



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Legacy Report 2011-16

NIA 317/11-16

REMIT, POWERS AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee for Education is a Statutory Departmental Committee established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Belfast Agreement, Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and under Standing Order 48.

Statutory Committees have been established to advise and assist the appropriate Minister on the formation of policy in relation to matters within his/her responsibilities. Specifically, the Committee has power to:

- consider and advise on departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- consider relevant secondary legislation and take the committee stage of primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister for Education.

The Committee has 11 members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, and a quorum of 5. The membership of the Committee is as follows:

Mr Peter Weir (Chairperson)

Ms Sandra Overend (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Jonathan Craig

Mr Chris Hazzard

Ms Dolores Kelly

Mr Danny Kennedy

Mr Trevor Lunn

Mr Nelson McCausland

Ms Maeve McLaughlin

Mr Robin Newton

Mr Pat Sheehan

Committee for Education

Review of 2011-16 Mandate

Scrutiny

The key points of the Committee's scrutiny during the 2011-16 mandate are summarised below.

- **Inquiries.**
The Committee undertook 3 formal inquiries.

[School Councils](#). As part of the process of enhancing the voice of the pupil in the decision-making process at schools and generating interest and participation in democratic government, many schools support school councils. The inquiry studied best practice and made recommendations to improve pupil participation and increase uptake of councils by schools. The Department subsequently issued revised guidance on school councils.

[Education and Training Inspectorate \(ETI\) and School Improvement Process](#) The Department's Every School a Good School (ESaGS) policy set out the role of the inspection process in promoting improvement in school performance. In response to concerns from stakeholders in respect of the increasingly high stakes nature of school inspection and the reported ineffectiveness of this aspect of the ESaGS policy, the Committee undertook an inquiry. The Committee considered practice in other jurisdictions; heard oral evidence in formal session and met informally with District Inspectors and Associate Assessors. The Committee made a series of recommendations relating to inspection practices and a new focus on improvement and pastoral support. The majority of Members also supported recommendations which would make the Education and Training Inspectorate statutorily independent of the Department. The Department did not accept this recommendation but did go some way to revise inspection practices in line with the Committee's views.

[Shared and Integrated Education](#) In response to policy developments relating to Shared Education and concerns expressed by stakeholders in respect of the limited development of the Integrated Education sector, the Committee undertook an inquiry. The Committee developed a definition of Shared Education which foregrounded educational benefit but also incorporated the key objectives of community reconciliation and good relations. The Committee also developed key measures of performance for this growing policy area. The Committee recommended a wide-ranging strategic review of Integrated Education. The Department recently launched a review of Integrated Education. The Committee's definition of Shared Education has been included in recent legislation.



Education Committee Members, Mr Nigel Frith, Principal, and students, during the Committee's visit to Drumragh Integrated College, as part of its inquiry into shared education (February 2015)

- **Reviews**

The Committee undertook detailed reviews of a number of key policy areas.

Common Funding Scheme. The Department proposed wide-ranging changes to the formula for school funding. The Committee undertook a number of stakeholder events and challenged the outworkings of the proposed revised scheme. The Committee also commissioned a Special Advisor to produce a report on the use of levels of Free School Meals Entitlement as a determinant of funding. The Department substantially altered its proposals – retaining the Small Schools Factor and other factors and increasing the overall budget delegated to schools.

Area Planning. The Department proposed to rationalise the schools estate in line with its Sustainable Schools Policy. The Committee undertook a series of stakeholder events and reviewed related practices in Scotland during a Committee visit. The Committee also commissioned a Special Advisor to produce a series of reports on the policy. The Committee produced a position paper which was debated in the Assembly highlighting deficiencies in the estimates of surplus places and the absence of co-ordination between different education sectors. The Department has subsequently made some changes to the Area Planning policy

Promotion of STEM in schools. The Committee reviewed the Department's effectiveness in respect of the Success through STEM policy. The Committee considered evidence for stakeholders; hosted a number of STEM promotional events; and undertook school visits. The Committee put down a related motion for debate in the Assembly. The Department commissioned a review of the teaching of science in primary

schools. A Departmental review of the delivery of the revised curriculum is also currently underway.

Others. The Committee also reviewed key policy developments including: Early Years provision; Home to School Transport; the recommendations of the Marshall Report on preventing child sexual exploitation; employee absence in the education sector; teachers' pensions legislation; teaching and non-teaching redundancy; Signature Projects (nurture units and literacy and numeracy); access to the curriculum for children with vision issues; EU funding opportunities; Computer-Based Assessment; Levels of Progression; review of GCSEs and A-levels; Food in Schools policy; Sport in Schools policy; and Youth Policy. The Committee also reviewed a small number of statutory rules.

- Programme for Government etc.
The Committee reviewed the Department's progress in respect of its Programme for Government (PfG) commitments; its resource and capital expenditure; and its Savings Delivery Plans. At the conclusion of the mandate, the Committee sought feedback from key stakeholders on the relevance of the PfG commitments; the appropriateness of the measures of performance and the nature of commitments which should be included in the next PfG. A summary of the feedback from stakeholders is included in the appendices.
- Legislation
The Committee undertook 4 Committee Stages during the mandate.

[Education Bill](#) This wide-ranging educational reform Bill proved to be highly contentious and included measures relating to the autonomy of schools and the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. The Committee undertook stakeholder events; considered evidence from a large number of witnesses and produced an extensive report exploring in detail the key issues. The Bill was not moved at Consideration Stage by the Minister.

[Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill](#) This Bill dealt with the provision of support for children with Special Educational Needs at schools and is part of a wider reform of the statementing process. The Committee put down amendments placing an obligation on DE to better specify the contents of SEN statements and obliging DE and DHSSPS to share information and co-operate in the provision of SEN support for all children. The amendments were supported by the Assembly.

[Shared Education Bill](#) Amendments were agreed by the Assembly which would require Shared Education projects to comply with the definition agreed by the Committee in its inquiry report. The Committee also put down amendments – supported by the Assembly - which would place a duty on the Department to promote, facilitate and encourage Shared Education.

[Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill](#) The Committee agreed amendments which were supported by the Assembly which would allow schools to develop measures to counter cyberbullying. The Committee also secured assurances in respect of the application of discretion for Special Schools in the interpretation of the bullying definition.

Committee for Education

Review of 2011-16 Mandate

Approach

The Committee recognised the challenge presented by the wide-ranging nature of education policy and the varying experiences of different sectors within Northern Ireland and in other jurisdictions. The Committee therefore adopted a strategic approach – seeking advice and information from experts and other stakeholders - and planning its scrutiny programme in order to focus on key policy areas while exploiting available resources and developing new and innovative approaches to its work. To this end, the Committee brought forward a suite of strategic plans which were designed to map out the Committee's scrutiny timetable for each Assembly session while making the best use of the resources, powers and time available to Members.

In addition to formal meetings – for which key statistics are appended – the Committee also undertook a number of other actions which are set out below.

- **Stakeholder events / informal meetings**

The Committee undertook 20+ stakeholder events or informal meetings during the mandate. The largest of the former involved around 80 participants. The smallest of the latter involved perhaps 2 representatives of a single organisation. Groups represented a wide range of educational interests including parents and children and young people. The Committee found these informal exchanges to be most informative and influential in subsequent Committee decision-making.



Committee for Education Members and Professor Tony Gallagher at the Committee's stakeholder event on Area Planning at Parliament Buildings on (September 2012)

- **Visits**
The Committee met with representatives of the Scottish Parliament and the Republic of Ireland Oireachtas during Committee visits. Members noted with interest the experience in other jurisdictions in respect of: Area Planning; post-16 qualifications; the promotion of STEM in schools; and sharing and integration in education.
- **External meetings**
The Committee held its formal meetings in a number of external locations – generally schools. Members found this to be an efficient way of combining school visits with the business of the Committee.



Committee for Education Members, Dr Anne Heaslett, Principal, and her senior staff, following an external Committee meeting at Stranmillis University College on (October 2015)

- **Special Advisers**
The Committee commissioned 2 Special Advisers during the mandate to advise on school funding and Area Planning. Members found the alternative perspective provided by external experts to be an essential part of the scrutiny process.
- **Focus Groups**
The Committee felt that the inclusion of children's views in its deliberations was an important part of the scrutiny process. The Committee therefore commissioned Assembly Research and Assembly Education Services to host school children's focus groups. The feedback from the focus groups influenced the Committee's consideration of school inspection; shared and integrated education and addressing bullying in schools – indeed the amendments relating to cyberbullying were directly inspired by the schools focus groups. The Committee noted that the focus groups' composition was

methodologically robust and the findings and feedback were subject to an appropriate level of challenge.

- **Social Media**
The Committee established a social media presence – on Twitter and the Assembly website – and used this to promote engagement in the Committee Stages of Bills and inquiry evidence-taking. The Committee adopted innovative promotional techniques including sound-bite interviews; Twitter postcards; and Twitter-deck features to establish and improve its social media footprint.

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Suggested Issues for the Successor Committee

The Committee considered a number of issues which have yet to be formally concluded. These are discussed briefly below.

- Special Educational Needs (SEN). The successor Committee may wish to consider the following:
 - DE has commissioned the production of a regional plan for Special Schools to be produced in July 2016;
 - the SEN Code of Practice is to be revised in order to transform the 5 stage statementing process to 3 stages with more emphasis on in-school support;
 - the new Code of Practice is also expected to specify how a child's capacity to understand its own SEN is to be determined; and
 - the SEND Bill and other legislation will place additional duties on DE and DHSSPS to co-operate in the provision of SEN. DE will be obliged to report on related progress during the next mandate.
- Early Years / Intervention. The successor Committee may wish to consider the provision of Early Years settings and the progress of the Early Intervention Transformation Programme and the legacy work relating to the Signature Nurture Units and Literacy and Numeracy projects. It is also possible that legislation may be brought forward in respect of reception classes and school starting age flexibility.
- Children's Services. DE will gain responsibility for a range of children's services. The successor Committee may wish to consider how in its new role, DE will minimise administration and duplication costs and governance complexity for the wide range of services including e.g. Sure Start, Early Years pre-school settings; the Pathway Fund; relevant Signature Programmes etc.. The Committee might also consider the effectiveness with which children's services are targeted at those in need.
- Pupil attendance strategy – DE is expected to bring forward for consultation a revised pupil attendance strategy and to consider the role of the Education Welfare Service
- Implementation of the anti-child sexual exploitation strategy – DE has recently produced an implementation plan for the recommendations flowing from the Marshall Report on child sexual exploitation. DE has suggested that child sexual exploitation strategies might be included in future in the Revised Curriculum but that this would require legislative change.
- Revised Curriculum – DE is currently reviewing the delivery of the Revised Curriculum and is due to report in summer 2016

- Review of GCSEs and A-levels – DE commissioned a review of the future of GCSEs and A-levels. The Minister's expert group is due to report with its findings in 2016.
- Promotion of STEM in schools – The Committee has reviewed the Department's success in respect of promoting STEM in schools. The successor Committee may elect to revisit issues relating to teacher confidence; Initial Teacher Education provision; provision of coding support in schools etc.
- Home to school transport – DE previously published a wide-ranging independent report with recommendations relating to changes to eligibility to Home to School transport support
- Integrated Education – the strategic review of Integrated Education is due to report in 2016. The successor Committee may also wish to review Fresh Start capital expenditure relating to Shared and Integrated Education.
- Shared Education – there are a large number of resource and capital projects related to Shared Education including: Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project (resource); Together: Building a United Community early Years scheme (resource) and shared campuses including the Strule campus (capital); Peace IV (resource) projects and Fresh Start Shared and Integrated Education (capital) projects.
- Education Governance. The Education Bill (2012) contained provisions which were intended to reform the governance of schools and education generally. The Bill was not moved at Consideration Stage. DE had previously advised that smaller successor Bills relating to some governance reforms may be considered for introduction at a later date.

Appendix 1

Committee for Education

The Committee has 11 members. The membership of the Committee throughout the current mandate was as follows:

- Mr Peter Weir (Chairperson) MLA ^{10,14}
- Ms Sandra Overend (Deputy Chairperson) MLA ^{9,15}
- Mr Jonathan Craig MLA
- Mr Chris Hazzard MLA ⁴
- Ms Dolores Kelly MLA ^{3,12,13,18}
- Mr Danny Kennedy MLA ^{1,2,16,17}
- Mr Trevor Lunn MLA
- Mr Nelson McCausland MLA ^{6,11}
- Ms Maeve McLaughlin MLA ⁸
- Mr Robin Newton MLA ⁷
- Mr Pat Sheehan MLA ⁵

