



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Committee for Education

## Minutes of Proceedings

6 November 2024

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

**Present:**

Mr Nick Mathison MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Danny Baker MLA  
Mr Colin Crawford MLA  
Mrs Michelle Guy MLA  
Ms Cara Hunter MLA  
Mr Peter Martin MLA  
Mrs Cathy Mason MLA

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)  
Mr Jim Nulty (Clerical Supervisor)  
Mr Thomas McConville (Clerical Officer)

**Apologies**

Mr David Brooks MLA



## Northern Ireland Assembly

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

### **1. Apologies**

An apology was received from Mr David Brooks.

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

2.1 Record of informal meeting with Belfast Wider Early Years Network.

The Committee noted a record of member's informal meeting with Belfast Wider Early Years network on 22 October 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Minister of Education indicating that members were impressed by the work of the Belfast pilot and endorsing the ask of:

- a commitment for funding to be provided to the end of the academic year;
- an extension of funding for 2 additional years to allow the collection of further data key to scalability and broader rollout.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange a visit to see the work of the Belfast Wider Early Years Network.

2.2 Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

The Chairperson recorded the Committee's thanks to the Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer on the occasion of her retirement.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

There were no Declarations of Interests.

### **4. Matters Arising**

The Committee discussed correspondence from Danny Baker MLA on his plan to introduce a Private Member's Bill to address the issue of Holiday Hunger.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

The Committee noted a Research and Information Service Paper on School Governors and Parental Accountability.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to ask Research and Information Service for additional information on Departmental powers.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite Research and Information Service and the Department of Education to brief it on School Governors and Parental Accountability at a future meeting.

### 5. Minutes of Proceedings

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 23 October 2024.

### 6. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Oral briefing from Dr Susan Lagdon and Dr Julie Ann Jordan

The Committee noted briefing papers from Dr Lagdon and Dr Jordan

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:10pm via teleconference:

Dr Susan Lagdon, Senior Lecturer in Psychology (Mental Health), Ulster University

Dr Julie Ann Jordan, Senior Researcher, Health and Social Care Northern Ireland.

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

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mrs Mason joined the meeting at 2:27pm.

Ms Hunter joined the meeting at 2:48pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education for information on:



## Northern Ireland Assembly

- How it ensures that home-schooled children and children subject to out-outs receive the full curriculum including mandatory elements of RSE; and
- How flexibly opt-outs from RSE can currently be delivered by schools (ie on a one-off, rolling or subject-to-review basis).

### **7. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Oral Briefing from the Evangelical Alliance**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the Evangelical Alliance.

The following witness joined the meeting at 2.50pm:

Mr David Smyth, Head of Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland

The witness 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 3:35pm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Addressing Bullying in Schools implementation Team asking how they might give guidance on conflicts and bullying in respect of faith-based teachings and sexual identity between pupils.

### **8. Northern Ireland Curriculum Refresh – Written Briefing**

The Committee noted a written briefing on the Northern Ireland Curriculum Refresh.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request an oral briefing from the Department of Education and CCEA.

The Committee adjourned at 3:41pm.

The Committee resumed at 3:50 pm

Ms Hunter re-joined the meeting at 3:50 pm



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**9. October in-year monitoring - Oral briefing from the Department of Education**

The Committee noted briefing papers from the Department of Education, a copy of the Finance Ministers Urgent Oral Statement on Autumn Budget 2024, correspondence from the Committee for Finance, and a Department of Education briefing paper on the Public Services Transformation Board.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:51pm.

Mr Neil Palmer, Acting Finance Director

Mr Stephen Van Houten, Acting Deputy Finance Director

The witnesses provided the Committee with a briefing on budget.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Mathison made a Declaration of Interest that he is a governor of a controlled primary school.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to the Department of Education seeking:

- An oral briefing on the capital budget;
- An explanation of the rationale for the 7.2% in Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta's budget in the light of the statutory duty around Irish Medium education;
- Details of the budget assigned in the current year for SEN transformation and the upcoming action plan;
- Details of the budget for the taskforce for the Controlled Schools Management Authority and wider work to reduce bureaucracy and move towards a single management authority; and
- A justification for proposed spend on the mobile phone pilot project.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing on the Education Authority Smart Bus project.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

### 10. Correspondence

10.1 The Committee noted correspondence from the Competition and Markets Authority providing its response to the Department of Education's School uniforms consultation.

