



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for the Economy

## Minutes of Proceedings

**Wednesday 24 September 2025**

**Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings**

**Present:** Mr Phillip Brett MLA (Chairperson)

Ms Diana Armstrong MLA

Mr David Honeyford MLA

**Present by video-conferencing:**

Mr Gary Middleton MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Jonathan Buckley MLA

Mr Pádraig Delargy MLA

Ms Sinéad McLaughlin MLA

Ms Emma Sheerin MLA

**Apologies:** Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

**In Attendance:** Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)

Katie McMaster (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

Karen O'Hare (Clerical Supervisor)

Kyle Lawlor (Clerical Officer)

The meeting commenced in public session at 10:08am.

## **1. Apologies**

Apologies were as indicated above.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **3. Chairperson's Business**

### **3.1 RHI Closure – Ministerial Statement**

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that the Minister had made an oral statement on 22 September 2025 in respect of the Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme.

**Noted:** The Committee noted a summary document of the pre-statement informal meeting with the Minister, that had been circulated previously.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from the Department on the RHI Closure Bill and the way forward for the Scheme.

### **3.2 Informal Meeting – HoL International Agreements Committee**

The Chairperson reminded Members of the recent informal meeting with the House of Lords International Agreements Committee on 17 September 2025.

**Noted:** The Committee noted a summary document of the informal meeting that had been circulated previously.

#### **4. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the Economy Committee meeting of 17 September 2025.

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

There were no matters arising.

#### **6. Careers Action Plan – Departmental oral and written evidence**

The following officials joined the meeting at 10:10am

- Clement Athanasiou, Director of Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division, DfE;
- Justin Kerr, Head of the Careers Service, DfE;
- Karen McCullough, Director of Qualifications, 14-19 Strategy, Statistics & Research, DE; and
- Gareth Edge, Head of the 14-19 Strategy Team, DE

Key issues discussed included: the careers portal discovery phase and business case; transformation bids; measuring progress for the action plan; Careers Occupation Information Unit support for careers teachers; professional development for all post-primary and special school careers teachers; the 6<sup>th</sup> form Funding Review and duplication between schools and FE colleges; meaningful work experience and insurance issues; a post-primary trial of triage and multiple careers advice interventions; AI autism tool; green skills and the integration with the broader curriculum; primary school engagement; support in the Jobs and Benefits offices etc.; support for redundancies and marginalised groups including the launch of the careers A to Z toolkit; exemplar jurisdictions; increases in NEETs and the link to skills vacancies; and Skills Council partnerships.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

Padraig Delargy left the meeting at 11:12am

The officials left the meeting at 11:14am.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking further information in respect of the related transformation bids.

**Agreed:** The Committee also agreed to write to the Committee for Education indicating its general support for the Careers Action Plan and its expectation that plans will lead to delivery.

## **7. Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Departmental oral and written evidence**

The following officials joined the meeting at 11:14am:

- Giulia Ní Dhulchaointigh, Director of Social and Regional Economy Division, DfE; and
- Ryan Crawford – Deputy Principal, Tourism Legislation, DfE

The evidence session was reported by Hansard

Key issues discussed included: the powers within the Bill to establish companies; issue grants; and the remit of Invest NI.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

The officials left the meeting at 11:20am.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond to the Committee for Finance indicating its support for the relevant clauses of the Bill, as they address the findings of the NIAO and as the consultation produced no objections.

The Committee agreed to revise the order of its agenda.

## **8. Correspondence**

### **8.1 Index**

**Noted:** The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

## **8.2 Ministerial Statement: RHI**

**Noted:** The Committee noted notice of a Ministerial oral statement on RHI tariffs etc. on Monday 22 September 2025.

## **8.3 Renewable Electricity Support Scheme**

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence providing further information on the renewable electricity support scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an oral and written evidence session from the Department on the Final Scheme Design.

## **8.4 Higher Education Financial Needs Analysis**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence indicating that the Higher Education Financial Needs Analysis is underway.

## **8.5 Higher Education Funding review**

The Committee considered Departmental correspondence providing information on the work strands of the Higher Education Funding review.

The Committee commented on the need for equitable treatment of students and all parts of the HE sector.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek an oral and written evidence session from the Department on the HE Funding Review.

## **8.6 Innovation Action Plan**

**Noted:** The Committee noted Ministerial correspondence including a copy of the Innovation Action Plan.

### **8.7 Postgraduate Tuition Fee Loans**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a Departmental Press Release in respect of the consultation on the NI postgraduate tuition fee loans.

### **8.8 Workplace Saving Schemes**

The Committee considered a Departmental response in respect of workplace saving schemes.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Financial Inclusion Team at the Department for Communities seeking clarity as to how workplace savings schemes are to be promoted.

### **8.9 Insolvency (Amendment) Bill Responses**

**Noted:** The Committee noted nil return responses in respect of the call for evidence for the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill, from the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and from the Committee for Justice

### **8.10 LCMs**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing information on the Cyber Security and Resilience (Network and Information Systems) Bill and the Public Office (Accountability) Bill (known as the Hillsborough Law) for which legislative consent may be sought from the Assembly.

### **8.11 Cross-cutting Executive policies**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, including forwarded information from the Executive Office in respect of cross-cutting Executive policies.

### **8.12 ESR Report**

**Noted:** The Committee noted the forty-fourth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, including S.R. 2025/110: The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) 2025 on which no comment was made by the ESR.

### **8.13 HoL NI Scrutiny Committee**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a response from the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee on the implementation of the EU Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) in Northern Ireland.

### **8.14 Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre**

**Noted:** The Committee noted a letter of thanks from the Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre, following its briefing on 17 September 2025.

### **8.15 ERG – Request for informal meeting**

The Committee considered correspondence from ERG, requesting an informal meeting with the Chairperson in respect of renewable energy and grid issues.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content for the Chairperson to meet informally with ERG, diary permitting.

### **8.16 Concerned Individual**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of wayleave arrangements and payments.

### **8.17 Concerned Individual**

**Noted:** The Committee noted correspondence from a concerned individual in respect of Department for the Economy handling of Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests.

### **8.18 QUB Invitation**

The Committee considered an invitation to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to an AI event on 22 October 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed it was content for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend the AI event on 22 October 2025, diaries permitting.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to defer its visit to Collins Aerospace and delay its related evidence session with the ADS Group.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Health asking to be kept abreast of issues relating to the funding of Day Opportunities for post-19 SEN young people.

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



## **10. Westminster Sustainable Aviation Fuel Bill – Evidence Session**

The following officials joined the meeting at 11:30am:

- Ian Maxwell – Head of Air Connectivity, DfE; and
- Stuart Maxwell – Air Connectivity Section, DfE

The evidence session was reported by Hansard

Key issues discussed included: spin-off benefits for local industry of sustainable aviation fuel; and the Minister's agreement to seek legislative consent for the relevant provisions of the Bill, subject to Executive approval.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their briefing.

The officials left the meeting at 11:37am.

**Agreed**      The Committee agreed to write to the Minister indicating its support for legislative consent for the Bill.

## **11. Any Other Business**

### **11.1 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Bursary Scheme**

**Agreed**      The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Education welcoming his announcement of the awarding of training bursaries to address teacher shortages.

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

The next Economy Committee meeting is scheduled to begin on Wednesday 1 October 2025 at 9:30am in Room 30, Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

The Committee meeting was adjourned at 11:39am.

**Phillip Brett MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for the Economy**

**1 October 2025**