



Committee for Employment and Learning

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

**Draft Programme for Government,
Investment Strategy and Economic
Strategy**

25 January 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Draft Programme for Government, Investment Strategy and Economic Strategy

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Basil McCrea (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jim Allister
Ms Michelle Gildernew
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr David McIlveen
Mrs Sandra Overend
Mr Alastair Ross

The Chairperson: There are a couple of modest items of business that I need to go through, including consideration of the draft Programme for Government, the investment strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI), the economic strategy, and the actions plans. As part of the consultation exercise, all Committees have been asked to make their submissions by 2 February. You have the Hansard reports of the various discussions that we have had, and the Minister presented to us just after the new year. Given that time is constrained and that the Committee's future is uncertain, I suggest that we get the Clerk to prepare, from evidence that has been given already, the two draft responses on our behalf. However, if members have anything in particular that they would like to talk about, they could either do so now — I remind you that this is being recorded by Hansard, because it is a Programme for Government issue — or e-mail the Clerk with the issues that the Committee might want to include. There are some quite substantive issues to discuss, of which this presentation is by no means the least. However, there are issues that we might want to put in a submission from an employment and learning perspective, whether that is NEETs, poverty issues, or university or college places. There are things that I think we will want to do, but we are a bit pressed for time. I suggest that, unless members have something to suggest here and now, they should give that information to the Committee Clerk by next week.

The Committee Clerk: I will write and ask for an extra week.

The Chairperson: I am looking for guidance from the Committee. Perhaps we do not want to miss the opportunity to have our say on the investment strategy and the Programme for Government. Without being critical, I feel that some elements of the Programme for Government are quite light, and we need to get more detail on it.

Ms Gildernew: The Health Committee wrote that it was disappointed at the number of targets for health-related issues that are in the Programme for Government. The Committee Clerk picked out points that were made in our evidence sessions, and that was helpful. For me, however, the biggest disappointment was with the investment strategy. I asked how much discussion there was with the Health Minister on the biggest barrier in health. There is plenty of evidence about the impact of poverty

on health and life expectancy, yet there was nothing about that in the investment strategy. Therefore, there were glaring omissions.

There have been a lot of very good discussions in this Committee, and we have received some brilliant presentations. There is much from previous sessions that we will want to include in our submission. The Programme for Government went from being overly burdened with targets in the previous mandate to having practically none in this one.

The Chairperson: Yes, it just has a note.

Ms Gildernew: Yes, and that is disappointing. We need to understand how we can match those targets with what has been achieved and with the areas that still need to be prioritised.

A good response from the Committee to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) would be helpful. It would help to shape things, especially when we do not know where matters will sit. We have to make the point that we do not know whether the responsibility for NEETs will lie with the Department of Education or with another Department in the future. This is really our last chance to get our spake in.

Mr Allister: I thought that Mr Murphy's paper was very enlightening. The economic strategy has set targets for jobs to be promoted, and the information in that briefing importantly drew the distinction between jobs that are promoted and jobs that are created. Mr Murphy referenced findings from other research going back to 2002-03 and 2004-05, and analysis shows that only 82% of the jobs that were promoted were actually created. That sets the context for what the promotion of 18,500 jobs means. The research on which that paper is based is a little dated, but I do not suppose that there is any reason to think that the factors that dictated it would be much different today. Indeed, the factors may, in fact, be more difficult.

The Chairperson: I think, Jim, that youth unemployment and unemployment in general will be issues of considerable concern over the next period of time. I am not sure whether we have the necessary focus on creating genuine employment. The Committee might want to take a view on that or, at least, to highlight that we would like some concrete data.

Mr Allister: I suppose the point that I am making is that the economic strategy would have been more informative if, instead of talking in grand terms about promoting jobs, it gave us a read through as to what that might mean for job creation.

The Chairperson: OK. We have a lot of work coming up that we have agreed to do. However, there is a timescale for the submission of our paper to OFMDFM. We will ask for an extension of a week for that, and we will also try to have a substantive discussion about what that paper is likely to look like. It may not be possible to get complete agreement on all the issues, in which case the parties will have to deal with them. However, as Michelle said, a lot of important issues were highlighted to the Committee, and it would be remiss of us if we did not put those in our submission.

I will ask the Committee Clerk to attempt to give us a draft paper that we can start to flesh out. Members should indicate, as Jim has done, whether there are any particular areas or points that they would like to include, and we will then see if we can get a Committee response on those. Thank you.