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Dear Gillian

Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill

I refer to your email of 13 August 2025 and would respond to your queries as follows:

Can you clarify for me where the power currently with DfE lies i.e. what is the legislative basis for this? Also, why was the power transferred to DfE?

- Article (51) of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 covers the making of awards to persons in respect of post graduate courses.
- Following devolution in 1998, and the creation of the Northern Ireland Departments by the Departments (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, this power was transferred to what was then the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (now DfE) by the Departments (Transfer and Assignment of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 1999 (SR 1999/481). This was on the basis that the power relates to the provision of awards in respect of higher education.

- No similar power currently exists for the Department of Education to make awards in respect of higher education.

Can you explain why QUB is the only realistic source?

- The EA has a statutory obligation to seek psychological advice in specified circumstances in line with Special Educational Needs (SEN) legislation. This obligation requires EA to employ suitably qualified and registered Educational Psychologists (EPs). It is therefore necessary to ensure that there is a sufficient pool of EPs within Northern Ireland from which the EA can recruit staff.
- The Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DECAP) is the only professional training course in educational psychology within Northern Ireland which provides the relevant qualification to enable registration as a practitioner. DECAP provides the relevant qualification to enable registration as a practitioner and produces a pool of suitably qualified EPs to enable the EA to meet its statutory obligations in line with Special Educational Needs legislation. The Doctorate programme also provides much of the access to ongoing Continued Professional Development required by an EP practitioner in order to maintain their registration.
- DECAP is a specialised and tailored course delivered by Queen's University (QUB) and was set up in 2006 at the behest of the Department to ensure that the EA could meet the statutory requirements.
- Students who are successful in getting a place on the course are granted a Training Award, which covers QUB tuition Fees, bursary and travel and conference costs. Students who successfully complete the DECAP course are obliged to take up employment as EPs within the EA for a minimum period of three years following qualification.
- If the DECAP was not funded by DE it is unlikely that QUB would continue to deliver this course, resulting in a diminishing pool of EPs available to work

within the EA, and this would substantially impact on the lives of children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

- There are no other universities or colleges in Northern Ireland that deliver the necessary Doctorate qualification to become registered as an Educational Psychologist. There are several universities in mainland Great Britain, and two universities in the Republic of Ireland that deliver a Doctorate in Educational Psychology, however students completing the course at one of these universities have no obligation to take up employment in the Education Authority. Without a sufficient number of Educational Psychologists graduating from the DECAP each year, the EA would have insufficient staff to meet its statutory obligations due to lack of resources

I trust this information is sufficient to address your queries, however if you need anything further please let me know.

Yours sincerely

Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer