Department of Education
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Department of Education Minister First Day Brief FEBRUARY 2024

Contents

PART A Overview

SECTION 1 – ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT

Structure of the Education System in Northern Ireland

1.1. The Department and the bodies set out below are responsible for the delivery of services in the Education sector:

The Department of Education (DE)

1.2. The Department is responsible for setting policy, strategy and for the central administration of education and related services in Northern Ireland. Its vision is" *"Every child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding".*

1.3. DE has a wide and complex range of functions, impacting on all areas of a child's wellbeing. As well as being responsible and accountable for the quality of education in grant-aided schools, youth organisations and those offered by early years providers, it also has responsibility for leading the development of the Executive's Children and Young People's Strategy and its Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.

1.4. While the Department has a part to play in most of the draft Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes, it has a particular role in the draft Outcome ***"Our children and young people have the best start in life".***

Every CHILD: the Department of Education Corporate Plan

1.5. The Department recently published 'Every CHILD', its Corporate Plan for the period 2023-2028. The Corporate Plan was developed through extensive engagement with officials across the Department and with stakeholders right across the education sector. It was also subject to a public consultation, including with children and young people, from September to November 2022 (a report on the public consultation is available on request).

1.6. Every CHILD contains a fresh Vision for education, as stated at paragraph 1.2 above. The Plan is structured around five Strategic Priorities for education, using the CHILD acronym, as follows:

- **CHAMPIONING** the needs and aspirations of all our children and young people and the positive impact of education;
- **HELPING** all our children and young people by supporting their well-being and learning;
- **INSPIRING** all our children and young people to make a positive contribution to society;
- Meeting the **LEARNING** needs of our children and young people and developing their knowledge and skills, enabling them to fulfil their potential;
- **DELIVERING** an effective, child-first, collaborative and high-quality education system.

1.7. Every CHILD contains a clear set of actions and indicators of success, all of which provide a clear line of sight to the Outcomes in both the most recent draft Programme for Government (PfG) and the Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS). The actions in Every CHILD also reflect DE's contribution to other Executive Strategies and Plans. Officials will liaise with you to review and amend Every CHILD to meet your requirements and your approval of the revised Plan will then be sought.

1.8. The PfG is the NI Executive's highest-level strategic document. It outlines the Executive's priorities and gives clear strategic direction to the policies, programmes, services and actions of government departments and provides a basis for allocating resources. A draft PfG was subject to public consultation in 2021, so the content and format of a new PfG will require consideration and agreement by an incoming Executive.

1.9. Within the Department, the PfG is central to everything we do. We want to ensure that the advice we give to you as Minister on all aspects of our responsibilities (including our resource allocation) connects with and supports the PfG.

1.10. The Department has also developed a draft Business Plan for 2024-25, which has been shared with Arm's Length Bodies to help inform their business plan priorities for 2024-25. Once the Plan has been agreed by the Departmental Board, it will be provided to you for consideration and approval.

Arm's Length Bodies

1.11. DE is supported in delivering its functions by a range of Arm's Length Bodies (set out below), each of which is accountable to the Department.

<u>Executive Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)</u>

- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Education Authority
- General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland[1]
- Middletown Centre for Autism
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
- Youth Council for Northern Ireland[2]

<u>Tribunal NDPB</u>

- Exceptional Circumstances Body

1.12. There are also key stakeholders which support the sector.

[1] Council stood down 13 December 2021 (see 2.12-2.13)
[2] Currently non-operational and subject to Minister's decision on future (see 2.10-2.11)

1.13. The summary descriptions of these bodies and their remits are set out in pages 30 to 42 below.

Departmental Staffing

1.14. The Department has an administrative staffing complement of over 520 Full Time Equivalents. Recruitment has been significantly restricted during the 2023/24 year due to financial constraints. As a result there are a significant number of vacant posts and additional unmet demands, which subsequently is a constraint to delivery. The staffing structure and associated budget is currently under review, seeking to ensure this is both fit for purpose yet affordable.

1.15. The Department's headquarters is at Rathgael House, Bangor and a further cohort of staff who process and manage teachers' pay and pension arrangements are based at Waterside House, Derry/Londonderry.

1.16. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), which is part of the Department, provides inspection services, information about the quality of education and policy advice. The ETI has 38 inspectors, and the Chief Inspector, who are home based. The ETI management team is based in Rathgael House.

1.17. A more detailed description of the teams and key personnel within the Department is set out in Part D of this brief.

DE Budget

1.18. In the absence of Executive Ministers, the 2023-24 Resource Budget for Education was set at £2,576.5m in the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's Written Ministerial Statement on 27th April 2023. This was £66.4m less than the closing prior year budgetary position. Following a number of Post Budget exercise in respect of Technical Transfers, DE had a total Resource Budget of c£2,581.7m, of which c£2,474.4m was allocated to the Education Authority. The 2023-24 Budget leaves the Education sector facing a funding gap in the region of £300 million. For further detail on the DE resource budget, and the associated pressures, please see Part C: Education Funding in Northern Ireland.

Key Education Statistics: Schools and Pupils

1.19. The infographics shown overleaf provide a summary of the many statistics which are available about the education system in NI. They include information on the number of schools, teachers and pupils and pupil qualifications and destinations.

School establishments and enrolments in Northern Ireland

2022/23

NISRA

Department of Education

Grant-aided nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools

	Controlled	Voluntary	Catholic Maintained	Other Maintained	Controlled Integrated	Grant Maintained Integrated	Total
Settings	515*	61*	442	30	32	38	1,118
	46.1%	5.5%	39.5%	2.7%	2.9%	3.4%	100.0%
Enrolments	138,861	52,405	124,224	5,440	9,204	17,979	348,113
	39.9%	15.1%	35.7%	1.6%	2.6%	5.2%	100.0%

*Preparatory Departments are included separately from grammar schools settings

Grant-aided primary schools

	Controlled	Voluntary	Catholic Maintained	Other Maintained	Controlled Integrated	Grant Maintained Integrated	Total
Settings	355*	11*	354	27	24	23	794
	44.7%	1.4%	44.6%	3.4%	3.0%	2.9%	100.0%
Enrolments	82,261	1,397	81,286	4,175	4,842	7,114	181,075
	45.4%	0.8%	44.9%	2.3%	2.7%	3.9%	100.0%

*Preparatory Departments are included separately from grammar schools settings

Includes pupils in primary school years 1-7, preparatory departments, reception classes and nursery units

Grant-aided post-primary schools

	Controlled	Voluntary	Catholic Maintained	Other Maintained	Controlled Integrated	Grant Maintained Integrated	Total
Settings	63	50	56	2	6	15	192
	32.8%	26.0%	29.2%	1.0%	3.1%	7.8%	100.0%
Enrolments	46,180	51,008	40,824	1,177	4,258	10,865	154,312
	29.9%	33.1%	26.5%	0.8%	2.8%	7.0%	100.0%

Source: NI school census

Queries? Contact: statistics@education-ni.gov.uk

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

KEY STATISTICS

Pre-Schools

		No. of Settings	Enrolments
A	Voluntary & Private Pre-Schools	349	7,043
B	Nursery Schools	93	5,796
	Schools with nursery classes	255	9,699
C	Schools with reception classes	45	177

Source: 2022/23 School Census

Schools

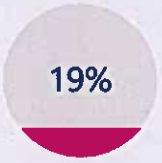
	Settings			Enrolments			Free School Meal Entitlement	Newcomers
	Total	Integrated	Irish Medium	Total	Integrated	Irish Medium		
Primary (Y1-Y7)	794	47	53	171,199	11,162	4,672	28%	8%
Non-Grammar	126	21	4	88,590	15,123	1,531	35%	4%
Grammar	66	0	1	65,722	0	215	13%	1%
Special Schools	39	0	0	6,930	0	0	52%	3%

Source: 2022/23 School Census

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

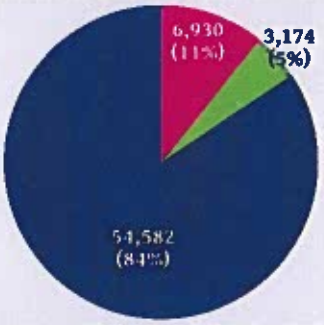
66,404

Total pupils with SEN



Pupils with a statement of SEN	24,283	7%
Pupils with SEN but not a statement (Stages 1-2)	42,121	12%

Source: 2022/23 School Census



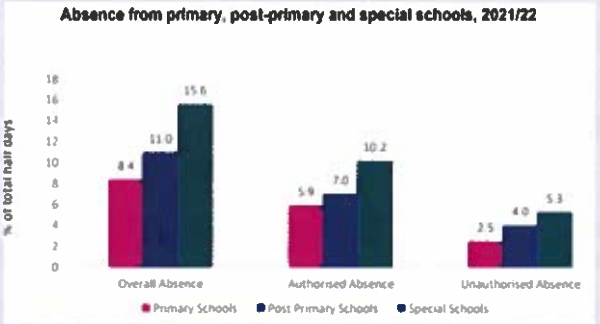
- SEN pupils in Special Schools (11%)
- SEN pupils in Specialist Provision in Mainstream (5%)
- SEN pupils in mainstream (84%)

Pupil Attendance

Primary Schools: 91.6% of half days attended

Post-Primary Schools: 89.0% of half days attended

Special Schools: 84.4% of half days attended



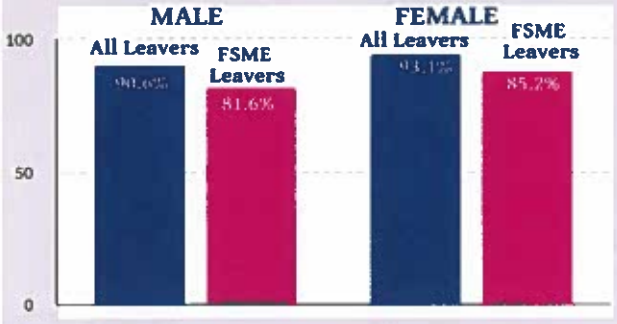
Examples of authorised absence include:
Bereavement, Suspension, Illness, Medical Appointments

Examples of unauthorised absence include:
Family holiday not agreed, other absence not covered by another code, reason not acceptable to school, no reason provided, late (arrive after registration)

Source: 2021/22 Attendance Statistical Bulletin

School Leavers achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C [1]

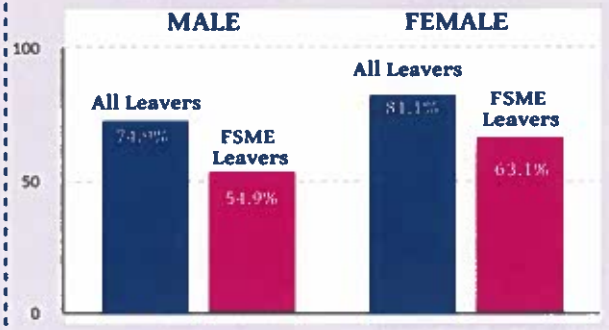
All Leavers 91.9%
FSME Leavers 83.4%



1 Including Equivalents

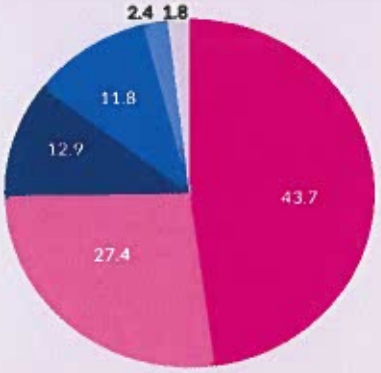
School Leavers achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C [1] incl GCSE Eng & Maths

All Leavers 78.0%
FSME Leavers 59.1%



Source: 2021/22 School Leavers Data

Destinations of School Leavers



- Higher Education (43.7%)
- Further Education (27.4%)
- Employment (12.9%)
- Training (11.8%)
- Unemployment (2.4%)
- Unknown (1.8%)

Overall, 95.8% of school leavers were recorded by their school as entering Education, Employment or Training.

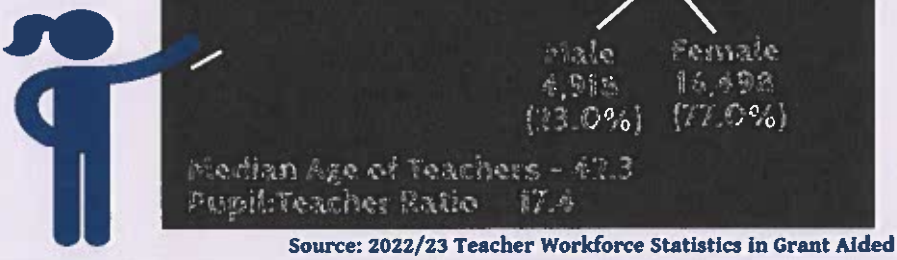
Source: 2021/22 School Leavers Data

School Meals Uptake

- **96,319 pupils across all school types were entitled to Free School Meals (FSM); this represents 27.7% of all pupils**
- **79.2% of those entitled to FSM availed of them on the day of the School Meals Census**

Source: 2022/23 School Meals Uptake Data Collection

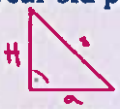
Teacher Workforce



Source: 2022/23 Teacher Workforce Statistics in Grant Aided Schools

International Research

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) - 2022 focuses on the ability of 15 year old pupils to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges



MATHS

The mean mathematics score for pupils in NI was not significantly [1] different from the OECD average.

NI significantly outperformed the majority, 47, of the 79 education systems in mathematics and was outperformed by 21.

[1] Significant refers to statistical significance at the 95% level

READING

The mean reading score of NI pupils was significantly above the average score across OECD countries.

NI significantly outperformed the majority, 56, of the 78 education systems in reading and was outperformed by 12.

SCIENCE

The mean science score of NI pupils was not significantly different from the average score across OECD countries.

NI significantly outperformed the majority, 48, of the 79 education systems in science and was outperformed by 17.

Source: PISA 2022 National Report for Northern Ireland

SECTION 2 – CURRENT INFORMATION AND TOPICAL ISSUES FOR EARLY DISCUSSION

2.1 EARLY/WEEK 1 ISSUES

2024/25 – School Placements for children with statements of Special Educational Need (SEN)

2.1.1 The EA has a statutory duty to secure provision of primary (including pre-school) and secondary education, and under Article 6(1)(a) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 have regard to the need for securing that special educational provision is made for pupils who have SEN.

2.1.2 Statutory responsibility for the identification, assessment and, in appropriate cases, provision of support for children with SEN rests with the EA as set out in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and reflected in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN (1998).

2.1.3 There has been increasing complexity of need and numbers of children assessed as requiring a statement of SEN in recent years. Since 2020, there have been challenges in meeting the demand for special education provision. Ensuring appropriate school placements for children and young people with statements of SEN is a top priority for the Department and the EA.

2.1.4 The EA is working to ensure children and young people secure high-quality placements appropriate to meet their needs for September 2024.

2.1.5 Since 2021/22 additional special education provision has been required to meet the increasing demand for places for children and young people with statements of SEN. Specialist Provision in Mainstream (SPiM) classes have

been established to provide appropriate places for some children with statements of SEN, a small proportion of whom might otherwise require a place in a special school. There are currently 478 SPiM classes across almost 200 schools.

2.1.6 The need for additional SPiMs has increased year on year, and work is on-going with the EA and stakeholders to ensure there are sufficient and appropriate places as demand continues to rise. Whilst the vast majority of children had secured a placement for the current year by September 2023, with less than five children unplaced at that point, many placements were not confirmed until summer 2023 (children going through the general schools admissions process received notification of their placements in May 2023). EA is projecting that similar numbers of children with a statement of SEN will require a new placement for September 2024, and they are working to identify appropriate provision including establishing new SPiMs where needed. EA has indicated there may be around 70 additional SPiM classes required to meet demand for September 2024.

2.1.7 The Department has established a Deputy Secretary led SEN Placement Strategy Group with the EA and stakeholders to develop strategic planning and oversight of the placements process to ensure that children and young people secure confirmation of an appropriate placement where possible, at the same time as their peers. There is a need to create capacity in the overall system and to continue to ensure that more mainstream schools can accommodate SPiM classes. Our legislation has a presumption of mainstream. The changing profile of our children means that the system needs to change to ensure that all schools have appropriate provision (whether in a mainstream class or a specialist class) for children with SEN.

2.1.8 The future need for specialist education provision inthe context of area planning considerations, will be scrutinised in the on-going 'End to End' Review of SEN by the Inclusion Directorate.

School Holiday Food Grants

2.1.9 From July 2020 – Easter 2022 the Executive agreed that a payment should be made to those entitled to free school meals to tackle "holiday hunger" during school holiday periods. The Executive also provided Executive direction for funding support to cover the costs of these payments, known as "school holiday food grant scheme" payments which were for £13.50 per pupil per week. In the absence of an Executive, the then Minister of Education extended this scheme to cover holiday periods during the 2022/23 financial year at a cost of c.£20.4m. As the ringfenced funding was no longer available from DoF in 23/24, the DE Permanent Secretary decided to discontinue the scheme from 31 March 2023.

2.1.10 [redacted]

[redacted]

Reducing Educational Disadvantage (RED) Programme

2.1.11 Work on the development of a Reducing Educational Disadvantage (RED) Programme (a working title) is well advanced. This will be a 'whole community approach to education' with a place-based focus, which will implement a number of actions under the report "A Fair Start" Report. This 2021 report was produced by an Expert Panel on educational underachievement that was established under 'New Decade, New Approach'. The report envisaged a cost of £10m per year for the RED programme when fully established. [redacted]

Early Learning and Childcare Strategy

2.1.12 The Childcare Unit leads on the development of the Executive's Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Strategy.

2.1.13 There is significant interest in the Strategy and particularly the actions likely to flow from it in terms of extended early learning provision and/or subsidised childcare. Work has been ongoing to develop high-level costed options. There has been significant engagement with the early years and childcare sector and other NICS Departments (through an established Stakeholder Engagement Forum and Programme Board). Liaison with colleagues from other jurisdictions on their early learning and childcare offers is ongoing and a range of external reviews have been commissioned to help inform the way ahead. Most recently, the Independent Review of Education contained the following recommendations for Early Years:

- '**Expand early years education**- The early years offer a unique learning opportunity for all children. Increased investment early years will extend access and improve quality, enabling early diagnosis and intervention in cases of difficulty. Early childhood health and education needs should be met through an integrated service. There should be phased expansion of early years education. First steps should ensure that all 2-years-olds

receive up to 20 hours per week and all 3-year-olds up to 22.5 hours per week. Priority should be given to 2-year-olds and those in disadvantage. The approach to expansion will be for the Department but could include extension of the scope of Sure Start and/or the provision of funded pre-school education for 2-year-olds.

- **Give additional support to allow parents to get back into work**- To support disadvantaged families seeking work and boost the economy, DE should work with other departments to prepare affordable plans for expanded childcare provision, taking account of both family economic circumstances and the stage of child development. Funding options could involve a means-tested sliding scale of charges.'

2.1.14 The childcare team have recently held several bi-lateral meetings with representatives from political parties to establish their preferences, and, in light of these conversations, are considering what a bespoke childcare offer for NI might include and how it could be phased in. The Strategic Investment Board has also recently been engaged to support this work and assist with the costing of options.

2.1.15 The previous Minister for Education, Michelle McIlveen, determined that funded pre-school education provision should be standardised to offer at least 22.5 hours education per week in the year before compulsory education, subject to budget being secured from the Executive. This would be a core component of an early Education and Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland, in line with the Fair Start (2022) action that "DE should standardise the length of pre-school education day to at least 4.5 hours per day, including access to free school meals for eligible children, thereby improving equality of provision". Scoping to inform standardisation has been carried out and a report is due to be published early in 2024.

2.1.16 The timeline for publication and implementation of the ELC Strategy, including pre-school standardisation, requires Executive agreement on significant policy decisions, including the model to be adopted, its scope and budget. There is no funding within the DE baseline for the Strategy and additional budget would need to be allocated by the Executive to move any of the actions beyond the concept stage. A significant increase in the number of staff working in this area would also be required to take forward any expansion. Given the previous announcements and the position in regard to scoping for pre-school standardisation, prioritising early investment in this area would enable implementation to commence quickly.

The Draft Period Products (Department of Education Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations

2.1.17 Under the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, all departments are required to specify in Regulations, bodies which will be subject to duties under the Act. **The legislative deadline for these Regulations to be 'made' was in May 2023**. While the Regulations have

been consulted on and drafted, they are subject to approval under the Draft Affirmative Procedure in the Assembly.

2.1.18 DE has engaged with the organisations specified in the draft Regulations so preparations can be made (as far as possible) on an informal basis.

2.1.19 All departments must progress swiftly to seek the Assembly's approval of the draft Regulations.

Ministerial Priorities / *Every CHILD* Corporate Plan

2.1.20 It is anticipated that there will be early media interest in your specific priorities for the new mandate. Although *Every CHILD*, the Department's five-year Corporate Plan was published in October 2023, it can be a vehicle for setting out publicly what you see as the education sector's key priorities for the next few years. You will be asked to give early consideration to *Every CHILD* so that it can be updated to reflect your requirements, following which you will be asked to formally approve the Plan. The Press and Internal Communications Team will liaise with you on any press releases and media interest on this and other key matters.

