indicator 13 on improving the quality of education



The framework document notes that the Department does not collate data in relation to this measure, stating that putting baselines in place and setting up regular monitoring arrangements will be part of the PfG agenda. It notes the publication of data in the biannual Chief Inspector's Report.

Status of the ETI

The ETI is situated within the Department of Education. In some jurisdictions inspectorates are independent of the education ministry. The House of Commons Education Committee notes that Ofsted's independence supports credibility.⁴⁵ The Committee for Education recommended in 2014 that the ETI should be statutorily independent from the Department. However, the Department responded that the ETI

⁴⁵ House of Commons Education Committee (2011) *The role and performance of Ofsted* London: The Stationery Office Limited

carries out inspections independently and that it did not plan to change the governance arrangements.⁴⁶

Frequency of inspection

The ETI employs a risk-based approach to the frequency of inspection, whereby schools are chosen for inspection based on school performance indicators, risk factors and District Inspector monitoring. This is a move away from the previous model of inspecting each school at least once every seven years.⁴⁷

Lack of pupil or parent voice

As drafted, the measure does not include a discrete opportunity to assess the views of pupils and parents in regard to the quality of education (beyond involvement in inspections). The OECD has recommended that the Department considers a consultation platform for parents.⁴⁸

Challenges around value added

The OECD notes that although the ETI accounts for school context during inspection, a lack of common objective measures and variation in the availability of information present challenges for assessing value added. It suggests that it is not clear how inspectors account for school context in making judgements across schools and sectors.⁴⁹

Comprehensiveness of the measure

There is clear evidence that classroom teaching has the greatest influence of in-school factors on children's educational outcomes, with school leadership also playing a key role. Poor quality teaching has a significant impact on outcomes. For example, primary school children placed with low-performing teachers for several years suffer a largely irreversible educational loss.⁵⁰ However, inspection evidence shows that:⁵¹

- Just over a fifth (21%) of post-primary learning provision inspected in 2012-14 was deemed 'satisfactory'; and
- Leadership needed to improve in over a third (34%) of post-primaries inspected.

It is possible that inclusion of other inspection measures, such as the quality of teaching and leadership, would give a broader picture of educational quality and areas

⁴⁶ Department of Education letter to the Committee for Education, 4th November 2014 [online] Available at: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/education/calls-for-evidence/inquiry-into-the-education-and-training-inspectorate-eti/>

⁴⁷ Shewbridge, C., Hulshof, M., Nusche, D., Stenius Staehr, L. (2014) *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Northern Ireland* OECD Publishing

⁴⁸ Shewbridge, C., Hulshof, M., Nusche, D., Stenius Staehr, L. (2014) *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Northern Ireland* OECD Publishing

⁴⁹ Shewbridge, C., Hulshof, M., Nusche, D., Stenius Staehr, L. (2014) *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Northern Ireland* OECD Publishing

⁵⁰ McKinsey & Company (2007) *How The World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out On Top* McKinsey & Company

⁵¹ Education and Training Inspectorate (2014) *The Chief Inspector's Report 2012-14* Bangor: ETI

for improvement. It is also unclear whether the indicator's measure will include education other than at school providers, as well as pre-school provision.

Summary

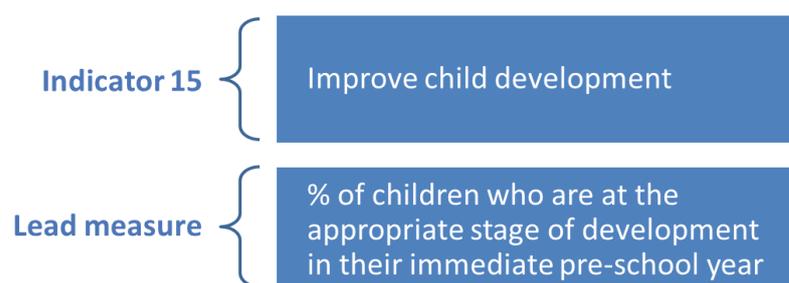
This indicator aims to improve education quality, with a lead measure based on inspection evidence on overall school performance. However, it may present challenges, and areas for consideration could include:

- The implications of ETI's status as part of the Department, for example in relation to impartiality or perceptions of impartiality;
- The lack of parental and pupil voice in the measurement of education quality;
- The implications of ETI's risk-based approach to inspection on timescales for inspection and for robustness of measurement;
- Whether measures on inspection evidence of individual aspects of the school, for example, teaching and leadership, will be included;
- The extent to which the measure accurately reflects value added by schools; and
- Whether pre-schools and Education other than at School providers will be included in the measure.

8 PfG indicator: improve child development

The PfG highlights the importance of early intervention in improving children's life chances, and in providing an opportunity to break inter-generational cycles of underachievement.

Figure 6: Indicator 15 on improving child development



3+ Review in DE-funded pre-school settings

The PfG notes that this data is not yet available, with no universal health check at age three. It states that health and pre-school practitioners are working through the Delivering Social Change Early Intervention Programme to pilot a 3+ Health Review.

