



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Thursday, 8 May 2025**

**Meeting Location:** Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Daniel McCrossan, MLA (Chairperson)

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Diane Forsythe, MLA

David Honeyford, MLA

Colm Gildernew, MLA

Cathal Boylan, MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Pádraig Delargy, MLA

**Apologies:**

Colin Crawford, MLA

Tom Buchanan, MLA

**In Attendance:** Lucia Wilson (Committee Clerk)  
Kirsten McClelland (Assistant Committee Clerk)  
Marion Johnson (Clerical Supervisor)  
Yannie Mahood (Clerical Officer)

The meeting opened in public session at 2.06 pm.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were noted from Tom Buchanan, MLA and Colin Crawford, MLA.

### **2. Draft minutes**

**Agreed:** The draft minutes of the meeting on 1 May 2025 were agreed.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

The Chairperson reminded members of their requirement to register their interests under Standing Order 69(5).

Colm Gildernew MLA and declared an interest in respect of a Private Members Bill he is bringing forward on homelessness and as a member of the All Party Group on homelessness.

Diane Forsythe MLA declared an interest as a member of the Audit Committee.

#### **4. Chairperson's Business**

The Chair welcomed Yannie Mahood to the PAC Committee Team and thanked the team for their ongoing work in support of the Committee.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

Members revisited a letter from FDA Trade Union regarding the recent Major Capital Projects – Follow Up Report.

**Agreed:** Members agreed a response to be issued to FDA.

Members considered further correspondence from a Member of the Public regarding concerns over the independence of the C&AG and Northern Ireland Audit Office.

**Agreed:** Due to the sensitive nature of this correspondence, members agreed to defer discussions until the meeting entered closed session.

**Agreed:** Following advice from the Clerk, Members agreed to seek further advice on the issues raised before considering a response.

Members noted a written submission from the Victims of Crime Commissioner in evidence to the inquiry into Reducing Adult Reoffending in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to note the correspondence and forward to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for inclusion in the final report.

Members revisited a letter from Chris Quinn, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) regarding evidence in inquiries.

**Agreed:** Members agreed a response to be issued NICCY.

#### **6. Correspondence**

Members noted a letter from a Member of the Public regarding the PAC report into Planning in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed a response to be issued to the Member of the Public.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to forward the letter to the Infrastructure Committee.

Members noted further correspondence from a Member of the Public regarding access to his GP Practice.

**Agreed:** Members noted the correspondence and agreed to forward it to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for inclusion in the final report.

Members noted a letter from Chris Quinn, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, submitting evidence to the inquiry into Access to General Practice in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to forward the evidence provided to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for inclusion in the final report.

Members noted correspondence from Homeless Connect regarding the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

**Agreed:** Members requested a response be drafted for approval at the next meeting.

The meeting moved into closed session at 2.13 pm.

## **7. Inquiry into Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future: First Consideration of draft report.**

The following witnesses and officials joined the meeting at 2.13 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Patrick Barr, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Suzanne Murphy, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Karen Armstrong, Senior Auditor, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Cheryl Brownlee, MLA joined the meeting at 2.15 pm.

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED for Members' attention and therefore should not be published more widely.

The Committee noted this is the first formal consideration for the report 'Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future' and agreed the title of the report is 'Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future'.

The Committee made the following decisions regarding each section and paragraphs within the report, that is – Agreed, Agreed as amended or to be reworded.

**Section 'Introduction': Paragraphs 37 – 43**

Paragraph 37: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 39: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 41: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 42: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 43: Read and Agreed

**Section 'Background': Paragraphs 30 – 34**

**Agreed: Section Title: There needs to be significant focus and pace to achieve the Skills Strategy goals**

**Paras 44 – 47**

Paragraph 44: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 45: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 46: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 47: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 1: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 2: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: Section Title: Spend on the delivery of the Skills Strategy is significant but the impact is not evident**

**Paras 48 – 51**

Paragraph 48: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 49: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 50: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 51: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 3: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: Section Title: There must be effective governance arrangements and collaborative working across departments**

**Paras 52 – 53**

Paragraph 52: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 53: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 4: To be reworded

**Agreed: Section Title: DfE has access to a wide range of data but it is not being used to best effect**

**Paras 54 – 53**

Paragraph 54: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 5: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: Section Title: More can be done to identify and remove barriers to educations, training and employment, including for those with SEN and disabilities**

**Paras 55 – 61**

Paragraph 55: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 56: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 57: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 58: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 59: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 60: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 61: Read and Agreed

**Agreed:** Members agreed to include further statistics on education, training and employment for those with SEN and disabilities.