Annual School Census

2.1.21 Every year, Statistics and Research Team (SRT) in DE carries out a school census exercise on the first Friday of October. Schools submit electronic returns containing pupil level information on every pupil enrolled in their school, including data on pupil characteristics and status such as Free School Meal Entitlement. This information is used for a wide range of purposes by DE, including allocating school budgets using the Common Funding Formula. This year the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) wrote to its members advising them to submit a paper census return rather than an electronic one. Other unions subsequently provided the same advice to their members and as a result a quarter of schools submitted a paper hardcopy return. Due to the poor quality of some of the paper returns and how labour intensive it would be to key them in manually, it has only been possible to process aggregate summary reports for these schools. These will be used to provide an unvalidated estimate of school level figures, and individual pupil level information will not be available for those schools who submitted paper returns. SRT have had initial discussions with the Education Information Solutions (EdIS) team about the prospect of one extract from the EdIS Cloud as a replacement for individual school census returns but this will not resolve the situation in the short term.

2.1.22 Using the information available, provisional enrolment figures for schools and for children in funded pre-school education in the 2023-24 academic year were published on 6 December:

School enrolments - 2023/24 Statistical bulletins | Department of Education (education-ni.gov.uk)

2.1.23 However, only very limited information remains for those schools who submitted paper returns and this will significantly inhibit the analysis SRT is able to carry out for the Department going forward. Individual pupil level data from the census is used to allocate funding to schools based on the number of pupils and certain pupil and school characteristics. Finance Directorate has been made aware of the data limitations which the paper census returns present. In many cases there will not be fully validated summary table information at school level available on which to base school funding and Finance is currently assessing the implications this will have on the allocation of funding to schools and will submit advice on the options for school funding in the absence of pupil level data.

2.1.24 Individual pupil level data is also used by other teams within DE. SRT wrote to Directors and team leaders asking them to identify the impact of not having this data in their work areas. Many of these impacts have repercussions for schools, for example, not being able to address capacity issues for SEN pupils in the system. Ultimately, the lack of data impacts on children and young people, either because financial resources cannot be targeted towards those who need it most or because it will present challenges in provision of services to the right children and young people in the right place. There are likely to be other impacts that come to light later in the year when SRT receives requests for information.

Industrial Relations and Pay

Teaching Staff

2.1.25 The current inflationary and cost of living pressures are making pay negotiations difficult, as pay awards are governed by affordability and the over-arching Executive Public Sector Pay Policy guidance. This is putting a strain on relations with Trade Unions. Failure to reach agreement on outstanding teachers' pay settlements for 2021, 2022 and 2023 has resulted in the five main teachers' unions, which make up Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) returning to industrial action in the form of Action Short of Strike. This escalated, when four of the unions took a half-day strike action on 21 February 2023 followed by all five unions engaging in a full day strike on 26 April 2023 and a further half-day strike on 29 November 2023. NITC have also announced a further 4 days strike action in the spring term, the first of which was 18 January 2024. Other dates are yet to be confirmed.

2.1.26 There are approximately 20,000 full-time equivalent teachers in grant-aided schools with an overall pay bill for the teaching workforce at approximately £1.3bn. NITC are requesting a pay rise over the 3 years of circa 30% which equates to c.£400m per annum. A pay increase for teachers of 1% in 2021 (in line with NI Public Sector Pay Policy limits), 5% in 2022 and 6.5% in 2023 (in line with the equivalent increase for teachers in England) would have a recurring annual cost of £170m. The Department will not be able to meet this cost without a significant increase to the education budget.

Non-teaching staff

2.1.27 Non-teaching staff are represented by a number of unions collectively known as the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC). Pay arrangements are negotiated nationally and have been implemented up to and including 2023/24. However, recent strike action by non-teaching staff is related to the Pay and Grading Review business case submitted by the EA. This proposes a single pay and grading structure for EA staff, which includes a higher starting salary for lower paid staff; standardised pay scales; and an increase in the pay differential between supervisors and entry level staff. The proposal has a significant cost attached, with the EA's current preferred option requiring funding of c£92m (incl. the back pay element from 2022) if settled within this financial year (2023-24). If is not settled in this financial year, the funding requirement would be c£153m in 2024-25 (incl. the back pay element). In addition, if the business case is approved, non-teaching staff in Grant Maintained Integrated and Voluntary Grammer schools will seek parity and this will have an additional cost of £11m for the period 2022-24, rising to £18m if is not settled until 2024-25.

2.1.28 Following significant work, a revised business case containing additional evidence and reworked costings was submitted by the EA at the end of November 2023. Departmental officials have reviewed this and concluded that the case demonstrates a real need for change. It was therefore submitted to DoF on 7 December 2023. It is not possible to provide a timescale for when DoF will finish their review of the business case or when the changes might be implemented. However, it is clear that a significant increase to the education budget is required to enable the changes to be implemented.

2.1.29 Industrial action by both teaching and non-teaching unions is having a very significant impact on the education system including pupils, staff and parents. Strike action has led to a series of widespread school closures with particular impact on special schools. Urgent resolution of the pay issues for teaching staff and the pay and grading review for non-teaching staff is imperative to restore stability to the education system but this can only be achieved with a very significant increase to the education budget.

Industrial Action Impact on School Improvement and Safeguarding

2.1.30 The return and escalation of industrial action by all five recognised teacher unions has also created a very challenging scene in terms of monitoring and effecting school improvement. This follows on from a protracted period of ASoS dating as far back as 2011 which significantly escalated in 2017 until an Agreement was reached in April 2020 just as the pandemic began. The current action began in April 2022 as the education system was still recovering from the pandemic.

2.1.31 The long list of Actions Short of Strike (ASoS) which the unions are directing their members to follow includes non-cooperation with inspection. NI is the only country within the UK where it is not illegal to obstruct an inspection.

There has therefore been very limited independent review of the quality of education provision across our schools, particularly over the last seven years. Several schools in the legacy follow-up to inspection process are also now refusing to submit action plans for improvement to the Department or to engage further with the Inspectorate.

2.1.32 The inspection process also provides assurance on schools adhering to safeguarding requirements within schools and the continued non co-operation of schools in regular inspections has been identified as a safeguarding risk. In terms of follow-up inspections, the ASoS further escalation as at September 2023 from the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), includes an instruction to no longer engage with ETI where a safeguarding issue has not been previously identified. DE have been mitigating this risk by reminding Teaching Unions, BoG's and Principals of their statutory duties to safeguard children and promote the wellbeing of their pupils under articles 17, 18 and 19 of The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order at all opportunities. A specific reminder to all educational settings issued in the covering letter to the updated statutory safeguarding guidance in September 2023.

2.1.33 End of Key Stage Assessments were suspended in 2020 in order to reduce the bureaucratic burden on schools in light of the pandemic. They continue to be suspended pending the Review of Statutory Assessment – this formed part of the Pay and Workload Agreement 2020 which brought an end to the previous industrial action. This has resulted in a vacuum of data on pupil progression and performance data other than external qualifications at Key Stage 4 (GCSE).

2.1.34 Non-engagement with School Improvement Professionals and the School Development Service also creates challenges in providing external support and professional learning. The ASoS also includes direction not to undertake School Development Planning and not to submit proposals around the use of School Development Days which are designed to bring about school improvement.

Independent Review of Education

2.1.35 The Independent Review of Education was commissioned in response to commitments contained in New Decade New Approach (NDNA). NDNA stated that the Executive should "*establish an external, independent review of education provision, with a focus on securing greater efficiency in delivery costs, raising standards, access to the curriculum for all pupils, and the prospects of moving towards a single education system*".

2.1.36 The Terms of Reference of the Review invited the Panel to "*agree a vision for what a high quality, innovative and inclusive education system would look like in Northern Ireland in the 21st century and how relevant partners might work together to realise that vision – making Northern Ireland a truly excellent system internationally*".

2.1.37 The then Department of Education (DE) Minister, Michelle McIlveen MLA, appointed the Panel in September 2021 following an open recruitment process chaired by DE *Permanent* Secretary, Dr Mark Browne. The Panel members are:

- Dr Keir Bloomer (Chairperson);
- Sir Gerry Loughran (Vice-Chairperson);
- Marie Lindsay;
- Robin McLoughlin OBE; and
- Isabel Nisbet.

2.1.38 The Panel's report was published on 13/12 23. It consists of three volumes:

- Volume 1 - An overview that describes the task, the priority areas for reform and key recommendations.
- Volume 2 – Provides more detail on each of the priority areas identified. It describes the current strengths, weaknesses and modes of operation of the education system. It sets out the Panel's rationale for the recommended courses of action.
- Volume 3 includes a number of Appendices that provide further background information relevant to the Review.

Each of the volumes is available on DE's website at:
www.independentreviewofeducation.org.uk/final-report

2.1.39 A total of 25 key recommendations are identified in the report which fall under 10 topic areas:

- Prioritise investment in education
- Reform educational governance and delivery
- Expand Early Years education
- Raise the age of education and promote life long learning
- Reform of the curriculum and invest in its management
- Reconfigure the network of schools and 6th forms
- Promote learners learning together
- Reforms in FE and HE
- Reform transfer at 11
- Improve services for learners with SEN.

2.1.40 Officials are now considering the findings of the report. In due course, advice will be forwarded on how best to review, consult on and consider implementing the various recommendations.

2.2. DE LEGISLATION PROGRAMME

Proposals for the Introduction of Executive Bills September 2022-2027, Potential Bills and Secondary Resolutions

Summary table: Years 1 and 2 (2023/24 & 2024/25)

Title / Department	Executive Paper on General Policy (Stage 1)		Date of Discussion with First Legislative Counsel	Formal engagement with OLC		Executive paper on Final Policy, agreement to drafting of Bill and inclusion of Bill in the Legislative Programme (Stage 2)		Instructions to OLC		Drafting of Bill		Consultation on Draft Bill (if carried out)		Executive paper on Introduction of Bill (Stage 3)	
	Draft circulated to Ministers	Considered by Executive		From	To	Draft circulated to Ministers	Considered by Executive	Final instructions due	% delivered to date	From	To	From	To	Draft Circulated to Ministers	Considered by Executive
[redacted]															
[redacted]															
[redacted]															

Summary Table: Years 3 and 4 (2025/26 & 2026/27)

Title / Department	Executive Paper on General Policy (Stage 1)		Date of Discussion with First Legislative Counsel	Formal engagement with OLC		Executive paper on Final Policy, agreement to drafting of Bill and inclusion of Bill in the Legislative Programme (Stage 2)		Instructions to OLC		Drafting of Bill		Consultation on Draft Bill (if carried out)		Executive paper on Introduction of Bill (Stage 3)	
	Draft circulated to Ministers	Considered by Executive		From	To	Draft circulated to Ministers	Considered by Executive	Final instructions due	% delivered to date	From	To	From	To	Draft Circulated to Ministers	Considered by Executive
[redacted]															
[redacted]															

Summary Table: Potential Executive Bills at early stage of consideration

Title	Description	Progress on development	Anticipated timescale to complete
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

Summary Table: Draft Affirmative Resolutions

Title	Description	Progress on development	Anticipated timescale to complete
Period Products (Free Provision)	A Statutory Rule made under section 2(1) of the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 to specify the public service bodies who are subject to the duty at section 2(3) of the Act.	Draft regulations laid in Assembly on 11 May 2023 to comply with the timeframe stated in the Act.	Regulations require the approval of the Assembly.
Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations	A revised Statutory Rule made under sections 3 and 11(2) of the SEND Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 to specify a range of new duties to be placed on the EA, Boards of Governors and Health Authorities; together with new rights for parents and children over 16.	Draft regulations are complete. A Ministerial decision on new regulations will be required to proceed.	Regulations require the approval of the Assembly.

Summary Table: Negative Resolutions

Title	Description	Progress on development	Anticipated timescale to complete
The Teachers' Pension Scheme (Remediable Service) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 – SR 2023 No. 131 ***More detail can be found at Section 8 paras 9.2.21 – 9.2.25***	The regulations introduce the retrospective part of the McCloud remedy, allowing eligible NI Teacher's Pension Scheme (NITPS) members to make a retrospective choice which will put them, as far as possible, in the pension position they would have been in had the discrimination not occurred.	Regulations were laid in Assembly on 7 September 2023.	

2.3 Urgent Executive Business

The table below lists issues that require Executive referral in the near future.

Subject of business to be referred to the Executive	Principal recommendations	Indicative timescale for referral (i.e. week 1, week 2, week 3 or week 4)	What would be the impact of deferring Executive referral beyond week 4?
Update on the development of an Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.	To provide an update on the work done to date, set out current position and proposed next steps, including timescale to bring forward a costed proposal for Executive consideration.	Week 1	All parties have signalled that this needs to be a priority for an incoming Executive. There are also high stakeholder expectations. Deferring an update beyond this is likely to attract criticism and ultimately delay the publication and implementation of an agreed Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.
Does the Executive wish to continue with measures to address holiday hunger for children and young people during school/college holidays as part of wider efforts to tackle poverty and if so, which Department should lead on this. ***Further information on this issue can be found at paras 2.1.9 – 2.1.19 and***	Future provision of support to address holiday hunger and an Executive direction for funding support should be delivered through additional ring fenced funding. Further work be taken forward as part of the anti-poverty/food-poverty strategy work led by DfC to identify the most appropriate lead department for any scheme to tackle holiday hunger.	Week 4	Deferral would delay the provision of support that could potentially have commenced for the Easter school holiday period.
[redacted]	The Executive would be asked to note: • The background to the work on the proposed reducing educational disadvantage Programme. [redacted]	Week 4	Executive consideration of the programme would support ongoing design and implementation – pending confirmation of funding.

	[redacted] • The approach to programme design and next steps.		
Significant Capital and Maintenance Investment needs across the entire Schools' Estate.	To provide significant additional Capital DEL allocation to : • begin addressing the significant underinvestment across the Schools' Estate, allocating sufficient and ongoing Capital DEL to permit those projects paused cross all Capital Programme Streams (e.g. Minor, School Enhancement and Major Capital Works) to proceed on site; • continue address the significant and immediate increase in Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision across the entire Schools Estate, in both Special Schools and to address Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPIMS); • To address the 15-year backlog in essential maintenance (c.£500m maintenance backlog) through a significant underinvestment in both Capital and Maintenance Investment right across our Schools' Estate; • To agree a Capital DEL allocation to address the shortfall in Capital Funding for Fresh Start Projects, following	Week 3	The Department has engaged with senior representatives from all Political Parties over the last number of years on the need for significant and immediate investment right across the Schools' Estate. There would be a reasonable expectation that this issue would be brought to the Executive as soon as possible, to garner Executive process as part of the 2024-25 Budget process and the Information Gathering Exercise for 2025-26 and 2026-27 and beyond.

	the withdrawal of Fresh Start Agreement Funding; and • Agree a ring-fenced Capital Budget for the Strule Programme.		
Funding for the Strule Shared Education Campus	Commitment to provide earmarked capital funding over three years to deliver the Strule Shared Education Campus following the withdrawal of Fresh Start funding.	Week 4	A live tender has been submitted for the Programme but there needs to be clarity on funding to permit completion of FBC and contract award. If delayed and no decision taken, there is a high risk the tender could be lost.
Request for funding to allow a teachers' pay settlement to be reached for 2021, 2022 & 2023, thereby ending industrial action by Teaching Unions. Please note an Executive paper will not be required if the agreed funding package is sufficient to cover the proposed Teachers' pay award.	To agree additional funding to allow a teachers' pay settlement to be reached for 2021, 2022 & 2023, thereby ending industrial action by Teaching Unions.	Week 2	There would likely be an escalation in industrial action, which has been having a significant detrimental impact on schools and on the education & wellbeing of children and young people.
Request for funding to allow implementation of the EA Pay & Grading Review for Non-Teaching staff and bring to an end the industrial action by non-teaching unions. Please note an Executive paper will not be required if the agreed funding package is sufficient to allow implementation of the review findings.	To agree additional funding to allow implementation of the EA Pay & Grading Review for Non-Teaching staff, thereby ending industrial action by Non-Teaching Unions.	Week 2	There would likely be an escalation in industrial action by Non-Teaching Unions. This has been having a significant detrimental impact on schools and on the education & wellbeing of children and young people. Special schools have been particularly impacted by this action.

2.4 Private Office and Ministerial Workload

2.4.1 The Private Office provides administrative support and will manage the commissioning and issue of responses for all your correspondence, convey your decisions on Departmental matters and manage your diary.

2.4.2 Private Secretary (PS), [redacted], provides first hand support and accompanies you to meetings, events and visits.

2.4.3 Assistant Private Secretary (APS), [redacted], supports Peter on a day to day basis and provide cover when Peter is not available.

2.4.4 Office Manager, [redacted], performs a range of functions to ensure the smooth running of the Private Office and is the point of contact for IT related issues.

2.4.5 Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer (DALO), [redacted], acts as the point of contact for Assembly business including the Education Committee, Oral and Written questions and Executive business.

2.4.6 An indication of the level of workload you can expect is detailed in the table below. This is purely a count of the number of items in each of the main categories of Ministerial cases. To note the timeframe coved in these figures includes periods of pandemic lockdown and increased correspondence.

Ministerial Workload		
January 2020 – October 2022		
Type of case	**Number received**	**Average per month**
Assembly Questions	3983	117
Correspondence Cases	4607	135
Ministerial Invites	1542	45
Ministerial Submissions (inc Executive Papers)	2870	84

2.5 Press and Internal Communications Team

2.5.1 The Press and Internal Communication Team is part of the Executive Information Service and provides core media services including strategic communication support and advice to the Minister and senior officials.

2.5.2 Acting Principal Information Officer (PIO) [redacted] heads up the team along with Senior Information Officers (SIO) [redacted] and [redacted]. [redacted] (SIO) provides support directly to the Permanent Secretary and leads the Department's Internal Communication activities.

2.5.3 The PIO and SIOs provide media relations and handling (traditional, social and digital) for the Department of Education. The team manage all aspects of Ministerial media activity including supporting Minister at events and visits; managing media and photographic/video services to the Minister; overseeing the preparation of news releases, lines to take and other internal and external written communications; responding to media inquiries; media monitoring; briefing journalists and managing relationships with the media; managing and arranging press conferences, radio and TV interviews, and media coverage of important events, announcements and visits.

2.5.4 The team also manages the Department's Internet, staff Intranet and social media communication through X, Facebook and Instagram.

PART B Overview

SECTION 3 – BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

3.1 The following section sets out the key roles and responsibilities of the main stakeholders within the Education sector.

School sectors and management arrangements

3.2 The main types of school sectors and the corresponding management arrangements are as follows:

a) Controlled:

Controlled schools are managed and funded by the Education Authority (EA) through Boards of Governors. Primary and secondary school Boards of Governors consist of representatives of transferors (mainly the Protestant Churches) along with representatives of parents, teachers and the EA. Nursery, grammar and special school Boards of Governors consist of representatives of the latter 3 categories plus representation from DE.

Within the controlled sector there is a small but growing number of controlled integrated schools. There are also 2 controlled Irish-Medium schools.

b) Voluntary: (Maintained)

Voluntary (maintained) schools are managed by Boards of Governors which consist of members nominated by trustees (mainly but not exclusively Roman Catholic), along with representatives of parents, teachers and the EA. These schools are funded through the EA for their running costs and directly by the Department in relation to capital building works.

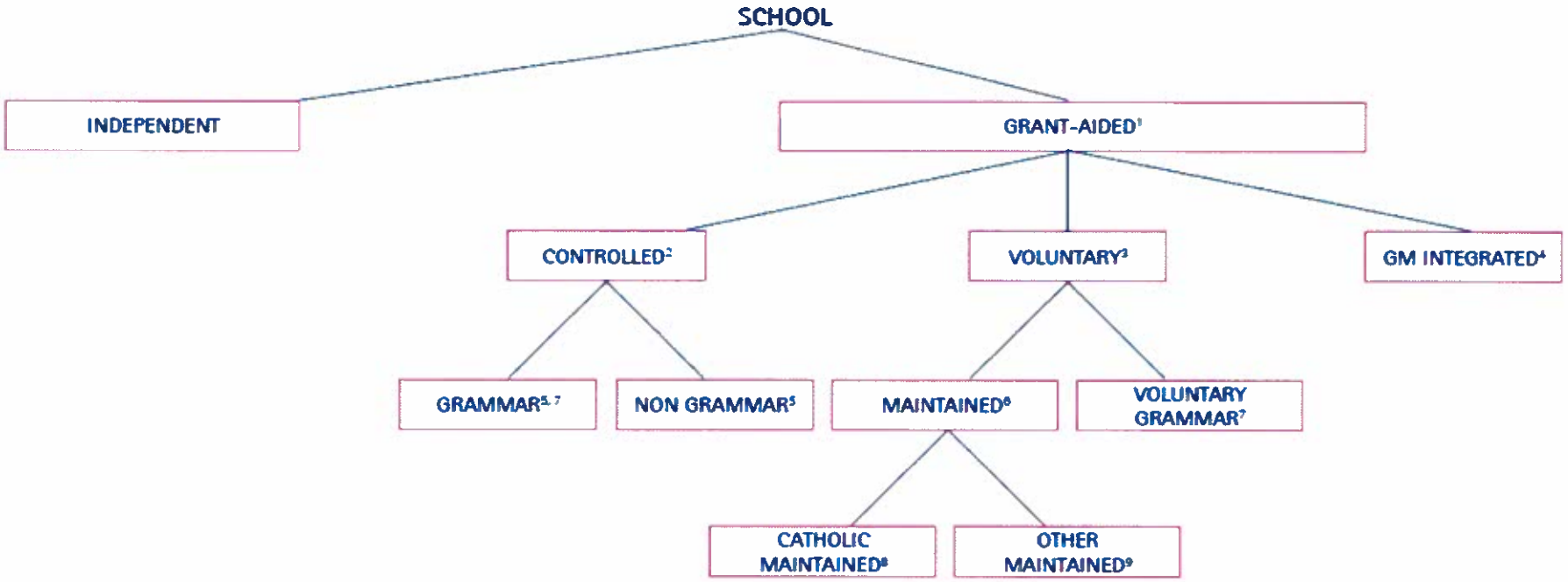
Voluntary schools vary in the rates of capital grant to which they are entitled, depending on the management structures they have adopted. The majority are entitled to capital grants at 100%.

c) Voluntary: (Non-Maintained)

These are mainly voluntary grammar schools (VGS), managed by Boards of Governors which consist of persons appointed as provided in each school's scheme of management (usually trustees or foundation governors) along with representatives of parents and teachers and, in most cases, members appointed by the Department or the EA. Following a review in 2015/16 of the Funding Authority arrangements for VGS and Grant-Maintained Integrated Schools (GMIS), the then Minister decided on 23 March 2016 to transfer the administrative arrangements of the VGS/GMIS Funding Authority function from the Department to the EA. The necessary legislative amendments were made on 24 March 2016 repealing 1989 legislation and

		commencing 1998 legislation to enable the EA to finance VGS/GMIS, with effect from 1 April 2016. As the EA was not in a position to take over the function on this date, the Department continued to fund VGS/GMIS during 2016/17 up to the successful transfer date to the EA on 1 April 2017.
d)	Grant-Maintained Integrated Schools	There are a number of grant-maintained integrated schools at primary level and post-primary levels. Refer to part c. above for GMI schools funding arrangements.