1 With effect from 31 January 2012 Mr Mike Nesbitt replaced Mr David McNarry

2 With effect from 17 April 2012 Mr Danny Kinahan replaced Mr Mike Nesbitt as Deputy Chairperson

3 With effect from 23 April 2012 Mr Sean Rogers replaced Mr Conall McDevitt

4 With effect from 10 September 2012 Mr Chris Hazzard replaced Mr Phil Flanagan

5 With effect from 10 September 2012 Mr Pat Sheehan replaced Mr Daithi McKay

6 With effect from 16 September 2013 Mr Stephen Moutray replaced Miss Brenda Hale

7 With effect from 16 September 2013 Mr Robin Newton replaced Miss Michelle McIlveen

8 With effect from 02 December 2013 Ms Maeve McLaughlin replaced Ms Michaela Boyle

9 With effect from 04 July 2014 Mrs Sandra Overend replaced Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson

10 With effect from 23 September 2014 Ms Michelle McIlveen replaced Mr Mervyn Storey as Chairperson

11 With effect from 06 October 2014 Mr Nelson McCausland replaced Mr Stephen Moutray

12 With effect from 17 November 2014 Mr Colum Eastwood replaced Mr Seán Rogers

13 With effect from 08 December 2014 Mr Sean Rogers replaced Mr Colum Eastwood

14 With effect from 11 May 2015 Mr Peter Weir replaced Miss Michelle McIlveen as Chairperson

15 With effect from 15 June 2015 Mrs Sandra Overend replaced Mr Danny Kinahan as Deputy Chairperson

16 With effect from 23 June 2015 Mr Ross Hussey replaced Mrs Sandra Overend as a Member

17 With effect from 14 September 2015 Mr Danny Kennedy replaced Mr Ross Hussey

18 With effect from 8 February 2016 Mrs Dolores Kelly replaced Seán Rogers

Committee for Education

Committee meetings & visits

Session	Number of meetings held	Percentage minutes public / closed	Number of meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Number of committee visits
2011/2012	41	Public – 98.35% Closed – 1.15%	0	7
2012/2013	39	Public – 90.03% Closed – 8.85%	3	6
2013/2014	38	Public – 88.9% Closed – 9.92%	5	6
2014/2015	39	Public – 89.77% Closed 10.00%	6	7
2015/2016	27	Public – 82.0% Closed 18.0%	1	1

Committee Bill Reports

Session	Name of Bill	Committee report (Ordered to print)
2012/2013	Report on the Education Bill	04/04/2013
2015/2016	Committee for Education Report on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill NIA 271/11-16	11/11/2015
	Committee for Education Report on the Shared Education Bill NIA 286/11-16	06/01/2016
	Committee for Education Report on the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill NIA 291/11-16	08/02/2016

Committee Inquiries

Session	Name of report	Committee Report (ordered to print)	Date debated in Plenary (if applicable)
2011/2012	Inquiry into School Councils	20/06/2012	N/A
2013/2014	Inquiry into the Education and Training Inspectorate and the School Improvement Process	28/05/2014	17/06/2014
2014/2015	Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education	01/07/2015	08/09/2015

Statutory Rules

Session	Number agreed by Committee
2011/2012	1
2013/2014	2
2014/2015	3
2015/2016	3

Committee Reports (excluding Bill and Inquiry reports)

Session	Name of report	Date (date approved by Committee)	Date debated in Plenary (if appropriate)
2012/2013	End of Session Report 12 May 2011 – 31 August 2012	10/10/2012	N/A
2013/2014	End of Session Report 2012- 2013 Report on a fact-finding visit to Scotland, October 2013	04/09/2013 16/10/2013	N/A
2014/2015	End of Session Report 2013- 2014 Position Paper: Area Planning	24/09/2014 13/05/2015	N/A 01/06/2015
2015/2016	End of Session Report 1 September 2014 - 31 August 2015 Legacy Report – 2011-2016	16/09/2015 9 March 2016	N/A

Witnesses

Session	Number of Organisations who gave evidence to the committee
2011/2012	32
2012/2013	51
2013/2014	52
2014/2015	59
2015/2016	31

End of Session Report 2015-16

INTRODUCTION

During the fifth session of the mandate the Committee undertook the following activities in line with its strategic plan for the session:

- considered evidence and agreed its report on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill;
- considered evidence and agreed its report on the Shared Education Bill;
- considered evidence and agreed its report on the Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill;
- considered and published its Special Advisor's findings on Free School Meal Entitlement and the funding of schools;
- considered regional planning proposals in respect of Special School provision; and
- reviewed in detail the Department's budget for 2016-17.

