

COMMITTEE FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

End of Session Report: 2014-2015

Remit, Powers and Membership

The Committee for Employment and Learning is a Statutory Departmental Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly established in accordance with paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Belfast Agreement, Section 29 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and under Standing Order 48 of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Committee has a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department for Employment and Learning and has a role in the initiation of legislation.

The Committee has power to:

- consider and advise on Departmental budgets and annual plans in the context of the overall budget allocation;
- approve relevant secondary legislation and take the Committee stage of relevant primary legislation;
- call for persons and papers;
- initiate inquiries and make reports; and
- consider and advise on matters brought to the Committee by the Minister for Employment and Learning.

The Committee has eleven Members, including a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, with a quorum of five. The Membership of the Committee is as follows:

Mr Robin Swann (Chairperson)¹
Mr Thomas Buchanan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson MLA²
Mr Phil Flanagan MLA³
Mr David Hilditch MLA⁴
Mr William Irwin MLA⁵
Ms Anna Lo MLA⁶
Mr Fra McCann MLA
Ms Bronwyn McGahan MLA⁷
Mr Pat Ramsey MLA
Ms Claire Sugden MLA⁸

This End of Session Report covers the work of the Committee for Employment and Learning from 1 September 2014 to 31 August 2015.

¹ With effect from 27 February 2013 Mr Robin Swann became Chairperson of the Committee

² Mr Sydney Anderson replaced Mr Alastair Ross on 1 December 2014

³ Mr Phil Flanagan replaced Ms Michelle Gildernew on 10 September 2012

⁴ Mr David Hilditch replaced Mr David McIlveen on 1 October 2012

⁵ Mr William Irwin replaced Mr Sammy Douglas on 6 October 2014

⁶ Ms Anna Lo replaced Mr Chris Lyttle on 29 September 2014

⁷ Ms Bronwyn McGahan replaced Mr Barry McElduff on 21 January 2013

⁸ Ms Claire Sugden replaced Mr David McClarty on 12 May 2014

The Committee's work programme for the session included a number of visits and stakeholder events. The Committee considered a range of primary and subordinate legislation, undertook a number of study visits throughout Northern Ireland, and met formally on 32 occasions including 85 evidence sessions of which 2 were in closed session.

In addition, the Committee continued to work on its Inquiry into Post School Special Educational Need for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland.

Details of Committee expenditure during this reporting period are included at Annex A.

Committee Meetings / Visits

Of the 32 meetings convened by the Committee, five were held outside of Parliament Buildings. In keeping with the Committee's aim of seeing the impact of the work of the Department of Employment and Learning at first hand and to meet with key stakeholders, the Committee held meetings at: Parkanaur College, Mellon Country Hotel, The Open University, the Dunsilly Hotel and the Ramada Plaza, Shawsbridge, where the Committee also attended the Colleges NI, Best Awards.

The Committee made 14 visits to a range of bodies and organisations to inform its work. Ten of these visits were in relation to the Committee's ongoing Inquiry into Post Special Educational Need Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities.

During the visits the Committee was able to talk to staff and young people regarding the issues of Employment and Learning, how to create employment and ensure effective training and education for young people. The locations visited by the Committee were as follows:

- Seashell Trust, Manchester
- Pure Innovations, Manchester
- Manchester City Council, Manchester
- PossAbilities, Manchester
- The Manchester College
- Springvale Employment and Learning Solutions, Belfast
- Hawthorns Adult Centre, Carrickfergus
- Ardnashee School and College, Derry
- North West Regional College, Londonderry
- The Open University, Belfast
- South West College, Enniskillen
- Parkanaur College, Armagh
- Colleges NI Best Awards, Belfast
- Compass Advocacy Network, Ballymoney

During its visit to North West Regional College on 12 November 2014 the Committee met with staff and students to see the excellent work the College is carrying out in the area.



Committee members with staff and students at North West Regional College.

Primary Legislation

Work and Families Bill

The Work and Families Bill (NIA 34/11-15) was referred to the Committee on 12 May 2014 and makes provisions to allow working parents the ability to manage their parental and work priorities with flexibility.

The Committee consulted on the Bill and established the impact it could have on employers. The Committee received assurances that there would be no undue burden on small and medium sized businesses and that the changes in requesting flexible working hours would not have a negative impact on carers. The Bill received Royal Assent on 12 January 2015.

Legislative Consent Motion Pension Schemes Bill

The Minister for Employment and Learning wrote to the Committee for Employment and Learning on 25 September 2014 notifying it of a UK Supreme Court decision which held that fee-paid judicial office holders are entitled to a pension on terms equivalent to those enjoyed by their salaried counterparts.

The Minister advised the Committee that the Departments responsible for devolved Northern Ireland judiciary have agreed that it is appropriate to seek to extend the amendments so that they apply to Northern Ireland and that he has obtained Executive approval to proceed by Legislative Consent Motion.

The Committee received the Legislative Consent Motion on 12 November 2014 and considered it at its meeting on 19 November 2014. In response to questions from the

Committee, Departmental Officials outlined the reasons for choosing a legislative consent motion to amend the current legislation. The Committee supported the Legislative Consent Motion and it passed the Assembly on 26 November 2014

Subordinate Legislation

During the session the Committee considered proposals for 29 Statutory Rules from the Department of Employment and Learning and requested clarification on a range of issues before agreeing the Rules. 22 of the Rules introduced by the Department were enabling provisions for the Work and Families Bill.

Inquiries

Inquiry into Post Special Educational Need Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities

The Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into Post School Special Educational Need Provision in Education, Employment and Training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland. The Committee's consultation on the Inquiry closed on 30 July 2014 and the Committee will consider the responses, take oral evidence sessions and finalise the report, proposing a number of recommendations in the 2015-2016 session.

