



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

WEDNESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2015

ROOM 29 PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Present: Mr Robin Swann MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan MLA (Deputy-Chairperson)

Mr Sydney Anderson MLA
Mr Phil Flanagan MLA
Mr David Hilditch MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA
Ms Anna Lo MLA
Mr Fra McCann MLA
Ms Bronwyn McGahan MLA
Mr Pat Ramsey MLA
Ms Claire Sugden MLA

In Attendance: Mrs Cathie White (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Vincent Gribbin (Assistant Assembly Clerk)
Mr Johnny Lawless (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Marion Johnson (Clerical Officer)

Apologies: None

10:02 am The meeting opened in public session.

1. Apologies

Apologies are detailed above.

2. Chairperson's Business

- The Committee considered its Strategic Planning Day which was held in South West College, Cookstown and formally accepted the following:

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule the following events in the Forward Work Programme:

- South West College.
- University of Limerick.
- Colleges NI Showcase.
- Include Youth - Employability Mentoring Project Launch.
- Belfast Metropolitan College and North West Regional College - Supported Learning Showcase.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule the following visits in the Forward Work Programme:

- Queens University Belfast (Meeting & Visit).
- Stranmillis University College (Meeting and Visit).
- Triangle Housing.
- Torbank Special School.
- Social Farming Enterprise.
- FirstSource Solutions, Derry (Meeting).
- School that delivers Apprenticeships.
- EOS NI.
- North West Regional College.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to visit the North West Regional College, EOS NI and FirstSource Solutions on the same day.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider a visit to a Care home for adults with disabilities in Donegal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commission research on the following issues:

- Schools that operate apprenticeship programmes.
- Widening Participation Strategy and lessons from Scotland.
- Information on Donegal day care centre.
- Impact of International Students on NI HEI sector and the wider economy.
- Higher education statistics including student flows and the operation of MaSN.
- Impact on Barnett Consequential as a result of the cutting of the Maintenance Grant in GB.
- Economic impact of the HEI cuts in NI.
- Location and values of 2007- 2013 ESF projects.
- Information on the announced cuts in the University sectors.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the issues raised in the Researchers briefing to the Department for comment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on the draft Employment Bill for 16 September 2015 and to schedule further briefings and evidence sessions when the Bill is introduced.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to seek an oral briefing from both DEL and DE regarding extending the Statement of Special Educational Need to age 25.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule briefing from the following organisations:

- Representatives for the Bamford Sub-group monitoring progress on the Bamford Report.
- DEL Disability Employment Service on the development of its new Strategy.
- Representatives of the Departments regarding their roles and how responsibility should be better coordinated (Health, Education, DEL, Roads Service).
- Mencap as the largest Community and Voluntary Sector provider.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule briefing on the Department's ongoing consultations on:

- Frequency of Student Support Payments.
- Further Education Strategy.
- Employment Tribunals.
- Part-time and Postgraduate Student Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing by the Students' Unions on Student Fees.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule 2 oral briefings biannually and 2 written briefings biannually from NISRA and departmental officials on the findings of the Labour Force Survey.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive briefings on the Department's progress in meeting the Savings Delivery Plan targets on a biannual basis.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive briefings on the Departmental Monitoring Rounds should they occur.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive a briefing on DEL's Programme for Government targets for Quarters 3 & 4 should targets be agreed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to receive bi-annual briefings on European issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an update from Departmental officials on its review of the first year of the Steps 2 Success programme when available.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an update on the progress of the Reviews of Apprenticeships and Youth Training Policy when available.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule an update on the progress of Economic Inactivity Strategy when available.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on the Departmental Business Plan for 2 December 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on the European Social Fund 2014-2020 Programme on 23 September 2015 and to schedule a briefing on the 2007-13 ESF programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on the Disability Employment Strategy in the forward work programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing from the South West College and Libraries NI on the benefits of having a joint site for a Library and a College.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2015

Agreed: The minutes of the meeting on 1 July were agreed.