The Committee also undertook consideration of other matters including:

- the wind-up of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland;
- the implementation of the Marshall Report on child sexual exploitation;
- proposed changes to the GCSE grading structure and the withdrawal of GCSE examining bodies; and
- the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in schools.

The Committee also scrutinised a number of statutory rules relating to: the Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme and the Curriculum Complaints Tribunal.

The Committee commissioned Assembly Research Services and Assembly Education services to undertake focus groups studies with school pupils on issues relating to bullying in schools.

Committee for Education

Expenditure for the period 1 September 2015 – 29 March 2016 (figures to be revised)

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of a committee visit to: 07/01/16 – BT Young Scientist Exhibition (Dublin).	£321.81
Advertising	Includes the cost of advertising relating to: 04/11/2015 – Shared Education Bill 30/11/2015 – Addressing Bullying in Schools Bill	£1275.74
External Consultancy	Includes costs associated with the Special Adviser on levels of Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) and school funding.	£2,000
General expenses	Cost of refreshments for committee meetings, committee events, working lunches, seminars, room hire, witness expenses, and conference fees for members.	£1034.83
Total Expenditure		£4632.38

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Programme for Government Stakeholder Event

Note of Issues Raised

Wednesday 24/02/2016 at 2.30pm in Long Gallery

PRESENT:

Members – Peter Weir MLA (Chairperson)
Sandra Overend MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Chris Hazzard MLA
Dolores Kelly MLA
Danny Kennedy MLA
Robin Newton MLA

Participating Organisations-

Association of Controlled Grammar Schools
Barnardo's
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Community Relations Council
Drumragh Integrated College
Early Years Organisation
Education Authority
Employers for Childcare
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Fostering Network
Integrated Education Fund
Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Mencap NI
National Deaf Children's Society
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
NICVA Education Departmental Monitoring Group
Queen's University Belfast
Save the Children
Stranmillis University College
Transferors' Representative Council
Ulster Teachers' Union
Young Enterprise NI

Feedback from participants

Participants expressed a wide range of opinions in respect of: the usefulness and relevance of DE's Programme for Government (PfG) targets; the Department's achievement of its related commitments and possible education targets for the next PfG. The Committee also noted a small number of related written submissions. Feedback from the PfG event is summarised below.

Usefulness / Relevance of DE's PfG Targets

Many participants highlighted the strongly held belief that the application of targets to education was an inappropriate way to drive: improvements in educational provision or enhanced outcomes for children and young people. Indeed stakeholders referred to adverse unintended behaviours in the education sector prompted by Departmental initiatives and policies. They referred to schools feeling that they had to achieve outcomes for themselves through the efforts of their pupils rather than focusing entirely on attaining the best outcomes for pupils. Many participants contended that the wider societal objectives of education did not always lend themselves to measurement by simple metrics, such as GCSE attainment, and improvement by short term programmes and that the DE PfG targets were therefore often of questionable relevance.

Stakeholders generally felt that the education sector suffered from "short-termist" programmes and "initiative overload" – these forced schools to waste time securing funding and diverting resources in support of transient programmes in order to comply with systems level targets often originating in the PfG. Most stakeholders indicated that if educational targets had to be adopted, they should be more outcome-focused and should align with the strategic objectives of education – i.e. the development of the skills and capabilities of all children regardless of their backgrounds in support of wider societal and economic goals. Some stakeholders suggested that PfG targets should consequently be based on the qualitative development of economically relevant skills and capabilities.

Other stakeholders noted that previous PfG targets did not focus on the educational attainment or progress of: children with Special Educational Needs or looked after children or other marginalised groups. It was argued that enhancing educational benefit for these groups through early intervention etc. may have a disproportionately significant beneficial impact on society and the economy.

Achievement of DE's PfG targets

Stakeholders expressed differing opinions in respect of the degree of achievement of DE's PfG targets.

Many participants felt that although there was an upward trend in GCSE attainment, improvement for some groups including: children entitled to Free School Meals; looked after children; children with hearing disability and Traveller children had been very limited.

Some stakeholders commented that the literacy and numeracy Signature Programme appeared to have had a very beneficial impact on literacy and numeracy in post-primary and GCSE attainment in English and maths. However as this had now been discontinued, some frustration was expressed at the absence of follow-up provision and indeed general planning

by the Department in the roll-out of this programme. Stakeholders again referred to unintended consequences associated with short term programmes of this kind including the focus on children performing at grade boundaries to the exclusion of those with greater need but who were less likely to attain a Grade C at GCSE. Other stakeholders commented on the absence of meaningful literacy and numeracy targets for primary school children and criticised related poor transition arrangements for children moving from primary to post-primary.