The 3+ Review will take place in DE-funded pre-school settings, with health visitors, education colleagues, children and parents working to promote child development. Assessment will involve the Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social-Emotional: Second Edition (ASQ: SE2). The questionnaire considers the following domains:⁵²

- Self-regulation;
- Compliance;
- Social-communication;
- Adaptive functioning;
- Autonomy;
- Affect; and
- Interaction with people.

A pilot took place between April and June 2016 in 43 pre-school settings across Northern Ireland, with evaluation underway. The Department expects the 3+ Review to be implemented between September 2016 and June 2017 in pre-school settings with DE-funded places, with remaining providers included between September 2017 and June 2018.⁵³

It is important to note that pre-school is not compulsory, and not all children attend DE-funded pre-school settings; 92% of the eligible population, or 24,200, received a place in 2015/16.⁵⁴

The role of pre-school in child development

Longitudinal research in Northern Ireland demonstrates that access to high quality pre-school provision improves attainment at the end of primary school, but that low quality provision does not provide benefits.⁵⁵ International research supports this, with pre-school attendance correlated with performance at age 15.⁵⁶

However, in the period 2012-14, almost a quarter (23%) of voluntary and private pre-school settings and 10% of statutory settings inspected in Northern Ireland were not evaluated as good or better.⁵⁷

⁵² Information provided by the Department of Education, April 2016

⁵³ Information provided by the Department of Education, April 2016

⁵⁴ Department of Education (2016) *Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland, 2015/16* Bangor: DE

⁵⁵ Melhuish, E., Quinn, L., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, B. (2012) "Preschool affects longer term literacy and numeracy: results from a general population longitudinal study in Northern Ireland" *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* pp. 1-17

⁵⁶ OECD (2011) *PISA in focus 2011: Does participation in pre-primary education translate into better learning outcomes at school?* Paris: OECD Publishing

⁵⁷ Education and Training Inspectorate (2014) *The Chief Inspector's Report 2012-14* Bangor: ETI

Summary

This indicator aims to improve child development, measured using a new assessment of children in DE funded pre-school provision. This presents a number of potential challenges. Areas for consideration could include:

- The evaluation findings of the 3+ Review pilot and the implications for this indicator;
- The implications of the lack of baseline data for measuring improvement over time;
- How, if at all, the Department plans to ensure that children who do not attend DE-funded pre-school provision are included in the 3+ Review;
- What actions the Department is taking to improve the availability and uptake of funded pre-school provision; and
- Whether measures on the availability, quality and outcomes of pre-school education will be included.

9 PfG 2016-2021: other relevant indicators

The PfG includes a range of other indicators for which the Department does not have senior responsibility, but may contribute to in some way. This section considers a number of these indicators.

Improve support for looked after children

Looked after children are defined as those in the care of a Trust or who are provided with accommodation by a Trust.⁵⁸

The framework document highlights the particular challenges looked after children face, suggesting that providing the best standards of support can help to improve their well-being. The Senior Responsible Officer for the indicator on looked after children is within the Department of Health, although the Department of Education will have a key role in this regard.

⁵⁸ Department of Education *Looked after children* [online] Available at: <https://www.deni.gov.uk/articles/looked-after-children-0>

Figure 7: Indicator 10 on improving support for looked after children

Care Leavers data relates to looked after children who turned 19 during the year ending 31st March who had been looked after on 1st April three years previously.

Factors affecting outcomes for looked after children

In Northern Ireland educational outcomes for looked after children are significantly poorer than for those of other children, particularly at post-primary.⁵⁹ Contributing factors include:⁶⁰

- **Placement changes** and school changes (often linked);
- **Type of placement** (those in foster or kinship care tend to perform better than those in residential care);
- **Length of placement** (longer placements are associated with better outcomes);
- **Absence** from school;
- **Access to high quality teaching and tuition;** and
- **Social work** support for birth families.

Care as a protective factor for educational outcomes

Research in England suggests that the correlation between being in care and poor educational outcomes reduces when other factors such as gender, ethnicity, SEN and circumstances prior to going into care are taken into account.⁶¹

This suggests that being looked after in itself may not be damaging to a child's education; rather, poorer educational outcomes arise from looked after children's prior experiences and other factors.⁶² In fact, care can be a protective factor for education,

⁵⁹ Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2015) *Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2013-14, Statistical Bulletin* Belfast: DHSSPS

⁶⁰ Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J. et al. (2015) *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data* Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education: University of Oxford

⁶¹ O'Higgins, A., Sebba, J., Luke, N. (2015) *What is the relationship between being in care and the educational outcomes of children?* Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education: University of Oxford

⁶² O'Higgins, A., Sebba, J., Luke, N. (2015) *What is the relationship between being in care and the educational outcomes of children?* Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education: University of Oxford

with children entering foster or kinship care at an earlier stage generally achieving better outcomes, possibly due to improvements in their learning environment.⁶³