3.3 The practical operation of all grant-aided schools (excluding Special schools) is delegated to Boards of Governors. Boards of Governors are responsible for the delivery of the curriculum, admission of pupils, and for the management of their delegated budget, aligned to their educational priorities, including the setting of staffing complements. A diagrammatical chart below shows the wide range of school types described above.



1 Article 2(2) of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986.

2 Article 2(2) 1986 Order "controlled school" means a grant-aided school under the management of a board.

3 Article 2(2) 1986 Order "voluntary school" means a grant-aided school other than a controlled school or a grant-maintained integrated school.

4 Article 2(2) 1986 Order, and 65(3) of the 1989 Order

5 Includes Controlled Integrated schools - Article 2(2) of the 1986 Order and articles 90 to 92 of the 1989 Order.

6 Article 2(2) 1986 Order "maintained school" means a voluntary school other than a grammar school.

7 Article 2(2) 1986 Order. NB definition unrelated to admissions criteria.

"grammar school" means a secondary school which -

(a) immediately before the coming into the operation of Article 128 of the 1989 Order was a school in which fees were charged or could have been charged in respect of pupils admitted to the school, or a school which replaces such a school or schools; or

(b) is established after the coming into operation of that Article and is designated by the Department as a grammar school.

8 Article 2(2) of the 1986 Order, and Article 143(1) of the 1989 Order.

9 Not a separately defined school type as such, this group includes Irish-medium school, and Church of Ireland schools.

Education Authority (EA)

3.4 The EA is an executive Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) of DE and is responsible for securing adequate provision for primary and secondary education; and for securing the provision of adequate facilities recreational, social, physical, cultural and youth service activities and for services ancillary to education for grant-aided schools and other grant-aided educational establishments. The EA's duties and responsibilities include:

- ensuring there are sufficient schools providing primary and post-primary education to meet the needs of all the people in NI;
- ensuring that provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN);
- providing central support to Shared Education partnerships and playing a leading role in the development and mainstreaming of Shared Education
- promoting the community use of school premises;
- securing the provision of adequate youth service activities and funding the provision of youth service activities either alone or together with any other person, having regard to the facilities provided by other persons; and
- assisting the Department as appropriate in discharging its statutory duties, including those relating to the encouragement and facilitation of both integrated and Irish-medium education.

3.5 Other services administered by the EA include student support services (which are under the control of the Department for the Economy (DfE)), school meals and transport, school clothing schemes, the enforcement of school attendance and the provision of library services to schools and other educational establishments.

3.6 The EA acts as the employing authority for all staff in controlled schools (schools under EA management) and for all non-teaching staff in Catholic maintained schools. It is responsible for supporting the development of governors, principals, teachers and other school-related staff and has duties to provide training, advice and support for schools to bring about improvement. The EA is accountable for the funding provided directly to it and for the funding delegated to controlled schools and Catholic maintained (and other maintained) schools. The EA is also the statutory funding authority for grant maintained integrated and voluntary grammar schools. The EA is therefore responsible for ensuring schools achieve good outcomes for their pupils in return for the money invested.

3.7 Expenditure on EA services is 100% publicly funded. This expenditure is met mainly from resources provided by DE and DfE, although the funding arrangements are necessarily complex:

- expenditure provision for some services is determined by the Department i.e. where such expenditure is demand-led or where there are special initiatives targeted on specific schools across Northern Ireland;

- the bulk of EA funding is through a resource allocation: the EA has responsibility for considering, in line with Ministerial priorities, the relative priority of different services and how they will deliver their operational service within this budget allocation; and

- the EA is required to submit Budget Plans to the Department at set intervals throughout the financial year, setting out how it intends to allocate resources. These Budget Plans are subject to appropriate Departmental approval.

3.8 The EA was subject to a quinquennial review, referred to as the Landscape Review, with a report published in June 2022. Further details are outlined under the Resources, Governance and Early Years topical issues.

3.9 The Chief Executive of the EA, Sara Long, has tendered her resignation and will leave the EA in mid-April 2024. The EA has plans in place to fill the Chief Executive position on an interim basis and quickly progress the permanent recruitment. DE will be involved in this process and any appointment will be subject to DE approval.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)

3.10 The CCMS an executive NDPB of DE. It was created in 1990 and is responsible for the employment of teachers in Catholic maintained schools, effective planning and management of these schools and for a number of other, mainly advisory, functions. The Council's headquarters is in Lisburn and it is funded 100% by the Department.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)

3.11 CCEA was reconstituted as an executive NDPB of the Department by Part 8 of and Schedule 3 to the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and established on 1 April 1994. It is responsible for keeping under review all aspects of the curriculum, examinations and assessment for grant aided schools and colleges of further education and to undertake statutory consultation on proposals relating to legislation. It also advises DE on matters concerned with the curriculum, assessment, examinations and external qualifications and accrediting and approving qualifications; conducting and moderating examinations and assessments, ensuring that standards are recognised as equivalent to standards of examinations and assessments conducted by other bodies or authorities exercising similar functions in the United Kingdom. It publishes and disseminates information relating to the curriculum, assessment and examinations, developing and producing teaching support materials for use in schools and carrying out research and development.

Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI)

3.12 The YCNI was established under the Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 and is an executive NDPB of DE. Following the creation of the EA as a regional body, responsibility for regional youth services funding and support

transferred from the YCNI to the EA on 1 April 2016, with funding for regional organisations earmarked.

3.13 Following expiry of the term of office for Board members, YCNI has not been operational since 1 April 2019. The outcome of a sector survey to inform a Ministerial decision on the future of the youth council was inconclusive with the majority of Regional Voluntary Youth Organisation seeking an enhanced role for YCNI, while local voluntary youth organisations were of the view that the YCNI should be abolished. Officials have provided an options paper and a decision on the way forward remains outstanding.

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)

3.14 Established under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, the GTCNI is the statutory body for the teaching profession and is dedicated to enhancing the status of teaching and promoting the highest standards of professional conduct and practice. It is an executive NDPB of DE. GTCNI holds the statutory responsibility for registering and regulating all teachers working in granted-aided schools in NI. It also undertakes a number of related activities including assessing and accrediting NI-delivered Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses, setting minimum qualification standards for those wishing to teach in NI, permitting and setting professional standards; and for providing advice in support of relevant DE policy development.

3.15 GTCNI does not receive any funding from DE. It is funded via income from registration fees which are paid annually by teachers (the current fee is £44 per annum). GTCNI's draft unaudited Accounts for 2022/23 show income of £1.216m and reserves of £2.131m. It is funded via income from registration fees which are paid annually by teachers (the current fee is £44 per annum). The GTCNI's Forecast income in 2022/23 was £1.227m. Its draft Annual Report and Accounts for 2021/22 show income of £1.26 million and reserves of £0.7m. Reserves are down significantly from those reported in its 2019-20 Annual Report and Accounts (£1.41m) due to a large increase in its pensions liabilities arising from the McCloud judgement.

3.16 DE approval is required before the GTCNI can access any of its reserves.

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

3.17 NICIE is a non-statutory executive NDPB of DE. The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, as amended by the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, places a statutory duty on DE to encourage, facilitate and support the development of integrated education. Support is defined in Section 5 of the Act and relates to identifying, assessing, monitoring, aiming to meet demand for integrated education in the context of area planning and the overall sustainability of the school estate. The Act also introduces a new definition of integrated education which includes those of different religious beliefs and none, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; those experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those not; and those of different abilities being educated

together in an integrated school. The 1989 Order also enables the Department to pay grants to any body appearing to the Department to have as an objective the encouragement or promotion of integrated education. This is the basis on which the Department funds NICIE. In 2023/24 a budget of £603k was provided to grant fund NICIE.

3.18 There are at present 71 grant-aided integrated schools (with a total enrolment of 27,183 pupils in 2022/23).

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)

3.19 Following a commitment in the Belfast Agreement, provisions in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 place a duty on the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education. The Order also makes provision for the Department to pay grants to any body appearing to the Department to have as an objective the encouragement or promotion of Irish-medium education; and it brought the funding arrangements for Irish-medium schools into line with those in other sectors.

3.20 In August 2000, the Department established the body Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG), a non-statutory executive NDPB of DE, to encourage and promote the strategic development of, and provide guidance and advice to, the Irish-medium sector. In 2023/24 a budget of £623k was provided to grant fund CnaG.

3.21 Irish-medium education is provided in both stand-alone schools and in units attached to English medium host schools. In 2022/23 there were a total of 7,310 pupils being educated in Irish-medium schools and units, in 83 settings. This includes 28 primary schools (3,675 pupils excluding pupils in units) and two post primary schools (1,177 pupils excluding pupils in units) funded by DE. There are seven primary and three funded post-primary Irish-medium units attached to English medium schools, comprising 1,566 of the total number of pupils eligible for grant-aid. There are also 45 Irish-medium pre-school settings (26 pre-schools, 18 nursery units in Irish-medium schools and 1 nursery Irish-medium unit in an English-medium) within the Pre-School Education Programme, with a total enrolment of 892 children.

Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA)

3.22 The MCA is a non-statutory executive NDPB, opened in March 2007 to deliver key educational services on an all-island basis for children with some of the most complex forms of autism. The Centre was developed under the Good Friday Agreement and is an agreed area of co-operation within the North South Ministerial Council.

3.23 It is a joint initiative between the DE and the Irish Department of Education (DE Ire), with funding provided on a 50/50 basis. A total budget of £3m was allocated for 2023/24 financial year ie: c£1.5m per Department.

3.24 The MCA delivers intensive assessment and learning support to children on an outreach basis in the home and school. It also offers a broad range of training courses for educational professionals and parents including a Whole School Approach in NI and a programme of research.

Exceptional Circumstances Body (ECB)

3.25 The ECB is a Tribunal NDPB established and funded by the Department in accordance with the School Admissions (Exceptional Circumstances) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. Its members are appointed by DE but they work independently from it.

3.26 The ECB considers cases where an applicant claims that their child must attend a particular post-primary school (and that school only) for exceptional or compelling circumstances, but an application to that school made through the normal admissions process has not been accepted. The ECB resource budget is £0.2m. The ECB's expenditure is demand driven, the majority of which is made up from Members' fees and expenses.

Stakeholders

3.27 The following organisations are the main support organisations and sectoral bodies with whom the department works to fulfil its objectives:

Teacher Unions

3.28 The Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) is the umbrella body for the five recognised teachers' unions – National Education Union (NEU) formerly known as the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), National Association of School Masters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) and Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU) – and forms the teachers' side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC). The TNC is the recognised negotiating forum for teachers' terms and conditions matters, including pay. TNC is made up of representatives from the Management Side (employers, sectoral interests and Departmental representatives) and the NITC.

Support Staff Unions

3.29 Given the number and variety of staff on the support side there are a number of trade unions representing their interests – Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), UNISON, UNITE, The Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts (ASPECT) and General Municipal Boilermakers (GMB) make up the trade union membership on the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC). The JNC is the negotiating machinery for EA which employs the bulk of support staff. DE currently has an observer role on JNC. Collective agreements from JNC do not extend to other ALBs although the trade unions would be keen to have collective bargaining arrangements in place which include all non-teaching staff, including Voluntary Grammar Schools.

Transferors' Representative Council (TRC)

3.30 The TRC is a non-statutory body, comprising the three Protestant churches (Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist) that owned schools prior to their transfer to public ownership. The TRC is de facto the voice of the main Protestant churches on education matters.

Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE)

3.31 The NICCE was set up in 2005 to co-ordinate the work of all Catholic School Trustees in NI. NICCE is comprised of Senior Trustees, both Diocesan and Religious. The six Northern dioceses and all the religious congregations with schools in NI each nominate three members.

Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS)

3.32 Under section 4 of the Education Act (NI) 2014, the Department provides grant support to the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS), whose role is to professionalise the contribution of the Catholic Trustees to area planning and shared education on behalf of the whole Catholic-managed sector, including Catholic grammar schools. A budget of £125k to grant fund CSTS has been approved for 2023/24. CSTS intends to use the full allocation.

Governing Bodies Association (GBA)

3.33 The GBA is a voluntary organisation that provides policy information, advice and support for its constituent schools as well as representing their views with politicians, policy makers, media and other educational stakeholders. Its 50 member schools, of which 29 are Catholic-managed, educate over one third of all post-primary pupils. In 2016 the then Minister agreed that annual funding of up to £100k may be made available for the GBA under section 4 of the Education Act (NI) 2014 to help professionalise their contribution to area planning. A budget of £125k to grant fund GBA has been approved for 2023/24. The GBA intends to use the full allocation.

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC)

3.34 A non-statutory body, the CSSC was established on 1st September 2016 and is registered as a limited company with its own Memorandum and Articles of Association and Board of 13 Directors in compliance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006. Its role is to provide a representative and advocacy role for controlled schools, including advice and support in responding to consultation exercises, developing and maintaining a collective ethos for the sector, working with the EA to raise educational standards, participating in area planning and building co-operation and engaging with other sectors.

3.35 Previous Ministers had agreed annual funding of approximately £1m to the CSSC. A budget of £1,032k, to grant fund CSSC was approved for 2023-24. The full allocation will be used.

Youth Sector

3.36 The Department invests in youth work to support and encourage children and young people to mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens. While distinct from formal education, non-formal youth work complements the formal education service and is particular effective in developing personal and social skills and re-engaging with young people for whom formal education has been less effective. Participation is voluntary.

3.37 The Youth Sector comprises both statutory (EA Youth Service) and voluntary provision. There are 98 statutory youth units with 549 youth workers and in excess of 1,400 EA Registered units eligible to apply for EA Funding (including uniformed, church based and community settings) that together engage around 150,000 young people.

3.38 The sector employs circa 1,700 full and part time staff, with delivery supported by circa 17,000 volunteers who contribute in excess of 38,000 hours per week.

3.39 Youth delivery comprises generic and targeted activities with targeted provision supporting the needs of particular groups of young people, within Section 75 grouping or those at greater risk of social exclusion, marginalisation or isolation due to a combination of barriers to learning and vulnerable and 'at risk' young people.

3.40 The EA Youth Service also delivers programmes on behalf of DoJ (Tackling Paramilitarism) and TEO (TBUC Camps and Planned Interventions), Funding is provide via technical transfer to DE, resulting in DE having oversight of the delivery. MOU's and SLA's are in place as part of the governance for this work.

3.41 The following infographics show the scope, reach and impact of Youth Services.

YOUTH SERVICES

2022/2023 REPORT CARD

Education Authority

HOW MUCH DID WE DO?

BASED ON WHAT WE PLANNED...

	PROGRAMMES COMPLETED	PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED	RESIDENTIALS INCLUDED	STAFF MODERATIONS
2022-2023 FIGURES	6393	254,770	477	622
2021-2022 FIGURES	7,700	280 341	269	911

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGED BY AGE GROUP

4 TO 8 AGE GROUP	9 TO 13 AGE GROUP	14 TO 18 AGE GROUP	19 TO 21 AGE GROUP	22 TO 25 AGE GROUP
31,744	115,747	102,796	3,154	1,329
43,283	122,713	109,430	3,525	1,410

* FIGURES NOW INCLUDE GENERIC NON-TARGETED PROVISION

2021-2022 FIGURES

HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?

2022-2023 FIGURES

BASED ON WHAT WE PLANNE

MODERATIONS
RATED GOOD OR ABOVE

95%
95

SATISFACTION SURVE

VERY SATISFIED	SATISFIED	NOT SATISFIED
46,690	12,011	1,297
77.8%	20%	2.2%

2021-2022 FIGURES

IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?

2022-2023 FIGURES

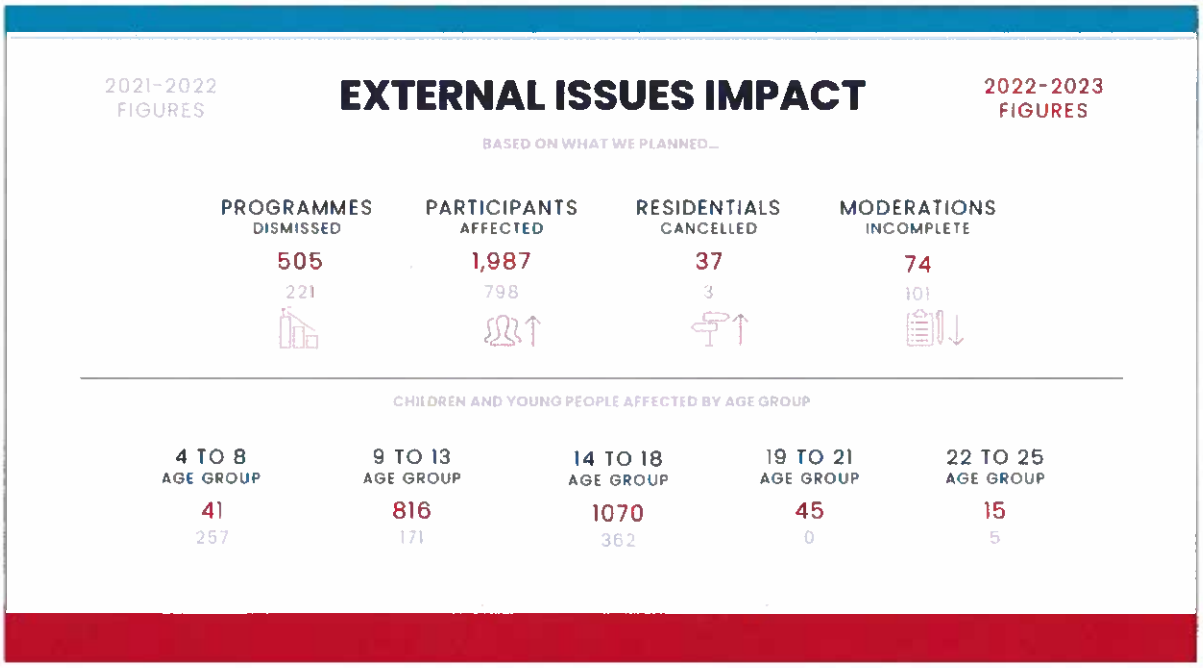
BASED ON WHAT WE PLANNED...

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

ACCREDITATION GAINED	CONTACT	ENGAGEMENT	ACTIVE PARTICIPATION	MAXIMISING POTENTIAL
11,649	34,149	37,959	25,701	10,481
5,106	28,844	27,700	30,866	9,529

PROGRESSION ON YOUTH WORK OUTCOMES

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP	DEVELOPMENT OF THINKING SKILLS...	ENHANCED PERSONAL CAPABILITIES	IMPROVED HEALTH & WELL BEING	IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS...	INCREASED PARTICIPATIVE...
15,672	40,893	84,976	71,246	89,517	81,924
14,650	39,063	46,149	62,503	53,391	29,877



***Note**: External issues impacting on delivery were due to staff illness, staff vacancies or staff having moved post.*

PART C – Overview

SECTION 4: EDUCATION FUNDING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Funding Trend

4.1 The school population is increasing, as well as the number of children presenting with special educational needs.

4.2 Education is facing extensive unavoidable cost pressures and rising service demands associated with delivering statutory and policy obligations. Without significant additional investment, the budget position for DE is likely to continue to be extremely challenging due to substantial unavoidable cost pressures facing the sector.

4.3 Schools' finances have been stretched year-on-year as evidenced by increasing schools' deficits and decreasing schools' surpluses. Increases to the Aggregated Schools Budget combined with COVID-19 funding which the Department secured in 2020-21 and 2021-22 to support schools through this period contributed to a temporarily improved position for schools. However, this masked the financial pressures faced by schools. Since 2022-23 and the cessation of COVID-19 support funding, the financial health of schools has continued to deteriorate with the value of school deficits again exceeding that of surpluses.

4.4 Based on the 2023-24 budget outcome, the estimate of the per-pupil spend in is £6,995, which equates to a decrease of £230 (c. 3.2%) per pupil compared to the 2022-23 figure of £7,225 per pupil.

4.5 In recent correspondence from the NIO (July 2023), it acknowledged that following the recently announced school funding package for England, per pupil spend in Northern Ireland in 2023-24 is not on a par with levels allocated in England and Scotland.

4.6 Reports by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (Oct 2018) (https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/publications/financial-health-schools-0) and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (July 2019) (NIAC Report) both acknowledged the increasing pressures on school budgets and the consequential detrimental impact on educational outcomes, with the former concluding that the school system is coming close to a '*tipping point*'.

