



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE
FOR EDUCATION**

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

**Draft Programme for Government
2011-15**

11 January 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Draft Programme for Government 2011-15

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)
Mr David McNarry (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr Trevor Lunn
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Daithí McKay

The Chairperson:

We will move on to a consideration of the Committee's draft response on the Executive's draft Programme for Government to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. You will recall that we wrote to the stakeholders asking for their views, which were circulated to members on Monday with a covering note from the Clerk. The Committee's draft response is included with the Clerk's note for consideration and comment. It is in members' packs and is marked "Draft A". You will see that there were 17 responses from stakeholders. I was reasonably pleased at that. Are there any suggestions for additions, deletions or amendments to Draft A? I will give members a minute or two to look at the paper.

Mrs Dobson:

Sorry, Chair. Are we looking at the Clerk's response?

The Chairperson:

Yes. Roisin, would you like to comment?

The Committee Clerk:

We have gone through all the stakeholder responses and pulled out their key issues. A lot of them had similar issues, and some were individual responses, but they are all in members' packs. Members may like to take their time to read through them between now and next week. The response is a draft at the moment, so please comment if there are any additions that you think should be made or whether there is anything in it that you feel should not be. We will agree our final response at next week's meeting.

The Chairperson:

OK. So, we have a week. However, to help the Committee staff, if there are any changes to be made, I would like members to have them in for Friday.

Mrs Dobson:

I have a couple of suggestions to make, if I may. I think that the paper is very good, and I commend Roisin for bringing it together. It is great to see so many wide-ranging and comprehensive responses. My first potential addition — and I have a few minor points to make — concerns paragraph 4 in your response:

“Whilst the Committee welcomes the PFG ... The Committee is concerned that schools are being expected to deliver savings in an already constrained economic climate.”

Given that principals are struggling with redundancies, could you add the words “staffing levels” after “class sizes”? I think that that would clarify the matter a bit better.

My other point was about paragraph 9, “Gaps in Programme for Government”. In the literacy and numeracy section, following on from the response from the Children's Commissioner, would it be possible to include the words: “There is no measure as to whether literacy and numeracy will have been improved or whether additional resources have been targeted.”?

I have one final point to make about preschool education and on comments that the University of Ulster made in response to that. At the end of the paragraph that talks about that being achieved through teacher-led nursery education to ensure the highest standards, could you add the words “and not playgroup”?

The Committee Clerk:

What paragraph is that?

Mrs Dobson:

Paragraph 9, which deals with preschool education.

The Chairperson:

Do you mean number 9 in our draft?

Mrs Dobson:

Number 9 in shared education. No, this is in the University of Ulster's section.

The Chairperson:

The Committee Clerk will track those changes, highlight them and then send them back out to members by email.

The Committee Clerk:

Yes. I can put them in and send them out via email so that you can see them before next week's meeting, and then, at that meeting, if you are content, you can agree them.

The Chairperson:

Just to help staff, if there are any other changes to be made, may I ask that we have them emailed to us by Friday? That would be much appreciated. Thank you very much.