In respect of PfG Early Years commitments, stakeholders commented that although uptake of provision had shown some increase there were significant outstanding issues relating to: under-provision in some areas; limited provision for children in foster care; limited availability of full-time settings; and differences in quality of provision in statutory and non-statutory settings. Some stakeholders felt that an opportunity to develop integrated pre-school provision had been missed in the current PfG and should be addressed in the next PfG.

Stakeholders generally welcomed the setting of PfG targets relating to Shared Education. Participants felt that although the targets for participation by children in Shared Education had not been met, they had at least served to generate discussion and provide the context for the Department's policy and related legislation.

Participants also commented on the absence of evaluation of the Department's policies and the Signature projects and a general failure to take account of evidence or the views of children and parents when developing and implementing policies.

Measurement of DE's PfG Targets

Stakeholders generally agreed that it was extremely difficult to usefully assess the Department's achievement or otherwise of its PfG targets. Considerable frustration was expressed by stakeholders in this regard – some of whom suggested that the absence of appropriate disaggregated data, provided in a timely manner, was a convenient method for avoiding legitimate scrutiny.

Stakeholders generally agreed that the above was unacceptable and that the Department should be obliged to provide a dashboard of progress measures which should be updated regularly and subject to audit. It was argued that the dashboard should also feature the progress of children with SEN and relevant Section 75 groups including looked after children and newcomers etc..

Stakeholders also commented in respect of DE's limited ability to track pupil progress across transitions and into Further and Higher Education. In line with the OECD, stakeholders criticised the absence of longitudinal studies of pupil progression and the consequent lack of evaluation of the effectiveness of Departmental policy.

Stakeholders also called for the Department to develop a methodologically robust and meaningful way to seek the views of parents and children on education matters and involve them in the development of policy.

Future DE PfG Targets

As indicated above, many participants questioned the wisdom of defining progress in education in terms of metrics or simplistic targets. Some stakeholders indicated however, that if targets were a necessary component of governance, they should be outcome-focused and reflect the wider objectives of education.

As indicated above, some stakeholders highlighted the need for an audited, regularly published and updated dashboard of Department of Education progress measures. Participants also highlighted the importance of a robust evidence base for policy development including particularly the experience in other jurisdictions.

Stakeholders also called for the PfG to include a more general visionary statement of the purpose of education including e.g.:

- to measurably improve outcomes for all children regardless of their background; or
- to enhance the well-being of children in order to ensure the realisation of their rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; or
- to enhance the well-being of children including through the provision of enhanced mental health support. etc.

The following more specific targets or objectives (in no particular order) were identified:

- all children to have access to at least 20 hours of free pre-school provision for 2 years accompanied by greater flexibility in school starting age;
- enhanced early identification and intervention for children with Special Educational Needs;
- the provision of educational support for SEN children and young people up to the age of 25;
- no children to leave primary 7 without being able to read;
- a mandatory requirement for children to remain in education (formal academic or vocational training and skills) until the age of 18;
- the provision of economically relevant vocational programmes within the curriculum for children before GCSE;
- enhanced focus on poor school attendance for schools with high levels of Free School Meal entitled children;
- the curriculum in all schools to include education for children on tolerance and understanding those of different backgrounds;
- the significant improvement in the current provision of careers guidance in schools; and
- to reduce the focus on the historic divisions in society and to better prepare children and young people with the skills needed for a global economic market.

Stakeholders also expressed support for: a restructuring of the educational sectors accompanied by enhanced delegation of funding to schools and a reboot of the Area Planning process; a review of the poor quality of many parts of the schools' estate; a review of Initial Teacher Education and CPD for teachers/principals focusing on mental health and well-being of teaching professionals, social and emotional evaluation of children and enhancing the qualifications for pre-school providers; a review and updating of the legislation

underpinning education; and an increased focus on the relevance of the curriculum to match the future needs of society and the economy.

Stakeholders also suggested that the transfer of functions to DE may have implications for the oversight of the new inter-departmental responsibility to co-operate identified in the Children's Services Co-operation Act 2015.

Stakeholders also expressed differing views but all called for the resolution of issues relating to the primary to post-primary transfer process.