Value-added

Research highlights the complex challenges many looked after children face. It suggests that a focus on progress, rather than on outputs, is likely to provide a more realistic picture of the achievements of the care system.⁶⁴

Summary

This indicator aims to improve support for looked after children, measuring the proportion of care leavers at 19 in education, training or employment. However, as drafted, the measure does not take account of the wide range of variables affecting outcomes for this cohort, or consider the value-added by the care system. Areas for consideration could include:

- The quality of the data currently available on looked after children, including Department of Education data and the scope of Care Leavers data;
- Whether the measure will take into account (control for) other variables, such as SEN, gender and ethnicity, in order to accurately assess the impact of care and the support provided;
- Whether measures of value added will be included, and the current lack of baseline data to assess value added; and
- Whether other measures will be included to assess educational factors and outcomes at earlier ages, for example: the proportion of looked after children with a pre-school place and personal education plan; outcomes at other key stages; and absences from school.

Improve the skills profile of the population

The Senior Responsible Officer for indicator 14, which relates to skills, is within the Department for the Economy. As the indicator refers to those qualified to Level 2, which refers to GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent, and those qualified to Level 3, which relates to A level or equivalent, the Department is likely to have an important role to play.

⁶³ Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J. et al. (2015) *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data* Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education: University of Oxford

⁶⁴ Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J. et al. (2015) *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data* Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education: University of Oxford

Figure 8: Indicator 14 on improving skills profile

The Department is likely to play a role in contributing to a range of other PfG economic indicators, for example:

- 16: Increase the proportion of people in work;
- 17: Reduce economic inactivity;
- 18: Increase the proportion of people working in good jobs; and
- 22: Increase innovation in our economy.

In relation to these indicators, areas for consideration could include:

- What, if any, role the Department of Education will play in supporting these indicators; and
- Whether there will be measures to take account of the science, technology engineering and maths (STEM) 'artery' or pipeline in schools.

Respect and reconciliation indicators

It is possible that the Department may contribute to a number of indicators held by the Executive Office:

- 26: Increase respect for each other;
- 31: Increase shared space (although the draft indicator refers only to leisure centres, parks, libraries and shopping centres); and
- 35: Increase reconciliation.

Areas for consideration could include:

- What, if any, role the Department of Education will play in supporting these indicators (for example, in relation to shared and integrated education); and
- Whether there is scope for measures to consider bullying in schools, particularly given the new recording system for schools to record acts of bullying and their motivation under the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Justice indicators

As educational provision for young people in custody is due to transfer from the Department of Justice to the Education Authority, it is possible that the Department of Education will contribute to the following justice indicators:⁶⁵

- 38: Increase the effectiveness of the justice system (although the current lead indicator refers to processing criminal cases within guideline time limits and not to other outcomes); and
- 39: Reduce reoffending.

Areas for consideration could include:

- What, if any, role the Department of Education will play in supporting these indicators; and
- What actions the Department is undertaking in regard to educational provision for young people in custody.

Quality of life for people with disabilities

Indicator 42, with senior responsibility held by the Department for Communities, refers to increasing quality of life for people with disabilities, based on a measure of life satisfaction (such data is not currently collected).

Areas for consideration could include:

- Whether this indicator will consider measures in regard to young people with SEN, including their levels of satisfaction with education;
- Whether it will take into account issues such as timely access to assessment and support for SEN, as well as wider issues such as participation in educational decision-making; and
- Whether indicators will be included on implementation of the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

10 Conclusion

This research paper has found that the Department achieved a number of its commitments in the previous PfG, but failed to meet others. In addition, some of the targets were not directly measurable, preventing an accurate assessment of its achievements.

⁶⁵ Information provided by the Department of Education, July 2016

The Department will contribute to a number of outcomes in the new PfG 2016-21. It is possible that the new outcomes-based approach may have implications for transparency and accountability.

There are a number of potential issues with many of the measures associated with the PfG indicators. Some of these relate to an inability to measure the value government has added, as opposed to change that may have happened anyway or as a result of other factors. Other issues relate to the limited scope of many of the measures, as drafted, and their robustness. Further areas for consideration could include:

- The failure to meet the previous PfG target on disadvantaged learners achieving the GCSE threshold measure, and how the Department plans to meet the *Count Read: Succeed* target of 65% of FSME pupils achieving the measure by 2019/20;
- The value added by the Signature Programme on literacy and numeracy;
- The effectiveness of the Department's actions on shared education;
- The availability and quality of pre-school education across Northern Ireland;
- The robustness of the data collected for the PfG, for example, in relation to schools sharing facilities and the lack of baseline data for some indicators;
- The implications of the outcomes-based approach in the draft PfG, including the lack of defined outcomes, for accountability and transparency; and
- Indicators that have not been included, for example, in relation to implementation of recent legislation such as the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.