4.7 The core Department has also taken steps to reduce its own running costs since 2014/15, reducing the workforce by over 16%.

4.8 As a result of budget pressures, the Department has started four of the last seven financial years in an over-commitment position as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – DE Opening Budget Over-commitment Position

Financial Year	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m	2021-22 £m	2022-23 £m	2023-24 £m
Resource Budget allocation	1,929.2*	1,939.4	2,037.7	2,276.1	2,345.1**	2,642.9***	2,576.5****
Over-commitment	2.7	21.9	25.7	-	81.2	-	-
DE assumed Opening Resource Budget	1,931.9	1,961.3	2,063.1	2,276.1	2,426.3	2,642.9	2,576.5
Over-commitment as a % of Resource Budget allocation	0.14%	1.13%	1.26%	n/a	3.46%	n/a	n/a

** Includes an allocation from the Public Sector Transformation Fund (PSTF) for teaching and non-teaching Voluntary Exit Schemes and the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme.*

***Includes an allocation for Food Hunger (£30.6m) and COVID-19 Funding (£44.4m).*

**** In the absence of Executive Ministers, the 2022-23 Budget for Education was set out in the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's Written Ministerial Statement on 24 November 2022.*

***** In the continued absence of Executive Ministers, the 2023-24 Budget for Education was set out in the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's Written Ministerial Statement on 27 April 2023.*

Education Budget Overview

4.9 A breakdown of how the Department's 2023-24 Opening Resource Budget was allocated is shown in percentage terms in the pie chart in the infographic at Annex A. The Department's Current Resource Budget is shown in monetary terms in Table 2 below.

4.10 As can be seen, a significant element, c91%[3], of the education budget is directed towards funding schools and pupils:

- c55.4% is allocated directly to schools via the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB);
- typically, c20% is allocated to schools from central budgets including: the special schools' budget, special education in mainstream, C2K (the managed ICT service), rates and teacher substitution costs; and typically,
- c11% is attributed to schools for services provided to them including: transport, school meals, headquarters costs (finance staff, directors, property services,

3 This does not include funding for other initiatives which directly benefit schools/pupils such as Extended Schools and the Entitlement Framework which are earmarked funds.

architects, etc.); support for pupils with special educational needs (including language and communication, autism, visual/hearing impairment, specific literacy difficulties, behaviour support, education other than at school, early years and support for children with generalised learning difficulties); the schools' development service (including assessors, curriculum, analysis of teacher pupil ratio, etc.); the music service; and the school library service.

4.11 The balance of the Department's funding (c5.3%) is targeted towards early intervention initiatives; youth and other children's services; other NDPBs; other education services; and Departmental costs.

Table 2 – Current 2023-24 DE Resource Budget Breakdown

Category of Expenditure	2023-24 Resource Budget £m
ASB - core front line funding distributed directly to all grant-aided schools through the Common Funding Formula for the delivery of the education curriculum. £1,430.1m includes both the £1,389.3m opening ASB distributed via the CFF plus additional in-year allocations[1].	1,430.1
EA Block Grant – includes both direct additional allocations to schools (for areas such as the special schools' budget, special education in mainstream settings, rates and teacher substitution costs); and support attributed to schools and pupils (for areas such as home to school transport costs, school meals and pupil support which covers Education Welfare Officers and Educational Psychologists, and costs associated with the assessment and statementing of pupils).	911.5
Earmarked budgets (allocated for specific purposes)[2]	92.3
Other NDPBs[3]	27.8
Other Education Services[4]	7.8
Early Years Provision	34.7
Youth	41.6[5]
Departmental costs	35.9
Total Resource	**2,581.7**

1. Additional in-year allocations to schools included with the ASB figure relate to the teachers' incremental (contractual) pay progression and 2023-24 non-teaching (NJC) pay settlement.
2. This includes budgets such as: schools maintenance; Pre-School Education Programme; Extended Schools; Entitlement Framework; Nurture Provision; SEN review; etc
3. DE's other NDPBs are: the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; Middletown Centre for Autism; Comhairle na Gaelscolaiochta; Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education; the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland; and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.
4. Other Education Services includes funding to Third Party Organisations, including: Sectoral Support Bodies; the Curriculum Sports Programme; Educational Psychology; Young Enterprise NI; Sentinus; Research; Childline; etc
5. This includes funding through technical transfer from TEO (£1.825m re: TBUC Camps & Planned Interventions) and DoJ (£1.911m re: Tackling Paramilitarism Youth Initiatives).

Impact of Unfunded Pressures on Northern Ireland Schools

4.12 Pay and price pressures in schools were not funded from 2015-16 to 2019-20. This impacted significantly on the financial position of schools, with a 175% increase in the number of schools[4] with deficits, and a reduction of 48% in the number of schools[5] with surpluses across this period, as illustrated in the finance infographics at Annex A.

4.13 2020-21 and 2021-22 were exceptional years given the significant impact on schools from the pandemic, including long periods of school closures and remote learning. The Department was able to secure COVID-19 funding in 2020-21 and 2021-22 from the Executive to support schools through this period. Consequently, the EA's final outturn for these years shows an improved position for schools, with increasing in-year surpluses far exceeding previous years, and a modest reduction in the schools' deficits position.

4.14 These two years mask the very challenging financial pressures faced by our schools. Since 2022-23, schools are operating in a more 'business as usual' environment, and the financial health of schools has returned to its pre-COVID trajectory–that is, deficits are increasing and surpluses are decreasing, albeit, more sharply.

Budget Strategy

4.15 Due to budgetary constraints in recent years, the Department's respective budget strategies have focused on the draft DE Programme for Government outcome "*Our children and young people have the best start in life*", and those core DE programmes which sit at the heart of its efforts to deliver against this outcome.

4.16 DE's assessment is that the relevant programmes lie in the areas of early years (Sure Start) and pre-school provision, schools' provision and youth services. Every effort has been made to minimise the impact of budgetary pressures on these services, as these programmes represent DE's main core statutory or policy commitments.

Savings Exercises

4.17 Given that c90% of the DE budget is directed to schools and pupils, the scope for savings in other areas is very limited.

4.18 In spite of this, a series of exercises to identify savings have been carried out in recent years. Table 3 refers.

[4] Controlled and maintained schools only. Similar data is not available for Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated schools, as these schools are separately identifiable entities in their own right, and each school must manage its own financial position and cash flow.

[5] See footnote 4 above.

Table 3 – Saving Exercises

Date	Exercise
June 2016	Exercise to classify a subset of budgets as either statutory or discretionary, with the discretionary budgets being apportioned into contractual and non-contractual percentage elements.
June 2016	Further exercise to capture additional information on the contractual element of discretionary budgets to help inform Ministerial decisions.
September 2016	Combination of the outcome of an in-year review with aforementioned exercises to prepare separate templates for key budget areas detailing the nature of the budget (discretionary/contractual) and other information including recurrent savings identified.
August 2017	Exercise to identify savings for 2018-19 and 2019-20.
April 2018	Exercise to identify savings for 2019-20.
July 2018	Exercise to review middle ground budget areas (i.e. Earmarked budgets over £1m and Other Education Services budgets over £0.5m) to identify savings.
August 2018	Further exercise to scrutinise the remaining (smaller) budgets in the above noted areas for any further potential cuts/savings.
September 2019	Another exercise to scrutinise the remaining (smaller) budgets in the above noted areas for any further potential cuts/savings.
September 2020	Exercise to identify savings was carried out as part of the DoF information gathering exercise in respect of 2021-24.
August 2021	Exercise to identify savings was carried out as part of the DoF information gathering exercise in respect of 2022-25.
November 2022	Following the Secretary of State's written statement on 24th November 2022 outlining the Budget for 2022-23, the Department undertook an exercise to identify savings to ensure a balanced Budget could be delivered for 2022-23.
February – June 2023	In managing the funding gap in 2023-24 the Department implemented significant staff vacancy control and reviewed all discretionary expenditure.
November 2023	DE Finance facilitated meetings between DE Policy Directors and their EA counterparts to identify feasible savings and cost reduction proposals.

4.19 Over the course of the last eight years and beyond, difficult decisions have been taken not to fund certain pressures, most significantly those pressures relating to pay and maintenance of the schools' estate. In addition, decisions in 2023-24 included reductions to the Aggregated Schools Budget, the Education Authority's Block Grant and the cessation of the Engage, Healthy Happy Minds (pilot) and School Holiday Food Grant schemes from the end of March 2023.

4.20 The Department has increasingly relied on in-year allocations secured via in-year monitoring rounds. Table 4 refers.

Table 4 – Resource Funding Secured In-Year

Financial Year	Additional Funding Secured In-Year £m
2014-15	5
2015-16	15
2016-17	31
2017-18	50
2018-19	48
2019-20	21
2020-21	55.6
2021-22	127.2
2022-23	n/a
2023-24	n/a

Note: In 2015-16 DE also received additional allocations of £34.7m in respect of additional employer pension costs and £24.5m from the Public Transformation fund.

In 2019-20 DE also received an additional allocation of £28.2m in respect of additional employer pension costs.

The 2020-21 Figure excludes allocations in respect of COVID-19 funding.

The 2021-22 figure excludes allocations in respect of COVID-19 funding, and also excludes £34.5m of Schools Surpluses surrendered.

In 2022-23 & 2023-24 the Budget for Education was set out by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in Written Ministerial Statements on 24 November 2022 and 27 April 2023 respectively. These were the only and final budget allocations, with no monitoring rounds or further opportunities to secure additional funding.

Resource Budget 2023-24

4.21 In the absence of Executive Ministers, the 2023-24 Budget for Education was set out in the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's Written Ministerial Statement on 27 April 2023 at £2,576.5m.

4.22 Following a number of Post Budget exercises in respect of Technical Transfers, DE has a total Resource Budget of c£2,581.7m, of which c£2,474.4m was allocated to the Education Authority.

4.23 Given the budgetary constraints faced by the NI Block there have not been any in-year monitoring rounds in 2023-24.

4.24 Whilst the Department welcomed the announcement of the Budget and the certainty that it provided to both the Department and its arm's length bodies to plan for the remainder of the financial year, the 2023-24 Budget still leaves the Education sector facing a funding gap in the region of £300 million (including

c£148m in respect of unfunded pressures for the Education Authority and schools; and c£148m in respect of 3 years of non-contractual pay pressures). The result has been that some very difficult decisions have had to be taken.

4.25 In addition c£103m is required in respect of a Pay & Grading review for non-teaching staff (although it should be noted this remains subject to business case approval).

Resource Budget 2024-25

4.26 The NI Block will face considerable pressure next year and beyond to meet the financial costs of Education, Health etc.

4.27 At this stage, detailed budgetary planning has not been undertaken and no decisions have yet been taken in relation to future years.

4.28 Finance commissioned an initial information gathering exercise in relation to Budget 2024-25. Current indications are that the Department's requirement in 2024-25 would be in the region of £3,515m. This would represent a c36% increase on the current 2023-24 Resource budget.

4.29 Finance has no basis to expect a 2024-25 budget settlement that would match the current estimated Resource requirement. Managing a shortfall of this magnitude will undoubtedly have a significant and adverse impact on the Department's ability to deliver educational services.

4.30 DoF has advised all Departments of a Budget 2024-25 information gathering exercise. DE Finance is leading on the Resource budget considerations, while the Investment & Infrastructure Directorate leads on a separate Capital exercise.

4.31 With limited additional funding available, the starting assumption for this exercise is a flat cash position for departments against the baselines provided, Table 5 refers.

Table 5 – DE 2024-25 Budget Baseline Budget

DE £000s	Non Ring Fenced	Ring-Fenced
2023-24 Secretary of State Budget Position	**2,576,508**	**2,583**
IFRS16	1,255	-1,255
EU Match Funding	-1,128	
Technical Adjustment	796	
2024-25 Budget Baseline Position	2,577,431	1,328

4.32 The Department has been asked to provide details of all the actions that will be necessary to allow them to live within a flat cash settlement.

4.33 Having been given a flat cash baseline of £2,577.4m and taking into account the current indication of requirements, the Department reported a funding gap of £937.977m.

4.34 Given the cuts the Department has already implemented, and the forecast overspend in the current year, further savings would be extremely difficult to achieve.

4.35 Whilst the Department and its associated Bodies will do their utmost to implement decisions and live within the allocated budget, it is important to highlight that some pressures will definitely materialise in 2024-25 as they are completely unavoidable or unstoppable such as the provision of demand-led statutory services (including SEN) and contractual pay and pension increases.

4.36 

4.37 In addition to allow decision makers to consider whether reductions should be applied to some Departments to provide funding for higher priority areas in other Departments DoF have also been asked Departments to model two scenarios, a 2% reduction (£51.549m) and a 5% (£128.872m) reduction, including details of the impacts of these cuts.

4.38 

4.39 It is anticipated that the limited funding available will be used to mitigate the worst impacts of actions identified by Departments in seeking to manage within a flat cash settlement. However, Departments may also submit bids for any additional funding requirements which cannot be funded out of existing resource DEL baselines. The Department therefore submitted bids for all pressures identified, ranked in order of priority.

Capital Budget 2023/24 and beyond

4.40 The Department's capital investment programme includes management and delivery of the key capital programmes: Major Works, School Enhancement Programme, Fresh Start Programme, Minor Works schemes and Youth projects.

4.41 In 2023-24 the capital budget for the Department of Education was £231.6m: £171.8m Executive funding (a 9% reduction of £16.5m from 2022-23) and £59.8m Fresh Start funding.

4.42 This allocation is extremely challenging, particularly given the high inflation in construction prices, and that much of this spend was already contractually committed prior to the current financial year. Further, DoF had initially indicated that education would receive Executive funding of £180m and therefore initial internal budget allocations were based on this assumption.

4.43 Due to the shortfall in budget available against capital demands in 2023-24, the Permanent Secretary agreed a number of extremely difficult decisions at the beginning of the current financial year in order to control expenditure. These included stopping the following projects:

- new Major works, School Enhancement Programme and Fresh Start construction contracts;
- priority 2 EA ICT requirements (approximately £24m and including EDIS end user devices for schools across Northern Ireland and EDIS online payments);
- land purchases for major works and school enhancement projects;
- curriculum related minor works and all traffic management schemes;.
- removal of delegated authority for LMS capital spend by schools;
- new youth capital construction contracts;
- Fair Start pupil devices;
- outdoor provision for special schools;
- EA bus replacement; and
- a range of miscellaneous smaller projects.

4.44 Despite the significant steps taken, there remains a significant expected overspend against budget available. The latest forecast capital budget position is an overcommitment of approximately £40m. The Department submitted a bid for c£90m capital to the Department of Finance, however at present only £12m Capital pressures for Fresh Start projects has been met.

4.45 Officials will continue to work to control expenditure across all capital programme streams with difficult decisions continuing to be made on a weekly basis to narrow the gap to a more manageable level.

Impact of EU exit and the Pandemic

4.46 The construction industry is continuing to manage increasing costs of materials as well of lack of supply of some key materials. This has the potential to significant impact the Department's delivery of the capital programme.

PART D Overview

SECTION 5 – KEY STAFF

DR MARK BROWNE, PERMANENT SECRETARY

LINSEY FARRELL, DEPUTY SECRETARY – EDUCATION POLICY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES GROUP

Directorates

- Curriculum, Assessment, Teacher Education & Professional Learning (Raymond Caldwell)
- Inclusion (Janis Scallon)
- Qualifications, 14-19 Strategy and Youth Work Policy (Karen McCullough)
- Raising Aspirations, Supporting Learning, Empowering Improvement (Peter Hutchinson (acting))
- Statistics and Research Team (Pauline Donnan reporting to Karen McCullough)

RONNIE ARMOUR, DEPUTY SECRETARY – RESOURCES, GOVERNANCE AND EARLY YEARS GROUP

Directorates

- Corporate Services and Governance (Andrew Scott)
- Education Workforce (Mark Bailey)
- Finance and Analytical Services (Neil Palmer (acting)
- Independent Review of Education (Philip Irwin)
- Early Years, Childcare and Children and Young People's Strategy (Paul Brush)

HEATHER COUSINS, DEPUTY SECRETARY – SUSTAINABILITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

Directorates

- Transport and Food in Schools (Margaret Rose McNaughton)
- Investment and Infrastructure (including Strule Shared Education Campus) (Dr Suzanne Kingon)
- Collaboration and Climate Change (James Hutchinson)
- Sustainable Schools Policy and Planning Directorate (Eamonn Broderick (acting))

FAUSTINA GRAHAM, CHIEF INSPECTOR

- Education and Training Inspectorate

SECTION 6 – EDUCATION POLICY AND CHILDRENS SERVICES GROUP

Deputy Secretary – Linsey Farrell (PA [redacted])

6.1 Overview of Directorates

CURRICULUM, & ASSESSMENT, TEACHER EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Raymond Caldwell [redacted]	Director Head of Curriculum Team Head of Teacher Education and Professional Learning, Assessment, CCEA Sponsorship and ECB Team
Vacant	Head of Review of Statutory Assessment (new team to be set up)

Key Responsibilities

- The aim of the work of the Directorate is to support teachers and leaders to ensure the effective delivery of the Northern Ireland curriculum in our schools.

- The Directorate leads policy development and provides ongoing advice in relation to the statutory curriculum, and associated policy development; school starting age; academic selection at age eleven; and the review of statutory assessment arrangements, the Learning Leaders Strategy, setting Initial Teacher Education (ITE) intakes, the ITE Working Group, the Policy Engagement Working Group, the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS), and the Gaeltacht Experience (Irish medium ITE programme).

- It also co-sponsors the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), and has oversight of the Exceptional Circumstances Body (ECB) for post-primary admissions.

INCLUSION

Janis Scallon	Director
[redacted]	Head of Special Education & Inclusion Policy Team (SEIPT)
[redacted]	Head of Special Education Review Team (SERT)
[redacted]	Head of Special Education & Inclusion - Early Years & Pupil Support (SEIEYPS)

Key Responsibilities

The Directorate has responsibility for developing and maintaining policies that address a range of barriers to learning for children who have or may have special educational needs (SEN).

Special Education & Inclusion Policy Team (SEIPT)

- Development of the emergent 'Towards Inclusion' policy as a response to addressing the needs of all learners who are vulnerable to exclusion within the system.
- Oversight and sponsorship responsibility for the Middletown Centre for Autism, a Non-Departmental Public Body which operates on a north/south basis.
- Oversight of EA SEN Expenditure
- Special Schools Sector Liaison
- Joint Health/ Education working in relation to SEN and Disability
- Children's Law Centre - SENDIST project
- European Agency for Special Education and Inclusion – regional liaison and project development

The team is responsible for the **current** SEN Policy framework including Code of Practice (1998), sponsorship Of Middletown Centre of Autism (area of interest for NSMC) and the emerging Towards Inclusion policy development agenda. The team leads on three workstreams of the 12 End to End Reviews (see topical issues):

- SEN Legislation/Policy
- Understanding SEN Finance and
- Special Schools

Special Education Review Team (SERT)

- Introducing the new SEN Framework which includes the implementation of the SEND Act 2016, associated new SEN Regulations and Statutory Code of Practice.
- The End to End Review of SEN in partnership with the EA (see Topical Issues for more information).

- Oversight of expenditure in relation to the EA SEND Implementation Team, EA SEN Transformation Programme and SENCo/LSC Funding.

The team is responsible for implementation of the **new** SEN Framework (see topical issues) including new SEN Regulations and a Code of Practice. The team also leads on five workstreams from the End to End Review of SEN (see topical issues) including:

- Statement Process,
- Workforce Development,
- Transitions,
- Advice and Communication,
- Review of SEN & Medical categories and
- Development of an Outcomes Framework.

The team is also responsible for the providing support to the governance structures of the End to End Review which include the SEN Strategic Oversight Group (SEN SOG) and DE/EA SEN Programme Board and Academic and Practitioner Advisory Group (APAG).

Special Education & Inclusion - Early Years & Pupil Support (SEIEYPS)

- SEN in the Early Years
- Early Intervention and Pupil Support Services
- SEN placements
- Oversight of Fair Start projects including the EA's SEN Early Years Inclusion Service and the Belfast Wide Early Years Pilot for children with additional needs
- Departmental role in joint oversight group for Special Olympics Ulster
- SEN in Irish-medium Education.

The team is responsible for a number of work strands to enhance educational provision and support children and young people with assessed or emerging Special Educational Needs (SEN), in line with DE's corporate aim that all children are happy, learning and succeeding. Work primarily focuses on young children in the early years which involves collaboration with Health, early interventions and pupil supports.

The Team also leads on addressing the on-going challenges of SEN placements and is working collaboratively with EA and stakeholders on a DE led SEN Placements Strategic Group to improve strategic planning.

SEIEYPS team leads on three of the End-to-End Review of SEN workstreams: (Early intervention; Area Planning; and Pupil Support Services.

QUALIFICATIONS, 14-19 STATEGY & YOUTH WORK POLICY

Karen McCullough
[redacted]

Director
Head of Qualifications Team
Head of 14-19 StrategyTeam
Head of Youth Work Policy Team
Statistics and Research Team

Key Responsibilities

Qualifications Team

- General qualifications policy including the oversight of annual qualifications delivery processes, working with CCEA Awarding Organisation and CCEA Regulation, and liaison with officials in the other UK jurisdictions on qualifications-related issues.

- Policy in relation to the post-COVID managed return to more normal examinations and awarding arrangements – to be achieved by Summer 2024.