4. Matters arising

The Committee noted a list of matters arising from the meeting on 1 July 2015.

5. Correspondence

10:05 am Mr Thomas Buchanan joined the meeting.

10:05 am Mr David Hilditch joined the meeting.

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence:

- Correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding the Northern Ireland Executive's Strategic European Priorities for 2015-2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel providing a Ministerial response on the Report on Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Public Sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel providing a copy of an Assembly Research and Information Service paper on Departmental Financial Forecasting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Departmental response regarding strategies to help people with disabilities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental response regarding Ministerial meetings relating to European Social Fund applications.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental response regarding contact with Edge Innovate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental response regarding the Construction Industry Training Board.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental correspondence providing notification of the consultation on developing modern, effective and efficient Employment Tribunals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Departmental correspondence providing notification of the consultation on future approaches to higher education quality assessment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the Inquiry Report into Building a United Community.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from EOS NI confirming the Committee visit to an employment centre.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Response from Belfast Metropolitan College regarding the provision of performing arts classes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Response from South Eastern Regional College regarding the provision of performing arts classes.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Copy of the OFQUAL Report from 1 April 2012 to 31 December 2014.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the report.

- Departmental correspondence providing a written statement and consultation document on the new Further Education Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Departmental response regarding European Social Fund Project Promoters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental response regarding an update on the Apprenticeship Strategy.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental response regarding United Youth.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental response regarding the geographical breakdown of EMA Pathways recipients.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental response regarding the provision of performing arts classes and MaSN allocation in South Eastern Regional College.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Correspondence from the Committee for Justice regarding the NIACRO Jobtrack Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee regarding issues raised by a whistleblower in the Department for Employment and Learning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from the Assembly Business Office regarding the Department for Employment and Learning's Annual Report and Accounts for 2014-2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Departmental correspondence providing a briefing paper on the Further Education Voluntary Exit Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Departmental response regarding the geographical breakdown of employers in action A4 of the Department for Employment and Learning's Business Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental response regarding the target A2 of the Department for Employment and Learning's Business Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental response regarding the additional £300,000 funding awarded to South Eastern Regional College.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Correspondence from Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland providing the Department for Employment and Learning's Investing Activity Report for July 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Departmental response regarding the upskilling of people to Level 2 qualifications.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the response.

- Departmental correspondence providing the Committee with an Interim Evaluation Report on Pathways to Success.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Departmental correspondence providing details of a consultation on the Frequency of Student Support Payments.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Departmental correspondence acknowledging receipt of correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee regarding issues raised by a whistle-blower in the Department for Employment and Learning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from Wade Training regarding the lead contractor for the Southern Region in the Steps 2 Success Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note that this correspondence has been issued to the Department for comment.

- Correspondence from Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland providing the Department for Employment and Learning's Investing Activity Report for August 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from NIC-ICTU requesting to brief the Committee on Zero Hours Contracts and the Employment Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and schedule a briefing in the forward work programme when the Employment Bill reaches Committee stage.

- Correspondence from Ian Collen regarding concerns over the closure of modern language provision at the University of Ulster.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and request an Assembly Research briefing on the types of courses cut and how heavily they were subscribed along with information on methods of gaining funding from relevant sectors for running courses.

- Correspondence from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment providing a copy of the Committee Opportunity for Excellence Report - Growing the Economy and Creating Jobs with Lower Corporation Tax.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Briefing paper from Assembly Research and Information Service on Examples of International Kinship Care.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the briefing paper.

- Briefing paper from Assembly Research and Information Service on an Explanatory Memorandum on the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on the European Youth Guarantee and its progress.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the briefing paper.

- Departmental correspondence providing an update on the Statutory Annual Leave Entitlement - Review of Economic Conditions.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and include it in the meeting pack for 30 September 2015.

