



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION**

### **Minutes of Proceedings**

WEDNESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2020

Video Conference and Senate Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Robbie Butler MLA  
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA

**Present by Video Conference:**

Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA  
Mr William Humphrey MLA  
Mr Justin McNulty MLA

**Apologies:** Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

**In Attendance:** Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)  
Ms Paula Best (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Emma Magee (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 9:03am in open session.*

#### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

#### **2. Chairperson's Business**

##### **2.1 Cancellation of end of year examinations in Wales**

The Chairperson advised the Committee that it had been reported that the devolved government in Wales had decided to set aside GCSE, AS and A-level end of year examinations in 2021. It was understood that end of year examinations were to be replaced with controlled assessments set by the examining body, delivered in school and marked externally.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) seeking: clarity on contingency arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A-level examinations in Northern Ireland for 2021

(including the use of moderated controlled assessments); and an update on CCEA's related discussions with examination regulatory bodies across the United Kingdom.

## 2.2 Independent Review of Education

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Minister had provided a copy of the draft terms of reference for the New Decade New Approach independent review of education and was seeking the Committee's views.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to consider the draft terms of reference and discuss its position at its next scheduled meeting.

## 2.3 Informal meeting with Belfast Special School Principals

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that Members had met informally with Belfast Special School principals on Tuesday 3 November 2020 and that a note on the meeting had been circulated to Members.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite representatives of Special Schools to brief the Committee in formal session at the end of the Special School Area Planning consultation, early in the New Year.

*Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 9:06am.*

## 2.4 General Teaching Council Northern Ireland

The Chairperson reminded Members that in the Department of Education's annual report and accounts for 2019-20, reference had been made to the General Teaching Council Northern Ireland (GTCNI) being put into "special measures". The annual report also seemed to imply that GTCNI may perhaps not have the necessary vires to de-register teachers.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking clarity on the use of "special measures" at GTCNI and in respect of the position relating to the de-registration of teachers.

*Mr Humphrey rejoined the meeting at 9:07am.*

## 2.5 Educational Psychology Assessments

The Chairperson advised Members that in recent Assembly Written Questions it had been indicated that 699 Educational Psychology assessments have been paused and a further 1,842 children are awaiting assessment.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority seeking clarity on the progress of Educational Psychology assessments and confirmation on the number of assessments that have actually been completed since lockdown began in March 2020.

## 3. Draft Minutes

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 4 November 2020.

## 4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

## 5. Forward Work Programme

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had previously taken evidence on the impact of the suspension of Special Educational Needs services on parents and children during lockdown and restart.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to arrange an informal Committee stakeholder event on the impact of lockdown and restart on the provision of Special Educational Needs on Thursday 3 December 2020 at 6-8pm via Zoom.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed a draft invitation and list of invitees. The Committee further agreed that Members would advise the Clerk of other relevant organisation to be invited to attend the event.

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

## **6. Irish Football Association, Gaelic Athletic Association and Ulster Rugby – sport and physical activity in the curriculum – oral briefing**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Irish Football Association (IFA) and Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) on recent research into the current Sports Programme and a briefing paper from Ulster Rugby.

The following witnesses joined the meeting in person at 9:09am:

Michael Boyd, Director, Irish Football Association;

Eugene Young, Director of Coaching and Games Development, Gaelic Athletic Association; and

Chris Webster, Head of Rugby, Ulster Rugby.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 9:09am:

Claire Rea, School Sports Coordinator, Irish Football Association;

Michael Glover, Key Stage 2 Project Coordinator, Gaelic Athletic Association;

Callum Irving, Researcher, Physical Intelligence;

*Mr Lyttle made a declaration of interest that he was a voluntary IFA coach.*

*Mr McCrossan joined the meeting at 9:19am.*

The witnesses provided a briefing on sport and physical activity in the curriculum.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

*Ms Mullan left the meeting at 9:48am.*

*Mr Humphrey made a declaration of interest that he was the President of the West Belfast District Scout Council.*

*Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 10:15am.*

*Mr Butler left the meeting at 10:17am. The Committee lost its decision making quorum.*

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

*Proceedings were suspended at 10:35am.*

*Proceedings resumed at 11:47am with Mr Lyttle, Mr Butler and Mr McCrossan present in the Senate Chamber, and Ms Mullan, Mr Bradley, and Mr McNulty present by video conference.*

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister:

- indicating its support for the proposed GAA/IFA £2.5m Primary School programme;

- seeking clarity on the measures the Department had undertaken in order to monitor and record the provision of Physical Education (PE) time in schools; and
- asking whether the Minister is considering launching a consultation to make the provision of a minimum level of PE time compulsory in schools.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department;

- seeking up to date data on participation by school pupils in PE;
- seeking clarity on the different physical activities relating to sport and otherwise on offer in schools;
- seeking sight of the PE curriculum;
- asking it to identify the barriers to participation in physical activity among pupils generally and for girls in particular and to indicate how these are to be addressed;
- asking it to indicate why schools appear unable to ensure recommended levels of PE are provided;
- seeking clarity as to whether new school builds are obliged to ensure they include adequate and appropriate PE facilities; and
- seeking confirmation that schools are able to avail of council facilities in order to provide PE.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to commission the Assembly Research and Information Service to produce a paper summarising research into the cost-benefit impact of the provision of physical education in schools in terms of health and economic benefits.