- General Qualifications Reform:

  - Undertake a review of general qualifications at KS4, specifically approaches to assessment to address Department commitments within the 'A Fair Start' report and the 14-19 Framework. This will include an analysis of the alternative awarding arrangements implemented during the pandemic, and qualifications reform work in the other UK jurisdictions, to help inform the development of proposals for reform.

  - Develop policy response to proposal to develop a new, baccalaureate-style post-16 qualifications to replace A levels and T levels.

- Ongoing engagement with the IM sector to ensure that IM learners continue to have access to a suitable range of qualifications delivered in Irish.

- Approval of qualifications to be taught in NI schools, working with CCEA and the EA on maintenance of the qualifications database – the NIEFQAN file.

- Working with DfE and DE colleagues with responsibility for CCEA sponsorship to address issues raised in a 2022 report in relation to the resourcing of CCEA Regulation

- Working with DfE on reform of vocational qualifications to address the impact of Vocational Qualifications reforms in England on the NI qualifications market.

14-19 Strategy Team

- 14-19 Strategy Team has responsibility for Area Learning Communities (ALCs)and the Entitlement Framework (EF) under which all post primary schools must provide pupils with access to a minimum of 21 courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Funding of £2.675m, reduced from £2.9m for 2023-24, is allocated to support delivery of the EF and is split across school collaboration, ALCs and EA administrative support.

- 14-19 Strategy Team has responsibility for the policy and delivery of careers education in schools. The careers system in NI is the responsibility of both the Department of Education and Department for the Economy (DfE). DE has responsibility for the policy and delivery of careers education in schools while DfE has responsibility for the policy and delivery of an all-age careers guidance service delivered by suitably qualified careers advisers.

- 14-19 Strategy Team works collaboratively with the 14-19 Framework Implementation Team in DfE to take forward actions set out in Developing a More Strategic Approach to 14-19 Education and Training – A Framework to Transform 14-19 Education and Training Provision publication.

Youth Work Policy Team

- The Youth Work Policy team is responsible for the development and implementation of the Department's Youth Work Policy and monitors the implementation by the EA of the policy and working with EA registered Youth Work providers from the Community & Voluntary Sector.

- The team also works with the Executive Office in relation to youth service delivery of the TBUC Camps programme, Planned Interventions Programme and the Department of Justice in relation to youth elements of the Executive's Tackling Paramilitarism programme.

Statistics and Research Team (reports directly to Karen McCullough but is a service for the whole department)

- Provision of analysis, research, monitoring and evaluation which inform policy making within the Department.

- Production of Official and National Statistics publications to provide a robust evidence base

- Management of external research and surveys (e.g. Young Life and Times Survey and international studies (PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS) and other ad-hoc policy relevant research).

- Facilitate data sharing with external organisations where justified taking account of the Digital Economy Act 2017 and the Data Protection Act 2018 and to support research projects through the Administrative Data Research NI

RAISING ASPIRATIONS, SUPPORTING LEARNING & EMPOWERING IMPROVEMENT

Claire McClelland	Director (currently on maternity leave)
Peter Hutchinson	Interim Director
[redacted]	Head of Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team
[redacted]	Head of School Improvement Team
[redacted]	Head of Pupil Support Team
[redacted]	Head of Additional Educational Needs Team

Key Responsibilities

- The aim of the Directorate is, as the name suggests, to raise aspirations and achievement for all learners, support their learning throughout their educational journey and empower schools, communities, families and children to work together to improve education, health and social outcomes. The Directorate is responsible for a range of areas including:
    - School Improvement Policy including School Development Planning and provision for School Development Days
    - International Studies
    - Nurture Provision
    - Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS)
    - Exceptional Teaching Arrangements (ETA)
    - Newcomer pupils / Traveller pupils / Roma pupils / Asylum seekers and refugee (ASR) children including those living in contingency accommodation / UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) / The Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (VPRS) / The Homes for Ukraine (HfU) Scheme
    - Children of Services Personnel/ The Armed Forces Covenant
    - Anti-Bullying including implementation of the Addressing Bullying in Schools (NI) Act 2016
    - Restraint and Seclusion in educational settings
    - Children Looked After
    - Child Protection and Safeguarding
    - Pupil behaviour
    - Pupil Suspensions and Expulsions
    - Education of young offenders including Review of Regional Services at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre and Lakewood Special School
    - Young carers
    - Emotional Health and Wellbeing
    - Educational Disadvantage including Use of Targeting Social Need
    - Extended Schools

- Pupil Attendance
- Period Dignity
- A range of locality based programmes including Tackling Paramilitarism and Organised Crime programme in specific locations.
- Neighbourhood Renewal, West Belfast Sharing the Learning and Full Service Schools (North and West Belfast).
- Community Use of Schools.
- Oversight and delivery of the report "A Fair Start" including development of a Reducing Educational Disadvantage (RED) programme.
- Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan

School Improvement Team

- School Improvement Team (SIT) has policy responsibility for the **school improvement policy**, whereby DE has set out the qualities of a good school in the policy document *Every School a Good School (ESaGS)*. The purpose of the policy is to promote the raising of standards and equality in all our schools and enable every young person to fulfil their potential, including through tackling underachievement. The policy sets out a suite of indicators of an effective school. At the core of the policy is self-evaluation leading to sustained self-improvement which is supported by the School Development Planning (SDP) process and the provision of up to five School Development Days (SDDs). The team is also responsible for guidance to schools on the SDP process which is a legislative requirement and annual guidance on the provision of SDDs.

- The policy also sets out the process to be followed when an inspection identifies important areas for improvement and a Formal Intervention Process (FIP) for those schools where the quality of education provision is less than satisfactory. Schools in the follow-up to inspection process are provided with tailored external support from the EA (in conjunction with CCMS if appropriate), to address challenges and bring about improvement. SIT will determine, in close liaison with ETI, EA and CCMS (if appropriate) when a school moves in or out of FIP.

- The team is currently progressing an End to End Review of School Improvement which will seek to develop a new school improvement policy and examine all of the inputs that feed school improvement including, for example, support for schools in the follow-up to inspection process, support for pupils to remove barriers to learning, curriculum development and professional learning and the use of data for self-evaluation and improvement.

- SIT is also responsible for managing the implementation and dissemination of the international benchmarking studies; *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA), *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS) and *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* (PIRLS).

Pupil Support Team

- Pupil Support Team has policy responsibility for promoting pupil emotional health and wellbeing, and the joint DE/DoH Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework was published in February 2021 alongside an implementation plan. The team is involved in a significant number of cross departmental / agency groups and works closely with the Education Authority in delivery of programmes to support emotional health and wellbeing, including the schools counselling service.

- Pupil Support Team also has policy responsibility for Safeguarding / Child Protection. The Department has issued safeguarding guidance entitled 'Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools: A Guide for Schools'. It applies to schools as Boards of Governors have a statutory duty under the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils and these requirements are set out in the guidance. The guidance also applies to early years settings, EOTAS Centres and youth settings.

- The team also has policy responsibility for Children Looked After.

Additional Educational Needs Team

- Additional Educational Needs refers to various groups of children and young people who for a variety of reasons may face additional barriers to education and learning. This makes it more difficult for them to achieve their full potential. The team holds policy responsibility for:
  - Nurture Provision
  - Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) / Exceptional Teaching Arrangements (ETA)
  - Newcomer pupils / Traveller pupils / Roma pupils / Asylum seekers and refugee (ASR) children including those living in contingency accommodation / UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) / The Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (VPRS) / The Homes for Ukraine (HfU) Scheme
  - Children of Services Personnel/ The Armed Forces Covenant
  - Anti-Bullying including implementation of the Addressing Bullying in Schools (NI) Act 2016
  - Restraint and Seclusion in educational settings
  - Pupil behaviour
  - Pupil Suspensions and Expulsions
  - Education of young offenders including Review of Regional Services at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre and Lakewood Special School
  - Young carers

Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team

- The Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team is responsible for reporting upon the use of Targeting Social Need funding, Extended Schools, Pupil Attendance, Period Dignity, Tackling Paramilitarism and Organised Crime programme in specific locations, Neighbourhood Renewal, West Belfast Sharing the Learning, Full Service Schools (North and West Belfast), Community Use of Schools, oversight and delivery of the report "A Fair Start" including the Reducing Educational Disadvantage Programme and contribution to the Executive's cross-cutting Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.

6.2 EDUCATION POLICY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES TOPICAL ISSUES

"A Fair Start" Report and Action Plan

7.2.1 "A Fair Start" report compiled by the Expert Panel on educational underachievement, delivers on a commitment within the "New Decade, New Approach" agreement. The report identifies 8 Key Areas which include 47 actions spread across 6 years. Work is continuing on the delivery of the Fair Start actions in 2023/24 of which there are 45 actions this year. Budget for 2023/24 is £2.5m (Expert Panel recommended a budget of £21m by Year 2 increasing to £73m in Year 5). This year's budget is being used on projects including SEN Early Years Inclusion Service; developments by CCEA and review by ETI in respect of Curriculum and Assessment; Digital Devices in Schools; Expansion of Restorative Practice in schools; the Horizons Programme[6] which is a 2-year youth development programme and increased support of the IM sector in producing its sector specific action plan.

7.2.2 Officials will bring forward recommendations for a programme of work in 2024/25 for your consideration and approval.

Shared Island Fund

7.2.3 [redacted]

[redacted]

[6] Recruitment for a 2024/25 programme has not proceeded in the absence of a confirmed budget

[redacted]

7.2.5 [redacted]

Pupil Attendance

7.2.6 Regular pupil attendance at school is an on-going challenge which has been significantly impacted by Covid-19. Since schools returned to normal operation in 2021/22 we have seen very concerning levels of absence from school. In 2017/18, 44,000 pupils had 10%+ absence. By 2021/22, this had increased to 98,000 pupils. A 123% increase. In the current academic year, the equivalent figure is approximately 90,000 pupils.

7.2.7 The Department held an Attendance Summit on 25 October 2023 bringing together representatives from the Department of Education, Education Authority, CCMS, Governing Bodies, schools, Trade Unions, CCEA, other departments and the voluntary and community sector to discuss these challenges.

[7] RED is currently the working title of the programme and may be subject to change.

7.2.8 The issue of emotional health and wellbeing was a consistent theme from both the presenters and attendees and this is reflected in the comments on the day. There are significant waiting lists for CAMHS and behavioural support which is having an adverse impact on pupil attendance.

7.2.9 Some of the key steps we plan to take forward include: Updating and consulting on the Miss School Miss Out (MSMO) Strategy to ensure it reflects the issues that have come to light since it was first published in 2016. We also wish to consult with EA on the development of a repository of effective practice to which DE, EA and schools could contribute and maintain over time.

7.2.10 We will also be continuing to use social media in advance of events such as Christmas and New Year to remind parents of the importance of not booking holidays during Term time. We will also be publishing details of in-year attendance by FSME% on the DE web-site on a regular basis.

End to End Review of School Improvement

7.2.11 In early 2023, the Department identified a priority need to undertake an End to End Review of School Improvement against a backdrop of:

- A School Improvement Policy '*Every School a Good School*' (ESaGS) that required review to take account of wider policy developments since it was published in 2009.
- A statement within the Landscape Review of the EA that despite EA's powers in terms of school accountability and notwithstanding the policy basis, feedback indicated "*the EA has limited resources to monitor, support and develop boards of governors and to put in place effective school improvement, school effectiveness or school governance interventions*"; and
- The opportunity provided by Covid to learn from practice that places the needs of children and young people at the centre of policy making and implementation.

7.2.12 The return and escalation of industrial action by teacher unions has created a very challenging scene in terms of monitoring and effecting school improvement. Non-cooperation with inspection means we have no independent review of the quality of education provision across our schools. Schools already in the legacy follow-up to inspection process are refusing to submit action plans for improvement or engage further. Refusal to undertake statutory assessment at Key Stages 1-3 until the former process is reviewed, has resulted in no data around pupil progression and performance other than external qualifications at Key Stage 4 (GCSE). Non-engagement with School Improvement Professionals and the School Development Service creates challenges in providing external support and professional learning. The action also includes direction not to undertake School Development Planning and not to submit proposals around the use of School Development Days which are designed to bring about school improvement.

7.2.13 The End to End Review of School Improvement is being delivered using a phased approach. Phase 1 involves a mapping exercise around the current infrastructure that supports school improvement to set out the roles and responsibilities of each inputting body including the cost. This phase is nearing completion. Phase 2 is underway and involves the progression of a series of workstreams including:

1. **Narrative to Support the Vision for Education**
   Development of a narrative to outline the purpose and value of education to society as a whole.

2. **School Improvement Policy**
   - Review of principles and key indicators
   - New policy for school improvement

3. **Supporting Schools / Operational Delivery**
   - Appropriate service delivery models of support for schools
   - Follow-on to inspection processes
   - Formal Intervention Process – future need

4. **School Development Planning / School Development Days**
   - Review of the School Development Planning process
   - Review use of School Development Days and Baker Days

5. **Supporting Children and Young People – Removing Barriers**
   - To include development of overarching strategic 'positive behaviour' framework
   - To include behaviour, nurture, EOTAS, social emotional learning, suspensions and expulsions etc.
   - How do we provide a continuum of support to remove barriers to learning

6. **Curriculum Development and Professional Learning and Development**
   Examining three themes to support and bring about school improvement:
   - Curriculum review and development.
   - Curriculum development supported by the continuum of TPL.
   - Wider teacher/leader/staff professional learning and development.

7. **Literacy and Numeracy**
   Short-term actions to promote the importance of developing literacy and numeracy skills pending the longer-term goal to develop a new strategy.

8. **Inspection (ETI)**
   Alignment between inspection policy and school improvement policy

9. **Effective use of Data to bring about School Improvement**

Consider the indicators of an effective school and the required measures and benchmarks for effective self-evaluation at school level and those required at a system level to assess the policy impact.

7.2.14 Phase 3 will involve the development of the Review outcomes including consultation on a new policy, a suite of readily deliverable actions and a roadmap of longer-term proposals for change.

Implementation of the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act 2016

7.2.15 The Addressing Bullying in Schools (NI) Act 2016 came into operation from 1 September 2021. The Act provides a common definition of bullying; establishes a new duty for schools to record all incidents of bullying their motivation and outcome. It requires the school Board of Governors to take responsibility for the development, implementation, monitoring and periodic review of the school's anti-bullying policies.

7.2.16 The Department provided £300k (£270k in 2023/24) funding to the EA to establish a dedicated Team to address bullying in educational settings. The Addressing Bullying in Schools Team (ABIST) is now fully operational and has specialist staff who support schools and educational settings to embed cultures to eradicate bullying.

7.2.17 As part of the new arrangements to address bullying the former Minister agreed that funding of the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (£88k) should cease in order to reduce the risk of duplicate funding. The Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum and associated funding ceased 31 March 2023.

The Armed Forces Bill 2019-21

7.2.18 The Armed Forces is an excepted/reserved matter. The Armed Forces Covenant, which is not a legal document, was published in May 2011 and is a promise between the UK Government/nation and the armed forces. It exists to ensure that the armed forces community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have been injured or bereaved.

7.2.19 Annex A of "New Decade, New Approach" sets out specific UK Government commitments to Northern Ireland which include UK-wide legislation to "further incorporate" the Armed Forces Covenant into law and support full implementation.

7.2.20 The Armed Forces Covenant Act 2021, which amended the 2006 Act, came into effect from 22 November 2022. It places duties on a number of bodies including The Education Authority and Boards of Governors of grant aided schools. The duties apply in relation to "relevant education functions" which are school transport, special education needs, admission criteria, duty of

boards of governors in relation to pupil welfare and admission to special schools of children resident outside of NI.

7.2.21 A copy of the Armed Forces Covenant Act 2021 was issued to educational settings and Arms Length Bodies on 29 November 2022.

7.2.22 Legal advice from the Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO) has indicated that providing more advantageous treatment is likely to amount to indirect religious or political discrimination. It is noted that there is a convention that Westminster will not legislate in devolved areas without a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM). It is only a convention and is not binding as Westminster has the power to legislate for any matter in any part of the UK. TEO would lead on the drafting and bringing into operation any LCM the Department will keep a watching brief.

Newcomer Policy and Funding

7.2.23 There were 18,753 'Newcomer' pupils (children who do not share a language in common with their teacher) in our schools at the October 2023 school census. The EA supports these pupils through their Inter-Cultural Education Service (IES), which aims to build the capacity of schools to support current and future newcomer children, through the provision of specialist advice, staff training, interpreting and translation services, and access to multi-lingual resources.

7.2.24 Schools also receive additional funding of £1,178.41 per pupil per annum for nursery & primary pupils, and £1,207.21 for post primary pupils through the Common Funding Formula (CFF) for each newcomer pupil for at least their first 3 years at the school. This can be extended *(currently indefinitely)* based on an assessment of each individual pupil's continuing language deficits. Total funding allocated to schools through the CFF for newcomer pupils in 2023-24 was around £22.2m.

7.2.25 The Department's 'Supporting Newcomer Pupils' policy was published in 2009. A review of the Newcomer policy and the funding associated with supporting the policy was commenced in autumn 2017. Following initial evidence gathering and analysis, a public consultation exercise on options for change commenced on 18 June 2019 and closed on 15 October 2019. Consultation responses (207) have been analysed and key themes identified.

7.2.26 Further work on compiling a report on consultation responses and agreeing revised policy proposals was delayed due to competing priorities brought about by COVID-19. Work on the review recommenced in 2022 and policy proposals for change have been developed however, these have not progressed in the absence of Ministers. A submission will be provided to you in due course providing you with options on the way forward.

UK Resettlement Scheme / Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme

7.2.27 The Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS), announced on 7 September 2015, was established to resettle 20,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees. Some of these refugees are resettled in Northern Ireland (NI). The scheme was due to end in March 2020, but was later extended for a further year until March 2021. In August 2020 the scheme was suspended for new arrivals due to travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic response. A direct safe and legal route to the UK for refugees in need of protection is offered under the new UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS).

7.2.28 A Memorandum of Understanding is in place between the NI Executive and the Home Office for the scheme. The Home Office provides funding for education costs for all children aged 3-18 on the scheme for the first year following arrival. The funding provided is calculated on the basis of £2,250 for children aged 3-4, and £4,500 for children and young people aged 5-18.

7.2.29 In addition to the above, the Department successfully bid to the Home Office for additional funding to cover Years 2-5. Funding of £308,700, £631,100, £827,100 and £42,075 was received in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 and 2022/23 respectively and allocated to the EA for operational costs (10%) and onward transmission to schools.

7.2.30 Recently the Department received £2.3m funding for Years 2-5 from TEO and the funding has now been be allocated to the EA / Schools, in line with previous years VPRS Years 2-5 allocations.

Traveller Policy and Review

7.2.31 Census information revealed that a significant percentage of working age Travellers had no educational qualifications, with a further 22 percent having low level qualifications. This is believed to impact the experiences of todays children.

7.2.32 Enrolments of traveller children from pre-school education to post primary have been steadily increasing in last number of years. However, despite the departments investment, exam results remain low and attendance of traveller children, particularly in post primary education is significantly lower than their 'settled' peers.

7.2.33 The current policy, Traveller Child In Education Action Framework was published in 2013, outlining the departments commitment to Traveller children and the steps to be taken to ensure that every traveller child has full access to education. It details what actions are in place

- To ensure information is provided to traveller families detailing how to avail of all educational provisions and opportunities;
- To help improve and maintain school attendance for traveller children;

- To ensure traveller parents are aware of the role they play in their children getting the required level of education they deserve;
- To help schools develop an inclusive and welcoming environment for traveller children;
- To provide education on traveller culture in schools to eradicate the potential for prejudice and hate crimes.

7.2.34 Included in the framework is the need to review this policy bi-annually, which due to conflicting priorities within the department, has not been actioned. The framework also included a number of targets for implementation by the Department and/or Education Authority (EA) and to date no formal measurement as to what extent these targets have been delivered against has been undertaken.

7.2.35 The Department has now launched a review of the Traveller Child in Education Framework. Officials have met with the TEO Traveller Thematic group to discuss issues faced by traveller children in education to assist with the policy review. In January 2024, the Department issued invitations to nominees to sit on a Stakeholder engagement group to support the review, with a view to completing the review and making recommendations for Ministerial consideration by December 2024.

Review of Restraint & Seclusion

7.2.36 The issue of restraint and seclusion is an area of significant interest. Guidance on the use of restraint is contained in the Department's Circular 1999/9 "Use of Reasonable Force". The Department provided evidence to the Education Committee on 24 February and 19 May 2021. In addition, a motion on restraint and seclusion was carried in the NI Assembly 24 May 2021.

7.2.37 At the request of the then Minister Weir, at the beginning of 2020 officials launched a review to consider the issues of restraint and seclusion for children and young people, with relevant partners, and to report back in due course. The review was temporarily halted due to the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector, with substantive work re-commencing in October 2020.

7.2.38 The Department issued interim guidance to all educational settings on Monday 10 May 2021 - DE Circular 2021/13.

7.2.39 A report on the review was submitted to Minister McIlveen who endorsed the six recommendations for change on 25 March 2022 and agreed to the publication of the report and to the recommendations being initiated after the end of the previous mandate.

https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/report-review-restraint-and-seclusion-educational-settings

7.2.40 The review examined options for change, including legislative requirements, in relation to the mandatory recording of incidents.

7.2.41 The recommendation to develop statutory guidance for all educational settings, in conjunction with key stakeholders, is ongoing. Draft statutory guidance was developed and a public consultation on the draft closed on 10 November 2023. Responses are currently being analysed and the Department's response to the consultation is being drafted. It is intended to provide you with a submission in the coming weeks, to seek your agreement to the Departmental consultation response to be published and the proposed next steps.

