



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

24 April 2024

**Meeting Location:** Room 29, Parliament Buildings

**Present:**

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)

Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Danny Baker MLA

Mr David Brooks MLA

Ms Cheryl Brownlee MLA

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Kate Nicholl MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Joshua Devlin (Clerical Officer)



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The meeting commenced at 2:00 pm in public session.

### **1. Apologies**

An apology was received from Robbie Butler MLA.

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

- 2.1 The Committee noted a record of informal meeting with NIC-ICTU on 16 April 2024.
- 2.2 The Chairperson informed the Committee that members held an informal meeting with British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy on 23 April 2024 and that a record of the meeting would be prepared for the next Committee meeting.

Ms Nicholl joined the meeting at 2.02pm.

### **3. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **4. Minutes of Proceedings**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 17 April 2024.



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### 5. Uniformed Youth Groups - Oral Briefing

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Department of Education on Youth Service funding

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Uniformed Youth Groups.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2: 02 pm:

Ms Lisa Keys, Chief Officer, Boys' Brigade Northern Ireland

Ms Claire Flowers, Chief Executive, Girlguiding Ulster

Ms Patricia McDermott, Executive Officer, Catholic Guides of Ireland

Mr Jonathan Gracey, Chief Executive, Scouts NI

Mr Ronan McGibbon, Provincial Commissioner, Scouting Ireland

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on the role of uniformed youth groups.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority to request:

- An assessment of the effectiveness of the uniform hub and the possibility of reinstating funding for this;
- Reconsideration of the limits of use of schools, outdoor education centres and the EA estate by voluntary groups, and engagement with Boards of Governors to promote community and voluntary sector activity in schools;
- A forecast regarding the timing and likelihood of more sustainable budget arrangements and award of development funding for retention of staff;
- Consideration of the high levels of administration required to comply with minor awards of grant; and
- Consideration of funding for training and for resumption of mental health programmes delivered by appropriate facilitators.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Communities seeking an update on the volunteering Strategy and how it might support voluntary youth services.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Justice regarding delays in processing Access NI applications, the impact of these and the timeline for Access NI becoming a “portable” service.

### **6. Education Authority – First Day Brief part 3 – CEO Introduction and Youth Provision - Oral briefing**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Education Authority

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:03 pm:

Mr Richard Pengelly, Chief Executive, Education Authority

Mr Dale Hanna, Director of Children & Young People’s Services, Education Authority

Mr Michael Hogg, Head of Service for Children & Young People’s Services,  
Education Authority

Ms Lynsey Branniff, Head of Youth Service, Local Delivery

The witnesses provided the Committee with an overview of the work of the Education Authority regarding Youth Provision.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority to request:

- elaboration of the youth service budget and funding model, providing a breakdown of funding for statutory vs community and voluntary services, including annual core awards and partnered programme funding;
- greater transparency in funding as crossfunding obscures impact;
- a breakdown of unfilled positions across the Education Authority; and
- follow-up information referred to by officials on a) local provision for interdisciplinary SEN support services “plugging into” youth provision and b) communication with parents regarding the cessation of swimming lessons.



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### 7. Correspondence

7.1 The Committee noted an index and summary note of correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education providing further information on sustainability and Infrastructure.

7.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Department of Education regarding SR 2024.94 the Period Products Regulations.

7.4 The Committee noted the Ninth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

7.5 The Committee noted correspondence from Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for the Executive Office regarding scrutiny of Common Frameworks.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to respond to the Committee for the Executive Office indicating that no areas covered by common frameworks are scrutinised by the Committee.

7.6 The Committee noted correspondence from Downey House Parents.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education asking that it considers the governance concerns raised.

7.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Speakers for Schools seeking a meeting with the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite Speakers for Schools to brief it at an informal meeting.

7.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Harry's Law Campaign regarding concerns about the unregulated use of restraint and seclusion in schools in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the Harry's Law campaign to an informal meeting.

7.9 The Committee noted correspondence from Barnardo's regarding the closure of the 'Time 4 Me' primary school service.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education seeking its assessment of the impact of the loss of this service to primary schools and seeking an urgent update as to how it intends to bring counselling and therapeutic services on a sustainably funded basis into primary schools.



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**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Health asking how it is working with the Department of Education to deliver counselling and therapeutic services to primary schools.

7.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland sharing their recommendations on Childcare and Early Learning.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the recommendations to the Department of Education supporting these.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to brief it at a future Committee meeting.

7.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Playboard NI and the Mae Murray foundation seeking a meeting with the Committee on inclusive play.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the organisations to brief it at an informal meeting.

7.12 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the lack of SEN provision post-19.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the Correspondence to the Committee for the Economy who have a primary scrutiny role in regard to this age group.

7.13 The Committee noted correspondence from St Malachy's Youth Centre thanking the Committee for sharing the Education Authority's response, and noted their continued dissatisfaction with the Education Authority's approach.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share this response with the Education Authority.

7.14 The Committee noted correspondence from Bytes seeking a meeting with the Committee for the Youth Start consortium, a youth employability programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the Youth Start consortium to brief it at an informal meeting.

7.15 The committee noted correspondence from Youth Work Alliance writing on behalf of a group of youth organisations including Bytes, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, Youth Action seeking to brief the Committee on a report 'Transforming Local Youth Work in NI'.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite the youth organisations to brief it on the report.



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## **8. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the Forward Work Programme as amended.

## **9. Any Other Business**

The Committee discussed the criteria used for pupils applying to move school in exceptional circumstances and noted that mental health was not a relevant criterion.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department for more information on the criteria selected.

## **10. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 1 May 2024 at 1:00pm in Frazer Room, Clondeboye Estate.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:42 pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**1 May 2024**