## **7. Department of Education / Education Authority – Draft Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework - oral briefing.**

The Committee noted the draft Children and Young People’s Emotional Health and Well-being in Education Framework.

The following officials joined the meeting by video conference at 11:58am:

Ricky Irwin, Director, Inclusion and Well-being, Department of Education;

Angela Kane, Head of Pupil Support Team, Department of Education;

Shauna Collinson, Interim Assistant Director of Pupil Inclusion, Wellbeing and Protection

*Mr Humphrey rejoined the meeting at 12:01pm.*

The officials briefed the Committee on the draft Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

*Mr Humphrey left the meeting at 12:30pm.*

*Mr Butler left the meeting at 12:37pm*

*Mr McCrossan left the meeting at 12:44pm. The Committee lost its decision-making quorum.*

*Mr McCrossan rejoined the meeting at 12:48pm. The Committee regained its decision-making quorum.*

The Chairperson thanked the officials for the briefing.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and Education Authority (EA) welcoming progress on the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework; encouraging greater joined-up working with the Department of Health and other departments; and stressing the vital importance of early intervention in the Framework and that this should be clearly set out in the accompanying text. The Committee also agreed to suggest that the Department / EA should make the best use of expertise in the community and voluntary sector and local councils.

*Agreed:* The Committee also agreed to write to the Department and the EA suggesting that it take forward the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum Elephant in the Room report including:

- the development of a mental health dictionary;
- the inclusion of explicit references to mental health in the curriculum;
- the development of a youth mental health hub including an on-line chat function; and
- the development of a youth-led mental health campaign.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department/EA to seek further information on the timescale for the piloting of counselling services in primary schools and details of the CCEA well-being curricular hub.

*Agreed:* The Committee also agreed to write to the Department/EA to seek further details on the overall estimated costs of the draft Framework and the projected shortfall compared to the £6.5m budget.

## **8. Correspondence**

8.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

8.2 The Committee noted a response from the Minister regarding the absence of clarity from CCEA in respect of 2020 grade awarding models and options.

8.3 The Committee noted with concern a response from the Department of Education regarding issues raised by parents of children with dyslexia.

8.4 The Committee noted with concern a response from the Department of Education about training teachers for the deaf.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the response to the National Deaf Children's Society and asking that this organisation advise of ongoing stakeholder engagement by the Department in order to resolve anticipated shortages of teachers for the deaf.

8.5 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned parent highlighting concerns about the transfer test.

8.6 The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual on the use of live streaming sessions to teach pupils at home as an alternative to school closures.

8.7 The Committee considered correspondence from the Queen's University of Belfast Centre for Children's Rights providing a copy of a research report exploring life in lockdown for autistic young people in Northern Ireland.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite the Queen's University Belfast Centre for Children's Rights to its informal Committee stakeholder event on the impact of lockdown on the provision of Special Educational Needs on Thursday 3 December 2020.

8.8 The Committee considered correspondence from Action for Children on the impact of lockdown on vulnerable children.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite Action for Children to its informal Committee stakeholder event on the impact of lockdown on the provision of Special Educational Needs on Thursday 3 December 2020.

8.9 The Committee considered correspondence from the Minister of Education on changes to GCSE curricula and assessment for 2021. Members discussed rising concerns among teachers relating to the delivery of the curriculum in 2020-21.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to seek an early oral briefing from the Minister of Education on curriculum delivery issues for the current academic year.

8.10 The Committee noted correspondence from a pupil indicating concerns about changes to the GCSE English Literature examination.

8.11 The Committee noted correspondence from another pupil indicating concerns about changes to the GCSE English Literature examination.

8.12 The Committee noted correspondence from a further pupil indicating concerns about changes to the GCSE English Literature examination.

8.13 The Committee considered an invitation from Deloitte MCS Limited inviting the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to participate in the review of the grade awarding arrangements used by CCEA in 2020.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to respond providing copies of its previous correspondence to the Department of Education and CCEA on grade awarding issues.

## **9. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

## **10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 18 November 2020 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:30am.

*The meeting was adjourned at 1:14pm.*

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**

**18 November 2020**