

## COMMITTEE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

### End of Session Report: 2013-2014

#### *Remit, Powers and Membership*

The Committee for Employment and Learning is a Statutory Departmental Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Belfast Agreement, Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and under Standing Order 48 of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department for Employment and Learning and has a role in the initiation of legislation.

The Committee has power to:

- consider and advise on Departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee stage of relevant primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister for Employment and Learning.

The Committee has eleven Members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, with a quorum of five. The Membership of the Committee since 1 September 2012 has been as follows:

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)<sup>1 2</sup>  
Mr Thomas Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Sammy Douglas MLA<sup>3</sup>  
Mr Phil Flanagan MLA<sup>4</sup>  
Mr David Hilditch MLA<sup>5</sup>  
Mr Chris Lyttle MLA  
Mr Fra McCann MLA  
Ms Bronwyn McGahan MLA<sup>6</sup>  
Mr Pat Ramsey MLA

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<sup>1</sup> With effect from 19 February 2013 Mr Basil McCrea is no longer Chairperson nor a member of the Committee

<sup>2</sup> With effect from 27 February 2013 Mr Robin Swann became Chairperson of the Committee

<sup>3</sup> Mr Sammy Douglas replaced Mr Sydney Anderson on 11 February 2013.

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<sup>3</sup> Mr Sammy Douglas replaced Mr Sydney Anderson on 11 February 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Mr Phil Flanagan replaced Ms Michelle Gildernew on 10 September 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Mr David Hilditch replaced Mr David McIlveen on 1 October 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Ms Bronwyn McGahan replaced Mr Barry McElduff on 21 January 2013.

Mr Alastair Ross MLA<sup>7</sup>  
Ms Claire Sugden MLA<sup>8</sup>

This End of Session Report covers the work of the Committee for Employment and Learning from 1 September 2013 to 31 August 2014.

The Committee's work programme for the session included a number of visits and stakeholder events. The Committee considered a range of subordinate legislation, began its scrutiny of the Work and Families Bill, undertook a number of study visits throughout Northern Ireland, and met formally on 28 occasions including 50 evidence sessions of which 6 were in closed session. Of the 6 closed sessions 5 were to discuss the Committee's Inquiry Report and one was to receive legal advice.

In addition, the Committee finalised its Inquiry into Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance in Northern Ireland and began work on a new Inquiry into Post School Special Educational Need for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland.

Details of Committee expenditure during this reporting period are included at Annex A.

#### *Committee Meetings / Visits*

Of the 28 meetings convened by the Committee, four were held outside of Parliament Buildings. In keeping with the Committee's aim of seeing the impact of the work of the Department of Employment and Learning at first hand and to meet with key stakeholders, the Committee held meetings at: Belfast Metropolitan College, Millfield Campus; the Northern Ireland Science Park, the Tullyglass House Hotel where it attended the Colleges NI Best Awards and met in the Omagh offices of Include Youth, where it also attended the launch of Include Youth's Transition Support Service.

The Committee also made 14 visits to a range of bodies and organisations to inform its work. During these visits the Committee was able to talk to staff and young people regarding the issues of Employment and Learning, how to create employment and ensure effective training and education for young people. The locations visited by the Committee were as follows:

- Living and Learning Project, Magherafelt
- Give and Take Scheme, Omagh
- European Employment Forum, Brussels, Belgium
- Queen's University, Belfast
- Glenveagh Special School, Belfast

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<sup>7</sup> Mr Alastair Ross replaced Mr George Robinson on 28 January 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Ms Claire Sugden replaced Mr David McClarty on 12 May 2014.

- Ulster Supported Employment Limited, Belfast
- Castle Tower School, Ballymena
- University of Ulster, Coleraine Campus
- Seagate Technologies, Londonderry
- Appleby Trust, Armagh
- Sperrinview Special School Dungannon
- Oakridge Social Education Centre
- Belfast Metropolitan College
- Northern Ireland Science Park, Belfast

During its visit to Queen's University Belfast on 20 November 2013 the Committee met with representatives from Seagate Technologies which resulted in the visit to the University of Ulster, Coleraine Campus and Seagate Technologies on 30 April 2014. To gather evidence for its Inquiry into Post School Special Educational Need for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland the Committee visited Glenveagh Special School, Belfast, Ulster Supported Employment Limited, Belfast, Castle Tower School, Ballymena, Appleby Trust, Armagh, Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon and Oakridge Social Education Centre, Dungannon.



