



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

4 December 2024

Meeting Location: Room 30, Parliament Buildings

Present: Mr Nick Mathison MLA (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

Apologies: Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)



Northern Ireland Assembly

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

1. Apologies

An apology was received from Mr Pat Sheehan.

2. Chairperson's Business

2.1 Oral Ministerial Statement on the Curriculum-Led Capital Investment Programme

The Committee noted a copy of the Oral Statement by the Minister of Education on the Curriculum-Led Capital Investment Programme.

2.2 Informal meeting with the Christian Institute

The Committee noted that an official report of the meeting would be prepared by Hansard.

3. Declaration of Interests

Mr Crawford made a declaration that he was a member of the Board of Governors of Governor, Harryville Primary School which has Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPIMS) units.

4. Matters Arising

No Matters arising were discussed.

5. Minutes of Proceedings

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 27 November 2024.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

6. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Oral Briefing from the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion

The Committee noted an RSE inquiry submission from the Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 2:04pm:

Professor Siobhan O'Neill, NI Mental Health Champion, Mental Health Champion

Dr Nicole Bond, Research Officer, Mental Health Champion

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

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an oral briefing with the Mental Health Champion on curriculum review in due course.

7. Committee Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) - Oral Briefing from Informing Choices.

The Committee noted an RSE inquiry submission from Informing Choices.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 3:22pm:

Mr Mark Breslin, Chief Executive Officer, Informing Choices NI

Mr Ruari Rowan, Director of Advocacy & Policy, Informing Choices 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 joined the meeting at 4:00pm.



Northern Ireland Assembly

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Informing Choices for further information on the training materials they use.

The Committee adjourned at 4:05pm.

The Committee resumed at 4:11pm.

8. Special Educational Needs and General Update - Oral Briefing -Teaching Unions

The Committee noted a briefing paper from Northern Ireland Teachers Council and a response from the Department of Education on the teachers' pay award.

The following witnesses joined the meeting at 4:11pm.

Ms Jacquie White, General Secretary, Ulster Teachers' Union

Mr Mark McTaggart, Northern Secretary, Irish National Teachers' Organisation

Mr Justin McCamphill, National Official Northern Ireland, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers

Ms Jackie Bartley, NI President, National Association of Head Teachers

Ms Pauline Buchanan, Regional Secretary, National Education Union

The witnesses provided the Committee with an update on staffing issues.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

Mr Brooks left the meeting at 4:58pm.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking inter alia:

- An update on the implementation of the TNC2011/2 Policy Statement on Tackling Violence and Abusive Behaviour against Teachers;
- An update on teachers' workload;
- An update on recruitment, retention and attrition rates in the teaching profession and an assessment of the need for intervention in this area; and



Northern Ireland Assembly

- The Department's assessment of the workload carried by SENCO's; and whether for instance it is scoping out the capacity to deliver this as a non-teaching role.

9. Correspondence

9.1 The Committee noted an index and summary of correspondence.

9.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance regarding its Northern Ireland Banking and Financial Services landscape Inquiry.

9.3 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority providing follow-up to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission Investigation into RSE in Post-Primary Schools in NI: assessment of progress against recommendations

9.4 The Committee noted the ISNI Report Delivery Tracking System Investing Activity Report for the Department of Education (DE) for November 2024.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education seeking an explanation for projects whose progress had not been updated in more than 90 days.

9.5 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual on its RSE Inquiry.

9.6 The Committee noted correspondence from the Youth Assembly about a project it is carrying out to examine the Learning for Life and Work (LLW) curriculum in schools.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a briefing with the Youth Assembly on the project in June 2025.

9.7 The Committee noted correspondence from the Education Authority about a Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) meeting on Thursday 5 December 2024.

9.8 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Communities asking about co-operation with the Voluntary and Community sector on Public Sector Policy development.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department of Education seeking a response to the issues raised.

9.9 The Committee noted a copy of correspondence from Causeway Coast and Glens Policing and Community Safety Partnership to the Minister of Education



Northern Ireland Assembly

regarding the need for a more centralised approach to providing age-appropriate developmental support for children and young adults regarding RSE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to add the correspondence to its inquiry into RSE.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to ask Causeway Coast and Glens Policing and Community Safety Partnership for further information on the project it is highlighting.

9.10 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on a briefing by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman on the use of restrictive practices in education.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a briefing from NITC and the Department of Education on school governance.

9.11 The Committee noted correspondence from Smartphone Free Childhood seeking to brief the Committee on research and evidence regarding the impact of smartphone use in schools across Northern Ireland.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange a formal briefing with the group.

9.12 The Committee noted correspondence from Dr Suzanne Whitten regarding the Philosophy with Children project.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to arrange an informal briefing on the Philosophy with Children project.

9.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Committee for Finance providing an update on proposals under consideration by the Interim Public Sector Transformation Board.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Finance to ascertain when they would arrive at the outcomes of the process.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a draft forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss priorities for its meeting with the Minister of Education at its next meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed its Forward Work Programme.



Northern Ireland
Assembly

11. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed.

13. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 11 December 2024 in Room 29, Parliament Buildings at 2:00pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:37pm.

Nick Mathison MLA

Chairperson, Committee for Education
11 December 2024