



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

Minutes of Proceedings

Friday 21 August 2020

Meeting Location: Senate Chamber and Video/Audio Conference, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

Present:

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Robbie Butler MLA
Mr Justin McNulty MLA
Mr Robin Newton MBE MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Ms Catherine Kelly MLA

Apologies:

Mr Maurice Bradley MLA
Mr William Humphrey MLA
Mr Daniel McCrossan MLA

In Attendance:

Mr Peter McCallion (Assembly Clerk)
Mr Trevor Allen (Assistant Clerk)
Ms Diane Bergeron (Clerical Supervisor)
Ms Louise Close (Outreach Manager, item 7 only)

The meeting commenced at 9:35AM in open session



1. Apologies

Apologies were as indicated above.

2. Chairperson's Business

There was no Chairperson's Business.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of its meeting held on 18 August 2020.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

5. Covid-19 and Schools Restart – Teaching Unions – Oral Evidence Session

The Committee noted: a relevant paper provided by the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council; correspondence from the Northern Ireland Committee – Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU) Education Group; and correspondence including tabled items from concerned parents and schools relating to social distancing, face coverings, cleaning in schools and other Restart issues.

The following witnesses joined the meeting in person and by audio conference at 9:37am:

Mr Justin McCamphill, National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers

Mr Gerry Murphy, Irish National Teachers' Organisation

Mr Graham Gault, National Association of Head Teachers

Ms Jacqui White, Ulster Teachers' Union

Mr Alastair Donaghy, National Education Union



Mr Robert Wilson, Association of School and College Leaders

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Witnesses briefed the Committee on issues relating to school Restart.

This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the witnesses for the briefing.

Proceedings were suspended at 11:23am

Proceedings resumed at 11:29am with the following Members present: Chris Lyttle, Karen Mullan, Robbie Butler, Catherine Kelly and Justin McNulty.

6. Covid-19 Awarding of Grades - Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) - Oral Evidence Session

The Committee noted correspondence from CCEA and a large number of correspondence items relating to grading concerns including the treatment of AS and GCSE module assessments.

Officials joined the meeting in person and by audio conference at 11:30am.

Mr Justin Edwards, Chief Executive, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Ms Margaret Farragher, Director of Education, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Trevor Carson, Chairperson, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Ms Amanda Swann, Business Manager Qualifications and Standards, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Ms Pamela Larmour, Programme Manager Statistics and Data Science, Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

The evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Robin Newton rejoined the meeting at 11:33am



Officials briefed the Committee on the awarding of GCSE, AS and A-Level grades. This was followed by a question and answer session. The Chairperson thanked officials for the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to CCEA: expressing its concerns in respect of the poor quality of communication and consultation by CCEA with key education stakeholders; seeking firm assurances that such processes would improve; and indicating that it would assist with the communication process in respect of forthcoming curricular and assessment consultations.

Karen Mullan declared an interest as a family member was about to undertake Year 12 studies.

Agreed: The Committee further agreed to write to CCEA urging it to clarify the position in respect of AS modules and Year 11 GCSE modules and their contribution to A-levels and GCSEs in 2021 respectively.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to also write to CCEA in order to further specify its requirements in respect of grade prediction and outcome data so as to support Committee scrutiny of the CCEA 17 August 2020 A-Level grade awarding model.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department urging it to undertake a formal review of CCEA's 2020 grade awarding process and to publish its findings at the earliest opportunity. The Committee felt that such a review would inform the development of curricular and assessment guidance for 2021 but that this should not delay the planned CCEA consultation on these matters.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk should seek further support from Assembly Research in order to enhance Members' understanding of the complexity of the grade awarding models.

Robin Newton left the meeting at 1:11pm

Agreed: Further to the briefing on Restart, the Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its concerns relating to poor engagement and limited consultation with stakeholders and inconsistent messaging to schools and parents. The Committee further agreed to write to the Department:

- urging it to re-establish the Practitioners' Group and Stakeholder Forum at the earliest opportunity;



Northern Ireland Assembly

- seeking clarity on consideration of the adoption of a more phased approach to School Restart;
- seeking clarification on risk assessments and indemnity matters and the associated legal issues;
- seeking clarification as to why the Education Authority has reportedly not provided over-arching guidance to schools on Restart;
- calling on it to establish a parental helpline and dedicated support package for principals including a principals' hotline with an identified Restart link officer;
- seeking assurance that non-critical work and school inspections will be paused pending the outworking of Restart;
- seeking clarification on the requirement for staff and pupils to use face coverings;
- seeking clarity on the expected level of staff shortage and assurance that adequate cover will be provided to schools; and
- highlighting some concerns from Members in respect of the provision of guidance to schools on Physical Education.

Proceedings moved into closed session at 1:18pm

7. Post-Primary Transfer – On-line Survey

The Committee discussed the interim responses to its on-line survey on post-primary transfer.

Justin McNulty left the meeting at 1:19pm – consequently the Committee lost its decision-making quorum

Justin McNulty rejoined the meeting at 1:21pm – consequently the Committee regained its decision-making quorum.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to promote the on-line survey to teachers via the General Teaching Council (Northern Ireland) and teaching unions (subject to their agreement) and to launch the children and young people's survey as soon as possible. The Committee further agreed to close the survey on 7 September 2020 to all respondents and consider its findings later in September.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department indicating its disappointment that it was not to support the promotion of the survey via C2K.



8. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed a revised forward work programme including the scheduling of another additional meeting on 2 September 2020 which was to include briefings from NIC-ICTU and, subject to availability, the Minister on Restart in schools.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 2 September 2020 in Room 30, Parliament Buildings and by video conference at 9:30am.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:47pm.

Mr Chris Lyttle MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education
2 September 2020