*Committee members with staff at Seagate Technologies and the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.*

### *Primary Legislation*

## **Work and Families Bill**

The Work and Families Bill (NIA 34/11-15) was referred to the Committee on 12 May 2014 and makes provisions to allow working parents the ability to manage their parental and work priorities with flexibility.

On 12 May 2014, the Committee wrote to key stakeholders seeking written evidence on the Bill by 23 June 2014. A total of seven organisations have responded to the request for written evidence.

Over the 2013-14 period the Committee received two preliminary briefings on the content of the Bill. During these briefings the Committee established the impact of the Bill on employers and received assurance that there would be no undue burden on small and medium sized businesses. The Committee also ensured that the changes in requesting flexible working hours would not have a negative impact on carers.

### *Subordinate Legislation*

During the session the Committee considered proposals for 8 Statutory Rules from the Department of Employment and Learning and requested clarification on a range of issues before agreeing the Rules.

### *Inquiries*

#### **Inquiry into Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance in Northern Ireland**

In the 2011-2012 session, the Committee began its Inquiry into Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance in Northern Ireland. On Wednesday 16 October 2014 the Committee ordered the report to be printed and on Monday 25 November 2013 the report was debate in Plenary.

The Committee's Inquiry has had a profound impact on the work of the Department. Even before the Committee finished the Inquiry the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department for Education were making changes to their careers structures in response to some the issues being highlighted by the Committee. For instance the Committee focused in on the lack of information for parents in helping their children choose career paths and the Department, in response, launched a parent's guide to careers, to be given out through all schools and colleges. In addition, the Committee questioned the online support for making careers decisions and the Department for Employment and Learning began a review of its website.

Following the publication of the report the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department for Education agreed to undertake a formal review of the careers strategy and careers provision and they used the issues raised by the Committee in its Inquiry Report to form the Review's Terms of Reference.

Departmental officials briefed the Committee on the 26 February 2014 on its response to the Committee report and accepted all 25 of the Committee's recommendations and outlined its proposed actions.

### **Inquiry into Post Special Educational Need Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities**

The Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into Post School Special Educational Need Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland. The Committee's consultation on the Inquiry closed on 30 July 2014 and the Committee will consider the responses, take oral evidence sessions and finalise the report, proposing a number of recommendations in the 2014-2015 session.

During the consultation period the Committee went on a number of study visits and has further visits scheduled in its forward work programme for the 2014 – 2015 session. As a direct result of this Inquiry the Department has already implemented a review of transport barriers for those with learning difficulties and has conducted an audit of the course places available in the 6 Regional Colleges to find the number of places and types of courses available to those with learning difficulties.



*The Chairperson and Members of the Committee with representatives of the staff at Oakridge Social Education Centre in Dungannon.*



*The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson and Members of the Committee with representatives of the staff and parents at Glenveagh Special School, Belfast.*

### *Budget Scrutiny*

The Committee is mindful of the current economic climate and has worked closely with the Department throughout the session to ensure that best use is made of the resources available.

On the 4 June 2014 the Department's Director of Finance briefed the Committee on the June Monitoring Round and the Committee raised concerns regarding what impact there would be on the Department if Welfare Reform did not proceed. The projected budget cut for the Department was £12 million, the Finance Director indicated that they were doing some internal scenario planning.

The Committee has had seven briefings from officials on aspects of the Department's budget, including the Monitoring Rounds, Savings Delivery Plans and funding from the European Social Fund. The Committee has also agreed with the Department that it receives regular briefings on the Department's Programme for Government commitments and that the departmental directors in charge of the commitments come to the Committee to provide updates on delivery.

### *Policy Scrutiny*

The Committee continued to exercise its scrutiny role over a wide range of policies, both those currently being implemented by the Department for

Employment and Learning, and those under development. During the session the Committee was briefed by the Minister and received his assurance that he would renew his full engagement with the Committee on the development of policy and that he would consult more with the Committee at each stage of the policy development process.

The Committee has been particularly focused on the contracting of the Department's new Employment Programme, Steps 2 Success. The Committee has had 2 formal briefings from officials during this session on this matter and has ensured that the Department has done all it can within the limits of procurement law to ensure that local organisations are given the chance to secure local contracts. Going forward the Committee has requested that the 3 successful bidders in each of the contract areas brief the Committee on their proposed structures and practices in Autumn 2014.