To date there have been 52 written submissions to the Inquiry, two evidence events with stakeholders, two events with individuals with learning disabilities and one event with parents and carers. The Committee has also made 11 study visits and commissioned 13 research papers and taken formal evidence from four organisations. The Committee also visited a range of organisations in Northern Ireland and Manchester to look at models of good practice.

As a direct result of this Inquiry the Department has already implemented a review of transport barriers for those with learning difficulties and has conducted an audit of the course places available in the 6 Regional Colleges to find the number of places and types of courses available to those with learning difficulties.



The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson and Members of the Committee with staff at Seashell Trust, Manchester

European Scrutiny

The Committee also kept itself updated with issues for the Department emanating from the European Commission and received 2 briefings from the Assembly Research and Information Service on the legislative and non-legislative issues relating to Employment and Learning coming out of Brussels and 2 briefings from Departmental officials regarding relevant European issues.

Budget Scrutiny

The Committee is mindful of the ongoing economic issues facing the Executive and has worked closely with the Department throughout the session to ensure that best use is made of the resources available. The Committee has received a number of briefings from Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University, Open University, Colleges NI and related Unions on the impact of cuts to budgets and has helped advise the Minister on options to mitigate against cuts to student places.

On the 1 October 2014 the Department's Director of Finance briefed the Committee on the October Monitoring Round and the Committee raised concerns regarding what impact there would be on the Department if Welfare Reform did not proceed.

The Committee has had seven briefings from officials on aspects of the Department's budget, including the Monitoring Rounds and Savings Delivery Plans. The Committee has engaged in issues regarding the European Social Fund programme for 2014 – 2020 and received briefing from the Community and Voluntary Sector regarding the application process. Due to the Committee's intervention the Minister re-opened the application process which resulted on additional organisations being approved for funding than would have originally been the case.

Policy Scrutiny

The Committee continued to exercise its scrutiny role over a wide range of policies, both those currently being implemented by the Department for Employment and Learning, and those under development. During the session the Committee was briefed by the Minister and received his assurance that he would renew his full engagement with the Committee on the development of policy and that he would consult more with the Committee at each stage of the policy development process.

The Committee has been particularly focused on the contracting of the Department's new Employment Programme, Steps 2 Success. The Committee has had 2 formal briefings from officials during the session on this matter and have been briefed by the 3 successful providers in each of the contract areas. The Committee has sought regular updates from the Department regarding the ongoing programme and is due to be briefed on this issue in the autumn.

The Committee has also agreed with the Department that it receives regular briefings on the Department's Programme for Government commitments and that the departmental directors in charge of the commitments come to the Committee to provide updates on delivery.

Engagement – Informal meetings / events

The Committee continued its extensive engagement with stakeholders in this session, in both formal and informal meetings.

The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson met informally with the Minister for Employment and Learning and his senior management team to discuss the work of the Department. The Committee has also hosted a number of smaller informal events for stakeholders. Such events have not only enabled the Committee to meet with stakeholders, but have also facilitated effective local networking and joined-up government.

The Committee has been very active and innovative in the ways it has engaged with stakeholders and gathered evidence. The Committee has held showcase events for the Open University, Colleges NI and a Belfast Metropolitan College Supported Employment Showcase Event in the Long Gallery to inform the Assembly of the excellent work carried out by the further and higher education institutions in Northern Ireland. The Committee also hosted a Technology Tournament for Belfast Rotary Club in which 100 young people aged 12-14 competed to design a piece of lifting apparatus.

On the 22 May 2015 the Committee sponsored the Annual Belfast Metropolitan College Fashion Show.

Likely Key Priorities for the next session

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme for the coming 2015-2016 session at its Strategic Planning Day on 9 September 2015 and agreed its key priorities.

Employment Bill

The Employment Bill is scheduled to be introduced in the Assembly in September 2015. The Committee will receive a briefing on the outline of the Bill prior to introduction. The Committee has also agreed to receive briefings from Employment Lawyers Group NI and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions regarding Employment Law when the Bill is introduced.

In addition the Committee will complete its work on its Inquiry and report its findings to the Assembly.

The Committee will also continue its scrutiny of the Departments management of:

- *Steps 2 Success*
- *European Social Fund Programme 2014 - 2020*
- *Reviews of Apprenticeships and Youth Training Policy*
- *Departmental Business Plan*
- *Higher Education Strategy*
- *Disability Employment Strategy*
- *Further Education Strategy*
- *Economic Inactivity Strategy*

In addition the Committee agreed its scrutiny of recurring issues as follows:

- *Labour Force Survey*
- *Savings Delivery Plans*
- *Monitoring Rounds and Outturn Figures*
- *Programme for Government*
- *European Briefing*

Committee for Employment and Learning

Expenditure for the period 1 September 2014 – 31 August 2015

Budget area	Details	Expenditure
Committee Travel - committee members and staff travel and subsistence in relation to visits and meetings outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of committee visits to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manchester as part of the ongoing Post SEN Inquiry. and 5 meetings held outside Parliament Buildings.	£ 4,647.99
Printing of committee reports	Committee for Employment and Learning Report on the Committee Stage of the Work and Families Bill	£ 349.40
Advertising – the cost of public notices relating to committee inquiries, the committee stage of Bills and meetings held outside Parliament Buildings	Includes the cost of public notices in relation to:	£0
Consultancy support - the cost of specialist advisers appointed by the committee and commissioned research, also the cost of drafting Standing Orders	Specialist adviser to the Committee on its Inquiry into post Special Educational Need (SEN) Provision in education, employment and training for those with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland	£600
General expenses	Cost of refreshments for committee meetings, working lunches, seminars, room hire, witness expenses, gifts provided by the committee during visits and conference fees for members.	£3,501.15
Total Expenditure		£9,098.54