Recommendation 6: To be reworded

**Agreed: Section Title: Businesses struggle to navigate and engage in the complex skills landscape**

**Paras 62 – 68**

Paragraph 62: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 63: To be reworded

Paragraph 64: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 65: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 66: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 7: To be reworded

Paragraph 67: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 68: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 8: Read and Agreed

**Agreed: To be reworded - Section Title: DfE needs to do more to ensure provision, and incentivise uptake, or courses that reduce the skills gap in Northern Ireland**

**Paras 69 – 71**

Paragraph 69: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 70: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 71: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 9: To be reworded

**Agreed: Section Title: Careers education in schools and Careers Service needs to be consistent and made available at an early stage**

**Paras 72 – 79**

Paragraph 72: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 73: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 74: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 75: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 76: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 77: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 78: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 79: Read and Agreed

**Agreed:** Members agreed to additional paragraphs to be included focusing on educational attainment and skills in schools.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to additional paragraphs to be included focusing on work experience.

Recommendation 10: To be reworded

**Agreed: Section Title: There has been a failure to sufficiently progress the development of a coherent approach to 14-19 education and training**

**Paras 80 – 86**

Paragraph 80: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 81: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 82: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 83: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 84: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 85: Read and Agreed



Paragraph 86: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 11: To be reworded

**Agreed: Section Title: Duplication of provision by schools and FE Colleges is a waste of public money and must be addressed**

**Paras 87 – 92**

Paragraph 87: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 88: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 89: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 90: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 91: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 92: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 12: To be reworded

**The Committee then returned to the Executive Summary paragraphs 1 to 24 and agreed the following:**

Paragraph 1: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 2: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 3: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 4: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 5: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 6: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 7: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 8: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 9: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 10: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 11: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 12: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 13: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 14: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 15: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 16: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 17: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 18: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 19: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 20: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 21: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 22: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 23: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 24: Read and Agreed

**Recommendations 1 to 12:**

Recommendation 1: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 2: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 3: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 4: To be reworded

Recommendation 5: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 6: To be reworded

Recommendation 7: To be reworded

Recommendation 8: Read and Agreed

Recommendation 9: To be reworded

Recommendation 10: To be reworded

Recommendation 11: To be reworded

Recommendation 12: To be reworded

That concluded the first consideration of the report – Developing the Skills for Northern Ireland's Future.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to bring the amended Report to its meeting on 22 May 2025 for final consideration

Officials left the meeting at 3.08 pm.

The meeting moved into open session at 3.08 pm.

### **8. Memorandum of Reply: Public Procurement in Northern Ireland**

The following witnesses and officials joined the meeting at 3.08 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Suzanne Jones, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

**Agreed:** Members agreed to seek an update on the MOR.

Officials left the meeting at 3.15 pm.

The meeting moved into closed session at 3.15 pm.

### **9. Northern Ireland Audit Office 2025-2026 Public Reporting Programme.**

The following witnesses and officials joined the meeting at 3.15 pm:

Dorinnia Carville, Comptroller and Auditor General;

Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The C&AG briefed members on the Northern Ireland Audit Office Public Reporting Programme for 2025-2026.

**Agreed:** Members noted the Public Reporting Programme.

The Chair thanked officials for attending.

### **10. Forward Work Programme**

The Clerk briefed members on the draft forward work programme,

**Agreed:** Members agreed the draft forward work programme.

Members reviewed the reports over which the PAC currently has primacy.

**Agreed:** Members agreed the next report selected for inquiry will be 'Homelessness in Northern Ireland'.

### **11. Any Other Business**

### **12. Date, Time, and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting will take place in Room 21 on Thursday 15 May 2025 at 2.00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.16 pm.

**Daniel McCrossan**

**Chairperson, Public Accounts Committee**

**15 May 2025**