The Committee also kept itself updated with issues for the Department emanating from the European Commission and on a quarterly basis it received a briefing from the Assembly Research and Information Service on the legislative and non-legislative issues relating to Employment and Learning coming out of Brussels.

The Committee over the last year has retained a keen interest in the efforts of the North West Regional College, its staff and management and the Department in progressing the College improvement programme and has retained pressure on all sides to ensure that the action plan that came out of the McConnell report is implemented.

#### *Engagement – Informal meetings / events*

The Committee continued its extensive engagement with stakeholders in this session, in both formal and informal meetings.

The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson met informally with the Minister for Employment and Learning and his senior management team to discuss the work of the Department. The Committee has also hosted a number of smaller informal events for stakeholders. Such events have not only enabled the Committee to meet with stakeholders, but have also facilitated effective local networking and joined-up government.

The Committee for Employment and Learning has been very active and innovative in the ways it has engaged with stakeholders and gathered evidence. The Committee has held showcase events for the University of Ulster, Queen's University Belfast, the Open University and Colleges NI in the Long Gallery to inform the Assembly of the excellent work carried out by the further and higher education institutions in Northern Ireland. The Committee has also held an

Apprenticeship Showcase event at which a wide range of employers promoted their apprenticeship programmes to careers teachers and other invited guests.

The Committee also held a Learning Disabilities work experience event on 13 November 2013, where 50 young adults with learning difficulties came to the Assembly and were given a look behind the scenes of the Assembly receiving presentations from Security and Ushering Service, Catering and Hospitality, Information Systems Office, Education Service and Facilities. The event proved to be very successful and it was decided by Members to make it an annual event.

On the 3 June 2014 the Committee sponsored the Annual Belfast Metropolitan College Fashion Show.



The Chairperson accepting a memento on behalf of the Committee from, Kevin Lavery, Head of School for Creative and Service Industries at Belfast Metropolitan College. The gift was presented to the Committee at the College's Annual Fashion Show sponsored by the Committee and was to thank the Committee for all its support over the years.



*Likely Key Priorities for the next session*

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme for the coming 2014/2015 session at its Planning Day on 3 September 2013 and agreed its key priorities which are outlined below.

The Committee's main priorities are to complete its scrutiny of the Work and Families Bill in the Autumn of this year. In addition the Committee will return to its Post School Special Education Need Provision Inquiry. In the New Year the Committee will also be responsible for carrying out the scrutiny of the Employment Bill and will participate, along with the Committee for Education, in the Scrutiny of the General Teaching Council Northern Ireland Bill.

The Department will also be continuing its work implementing reviews of a range of its core functions which the Committee wishes to maintain a strong interest:

- *Steps 2 Success*
- *Review of Teacher Training Infrastructure*
- *Reviews of Apprenticeships and Youth Training Policy*
- *Consultation on Economic Inactivity*
- *Departmental Business Plan*
- *European Social Fund*
- *Graduating to Success and Access to Success*
- *Disability Employment Strategy*
- *Further Education Strategy*
- *Zero-Hours Contracts in NI*
- *North West Regional College Action Plan*

In addition the Committee agreed its scrutiny of recurring issues as follows:

- *Labour Force Survey*
- *Savings Delivery Plans*
- *Monitoring Rounds and Outturn Figures*
- *Programme for Government*
- *European Briefing*
- *Skills Strategy*

## Committee for Employment and Learning

## Expenditure for the period 1 September 2013 – 31 August 2014

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of committee visits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brussels to attend the European Employment Forum</li> </ul> and 4 meetings held outside Parliament Buildings.	£ 6,195.18
Printing of committee reports	Committee for Employment and Learning Inquiry into Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) in Northern Ireland.	£1,773.67
Advertising – the cost of public notices relating to committee inquiries, the committee stage of Bills and meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of public notices in relation to: ADVERTISING - Inquiry - Post 19 SEN (Advert placed in Belfast Telegraph, Newsletter & Irish News. (£624.64) Andersonsprattgroup Ltd - Employment and Learning Committee Bill enquiry signposting advertising. (£633.06)	£1,257.70
Consultancy support - the cost of specialist advisers appointed by the committee and commissioned research, also the cost of drafting Standing Orders	Specialist adviser to the Committee on [issue/inquiry to which the advice related]	£0
General expenses	Cost of refreshments for committee meetings, working lunches, seminars, room hire, witness expenses, gifts provided by the committee during visits and conference fees for members.	£4,362.86
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>£ 13,589.42</b>