7.2.42 The report includes a recommendation to repeal Article 4 1 (c) of the Education (NI) Order 1998. In line with the recommendations of the March 2022 report, preparatory work is underway in relation to the process for repealing the legislation in relation to the use of reasonable force and will be presented to you for consideration, along with any further legislative proposals, in due course.

Suspension and Expulsion Review

7.2.43 The current legislation, procedures and processes for the suspension and expulsion of pupils from schools in Northern Ireland (NI) was last reviewed in 2004 with legislative changes included in Articles in the Education (Northern Ireland Order 2006) some of which remained uncommenced.

7.2.44 A Project Board, representative of all school sectors, and a Project Team were established in mid-2019 to take forward a further review of the arrangements for pupil suspension and expulsion.

7.2.45 Extensive engagement took place as part of the review, including managing authorities, Board of Governors, school Principals, DE colleagues, children's advocacy groups, Equality and Human Rights Commission, other UK and ROI jurisdictions, parents and children and young people, including those in the youth justice system. Their experiences and views have been considered in the Project Report.

7.2.46 Given there was some delay in the review due to the COVID-19 pandemic as an interim measure to address some emerging issues, DE circular 2021/04 issued to all schools reminding them of their statutory responsibilities in relation to suspensions and expulsions with particular emphasis on SEN pupils, reduced hours and informal suspensions.

7.2.47 There has been interest from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People around 'poor' practices in schools, including informal exclusion of pupils in schools, particularly those with SEN (behavioural issues). There is a risk of criticism from children and young people's advocates as well as the media if DE do not progress the review and its findings to ensure current arrangements here are fit for purpose.

7.2.48 The suspension and expulsion review report was discussed by the Department's Top Management Group in early January 2023. Recommendations from the review will be considered as part of Workstream 5 – Removing Barriers – of the end to end review of School Improvement.

Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS)

7.2.49 EOTAS provides both full-time and part-time educational provision for pupils with social, emotional, behavioural, issues. The full-time provision, for pupils who have been expelled or have otherwise disengaged from their registered school, is intended to allow participation in education until these pupils achieve a new school place, are prepared for re-entry to an existing school place or to maintain their education until compulsory school leaving age. EOTAS part–time (partnership) provides for both primary and post-primary children to help support their behavioural issues whilst still attending their registered school.

7.2.50 A high proportion of children placed in full time EOTAS Centres have SEN.

7.2.51 EOTAS Centres are inspected by the ETI as with schools, and due to a number of concerns raised in ETI reports, a review of the overall service provision in EOTAS was undertaken by ETI in 2019.

7.2.52 The ETI report provided its report to DE on 7 February 2022. The report provided a number of recommendations for improvement, mainly for the EA.

7.2.53 Former Minister McIlveen noted on foot of the key findings and recommendations of the report:

- the EA will develop a detailed action plan, including costings and set up a governance group to take forward the work;
- that officials will provide a further update when the EA action plan is received;
- that officials will liaise with the EA to address ETI's recommendations, including updating the statutory guidance, and to ensure that mitigations are taken by the EA to address the risks it has identified; and
- that the ETI will review the impact of the action plan after an agreed timescale which is likely to be within the next 18-24 months.

7.2.54 In October 2022 Former Minister McIlveen attended a number of EOTAS settings and saw constrained and often poor quality accommodation in which vulnerable young people with complex needs are being supported. Following the visits, the former Minister wrote to Sara Long on the 27 October, advising that the EA should, with immediate effect, put plans in place to ensure the maximum sharing of youth facilities with EOTAS centres across Northern Ireland where practicable. The aim of the request was to allow the efficient use of these resources for the benefit of both cohorts of

children and young people (i.e. those in EOTAS, and Youth Group members). The EA are keeping officials responsible for EOTAS and Youth Service provision fully informed of progress in relation to the advice/request. To date, arrangement in place for shared facilities in Newry appear to be working satisfactorily; demand for use of youth facilities in other locations has been very limited.

7.2.55 The EA EOTAS Action plan was submitted to DE on 3 June 2023. The Department wrote to the EA in relation to the implementation of the EOTAS Action Plan in September 2023 and to raise other broader concerns on the provision of EOTAS. EOTAS policy will be reviewed as part of the Supporting Children / Removing Barriers workstream of the End-to-End Review of School Improvement, with a view to developing a strategic long-term approach to EOTAS.

7.2.56 The EA has approved the establishment of a cross-directorate EOTAS Governance Group. which will have oversight of the implementation plan and will report to the EA Performance and Engagement Committee regularly. Officials from AENT attend the Governance Group.

Nurture provision

7.2.57 In September 2020, the former Minister Peter Weir MLA announced a new Nurture Programme on 18 September 2020 which included:

- 15 new Nurture Groups (NG) in primary schools in the 2020/21 school year (46 nurture groups were funded by DE at this time);
- a new 'Nurture Approach in Education Programme' for all educational settings including Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS); and
- a new Nurture Advisory and Support Service (NASS) within the Education Authority (EA).

7.2.58 Funding of £4.05m, was secured from 2021/22 onwards to take forward the programme.

7.2.59 Following the publication of the Fair Start Report and Action Plan on 1 March 2022, the former Minister Michelle McIlveen MLA announced the establishment of a further 16 Nurture Groups in the 2021/22 financial year. As this not possible within the time-scale it was agreed that 7 Groups were funded in in the 2021/22 school year, with a further 9 planned in the 2022/23 financial year.

7.2.60 There are currently 62 funded Nurture Groups and a Nurture Advisory and Support Service. The total Nurture budget is £5,640m with £490k coming from Fair Start Funding.

7.2.61 In October 2023 the Department began a process to evidence and inform our future long-term approach to Nurture Provision. This will include the development of models/options for future Departmental support, associated

funding recommendations and the consideration of the strategic fit of Nurture Provision within the wider landscape including Emotional Health and Wellbeing (EHWB), Education and Welfare Services (EWS) and Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Education of young offenders including Review of Regional Services at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre and Lakewood Special School

7.2.62 The 2018 'Review of Regional Facilities for Children and Young People' Report, commissioned by the Department of Health (DoH) and the then Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) in collaboration with the Department of Justice (DoJ), recommended the establishment of a single integrated Care and Justice Campus comprising of the existing Secure Care Centre at Lakewood and the Juvenile Justice Centre at Woodlands. The recommendations of the review report and the subsequent consultation were based on the establishment of a single integrated Campus, however, in March 2022 the then Ministers of Health and Justice (Naomi Long MLA and Robin Swann MLA respectively) took the decision that the two facilities would continue to operate as separate entities while working together to improve overall provision for young people through the harmonisation of services and facilities, including education, across both sites where possible.

7.2.63 While the then Education Minister, Michelle McIlveen MLA, had not been involved in the decision-making process, noting the joint Health and Justice Ministerial decision that Woodlands and Lakewood would continue to operate independently, she responded to Minister Long to confirm that the Department of Education (DE) and Education Authority (EA) officials would "explore in partnership with all interested parties...how a shared model of education might be delivered."

7.2.64 DE officials have subsequently engaged with a range of key personnel involved in the wider Regional Care and Justice Programme, including through the DE-led Woodlands-Lakewood Education Working Group strand of the programme structures. This work has focused on scoping and assessing the options to harmonise education provision, however, a recurring theme throughout the course of this work has been the lack of clear rationale for the harmonisation of education provision in the absence of the establishment of a single integrated Care and Justice Campus, particularly in terms of the improved outcomes that harmonisation might deliver for the children and young people concerned. This has been further brought into focus following the publication of the 'Report of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services', the recommendations of which has recently been consulted on.

7.2.65 The educational needs of children and young people are currently being met in both settings, as evidenced by inspection/monitoring reports. There is also a lack of compelling evidence or clear rationale for the benefits to these children and young people in harmonising education provision between the two sites while they remain two separate entities.

7.2.66 In light of the above, the Department now intends to take a change of approach in relation to this work.

7.2.67 In the absence of a single campus proposal, rather than continuing to focus on harmonising the education provision across the two sites, the Department intends to now focus on considering the educational needs of children and young people in preparation for any future single site option. This will be done by undertaking a detailed needs analysis to inform the most appropriate model of education should the plans for Woodlands and Lakewood as a single integrated Campus proceed. The Department intends to engage with the Education and Training Inspectorate in taking this work forward. The focus of this needs analysis will be on identifying the needs of the children and young people to ensure their educational outcomes would be improved and maximised in any future arrangement through the most appropriate model of education.

7.2.68 Officials will now scope out the work necessary for this detailed needs analysis and evaluation, with a view to ensuring the outworkings can feed into the wider programme in a timely manner. The Department will be asked to be fully involved in the ongoing work on the Regional Care and Campus Programme and consulted on prior to any decisions being made in relation to education.

7.2.69 At the time of writing, following discussions with the Permanent Secretary during which he agreed to the proposed approach outlined above, a draft submission to formally seek the Permanent Secretary's approval to the proposed change of approach is currently with the Deputy Permanent Secretary for consideration.

Young Carers

7.2.70 The Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS) was adopted by the previous Executive on the 10 December 2020. The Executive CYPS recognises Children and Young People acting as carers. At page 79 it records "We will ensure children and young people acting as carers receive the support they need to fully undertake their education and have opportunities to relax, socialise and have breaks from their caring responsibilities."

7.2.71 Young carers are defined as children and young people who have a substantive caring role for a member of their family, whether that be another child / young person or an adult, and whose health or development is affected due to their caring role. Many of these young carers are not visible in school and it can therefore be difficult for the school community to offer them appropriate support.

7.2.72 Young carers can be identified at school level and supported through for example, referrals to the Education Authority's (EA) Education Welfare

Service (EWS), the School Age Mothers (SAM) programme and the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS). Guidance on supporting young carers in school is available on the EA's website.

7.2.73 The Department does not have a specific policy or budget to support the education of young carers and has no direct role in identifying young carers, however officials recently engaged with Action for Children and Barnardo's NI to produce a 'Young Carers in Education Digital Awareness Pack', which was circulated to educational settings across Northern Ireland on 29 January 2024, with the aim of helping to raise awareness of the support available for young carers in education. The 'Young Carers in Education Digital Awareness Pack' included: a letter from the Permanent Secretary to promote the poster (see below), guidance and support services available to children and young people with a caring role; a digital poster designed by young carers; EA and Health and Social Care Board (HSC) Guidance – 'Supporting Young Carers in School'; and Young Carers' Education Research by Action for Children.

Children Looked After Strategy

7.2.74 The Departments of Health and Education have jointly developed a Strategy for Children Looked After entitled *'A Life Deserved: "Caring" for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland', published in February 2021.* The Strategy, brought forward in the context of the recently published Children and Young People's Strategy, sets out the strategic framework for improving the lives and outcomes of these children to align with their peers.

7.2.75 The development of the Strategy included direct engagement with key stakeholders and a public consultation exercise and following analysis of the responses, a revised draft was prepared. Taking account of stakeholder feedback, it *was* agreed that going forward, the terminology will be changed to 'Children Looked After'. Executive approval to publish was granted on 4 February 2021 and the Strategy was formally launched on 19 February 2021. DE and DoH are continuing to work together to fulfil the implementation plan through two of the key delivery vehicles: the Children Looked After Service in the EA and the Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework.

7.2.76 Revised guidance on the Personal Education Plan (PEP) for primary age Children Looked After, was approved by the previous Education Minister in October 2022 and was introduced under DE Circular 2023/03 with effect from 17 February *2023*, in response to early intervention and prevention reviews. The revised process is centred around the child and their needs and includes a revised PEP template and planning process for primary school aged children. Education settings will be supported by the Education Authority's DE funded Primary Children Looked After Advisory Service within EA who will also train and liaise with Health and Social Care Trust social work staff involved with these pupils. Post primary schools and early years settings are continuing to follow existing guidance until the support for

children looked after in early years and post primary settings is more widely considered.

7.2.77 Action Short of Strike (ASoS) by Teaching Unions has had some impact on the roll out of this revised guidance across schools with children looked after on their register. Union advice has specifically directed schools not to engage in this service despite DE and EA confirming there had been a pilot undertaken, engagement with schools and unions, and adequate subcover included for schools to complete the actions needed to ensure the appropriate supports were in place for these vulnerable children.

Operation Encompass

7.2.78 The Department is working collaboratively with the Department of Health (DoH), the Department of Justice (DoJ), the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) and the PSNI to take this work forward in NI to introduce Operation Encompass as part of the implementation of the *"Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy"*.

7.2.79 From its inception in 2011, Operation Encompass has directly connected police in England and Wales with schools, to ensure support for children living with domestic abuse in their homes when there has been a police attended incident of domestic abuse. It requires the sharing of information to provide an efficient, confidential channel of communication between police and key adults within schools, to ensure a secure and sympathetic environment is provided. Legal advice confirmed that a new legislative provision was required to allow the sharing of information and there was a need to be satisfied that the sharing of information was necessary, justified and proportionate. *'The Domestic Abuse and Family Proceedings Bill'*, was agreed as the vehicle to bring forward a provision on this topic and received Royal Assent on 1 March 2021 to become The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021. Regulations were subsequently brought forward under this Act in the form of the Domestic Abuse Information Sharing with Schools etc. Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 outlining the specific requirements in relation to Operation Encompass in NI. DE and the EA are now leading on implementation of these regulations building on an existing pilot scheme with full implementation across schools being completed in May 2023 and EA support being given for implementation in other relevant educational settings.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

7.2.80 There is increasing concern about the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people. We know that while many schools are providing strong support to pupils, many are struggling to cope with the increasingly complex issues presenting in children and young people. As a way of addressing this, DE worked collaboratively with the Department of Health (DoH), the Public Health Agency (PHA), the Strategic Planning and

Performance Group (SPPG) (formally the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB)), the Education Authority (EA) and other Government Departments, to develop an Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework. The Framework was launched jointly by Minister Weir and Minister Swann on 26 February 2021, along with the Framework's Implementation Plan.

7.2.81 The main emphasis of the Framework is to support schools to promote emotional health and wellbeing at a universal level, through a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach, and providing early and enhanced support for those children and young people who may be at risk or showing signs of needing further help.

7.2.82 A recurring budget of £6.5m had been approved to support the Framework and the final two supporting projects commenced September 2023. Implementation is monitored on an ongoing basis by the Framework Programme Board, with representation from the key stakeholder groups. The wider monitoring and evaluation of outcomes of the overall programme, remains under consideration beyond the annual OBA report cards and regular monitoring that currently apply to each project.

7.2.83 [redacted]

Healthy Happy Minds Pilot

7.2.84 In 2021/22 £5m was secured through Covid-19 funding which enabled the Department, in conjunction with the Education Authority, to develop the pilot counselling and therapeutic support provision for all primary school age children in the 21/22 academic year. The pilot was extended by Ministerial Directions and in light of the significant budgetary pressures facing the NI Block in 2023/24, there was no further financial support available to extend the pilot beyond 31 March 2023. There was very significant interest in this from a wide range of stakeholders including MLAs and the All Party Group for Mental Health.

7.2.85 [redacted]

Counselling Service for Schools

7.2.86 The current contract for the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS), available to all post-primary schools (including special), is due to end in August 2024. EA are currently proceeding with a new procurement exercise to ensure continuity beyond August 2024.

Youth Services

7.2.87 The Education Authority (EA) has responsibility for the delivery of youth services, including assessing and allocating funding based on identified need. Funding opportunities, open to voluntary youth centres, have been developed based on a Local and Regional Assessment of Need process. This process includes engagement with voluntary youth centres, young people, and other interested groups, along with an analysis of relevant statistics and current research available for each geographical area.

7.2.88 The Independent Review of Education Report concludes that youth work represents good value for money. Its costs can be seen as preventive spend which can obviate later spending in other areas. Youth work contributes economic and social value by helping to reduce crime, improve health, promote community relations and increase employment, as well as increase participation in education. However, more could be done to both quantify and communicate the economic value and benefits of youth service delivery. The Review also found some evidence to suggest that statutory youth work in Northern Ireland is underfunded, especially in comparison with England. For instance, it is estimated that the expenditure in the youth sector in England is around £2bn. Pro rata spending in Northern Ireland would exceed £70m whereas the revenue budget in the EA is currently £40.626m[8]. Further analysis is needed to establish the position definitively.

7.2.89 EA's immediate focus is on meeting the priority needs of young people across all education settings, including youth groups, however, given the challenging budget position it is difficult to envisage a situation in the next financial year where there will be no impact.

7.2.90 To best meet the most urgent needs of young people, the EA has increased the number of funding awards available across the province with 2023/24 awards subject to budget availability and affordability. While increasing access to young people, the increase in awards has resulted in less funding available to some funding awards than in the previous awarding period.

7.2.91 In line with the Priority for Youth policy commitment, the EA implemented a new funding scheme on 1 April 2021. There have been a number of issues, raised by the youth sector and officials have sought to resolve these through

[8] This includes funding through technical transfer from TEO (£1.825m re: TBUC Camps & Planned Interventions) and DoJ (£1.911m re: Tackling Paramilitarism Youth Initiatives).

discussion with the sector and EA. An initial review of the impact of the scheme on meeting the needs of children and young people commenced in Autumn 2022 and is due to report by early 2024.

7.2.92 In response to sector concerns, the EA has agreed to review the funding scheme and current processes and has established a programme of work to do so in collaboration with community and voluntary youth sector representatives. Officials are monitoring the situation.

7.2.93 As part of the implementation plan for the new funding scheme implemented in 2021, DE Officials commissioned ETI to undertake a review of the impact of the new funding scheme on meeting assessed needs of young people. While initial findings have been shared at official level, work is underway to finalise and report key findings to the sector in 2024. ETI are due to report in summer 2023.

Youth Policy Review

7.2.94 With the last commitment of the Priorities for Youth policy – the implementation of a new funding scheme – having been actioned, there is a need to review and update the current youth policy which was published in 2013. A number of groups have been established to assist with the review, including a Young People's Advisory Group, a Policy Reference Group and a Cross-Departmental Group on Youth Services. Commitments have been made to a co-design process with children & young people's lived experience central to the process. The review commenced in September 2023 and is anticipated to complete by end 2025/early 2026 .

Youth Council NI

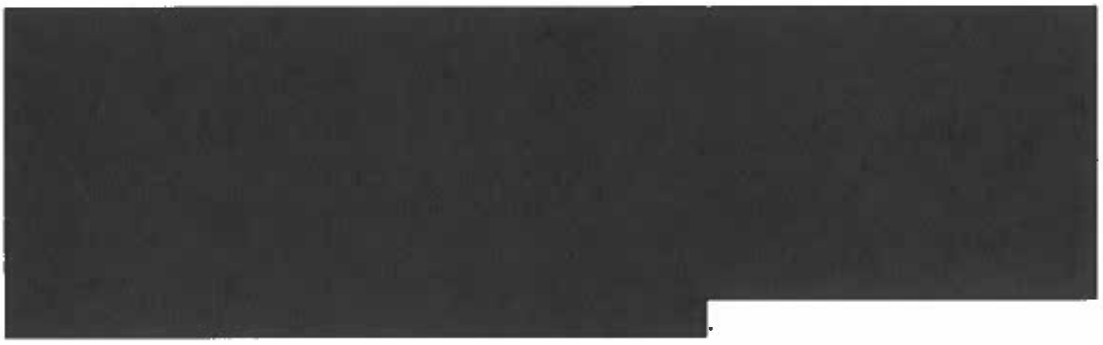
7.2.95 While remaining a statutory body, the Youth Council Northern Ireland has been non-operational since March 2019 when the then Council's term of office ended and new members could not be appointed in the absence of a Minister. Following appointment of a new Minister in 2020, at his request, the future of the Youth Council was reviewed, including a survey of the voluntary youth sector and an options paper prepared. A decision on the way forward remains pending.

7.2.96 An early meeting would be appropriate to seek your views on the way forward.

North/South Education and Training Standards Committee (NSETS)

7.2.97 NSETS was established on a cross-border basis in 2006 by the DE and the Youth Affairs Unit of the then responsible Irish Government Department (now DCEDIY) to ensure and promote quality standards in the education and

training of youth workers through an endorsement process. NSETS professional endorsement represents a formal recognition by the youth work sector that programmes of study in youth work have met prescribed criteria and are fit-for purpose. The Committee engages with similar bodies in other UK regions and this ensure transferability of qualifications on a North/South and East/West basis.

7.2.98 

7.2.99 NI members have been appointed through the Youth Council NI, but as this has been non-operational, a process of engagement with the youth sector enabled new members to be appointed. The NI joint chair who was a YCNI appointee and has agreed to continue their role pending the outcome of the YCNI review, though with decision delayed it is not clear how much longer the current appointee would be willing to continue in this role.

Youth Provision delivered for Other Departments

7.2.100 As part of a joined up and collaborative approach, the Education Authority delivers the T:BUC Camps programme on behalf of TEO. DE has oversight responsibility with TEO (Shared Future) funding through a technical transfer to DE and managed through an MOU and SLA. The 2023/24 application process has completed and delivery will commence from April 2023.

7.2.101 The Education Authority also delivers a number of programmes in relation to the Executive's Tackling Paramilitarism Strategy. DE has oversight responsibility with DoJ (Fresh Start) funding through a technical transfer to DE. The Independent Reporting Panel which oversees the Tackling Paramilitarism Strategy has recognized the value of the youth work Programmes.

Academic Selection

7.2.102 The use of academic selection remains a divisive issue. From November 2023 a single test overseen by the Schools' Entrance Assessment Group (SEAG) will take place. Officials have been and will continue to liaise with the Chair of SEAG on their arrangements for the new single assessment to ensure parents and pupils have the information they need in order to participate.

