



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

16 October 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

Mr Colin Crawford MLA

Mrs Michelle Guy MLA

Mr Peter Martin MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)

Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)

Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)

Mr Thomas McConville (Clerical Officer)

Present via teleconference

Ms Cara Hunter MLA

Mrs Cathy Mason MLA



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The meeting commenced at 2:01pm in public session.

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Chairperson's Business

Ms Hunter joined the meeting at 2:06pm.

2.1 The Committee noted a record of an informal meeting with Teaching Unions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education:

- Seeking an update on negotiations with regard to the teachers' pay award; and
- Seeking an update on engagement with teachers unions on workload.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education:

- Seeking his understanding of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Education in regard to establishing a single management authority within education and seeking for a timeline for a departmental response to the independent review of education; and
- Seeking clarity on the rationale for the decision to create a new management authority for controlled schools and the resource involved in this taskforce.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education querying progress on the Childcare Strategy given its content, support, necessity and that it is long awaited; and to the Department of Finance asking it to baseline the money to allow the Childcare Strategy to proceed.

2.2 The Committee discussed an event held with young people regarding its RSE Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to attendees thanking them for their contribution.



3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declaration of interests.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to agenda item 5.

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 9 October 2024.

6. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education - Oral briefing from Dr Áine Aventin

The following witness joined the meeting at 2:16pm via teleconference:

Dr Áine Aventin, Senior Lecturer, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Queen's University Belfast.

The witness provided the Committee with a briefing on Relationships and Sexuality Education.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

7. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education Oral Briefing from the Rainbow Project, HERe NI and Cara-Friend

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Rainbow Project and HERe NI.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:58pm.

Ms Alexa Moore, Policy, Campaigns and Communications Manager, the Rainbow Project



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Ms Sophie Nelson, Policy Officer, HERe NI

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on Relationships and Sexuality Education.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Ms Hunter left the meeting at 3:23pm.

A brief discussion ensued about a link on the Rainbow Project's website.

Mr Martin will pursue this matter as an individual MLA.

The Committee adjourned at 4:02pm.

The Committee resumed at 4:11pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to return to agenda item 4.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered a written briefing paper from the Department of Education on the 2025-2026 Budget process.

The Committee considered a draft Committee response on the Programme for Government.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it was content with the response as amended.

8. Correspondence

8.1 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy forwarding the Northern Ireland Skills Council Digital Skills Action Plan, 2024-2034.

8.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Board of Governors St Mary's Primary School, Fivemiletown, providing a briefing paper on its work to create a definition of strategically Important Small Schools.



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Agreed: The Committee agreed to share the correspondence with the Department of Education.

8.3 The Committee noted correspondence from Michael Brown, Queens University Belfast in relation to the Committee RSE Inquiry.

8.4 The Committee noted correspondence from Dundonald Gospel Hall in relation to the Committee RSE Inquiry.

8.5 The Committee correspondence from the Youth Assembly setting out procedures and processes which are in place to ensure that the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly is a representative group of young people.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Youth Assembly thanking them for their correspondence and welcoming its ongoing engagement with the Committee.

8.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities providing a copy of correspondence to the Department of Education seeking information on work and projects ongoing that involve engagement with disability fora and their members.

8.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing the Department of Finance analysis of 2024-25 Outturn and Forecast Outturn Information for August.

8.8 The Committee noted correspondence from Belfast area Sure Start Managers about the work of Sure Start in Northern Ireland and current issues affecting families with young children living in the disadvantaged communities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite Sure Start to provide it with an oral briefing at a future meeting.

8.9 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual asking about possible conflict of interest were SEAG members to sit on Board of Governors, which select selection criteria.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Education Authority on this matter.

8.10 The Committee noted the Twenty-Third Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules

8.11 The Committee noted the Twenty-fourth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules

8.12 The Committee noted an index of correspondence.



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8:13 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from Whitehead Primary School and Nursery Unit to the Department of Education regarding the option for the nursery unit and the playgroups to offer full time nursery places commencing in September 2025 and concerns about its impact on existing suppliers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education and the Education Authority on this matter.

8:14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Christian Institute detailing concerns about the way the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers is structured.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to revise the questionnaire to add more text boxes and options, allowing for more nuanced and varied responses, and to extend the deadline for responses to Tuesday 12 November 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Christian Institute regarding its decision.

8:15 to 8:130 The Committee noted correspondence from individuals detailing concerns about the way the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers is structured.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the correspondents informing them of its decision to revise the questionnaire to add more text boxes and options, allowing for more nuanced and varied responses, and to extend the deadline for responses to Tuesday 12 November 2024.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

The Committee discussed the scheduling of its RSE Mini-Inquiry.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to extend its inquiry to the end of January 2025.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister expressing disappointment that his diary should preclude his attending Committee before 2025.



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11. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 23 October 2024 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Education
23 October 2024