



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 21st May 2025

Meeting Location: Studio Ulster, Belfast

Present:

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

Apologies:

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

In Attendance: Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)
Stuart Gilmour (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:07am.

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Further Education pay settlement

The Chairperson advised Members of press reports in respect of the Further Education lecturer pay settlement and recorded his appreciation that the prospect of further industrial action in Further Education colleges, prior to the end of year examinations, had been averted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister thanking her for her efforts in respect of securing a pay deal for Further Education lecturers.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 14 May 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the joint concurrent Committee meeting of 14 May 2025.

5. Matters Arising

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to both the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy, in respect of the participation by officials in further joint concurrent evidence sessions.

6. Studio Ulster – Economic Importance of the Creative Arts – evidence session

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 10:09am:

- Professor Declan Keeney, Chief Executive, Studio Ulster;
- Professor Frank Lyons MBE, UU Senior Responsible Officer, Studio Ulster Project; and
- Angela Reavey, Board Member, Studio Ulster.

Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 10:20am.

Key issues discussed included: the need for a creative industry strategy; the need for a creative industry workforce strategy; the importance of multi-year innovation funding; associated costs, break even and future proofing for Studio Ulster; an aligned benefits tracking framework; the Skills for Urban and Rural Futures (SURF) programme; creative arts competitors and comparator countries; taxation incentives; the CoStar programme; the need for co-operation across the sector; sustainability and reducing associated carbon emissions; and the formal launch of Studio Ulster.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for their briefing.

The witnesses left the meeting at 11:35am.

Proceedings were suspended at 11:35am.

Proceedings resumed at 11:37am.

7. Enhanced Investment Zone (EIZ) – evidence session

The following officials joined the meeting at 11:37am:

- Ciaran McGarrity, Director, Economic Policy, DfE;
- Adrian Grimshaw, Strategic Capital Advisor, Strategic Investment Board; and
- Brendan McGuigan, Director, Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering, Invest Northern Ireland.

Gary Middleton declared an interest in respect of his wife being a board member of Foyle Port.

Key issues discussed included: the role of the Department, Invest NI and the Strategic Investment Board in respect of the EIZ; the Treasury Gateway process, revised timeline and scope change for the EIZ programme; the focus on advanced manufacturing, productivity, skills and the involvement of Higher Education in the EIZ programme; the development of transformational projects; support for indigenous companies versus Foreign Direct Investment; the need for a clustering policy; and the benefits of the EIZ programme for the ports.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their evidence.

Officials left the meeting at 12:08pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking information on tax exemptions in the Enhanced Investment Zone programme within the rest of the United Kingdom and sight of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's evaluation report for the EIZ's across the UK, when available.

8. SR 2025/90 Freight Containers Safety Regulations

The Committee considered a statutory rule: SR 2025/90 The Freight Container (Safety Convention) Regulations Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 and agreed the following motion:

Agreed: “That the Committee for the Economy has considered SR 2025/90; The Freight Container (Safety Convention) Regulations Order (Northern

Ireland) 2025, and subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objection to the rule.”

9. LCM Product Regulation and Metrology Bill – Committee Report

The Committee considered a draft of its report on the legislative consent memorandum laid in respect of the Product Regulation and Metrology Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the draft report should be printed as the Committee’s second report of the mandate.

10. Correspondence

10.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

10.2 Causeway Coast and Glens, City and Growth Deal

Noted: The Committee noted the response from the Department of Finance including an update on the projects within the Causeway Coast and Glens, City and Growth Deal.

10.3 Sentencing Bill

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Justice in respect of the Sentencing Bill and a proposed new offence of assaulting someone delivering a service – the definition of the latter to include shop workers.

10.4 Belfast International Airport

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office in respect of investment in Belfast International Airport.

10.5 EU Critical Raw Materials Regulations

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords' NI Scrutiny Committee, in respect of the EU Critical Raw Materials Regulations.

10.6 Geographical Indicators

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords' NI Scrutiny Committee, in respect of Geographical Indicators for craft and industrial products and a review of the UK domestic regime for Geographical Indicators.

10.7 Vehicle Emissions.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the House of Lords' NI Scrutiny Committee, in respect of EU regulations relating to vehicle emissions.

10.8 Regional Jobs, Skills and Investment Bill

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from Sinead McLaughlin MLA, in respect of responses to the consultation on the proposed Regional Jobs, Skills and Investment Bill.

10.9 Work Experience

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from Speakers for Schools in respect of new work experience guidance in England.

10.10 Transmission Investment event

Noted: The Committee noted a Transmission Investment event on 28 May 2025 in Parliament Buildings.

10.11 Downpatrick Flood Relief

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence which was sent to the Minister, from Downpatrick and County Down Railway (DCDR), in respect of Downpatrick flood relief funding.

10.12 Northern Ireland Competition Forum event

Noted: The Committee noted a Northern Ireland Competition Forum event on consumer protection, relating to the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024.

10.13 Medical Student Finance

Noted: The Committee noted an invitation to a roundtable event on medical student finance on 2 June 2025.

10.14 Concerned Individual

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of complaints against the Lady Chief Justice and the President of Employment Tribunals.

11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its forward work programme including in respect of: an informal meeting with BORMAC; a rescheduled session on vehicle emissions; and the legislative consent motion on aspects of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to undertake an informal meeting with BORMAC on 3 June 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to undertake a rescheduled vehicle emission regulations evidence session as part of an Economy Committee meeting rather than as a joint concurrent meeting with the Committee for Infrastructure.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an evidence session on the legislative consent motion on aspects of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the reported Ministerial letter to the Executive in respect of June Monitoring support for Higher Education and to seek related oral evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its forward work programme, as amended.

12. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking an update on the funding for the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (now also known as Momentum 2).

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 28 May 2025 at 9.30am in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

A joint concurrent meeting of the Economy Committee and the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 28 May 2025 at around noon in the Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 12:16pm.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

28 May 2025