The Curriculum

7.2.103 Arrangements for the curriculum are set out in the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (NI) 2007. This sets out statements of minimum entitlement across areas of learning that all pupils of compulsory school age must receive. There are a number of curricular issues currently being focused on.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

7.2.104 RSE is mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age (4 to 16). It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors of each school to ensure that a comprehensive programme is delivered (as it is for all areas of learning). The Department also requires schools to develop their own RSE policy, which should be subject to consultation with governors, and parents and pupils.

7.2.105 Over the last number of years, there has been significant public, media and political interest in the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in NI schools. In particular, a number of advocacy groups, MLAs and media commentators have called for greater standardisation of and prescription in the RSE curriculum around the teaching of issues such as consent, LGTBQ+ rights, abortion and domestic and sexual violence and violence against women and girls more generally.

7.2.106 Sir John Gillen's *Independent review of the arrangements to deliver justice in serious sexual offences cases,* has recommended that the Department draw up a plan to exhort all schools to include serious sexual offences within their RSE curriculum. Officials are part of DOJ's Education and Awareness Working Group which is a cross departmental multi-agency group established to raise awareness and education in Northern Ireland of the issues highlighted in the review.

7.2.107 The Department has provided the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) additional funding to develop and review their RSE resources. In June 2019 they launched an online RSE Hub to provide teachers with resources and support to increase their competence and confidence in delivering RSE. A key aspect of CCEA's work has been the development of a RSE Progression Framework. The purpose of the framework is to set out clearly what should be taught at each key stage and to provide relevant age-appropriate themes, and links to resources for teachers to support teaching and learning.

7.2.108 The Secretary of State made the Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 which amend the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 in respect of Learning for Life and Work (LLW) to ensure that pupils at key

stages 3 and 4 have the opportunity to ***"Receive age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion"***.

7.2.109 The Regulations also required the Department to make provision, by regulations, about the circumstances in which, at the request of a parent/carer, a pupil may be excused from age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion or specified elements of that education. These were made by January 2024.

CPR in Schools

7.2.110 The legislation underpinning the statutory curriculum was amended with effect from 10 March 2022 to make cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training and automatic external defibrillator (AED) awareness a compulsory element of Learning for Life and Work at Key Stage 3.

7.2.111 The Department has been working with CCEA, the EA and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to develop resources and support for schools. Training for teachers is currently ongoing.

Emerging Issues

7.2.112 In addition to RSE and CPR, the Department is also considering how best the curriculum and curricular development can support:

- modern foreign languages;
- recommendations from the Fair Start Report around curriculum refresh and play at Foundation Stage;
- the provision of PE in primary schools;
- digital skills [and the DfE 10X Economy Report]; and
- climate change and green growth [and the DEARA Draft Green Growth Strategy].

DELIVERY OF QUALIFICATIONS

2024 Awarding

7.2.113 Following the cancellation of examinations in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID pandemic, and the re-introduction of examinations with adaptations (unit omissions) in 2022, Summer 2023 represented the first full series of CCEA examinations since 2019. It was recognised that learners taking exams in 2023 continued to feel the impact of having had their education disrupted over the past couple of years, and in recognition of this CCEA has

provided *Advance Information* of the broad focus of the content of the majority of the Summer 2023 exam papers to help learners prepare for exams. Furthermore, the Department provided a £2m Qualifications Support Programme, allocated to schools on the basis of the number of pupils in Year 12 (the last year of compulsory education), to provide targeted support to pupils sitting examinations in Summer 2023.

7.2.114 On 18 October 2022 CCEA announced that its approach to awarding grades in Summer 2023 (which was accepted by the then Minster) would see a stepped approach on the journey back to the pre-pandemic statistical standard with an expectation of achieving this by 2024.

7.2.115 Summer 2024 will see the first full examination series since 2019, with no adaptations to exam and no additional supports such as advanced information or funding for schools to support pupils prepare for exams. The intention remains a return to the pre-pandemic statistical standard. This will be the first year that all three jurisdictions that share the GCSE and AS/A level brands aim to return to pre-pandemic examination arrangements and awarding standards.

General Qualifications Reform

Key Stage 4 Qualifications (GCSEs)

7.2.116 During 2023/24, the Department plans to progress (subject to resources) qualifications review and reform work to address a number of policy commitments set out in the 14-19 Framework and the 'A Fair Start' report, both of which were published in 2022. This will include a review of qualifications and assessment at Key Stage 4, specifically consideration of the future of GCSEs revisiting work completed prior to the pandemic and drawing on lessons from the alternative arrangements deployed during the pandemic. CCEA has been commissioned to provide a report to the department setting out the progress on this work up to the end of 2019, the lessons to be drawn from the alternative arrangements in place during the pandemic, reforms being progressed in the other UK jurisdictions, and advise on a programme of work to progress KS4 qualification reform.

Post-16 - The Advanced British Standard

7.2.117 On 4 October 2023 the Prime Minister announced, at the Conservative Party conference, a proposal to develop a new qualification for post-16 students, to be known as the "Advance British Standard". This qualification is to replace the current A level and T level qualifications.

7.2.118 The Government announced there would be a formal consultation on the approach and design of the new qualifications, accompanied by "an ambitious programme of stakeholder engagement", to inform a White Paper

to be published next year. The formal consultation launched on 14th December and runs until 20th March 2024.

7.2.119 Following the Prime Minister's announcement, we engaged immediately with colleagues in DfE (Eng), raising our initial questions about the implications of the proposal for Northern Ireland. A levels are a shared brand across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and any change to the qualification in one jurisdiction will have implications for the continued use of the qualification in the other jurisdictions.

7.2.120 The proposals will impact the policy responsibilities of both the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy. Permanent Secretaries from both Departments, along with their counterpart in the Welsh Government, wrote to the Permanent secretary in the Department for Education in England seeking assurances that the devolved administrations will be engaged in a process of co-development. A policy response to developments in England will be required to protect the interests of NI learners, particularly those who may want to access higher education institutions in England in future years.

A Framework to Transform 14-19 Education and Training Provision

7.2.121 The Transition of Young People into Careers (14-19) Project was established January 2019 and aimed to transform the current education and training system to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. The Project was jointly funded and led by Department of Education (DE) and the Department for the Economy (DfE) with a focus on improving the pathways for young people as they transition from education into careers.

7.2.122 Both Departments worked in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders to establish a basis on which to drive forward a more strategic approach to 14-19 education and training with the aim of ensuring that each young person can become successful contributors to both society and the economy.

7.2.123 In June 2022 the Education and Economy Ministers published the 14-19 Framework, 'Developing a more strategic approach to 14-19 education and training: A Framework to transform 14-19 education and training provision'[9] (the Framework).

7.2.124 The document provides an overarching narrative setting out the current context and need for a more strategic approach. It articulates the vision for 14-19 education and training and, to focus delivery, sets out objectives and outcomes aimed at "Educating all of our young people to develop their knowledge and skills, enabling them to fulfil their potential and contribute to society, the economy and the environment".

[9] A Framework to Transform 14-19 Education and Training Provision

7.2.125 In terms of how this will be achieved, the framework presents a series of 12 strategic actions under five key themes. The strategic actions signal where emphasis and resources should be directed to help address the key challenges identified. Underpinning the 12 strategic actions are a series of 34 supporting actions.

7.2.126 Most of the actions in the Framework focus on areas for improvement and are frequently aimed at addressing issues of consistency in the content and quality of what learners experience in 14-19 provision. There are some actions, including the reviews of general and vocational qualifications and establishing a comprehensive review of post 16 education and training, that represent significant pieces of work in terms of both time and resource.

Breakdown of actions

7.2.127 Whilst only the overarching Framework document was published, both Ministers agreed the underpinning implementation plan.

7.2.128 For each action, the Project Team which led the development of the Framework identified a lead, proposed timeframe (short, medium or long term) estimated costs and resource requirements for implementation, acknowledging that the need remained to fully scope the requirements of each action.

7.2.129 Ministers were advised that the departments were not resourced to deliver most of the actions and that effective and timely delivery will depend on the availability of additional resources or reprioritisation of work.

Hybrid Delivery Model

7.2.130 A new 14-19 Framework Implementation Programme Board was established to oversee the implementation of the actions. At the first Programme Board meeting in December 2022 members agreed to a hybrid delivery approach whereby a Programme Implementation Team will oversee the delivery of the Framework. The Programme Team is also responsible for delivery of a number of the actions within the Framework with policy teams in DE and DfE taking forward individual actions which could be picked up through ongoing or planned policy review and reform. The Programme Team sits within the Strategy Portfolio Management Division in DfE, is jointly funded by the two departments and reports to the joint SROs – Linsey Farrell and Moira Doherty.

NORTHERN IRELAND AUDIT OFFICE (NIAO) AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE (PAC) SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) REPORTS

7.2.131 The 2020 NIAO report "Impact Review of SEN" (Report) concluded that significant issues identified in its 2017 report persist and that the Department

and the EA cannot demonstrate value for money in the provision of support to all children with SEN.

7.2.132 Officials gave evidence to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) (October 2020) and PAC published its Report ("Report on Impact Review of SEN"), on 25 February 2021. This contained seven recommendations which were all accepted by the Department in the Memorandum of Reply which was presented before the Assembly by the Minister of Finance on 20 April 2021. The PAC recommendations have all been progressed and most recommendations (3-7) are being taken forward as part of the Department led End to End Review of SEN, which incorporates the Education Authority SEND Strategic Development programme (now known as the SEND Transformation programme).

Independent, external review of the effectiveness of SEN processes

7.2.133 In response to Recommendation 2 of the PAC report on 'Impact Review of SEN', which stated that the 'PAC strongly believes that there is a need for an independent, external review of the effectiveness of SEN processes, to help build public confidence', the Department commissioned the external consultancy firm IPSOS, to carry out an Independent Review of Special Educational Needs.

The aim of the Review was to 'understand whether SEN provision and processes are fit for purpose in terms of progress made by children, impact on children's outcomes and whether services can be delivered more effectively and efficiently'.

7.2.134 The final report 'Independent Review of Special Educational Needs Services and Processes' was published (May 2023) and can be found at https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/independent-review-special-educational-needs-services-and-processes. The recommendations have informed and shaped the direction of travel as set out in the End to End Review of SEN, however if required, a presentation of the findings and recommendations can be arranged.

7.2.135 More details on the range of PAC recommendations and audit issues and how these are progressing can be provided in separate submissions, as required.

SEN Regulations and Code of Practice

7.2.136 A new SEN Framework was agreed by the NI Assembly in 2012 and includes three key elements - an Act; supporting Regulations; and an associated statutory Code of Practice. The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Act (NI) 2016 received Royal Assent on 23 March 2016.

7.2.137 The Department initially consulted on the draft Regulations in 2016, however the Assembly fell shortly thereafter.

7.2.138 Due to the elapsed time since we originally consulted on the draft SEN Regulations (2016) and the substantial changes that were made to the Regulations, it was decided to launch a formal consultation on both the new Regulations and the new Code of Practice at the same time. The Department launched these consultations on 30 September 2020 and due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic the closing date was extended to 2 March 2021. The Department presented a summary report on each consultation to the Education Committee on 23 June 2021. Following consideration of changes proposed through the consultation process the draft Regulations are nearing completion with only minor changes to be resolved before being passed to DSO for final review. The new Regulations will need to be approved by the Minister before officials present them to the Education Committee when one is in place. The new Regulations are subject to affirmative resolution so will therefore need to be passed by the NI Assembly.

7.2.139 The Department is working closely with the EA, Department of Health and Health and Social Care Trusts to minimise any risks regarding the readiness and capacity of organisations to implement the SEN Framework. The EA currently receive £2.541m per year (£1.271m for 2023/24 due to reduced budget available) for a dedicated SEND Implementation team that develops and delivers training on the new Framework to EA staff and schools.

7.2.140 The new SEN Framework places additional duties on the EA and schools and therefore to support them in their preparation for implementing the new SEN Framework funding of £30m per annum has been approved. Since January 2020, £70.5m has been allocated due to reduced budget allocation in 2022/23 of £22m and £11m for 2023/24. A new business case for this funding is due in 2025/26 and there is a real risk that schools will not be able to implement fully the new SEN Framework if the £30m funding is not recurrent.

DE End to End Review of SEN

7.2.141 In early 2023, DE embarked on an End to End review of SEN, to address the recommendation made in the IPSOS report that stated:
"Within a year, DE needs to set in place a plan that will set out the actions that will be delivered to implement transformational change to SEN and the wider education system within reasonable timescales.

The plan should be led by a senior Civil Servant who is directly accountable to the Minister ..... Senior Responsible Owners should be identified for each recommendation, as well as timescales for delivery and the role and responsibilities of each agency who will be involved in its implementation."

7.2.142 The review is the overarching piece that brings together the work being taken forward under the EA Transformation programme and the department led 12 workstreams. It aims to address gaps and explore alternative delivery options to deliver transformational change in a timelier manner. It is crucial that there is a focus on improving outcomes through high quality, timely and more cost-effective services.

7.2.143 A key emphasis of the End to End review includes a need to focus on outcomes for children and young people with SEN ensuring that the delivery model supports them to be happy, learning and succeeding, in line with DE's 'Every Child' corporate vision. The review is being taken forward in four stages over a period of 12-18 months. Phase one of the Review was completed in summer 2023 and primarily focused on setting up governance structures and developing the internal strategy for delivering transformational change. Phase two has commenced and will primarily focus on stakeholder engagement to gather evidence and experiences to assist in the development of alternative approaches and solutions. Both phases will be followed by the development of options (phase three) and the way forward which includes an implementation plan (phase four).

7.2.144 Progress on the End to End Review is reported to the joint DE/EA SEN Programme Board which is co-chaired by DE Deputy Secretary of Education and Children Services Policy Group and EA Interim Director of Education. The Programme Board meets bi-monthly and as well as DE and EA members it includes Department of Health, CCMS, NICCY, ETI, trade unions, and members from the Transformation Programme Reference Group and Academic and Practitioner Advisory Group.

7.2.145 Progress is also reported to the SEN Strategic Oversight Group, which is chaired by DE Permanent Secretary and membership includes EA, CCMS, Department of Health and ETI along with an academic from Ulster University and Chair of the SEN subgroup of the Principals Forum.

EA SEND Transformation Programme

7.2.146 The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Transformation Programme is an EA led programme initiated in late 2020 that was established to address the majority of the 200+ recommendations made across numerous scrutiny reviews and reports in relation to SEN (such as the EA's Internal Audit of Practice; NICCY's Review 'Too Little, Too Late'; the Department's SEN Transformation project; the NIAO's 2017 Value for Money Report and 2020 follow up Impact Report; and the Public Accounts Committee Report issued in February 2021).

7.2.147 While an outline business case was approved for £11.3m (£6.1m in 2022/23, £3.8m for 2023/24 and £1.4m for 2024/25), due to budget pressures and embargoes on recruiting staff, the EA surrendered £2.2m of their £6.1m allocation during the 2022/23 financial year and only received £1.9m for

2023/24, again due to budget pressures within the education sector. The budget for 2024/25 has not yet been set.

7.2.148 The EA are currently reconfiguring the Transformation Programme into one project which focuses on delivering a local integrated support model for stage 2 SEN pupil support services by September 2024. Due to significant changes in the scope, an addendum to the OBC is required which EA and DE are currently working on.

DE Workstreams

7.2.149 There are 12 DE led workstreams and each one has identified the key challenges, gaps and areas that need to be considered in ensuring that all children with SEN have the **right support from the right people at the right time and in the right place to ensure they are happy, learning and succeeding**. These include:

- **Early intervention for children and young people with SEN:** This workstream will: consider what barriers prevent early identification of SEN and provision of appropriate intervention; consider what is meant by early intervention, what that means in practice and the overlap with health; detail emerging pressures on early years settings which are seeing an increased number of young children with additional or educational needs; consider adoption of system wide trauma informed teaching practices as a method of providing support and intervention at an early stage for a child; consider this in the context of unmet need and perceived 'gatekeeping' to support services and through the lens of Fair Start recommendations.

- **Accessibility and effectiveness of the specialist EA SEN Pupil Support Services**; findings from the various reviews of SEN and feedback from schools and practitioners indicates challenges with the access and quality of the current EA Pupil Support Services which form a fundamental part of the graduated response to supporting children with SEN. There are currently 10 different EA SEN pupil Support Services covering different areas including autism support, SEN early years, literacy, language and communication, sensory support for visually and hearing impaired children. This workstream will examine the effectiveness of the current pupil support models of delivery and identify gaps through engagement with schools, education settings and Health professionals, and will be undertaken in parallel with the EA project which proposes to reconfigure the current Pupil Support Services delivery model into five Local Integrated teams (see EA SEND Transformation Programme above).

- **Statement process** - This review will examine the current statement process and how professional advice is translated into statements and support delivered in school. It will also look at the advice and support offered to those who are referring to see if improvements can be made.

The provisional criteria for the statutory assessment and statement process will be examined; including interaction with SENDIST.

- **Advice and Communications** - This review will link to each of the other reviews and the EA Transformation Projects. It will examine the current issues with advice from the perspective of children, parents, schools, EA and Health in relation to SEN. This will also examine progress of the recommendations from the DE SEN Learner Journey. A dedicated page of the DE website has been developed and includes details of engagement events.

- **SEN & Medical Categories** - This review will examine the current list of SEN and Medical categories; and will involve engagement with education and health professionals.

- **Outcomes Framework** - This review will build on the work detailed in the EA Transformation OBC. It will look at other jurisdictions to understand how development and progression is measured for children with SEN across mainstream and special schools leading to the development of an outcomes framework for children with SEN. A number of workshops have been held and an outcomes framework is currently under development. A plan on a page has been produced that clearly shows the vision and outcomes expected for children and young people with SEN. Further workshops are planned on developing further the oucomes for each workstream in the End to End review.

- **SEN Placements / area planning:** there is a need to ensure that there is sufficient appropriate educational provision for increasing numbers of children with a statement of SEN which meets their needs, and to address the issue of delays in the confirmation of placements. This workstream will: examine the current cycle of remedial actions put in place by the Education Authority (EA) to provide appropriate placements for children with a statement of SEN, focusing on whether those placements meet their needs; working with EA, identify any geographical or statistical patterns on a regional basis for the short, medium and long term and how they can be operationalised; consideration of specialist provisions in mainstream (SPiMs) and satellite special school sites, and what 'pathways' exist for children; consider the building and capital implications and the financial impact of creating additional specialist provision within the school system; wider issues including access to health supports and therapeutic interventions will also be examined.

- **SEN Legislation/ Policy**: this workstream is to considering the current legislative context for SEN/D and whether reform is required alongside the current policy and early consideration of any future policy development work required.

- Understanding SEN Finance which brings together a collective from across DE SEN policy, DE Finance; EA operational delivery directorates and EA Finance, 'to confirm joint understanding of how the EA SEN budget (forecasted £550m 2023/24) is developed, allocated, spent and reported on thus informing a more effective, efficient and sustainable delivery model of SEN support services that will improve outcomes for children and young people.'

- **Special Schools** which is to consider the vision for special schools in the context of of an aspirational inclusive education system: all children and young people educated together in their local school, as part of a whole community and rights based approach; in partnership with school leaders codesign solutions to address longstanding challenges and under investment within the sector.

- **Workforce development** this workstream is examining all aspects of the workforce including teaching and non-teaching staff, Initial Teacher Education, Teacher Professional Development and how we can better utilise professional support in the classroom (including more effective deployment of Classroom Assistants)

End to End Review of School Improvement

7.2.150 In early 2023, the Department identified a priority need to undertake an End to End Review of School Improvement against a backdrop of:

- A School Improvement Policy '*Every School a Good School*' (ESaGS) that required review to take account of wider policy developments since it was published in 2009.
- A statement within the Landscape Review of the EA that despite EA's powers in terms of school accountability and notwithstanding the policy basis, feedback indicated "*the EA has limited* resources *to monitor, support and develop boards of governors and to put in place effective school improvement, school effectiveness or school governance interventions*"; and
- The opportunity provided by Covid to learn from practice that places the needs of children and young people at the centre of policy making and implementation.

7.2.151 The return and escalation of industrial action by teacher unions has created a very challenging scene in terms of monitoring and effecting school improvement. Non-cooperation with inspection means we have no independent review of the quality of education provision across our schools. Schools already in the legacy follow-up to inspection process are refusing to submit action plans for improvement or engage further. Refusal to undertake statutory assessment at Key Stages 1-3 until the former process is reviewed, has resulted in no data around pupil progression and performance other than external qualifications at Key Stage 4 (GCSE). Non-engagement with School Improvement Professionals and the School Development Service creates challenges in providing external support and professional learning. The action also includes direction not to undertake School Development Planning and not to submit proposals around the use of School Development Days which are designed to bring about school improvement.

7.2.152 The End to End Review of School Improvement is being delivered using a phased approach. Phase 1 involves a mapping exercise around the current infrastructure that supports school improvement to set out the roles and responsibilities of each inputting body including the cost. This phase is nearing completion. Phase 2 is underway and involves the progression of a series of workstreams including:

- The development of a narrative around the education vision,
- A review of the overarching School Improvement Policy,
- An examination of the operational support available for schools,
- A review of the School Development Planning process and the use of School Development Days,
- The development of a continuum of support for children and young people and a framework for removing barriers to learning,
- A review of how curriculum development and professional learning and development support and bring about school improvement,
- Progression of measures to promote the importance of literacy and numeracy skills, in the interim period until the Department can resource

the development of a new Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (the previous 10 year strategy 'Count, Read, Succeed' completed in 2020),
- Ensuing alignment between the new policy indicators and processes and that of the new inspection approach, and
- Consideration of the data required to evaluate the quality of education provision and measure effective improvement within a school and at a system level.

