



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

28 February 2024

Meeting Location: Room 29, Parliament Buildings

Present:

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mr David Brooks MLA

Ms Cheryl Brownlee MLA

Mr Robbie Butler MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Neal Flanagan (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Officer)



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The meeting commenced at 2:01 pm in public session.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson reflected on the fact that there had been a substantial amount of education business in plenary earlier in the week with which Committee members had engaged.

3. Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 21 February 2024.

The Committee moved to closed session at 2:04 pm.

4. Introductory Briefing from Research and Information Service

The Chairperson referred members to briefing papers from the Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe).

The following witness joined the meeting at 2:04 pm:

Niamh Devlin, Research Officer, NI Assembly Research and Information Service



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The Research Officer provided the Committee with a briefing and PowerPoint presentation on the role of RalSe and key issues in the education sector.

The Chairperson and members thanked the Research Officer for attending the meeting.

The meeting moved to public session at 2:48 pm.

The Committee agreed to move to item 7.

7. Correspondence

7.1 Members noted an index and summary note of correspondence.

7.3 and 7.9 The Committee considered correspondence from Barnardo's and separate correspondence from Action for Children setting out policy priorities, particularly related to links between poverty and educational outcomes for children and young people.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite both groups to a future informal stakeholder event, preferably in advance of the summer recess.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an update from the Department for Communities on the current status of the Executive's anti-poverty strategy.

7.5 The Committee considered correspondence from Gael Linn concerning its Scoil Spreagtha scheme and the current situation regarding Irish as a subject at the post-primary level.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Gael Linn to a future informal briefing.

7.6 and 7.14 The Committee considered correspondence from the Joint Negotiating Committee of Trade Unions and separate correspondence from NIC-ICTU, both regarding ongoing pay and grading negotiations.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite both groups to present separate oral briefings at a future meeting.

7.10 The Committee considered correspondence from Relate regarding Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).

Agreed: The Committee agreed to inform Relate of plans for a Committee mini-inquiry into RSE and to include it among stakeholders to the mini-inquiry.

7.11 The Committee considered correspondence from the Secondary Students' Union of NI and NI Youth Forum, seeking the opportunity to give evidence to members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to include the Secondary Students' Union of NI and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum among young people's representatives at its meeting on 20 March.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider a future young persons' stakeholder event to include a comprehensive range of youth advocates such as the Secondary Students Union of NI, the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, the NI Youth Assembly, and Diverse Youth NI.

7.12 The Committee considered correspondence from Claire Hanna MP regarding cuts in core funding for St Malachy's Youth Centre, Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority to seek clarity on the funding situation for the centre and to ask for an explanation for the withdrawal of funding for its outreach program.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that members seek to visit St Malachy's Youth Centre, diaries permitting.

7.15 The Committee considered correspondence from the Chair of the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, asking whether members would like to join its visit to Hazelwood Integrated College on 11 March.

Agreed: Several members agreed to join the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee visit to Hazelwood Integrated College.



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7.16 The Committee considered correspondence from the Principal of Millennium Integrated Primary School expressing grave concern that ringfenced funding for a new build under the Fresh Start Programme had been withdrawn.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Secretary of State to urge the UK Government to take steps to undo the damage caused by their decision to reprofile Fresh Start funding, highlighting the ten schools affected and noting the advanced stage of progress in Millennium Integrated in particular.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to provide it with the above correspondence to the Secretary of State to consider as part of its inquiry into integrated education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education to seek an update on how given the reprofiling of this funding he intends to protect capital investment in shared and integrated education campuses; and noting the recent findings of the NIAO update report on capital projects.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to dispose of correspondence not noted above per the summary notes in the meeting pack.

5. Employers for Childcare – Oral Briefing

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:05 pm:

Mrs Marie Marin, CEO, Employers for Childcare

Ms Aoife Hamilton, Consultant, Employers for Childcare

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee adjourned at 4:03 pm.



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The Committee restarted in public session at 4:12 pm with the following members present: Nick Mathison, Pat Sheehan, Danny Baker, David Brooks, Cheryl Brownlee, Robbie Butler, Cara Hunter, Cathy Mason, Kate Nicholl

6. Overview of Resources, Governance and Early Years – Department of Education Oral Briefing

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:12 pm:

Mr Ronnie Armour, Deputy Secretary, Resources, Governance and Early Years

Mr Neil Palmer, Interim Director of Finance

Mr Paul Brush, Director of Early Years, Childcare, and Children & Young People's Strategy

Mr Andrew Scott, Director of Corporate Services and Governance

Mr Mark Bailey, Director of Education Workforce

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek follow-up information on several matters.

8. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the agenda for its meeting on 6 March.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hear from representatives of the Irish-Medium sector, to include Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, at its meeting on 13 March.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to hear from representatives of the young people's advocacy sector at its meeting on 20 March.



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9. Any Other Business

Cara Hunter gave the Committee a brief account of her visit to a Royal School of Chemistry primary science celebration at Ulster University's Coleraine campus. PGCE students showed how they would try to bring chemistry into the primary classroom and also discussed issues such as a shortage of chemistry teachers in secondary schools and the need for more women in STEM subjects. The Committee thanked her for undertaking the visit on its behalf.

10. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 6 March 2024 in Room 29 Parliament Buildings at 2:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:21 pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

**Chairperson, Committee for Education
6 March 2024**