



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Economy

Minutes of Proceedings

Wednesday 23 October 2024

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont

Present:

Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

Mr Philip McGuigan MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Apologies:

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

In Attendance:

Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Anthea Matthews (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:02am

1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chairperson's Business

3.1 Review of Higher Education

The Chairperson advised that in AQW 16536/22-27 the Minister had referred to a review of Higher Education which is to be launched in 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking the timeline and the terms of reference for the review including the potential impact on the MaSN cap and the distribution of students across Northern Ireland's university campuses.

3.2 Alliance for Lifelong Learning

The Chairperson advised that in AQW 16217/22-27 the Minister had referred to research into the impact measurement of lifelong learning with the Alliance for Lifelong Learning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking more information on the related research and the initiatives that are being pursued with the Alliance for Lifelong Learning.

3.3 NUS-USI

The Chairperson advised that, as previously agreed, he met with representatives of NUS-USI on Tuesday 22 October 2024. A note of the meeting had been issued to Members.

4. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 16 October 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Correspondence

6.1 Index

Noted: The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

6.2 Local Economic Partnership Funding Formula

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response indicating that the Department is developing the Local Economic Partnership funding formula by end of December 2024 and will approve development projects from May 2025.

6.3 Student Loans

Noted: The Committee noted a Departmental response indicating that Graduate Entry Medical School students are to be treated as undergraduates and will consequently be able to apply for tuition fee loans. The Department also clarified that student loans are between the student and the Department and that related policy is set by the Department. The Committee noted also that a related Departmental briefing is scheduled for January 2025.

6.4 SIB Report on Support for FE Students

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the SIB report on the demands on the Additional Support Fund for Further Education students.

6.5 Joint working between DE and DfE

Noted: The Committee noted an update from the Department in respect of co-operation with the Department of Education including the Careers Action Plan which is to be published in December 2024. The Committee noted that it was awaiting a further Departmental response on the 14-19 Framework.

6.6 Translink Business Case - Nightmovers Service

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Minister for Infrastructure indicating that, pending receipt of the related Translink business case, it appeared that there was unlikely to be sufficient budget to support the extension of Nightmovers service.

6.7 Nightmovers Service

Noted: The Committee noted a response from the Economy Minister indicating that the Department is undertaking research with 3 Belfast Business Improvement Districts and Translink to understand the impact of public transport on the night time economy.

Jonathan Buckley joined the meeting at 10:08am

6.8 Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence between the Home Office and the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Committee including commentary on the Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme.

The Committee recorded its continuing support for the Minister seeking derogations from the ETA scheme in order to support tourism in Northern Ireland.

6.9 Productivity Research

Noted: The Committee noted a response from Dr Jordan in respect of research into well-being issues linked to productivity including the 4 day week etc..

6.10 UKG Insurance Taskforce

The Committee considered correspondence from the Competition and Markets Authority advising of the establishment of a UKG taskforce to review and stabilise motor insurance costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the SoS for Transport and the Economic Secretary to Treasury, welcoming the Taskforce; seeking information on its terms of reference including motor insurance in NI and offering engagement with the Committee.

6.11 UKG Insurance Taskforce- ABI

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of further advice from the Association of British Insurers in respect of the UKG Taskforce to review and stabilise motor insurance costs

6.12 Additional Support for Families with Multiple Births

The Committee considered commentary from a concerned individual in respect of the need for additional support for families with multiple births – including in respect of employee leave and altering maternity payments to be: per baby rather than per birth.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Committee for Education, for its information.

6.13 NI Human Rights Commission Strategic Plan Consultation

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of the NI Human Rights Commission strategic plan consultation.

6.14 RHI

Noted: The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from the Renewable Heat Association NI to the Department seeking a meeting on RHI and referencing a forensic accountant's report.

7. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek a Ministerial evidence session before Christmas on the 2025-26 budget position.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Education suggesting a further joint concurrent meeting on the extension of compulsory education; 14-19 framework and careers matters etc.

Agreed: The Committee noted that Ulster University had failed to respond to the Committee's invitation to provide oral and written evidence.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme, as amended.

8. Any Other Business

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the President of the University of Mosul, Iraq advising of the very useful informal meeting with the UNESCO group and hoping for a further engagement in May 2025 when the group returns to Northern Ireland.

9. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 6 November 2024 at 10:00am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:17am.

Phillip Brett MLA

Chairperson, Committee for the Economy

6 November 2024