10.2 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual expressing concerns regarding branding on school sports clothing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the IFA and GAA on this matter.

10.3 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers on RSE.

10.4 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers on RSE.

10.5 The Committee noted correspondence from Advice NI proposing changes to the Service provided by the Bereavement service in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department seeking its views on the proposals that relate to it.

10.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Assembly Education Service providing an update on a Speakers for Schools online event on Friday 6 Dec 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and Committee Clerk would attend the event.

10.7 The Committee noted an invitation from the Education Authority to a Black History Expo 2024 event.

10.8 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual about sound issues at a committee meeting.

10.9 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).

10.10 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from Women's Policy Group NI.

10.11 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from Love for Life.

10.12 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy regarding additional support for families with Multiple Births.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

10.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for the Economy suggesting a further joint concurrent meeting to scrutinise the policy and delivery of the extension of compulsory education; 14-19 framework and careers matters.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a joint concurrent meeting with the Committee for the Economy to scrutinise the policy and delivery of the extension of compulsory education; 14-19 framework and careers matters.

10.14 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers on RSE.

10.15 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding links to GenderGP on the Rainbow Project website.

10.16 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers on RSE.

10.17 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers on RSE.

10.18 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from Parentkind.

10.19 The Committee noted an invitation from the Education Authority to a Restorative Practice in Education conference.

10.20 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from Women's Platform.

10.21 The Committee noted the twenty fifth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

10.22 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Infrastructure forwarding correspondence from Minister of Infrastructure on Zero Emissions Vehicles and fleet management.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Department of Education and the Education Authority asking about the uptake of electric/zero emissions vehicles across their fleets.

10.23 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from Informing Choices Northern Ireland.

10.24 The Committee noted the Social Value Monitoring Investing Activity Report for the Department of Education for October 2024.

10.25 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from the Mental Health Champion.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

10.26 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from Alliance for Choice.

10.27 The Committee noted an invitation from Invitation from Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to the launch of its Annual Human Rights Statement 2024.

10.28 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from the Marie Collins Foundation.

10.29 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from Humanists UK.

10.30 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers on RSE.

10.31 The Committee noted the Education Authority Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24.

10.32 The Committee noted Correspondence from NICCY proposing a joint Education Committee /Health Committee evidence session on co-operation on Special Educational Needs.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to NICCY to confirm that a joint meeting was being arranged on this issue.

10.33 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the Rural Childcare Programme.

10.34 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from HerNI and the Rainbow Project.

10.35 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from PolicyWise.

10.36 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from Parenting Focus.

10.37 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

10.38 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

10.39 The Committee noted a submission to its inquiry into RSE from CCEA.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to include the responses in its inquiry into RSE.

10.40 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the implementation of the 14-19 implementation framework.





## Northern Ireland Assembly

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing on the implementation of the 14-19 implementation framework.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with the Committee for the Economy.

10.41 The Committee noted an invitation from the Education Authority to its Joint Consultative Forum on 5th December 2024.

10.42 The Committee noted an E-Newsletter from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

10.43 The Committee noted Correspondence from Auditory Verbal regarding access to early and effective support for deaf children.

10.44 The Committee noted the Department of Education Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24.

10.45 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers on RSE.

10.46 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual regarding the Committee questionnaire for parents and teachers on RSE.

10.47 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities providing a response from the Department of Education on disability rights and representation.

10.48 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the Education Psychology allocation Model.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with Causeway Neurodiversity.

10.49 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on guidance for mobile phone use in schools.

10.50 The Committee noted a response from Invisible Traffick providing information on its Junior Education Programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the paper with the Committee for Justice and the Committee for Health indicating the possible expansion of the project with additional funding.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to include the response in its inquiry into RSE.



## Northern Ireland Assembly

10.51 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority regarding pre-school placements at Whitehead PS.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to share the response with Whitehead Nursery Unit.

10.52 The Committee noted a response from the Ulster University School of Law to the Northern Ireland Programme for Government.

10.53 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority on RSE provision in youth work.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to include the response in its inquiry into RSE.

### 11. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to invite Love for Life to its stakeholder event on 12 November 2024.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing on the operation of DEIS schools in the Republic of Ireland.

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

### 12. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the work of the Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to circulate details of the Foundation's work to members.



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 13 November 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:57pm.

**Nick Mathison MLA**

**Chairperson, Committee for Education  
13 November 2024**