- Departmental correspondence regarding a Department for Business, Innovation and Skills consultation on the Posted Workers Enforcement Directive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister providing a copy of the ONIEB Director's Report from January - June 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Departmental correspondence providing a copy of the North South Student Flows Research Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from the University Council of Modern Languages regarding the closure of the School of Languages at the Ulster University.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and request an Assembly Research briefing on the types of courses cut and how heavily they were

subscribed along with information on methods of gaining funding from relevant sectors for running courses.

- Correspondence from the Minister for Employment and Learning regarding the Economic Inactivity Strategy - Impact of Ongoing Budgetary Constraint.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and to reschedule the briefing on the Economic Inactivity Strategy in the forward work programme.

- Correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding EU Policy Dossiers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister regarding Departmental Engagement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

- Correspondence from Mr A Bullar regarding the Steps 2 Success Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the correspondence and forward it to the Department for comment.

- Minister for Employment and Learning Oral Statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the Launch of the Higher Education Big Conversation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the statement.

- Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Paper - Cuts in the University Sector.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the briefing paper.

- Invitation from Manufacturing NI to an event on the way forward.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from Alliance Contracting - Building New Collaborations Alliance Contracting

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to a Strategic Plan Consultation Event.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from the Open University to the Chairperson to attend the graduation ceremony.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from the Open University to the Deputy-Chairperson to attend the graduation ceremony.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from the Forum for Adult Learners NI to the 4th Annual Impact Forum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from the Construction Employers Federation to the Construction Excellence Awards.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from the General Teaching Council to a Beyond Improvement Lecture.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from the Department for Employment and Learning to the launch of Space Week 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from the Committee for the Environment to the launch of Northern Ireland Environment Week.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

- Invitation from the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Trust and Queen's University Belfast to an EU Referendum Debate.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note the invitation.

6. Forward Work Programme

- The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme to 9 December 2015.

7. SR 2015-276 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) Legislation

Agreed: That the Committee for Employment and Learning has considered SR 2015-276 The Industrial Training Levy (Construction Industry) Order (Northern Ireland) Legislation, and has agreed that it is content for the Department to make the rule.

8. Ministerial Briefing - The Term Ahead

10:20 am The Minister and Departmental officials joined the meeting.

10:20 am Mr Sydney Anderson joined the meeting.

The Committee was briefed by Dr Stephen Farry, Minister for Employment and Learning, Mr Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary, Mrs Catherine Bell CBE, Deputy Secretary and Ms Sheila McNeill, Deputy Director of Strategy, European and Employment Relations Division.

The briefing was followed by a question and answer session.

10:46 am Mr William Irwin joined the meeting.

Agreed: The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with information on how much the transition to monthly payments for students cost in Scotland.

Agreed: The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with details on what the Barnett Consequential impact is on the Northern Ireland budget on the removal of maintenance grants in England.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Vice-Chancellors of the University of Ulster and Queens University Belfast to discuss their budget cuts.

11:35 am Mr Pat Ramsey left the meeting.

Agreed: The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with a full financial breakdown of the technical assistance budget for the closing European Social Fund Programme 2007-2013 and the budgetary profile for technical assistance for the new 2014-2020 Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward emails received by Members regarding Steps to Success to the Department for comment.

11:47 am Mr Thomas Buchanan left the meeting.

Agreed: The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with details of the indicators and standards for quality assessment of the Steps 2 Success Programme.

11:55 am Mr Thomas Buchanan re-joined the meeting.

Agreed: The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with information on when the update on the Steps to Success Programme will be available and to provide an evaluation and statistics on the Steps 2 Success Programme.

Agreed: The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with a list of higher level apprenticeships that are being funded by the Department.

12:18 pm Ms Bronwyn McGahan left the meeting.

12:21 pm The Minister and Departmental officials left the meeting.

9. Any other business

None

10. Date, time and place of next meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting should be held on Wednesday 23 September 2015 at 10.00 am in Room 29, Parliament Buildings.

12:22 pm The Chairperson adjourned the meeting.

**Mr Robin Swann MLA
Deputy Chairperson, Committee for Employment & Learning**

23 September 2015