



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## **COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION**

### **Minutes of Proceedings**

WEDNESDAY 3 March 2021

Video Conference

#### **Present by Video Conference:**

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Pat Sheehan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA  
Ms Nicola Brogan MLA  
Mr Robbie Butler MLA  
Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA  
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA  
Mr Justin McNulty MLA  
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

**Apologies:** None

**In Attendance:** Ms Aoibhinn Treanor (Assembly Clerk)  
Mr Mark McQuade (Assistant Clerk)  
Mr Craig Mealey (Clerical Supervisor)  
Ms Emma Magee (Clerical Officer)

*The meeting commenced at 9:04 am in public session.*

#### **1. Apologies**

There were no apologies.

#### **2. Chairperson's Business**

##### **2.1 General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)**

The Chairperson reminded members that the Committee agreed to arrange oral briefings with the Department of Education and the General Teaching Council NI on its role, legal vires and stakeholder concerns at its meeting on Wednesday 24 March 2021.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to be briefed informally by the Northern Ireland Teachers Council (NITC) on their concerns about GTCNI on 9 March 2021.

##### **2.2 Tabled items**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department in regard to school restart and exams; covid-19 vulnerable children plan benchmarking, vaccination and pandemic learning; the recruitment arrangements for a chairperson, vice-chairperson and panel member of the imminent New Decade New Approach Review of Education, which are unregulated appointments; and notification of the termination of the Transformation programme; for discussion with the Minister on 10 March.

### 2.3 Recent announcements

The Chairperson informed members of the publication of the Department's Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework and of the Teachers' Pay settlement.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister asking him to brief it on his plans for an integrated strategy for children to return to school and plans for a summer programme at his briefing on Wednesday 10 March 2021.

### 3. Draft Minutes

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 24 February 2021.

### 4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

### 5. Restrictive Integrated Education - Integrated Education Fund - Oral Briefing

The Committee noted briefing papers from the integrated Education Fund.

*Mr Humphrey joined the meeting at 9:13am.*

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 9:11am:

Ms Amanda McNamee, Principal, Lagan College

Ms Hilary Copeland, Chair of Trustees, Integrated AlumNI

Mr Sam Fitzsimmons, Communications Director, Integrated Education Fund.

The witnesses provided the Committee with an overview of integrated Education in Northern Ireland.

*Mr Newton joined the meeting at 9:15am.*

*Mr Bradley joined the meeting at 9:15am.*

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the four main churches seeking their position in terms of support for Integrated Education after 40 years of its development, and as a reconciliation measure.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education:

- Seeking its position in respect of future growth of the Integrated Education sector and the use of area planning to facilitate this;
- Asking for clarity on how area planning works to open up the school estate to integrated schools given residential segregation;

- Seeking information on how it facilitates and encourages Integrated Education by assessing and meeting demand, and an insight into its recent decisions in this regard, such as the case of Strangford College;
- Seeking clarity on the differences in process for the integrated movement to make significant changes via development proposal, as distinct from other school sectors; and
- Asking whether parent Boards of Governors of the intentionally planned and parent-led integrated schools have equal standing to Boards of Governors that include transferors/church representatives; and why the Department has never planned an integrated school.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education requesting information on what sports are played at each post-primary school in Northern Ireland.

## **6. Religious Education Certificate Report - Ulster University UNESCO Centre- Oral Briefing**

The Committee noted a briefing paper from the UNESCO Centre; an Ulster University briefing paper on the Certificate in Religious Education; and an Ulster University Transforming Education report.

The following witnesses joined the meeting by video conference at 10:45 pm:

Dr Matthew Milliken, Ulster University.

Dr Milliken briefed the Committee on the “teachers’ exception” currently provided for under Fair Employment legislation (FETO).

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Dr Milliken for his briefing.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Executive Office and the Department of Education seeking an update on the FETO exemption.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to seek a briefing on the FETO exemption.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to sectoral bodies and the four main churches seeking:

- Their views on the continued requirement for FETO and CRE particularly in post-primary school;
- Their position on the Certificate for Religious Education (CRE); and
- Their position on potential reform of the teacher exemption in FETO.

## **7. Correspondence**

7.1 The Committee noted an index of incoming correspondence.

7.2 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister for Education providing a copy of his written statement to the Assembly on School Restart.

7.3 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual seeking clarity on additional issues regarding WJEC qualifications; and enclosing a letter from WJEC to Minister.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department on the additional issues raised in the letter.

7.4 The Committee noted a response from the Education Authority providing a copy of the Education Authority Youth Service Update Report on the START and FLARE Programmes.

7.5 The Committee noted correspondence from BlendED NI on Parental Engagement software.

7.6 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding internet access for pupils and setting out the actions it is taking to rectify this issue.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to forward the response to Goliath and NITC who raised this matter with the Committee.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education on its concerns about internet inequality and digital poverty, in light of representations that children were attending school through remote learning via their parents' mobiles and parents could not always afford the data to allow them to attend. The Committee also agreed to copy this correspondence to the Education Authority.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Minister seeking a timetable for vaccination of staff in Special Schools.

7.7 The Committee noted correspondence from Karen Mullan MLA indicating her intention to bring forward a Private Members Bill regarding Holiday Hunger seeking to provide food security to families who rely on free school meals throughout the year.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to invite Ms Mullan to brief it informally on her proposed Private Members Bill.

7.8 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual highlighting concerns regarding the inability to prepare for next year's transfer test in a school setting.

7.9 The Committee noted correspondence from an individual voicing concerns about the time frame given to teachers for returning to the classroom.

7.10 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister for Education providing a copy of the Curriculum Guidance for Years 1-3 for return to school on 8 March 2021.

7.11 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education regarding the timeline for a potential Bill on flexible school starting age.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to copy the response to the individual who raised this matter with the Committee.

7.12 The Committee noted a response from Belfast Youth Forum regarding Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Education highlighting the suggestions and recommendations made by Belfast Youth Forum.

7.13 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister for Education and the Minister for Health about the publication of the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Well-Being in Education Framework.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed to schedule a briefing on the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Well-Being in Education Framework.

7.14 The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister providing details of the recruitment programme and revised terms of reference for the Independent Review of Education.

7.15 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on issues relating to Restart and Examinations.

7.16 The Committee noted a response from the Department of Education on the Covid-19 Vulnerable Children Plan.

7.17 The Committee noted correspondence regarding complications caused by the St Patrick's Day holiday to the short school return envisaged for years 1-3.

*Mr Newton left the meeting at 12:02pm.*

## **8. Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered its forward work programme.

*Agreed:* The Committee agreed its forward work programme as amended.

## **9. Any Other Business**

No other business was discussed.

## **10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting**

The next formal Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 10 March 2021 by video conference at 9:30 am.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12:04pm*

**Mr Chris Lyttle MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Education**  
**10 March 2021**