7.2.153 Phase 3 will involve the development of the Review outcomes including consultation on a new policy, a suite of readily deliverable actions and a roadmap of longer-term proposals for change.

Review of the DE Guidance 'Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs in Education Settings'

7.2.154 The joint guidance 'Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs' was issued in 2008 by DoH, PHA and DE. Due to the age of the guidance, and advancements in healthcare practices it was considered due for review. The former Minister agreed in October 2021, to broaden the scope of the guidance to include healthcare needs and youth settings.

7.2.155 Subsequent to that agreement, the working group comprised of relevant stakeholders, determined that the scope was so vast that a focused approach on medication needs was required in the first instance, and the wider healthcare consideration paused.

7.2.156 It is hoped to issue the revised Guidance on Medication needs to all education settings in the summer 2024 term.

MENTAL CAPACITY ACT 2016 AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION SETTINGS

7.2.157 The Department are currently working with colleagues from the Department of Health (DoH); Health and Social Care Board; Public Health Agency and the Education Authority to understand and provide guidance for educational settings in relation to the out-workings of the introduction of the Mental Capacity Act 2016.

7.2.158 This work is focussed on those children who have attained the age of 16 where it has been determined that it is in their best interests to remain within a school setting (most likely a special school/ specialist provision) and if there are any requirements for a Deprivation of Liberty (DoL) Authorisation to be in place.

7.2.159 Wider considerations of a potential deprivation of liberty through the use of restrictive practices, where the child is a risk to themselves or others, is a matter for the overarching Departmental 'Review on Seclusion & Restraint', to which this work will contribute.

7.2.160 The Department will be required to issue guidance to support the existing DoH Code of Practice; provide training, support and some additional staffing to the Education Authority to manage this process as part of Transitions Planning; and to ensure that there is a clear pathway to the relevant Health and Social Care Trust, as outlined within the Mental Capacity Act 2016, as all decisions in respect of the 'Deprivation of Liberty' (DoL) Authorisations are taken by a panel established within the young persons home trust area.

Fair Start - Expansion of the EA's SEN Early Years Inclusion Service

7.2.161 The EA submitted a business case under Fair Start to bolster its SEN Early Years Inclusion Service (SEN EYIS) to meet recommendation KA (xii):

- "EA should expand and enhance their Early Years SEN Inclusion Service to ensure that pre-school settings have access to expertise to enable them to support children with additional needs / SEN in their pre-school education"

7.2.162 £700k funding was received 2022-23 23 with a further £370k allocated for 2023/24. This has enabled the appointment of six additional staff to enhance the service.

PERIOD DIGNITY

7.2.163 A pilot scheme to address Period Dignity in Schools launched in September 2021 and the project is continuing to progress well. Work is overseen by a Steering Group which includes school representatives, DE, EA and CCEA Representatives from DfE and DfC attend as observers.

7.2.164 Funding for 2023/24 was slightly impacted by budget reductions and is £413k, which includes continued embedding of the scheme through communications, curriculum materials and Teacher Professional Learning opportunities.

7.2.165 Under the Period Products (Free Provision) Act 2022, all departments are required to specify in Regulations, bodies that will be subject to duties under the Act. DE has consulted on and drafted its Regulations, which, if approved, would require its Arms' Length Bodies to make period products available free of charge to pupils, young people, staff, and visitors. The legislative deadline for the Regulations was in May 2023, however the draft Regulations are subject to approval under the Draft Affirmative Procedure in the Assembly.

7.2.166 The intention of the Act was that provision be in place by May 2024. While formal progress cannot be made until the draft Regulations have been approved by the Assembly, DE has engaged informally with those organisations specified in the draft Regulations.

TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Learning Leaders – a Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning

7.2.167 The Department's Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning: Learning Leaders was published in March 2016. It sets out the Department's vision for teacher professional learning together with a number of policy commitments which underpin it. The vision is *"Every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people"*.

7.2.168 Its overall aim is to empower the teaching profession to strengthen its professionalism and expertise to meet the challenging educational needs of young people in the 21st century. Key areas are the development of a teacher professional learning framework, development and dissemination of effective practice, building professional learning communities, building leadership capacity, and engagement.

7.2.169 Implementation is taken forward through an Oversight Group, a number of Working Groups and annual Action Plans, although the pace of progress reduced significantly during the Covid-10 pandemic.

7.2.170 A proposals paper ("Teacher Professional Learning in Northern Ireland" (TPL in NI)) was produced in 2021, summarising the development work progressed including a Framework for Teacher Professional Learning, a Leadership Lens and a revised set of teacher competences. This was then tested with targeted focus groups to get feedback on the proposals in advance of a full consultation.

7.2.171 Feedback from these sessions confirmed that there was a general lack of awareness and understanding about the Learning Leaders strategy and there were also considerable misconceptions about the 'TPL in NI' proposals,

7.2.172 A communication plan in support of the Learning Leaders Strategy was developed to raise awareness and the TPL in NI have been reviewed and retested with stakeholders.

7.2.173 Subject to your approval, It is anticipated that the consultation on the 'TPL in NI' proposals will now take place during the 2023/24 academic year.

Intakes to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Courses

7.2.174 Each year the Department allocates places to ITE courses offered by the four Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) / ITE providers (St Marys University College, Stranmillis University College, Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University). For 2023/24 the Department recommended that student intakes should be reduced by around 5% (from 580 to 552), due to the service-wide budgetary

context and challenges, and this was approved by the Department for the Economy (which has responsibility for the administration and funding of these ITE programmes). It should be noted, however, that in line with the Department's statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish Medium Education, the reduction in intakes did not apply to Irish Medium ITE places (46 in total).

7.2.175 

7.2.176 

7.2.177 The Department is aware of schools experiencing some difficulties in recruiting teachers to fill vacancies, mainly at post-primary level, in particular subjects, for example, in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Schools have confirmed that the issue is impacting on both the recruitment of permanent teaching staff, and the securing of suitable substitute teacher cover in schools through the NI Supply Teacher Register (NISTR). This issue, along with a range of workforce issues, forms part of the wider consideration of the teaching workforce. A paper on this issue was submitted to TMG in August 2023.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Working Group

7.2.178 Membership includes representation from the four HEIs / ITE providers, the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), Council for the Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Education Authority (EA), the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), the General Teaching Council for NI (GTCNI), Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) and Teacher Practitioners.

7.2.179 Current actions include work on a revised Teacher Education Partnership Handbook, which provides guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the various education partners (such as the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the EA) as well as student teachers, (newly qualified) early career teachers, teacher tutors and others with a role in the main stages of early career education.

Policy Engagement Working Group

7.2.180 This was established in 2023 to provide policy makers in DE with direct access to the HEIs and the HEIs an opportunity to influence Departmental policy from the outset. It allows the Department to gain valuable insights from the HEIs, specifically through the lens of research and practical experiences. It also provides a forum for policy leads to share current and emerging Departmental priorities.

SECTION 7 – RESOURCES, GOVERNANCE AND EARLY YEARS GROUP

Deputy Secretary – Ronnie Armour (PA Briege Coyle)

7.1 Overview of Directorates

CORPORATE SERVICES & GOVERNANCE

Andrew Scott

Director
Deputy Director of Governance Team
Head of Education Governance Team
Head of Governor Policy and Appointments Team
Departmental Business Services Team
Head of Private Office
Head of Information Management Team
Head of Press and Internal communications Team
Head of Economic Advisory Unit
Head of Internal Audit

Key Responsibilities

- The **Governor Policy and Appointments Team (GPAT)** is responsible for governor policy, the appointment of school governors, approving school schemes of management and the registration of independent schools. The team is also progressing a review of school governance.

- The **Education Governance Team (EGT)** has oversight responsibilities for business planning, governance, accountability and assurance issues between the Department and its NDPBs. It provides assurances regarding the effectiveness of risk management, including management of the Corporate Risk Register and for *Every CHILD*: the DE Corporate Plan 2023-2028 and annual Business Plans; oversees the Department's contribution to and performance against the Programme for Government outcomes; and oversees Ministerial public appointments. EGT also implements agreed procedures to administer and monitor grant support for three publicly funded organisations: the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS), the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) and the Governing Bodies Association (GBA). All were set up/funded for specific purposes with the approval of former Ministers.

- The **Information Management Team (IMT)** promotes information assurance, legislative compliance and information/records management best practice through advice, guidance, policies and procedures.

- The **Private Office** is responsible for providing support to the Minister, facilitating decision making by the Minister and the Senior Management team; and ensuring those decisions are underpinned by good quality and timely advice.

- The **Press and Internal Communications Team (PICT)** is responsible for providing media support and advice to the Minister and the Senior Management Team, across all platforms and managing internal communications.

- The **Departmental Business Services Team (DBST)** has responsibility for the management of DE's staff salary budget and carries out a liaison role in relation to matters such as workforce planning and vacancy management. DBST provides Secretariat to the DE Board and Staff Engagement Forum and coordinates on department-wide issues and International matters including British Council. The team also provides a range of corporate services to support the operation of Rathgael House such as accommodation, facilities management, health & safety and security for the premises, staff and visitors. DBST also maintains the Department's Business Continuity and Emergency Response plans and is responsible for ensuring Departmental adherence to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act: Equality Duties.

- **Economic Advisory Unit (EAU)** disseminate DoF Better Business Cases NI/Five Case Model Guidance to the Department and ALBs; advise and support towards the development and approval of value for money business cases for all DE and DE ALB activity - both above and below delegated limits; advise and support towards policy, programme and project evaluations and disseminating the results; provide DE specific Better Business Cases templates for the use of the Department and ALBs; and undertake annual test drill and compliance exercises.

- **Internal Audit (IA)** aim to deliver a professional, high quality Internal Audit service to enhance delivery of education. IA provide advice and guidance to management to improve internal controls. IA also evaluate potential fraud, irregularity or whistleblowing allegations to determine appropriate action and address system weaknesses.

EDUCATION WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Key Staff

Mark Bailey 	Director Head of Teacher Negotiating Team Head of Non-Teaching Workforce Team Head of Teachers' Pay & Pensions Team Head of GTCNI Interim Sponsorship Team

Key Responsibilities

- Policy responsibility for workforce issues affecting the education workforce.
- Ascertaining if pay and conditions of service are appropriate to maintain an able and committed education workforce.
- Consultation with Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) which comprises the 5 recognised teachers' unions on teachers' pay, terms, conditions and workforce issues through Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) structures.
- Supporting EA who consult with the recognised education support staff unions on pay, terms, conditions and workforce issues through Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) structures for non-teaching staff.
- Processing pay remit business cases for education sector staff in line with the NI Executive's public sector pay policy.
- Payroll Team located in Waterside House Londonderry, provides an outsourced facility processing teachers' salary payments, which amount to nearly £800m per annum on behalf of and under instruction from the employers, the EA, the CCMS and schools in the GMI and Irish Medium education sectors. Voluntary Grammar Schools (VGS) run their own payroll.
- Pension Team located in Waterside House with responsibility for the policy and administration of the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme (NITPS) comprising 44,500 active or deferred members and approximately 25,000 former teachers receiving pension benefits.
- Lead on a number of major projects including a replacement teacher's pension system and nine workforce reviews to address teacher concerns about workload and accountability and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. These Teams completed their remit at 31 March 2023.
- Sponsorship and oversight of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) and the preparation of legislation for its agreed dissolution and replacement.

FINANCE DIRECTORATE

Key Staff

Vacant	Director
Neil Palmer	Acting Finance Director
[redacted]	Head of Budgeting Team
	Head of Financial Monitoring Team
	Head of Financial Reporting Team
Vacant	Head of Common Funding Scheme Review Team
[redacted]	Head of Education Technology and Procurement

Key Responsibilities

- The role of the Finance Directorate is to manage the Department's Resource Budget (c£2.6bn), in line with Departmental priorities and draft PfG targets, to ensure propriety, regularity and value for money. The Directorate is responsible for securing funding, allocating resources, monitoring expenditure and reporting results.

Budgeting Team

- Oversight of the overall Education budget, including the setting and monitoring of the in-year budget and assessing future years budgetary requirements on an ongoing basis and in accordance with DoF guidelines.

- Preparation of Main Estimates, Spring Supplementary Estimates and Vote on Account, including associated briefing for both the DE and DE TSS Estimates.

- Determining and reporting the DE and NDPB Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) requirements to DoF.

- Completion of annual Provisional and Final outturn, monthly and Forecast Outturn requirements to DoF.

- Providing advice and guidance on the allocation, monitoring and management of the GAE/GPE budget.

- Providing associated briefings in respect of the above and advice and guidance on budgeting/public expenditure issues.

Financial Monitoring Team

- Allocating Resource budgets to EA, CCEA, CCMS and YCNI.

- Review and approval of Budget Plans of the above bodies.

- Monitoring of all in-year allocations to these bodies throughout the year.

- Monitoring Resource expenditure against budget in the above bodies and any related business plan targets of these bodies.

- Updating and publishing the Common Funding Scheme.

- Running the Common Funding Formula to determine school budgets.

- Providing budgeting advice in respect of all of the Department's NDPBs and all Schools.

Financial Reporting Team

- Production of the Department's Annual Report and Accounts:

    - Department's Core Accounts;
    - Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) Annual Statements;
    - Miscellaneous Trust and Endowment Scheme Accounts;
    - Whole of Government Accounts; and
    - Consolidated Accounts under Review of Financial Process.

- Encourage, support and promote effective financial governance and financial accountability across DE and its NDPBs.

  Delivering the Department's Retained Finance Function including the management of service provided by Account NI and promoting optimum use of the finance system.

- Provide relevant accounting and finance advice and guidance.

- Effective monitoring of cash.

Education Technology and Procurement Team

- Provide procurement advice and guidance for DE and DE's NDPBs and, in conjunction with DoF's Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD), contribute to the accountability and governance of procurement.

- Provide an oversight role of the portfolio of Education Technology across the Department and its ALBs, monitoring and reporting on the delivery status of high risk Education ICT Projects and Programmes.

- Ensuring the effective functioning of the DE ICT Programme Board to support effective governance and accountability in relation to the delivery of Education Technology programmes and projects.

- Ensuring the effective functioning of the Departments Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF EDUCATION

Key staff

Philip Irwin Director

Key Responsibilities

- As part of the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) Agreement it was agreed that "*The Executive will establish an external, independent review of education provision, with a focus on securing greater efficiency in delivery costs, raising standards, access to the curriculum for all pupils, and the prospects of moving towards a single education system*".

- Terms of Reference for the Independent Review were agreed by the Executive on 10 December and published on 15 December 2020[10]. The ToR was subsequently revised due to comments from DfE Minister and reissued on 3 February 2021.

- The panel was appointed in September 2021 and began work at the beginning of October 2021. Following release of an interim report in October 2022, the Panel's final report was published on 13 December 2023.

- A small Secretariat Team was in place throughout this period supporting the work of the Review Panel.

- The team is now undertaking a consultation process with internal directorates and key arm's length bodies with the aim of:
  - Clarifying the Panel's rationale for the various recommendations;
  - Taking views from the DE and ALB teams on the various recommendations – both those that directly impact them and wider, cross-cutting recommendations;

  This information will then be used to assess both the impact and complexity of implementing different recommendations and then proposing a prioritised programme.

- In parallel, consideration will also be given to delivery and governance arrangements. The recommendations range from those that are specific to DE directorates (and could potentially be delivered by that directorate while continuing their 'business as usual'), through recommendations that involve multiple DE directorates and/or ALB's and would therefore require an additional DE delivery team, through to those that cut across multiple Departments and are therefore a matter for the Executive. A flexible governance structure will therefore be required to deal with this range of recommendations.

[10] https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Independent%20Review%20of%20Education%20-%20Terms%20of%20Reference%20-%20Published%2015%20Dec%202020.pdf

- Currently, it is intended that this consultation/assessment process will be completed by end April, at which point plans for a prioritised, branded change/transformation programme would be submitted to you for consideration.

EARLY YEARS, CHILDCARE & CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGY

Paul Brush	Director
[redacted]	Head of Childcare Strategy Team and Learning to Learn Team
[redacted]	Childcare Team Lead
[redacted]	Childcare Team Lead
	Head of Early Years Team (Intervention Programmes)
Vacant	Head of Early Years Team (Learning to Learn)
[redacted]	Head of Early Years Team (Pre-School)
	Head of Children & Young People's Strategy

Key Responsibilities

- The focus of this directorate is to provide policy advice to the Minister and to develop, implement and evaluate agreed policies and associated programmes in the areas of early childhood education and childcare provision designed to complement formal learning. It also has responsibility for coordinating the Executive Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 and Executive input to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The directorate has 6 teams as listed below:

- **Childcare Unit**: responsible for developing the Executive's Early Learning and Childcare Strategy and managing the Bright Start School Age Grant Scheme.

- **Pre-school Team**: responsible for securing pre-school education provided through statutory and non-statutory providers participating in the universal Pre-school Education Programme.

- **Interventions Programmes Team**: responsible for early years interventions targeted at supporting children at risk of educational underachievement: the Sure Start Programme, the Pathway Fund and Toybox Project (Traveller and Roma children). Also responsible for core funding to the early years sector.

- **Learning to Learn Team:** responsible for the 'Learning to Learn' early years education and learning policy framework and the 'Getting Ready to Learn' programme.

- **Children's and Young People's Strategy Team:** responsible for coordinating, monitoring and reporting on the Executive's Children's and Young People's Strategy, leading on UNCRC issues, taking forward a project to facilitate the participation of young people in decision making and play policy.

8.2 RESOURCES, GOVERNANCE AND EARLY YEARS TOPICAL ISSUES

Strategic and governance issues

8.2.1 **Every CHILD**: the DE Corporate Plan 2023-2028 – see Section 2.1 above.

8.2.2 **EA Landscape Review** – as part of the recommended 'quinquennial review' of Arms' Length Bodies, the EA were subject to an external review which was published in June 2022. The Report made thirteen recommendations, focused on the themes of the future form, function and financing of the EA; improvements required to support organisational effectiveness; and governance, accountability and relationships which will support future EA effectiveness. DE and the EA have jointly developed an Action Plan to address these recommendations; progress is overseen by senior DE and EA officials through a quarterly Oversight Group. A prioritised approach has been taken to ensure available resources are focused on areas that will make the greatest difference, and engagement will take place with stakeholders as this work progresses.

8.2.3 **EA Senior Staffing** – the Chief Executive of the EA, Sara Long, has tendered her resignation and will leave the EA in mid-April 2024. The EA has plans in place to fill the Chief Executive position on an interim basis and quickly progress the permanent recruitment. DE will be involved in this process and any appointment will be subject to DE approval.

8.2.4 **Public Appointments** – In the absence of an Education Minister, CCEA was added as named body on the Northern Ireland (Ministerial Appointment Functions) (No.2) Regulations, enabling the Secretary of State (SoS) to make appointments. Following an open competition – held in the autumn of 2023 – on 9 January the SoS chose to appoint all suitable candidates (from a ranked list) and, following completion of the necessary AccessNI checks, is due to sign the letters and Minutes of Appointment. Aside from this, appointments and re-appointments are coming due in the next few months to four other Departmental ALB's; four on the Board of the Middletown Centre for Autism, two on the Board of NICIE, one on the Board of CnaG and 12 Representative Interest members on the Board of the EA. A decision is also required in the coming months whether to re-appoint the EA and CCEA Chairpersons, whose first term of office expires in December 2024 and January 2025 respectively.

8.2.5 **Partnership Agreements** – the Department of Finance has undertaken a review of departmental sponsorship of ALBs and developed templates for "Partnership Agreements" between departments and ALBs, which seeks to introduce a new style of working focusing on honest, open and constructive relationships within the overall governance framework. Work on a Partnership Agreement for CCMS is nearing completion and is expected to be approved before the start of 2024-25. The remaining Partnership Agreements are being progressed by the relevant sponsor teams, with the EA Partnership Agreement forming a key component of the EA Landscape Review Action Plan.

8.2.6 Decision on **governor appointment** process - Stemming from reformation of the Northern Ireland Executive and an internal review of a major reconstitution of

Boards of Governors in 2018/19, [redacted].

8.2.7 **Reconstitution** of boards of governors –The reconstitution in controlled / maintained schools launched on 13 November 2023. The process involves approx. 9,000 governor positions, including 716 DE governors. There are around 11,000 governors in all grant-aided schools.

8.2.8 Review of **School Governance** - Considering how current governance policy and its operational delivery can better support the provision of effective boards in schools. Stakeholder engagement informed high-level themes including recruitment, and learning and development, approved by the DE Board. Progress to date has included a new DE governor application form with updated skills approved by the former Minister; new online portal for DE governor applications; updated publication of the governor guide; and policy considerations including governor training, two-terms rule and governor vetting.

Financial support for the childcare sector during COVID-19

8.2.9 Approximately £40m emergency funding was provided to support the childcare sector from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022 to provide financial assistance to support the sector with COVID-19 temporary closures and sustainability issues. The sector has called for similar support to be made available again to assist with the current cost of living pressures. They have been advised that this is not feasible within the current budgetary context.

Industrial Relations – Teaching & Non-teaching staff

8.2.10 The current inflationary and cost of living pressures are making pay negotiations difficult, as pay awards are governed by affordability and the over-arching Executive Public Sector Pay Policy guidance. This is putting a strain on relations with Trade Unions. Failure to reach agreement on outstanding teachers' pay settlements for 2021, 2022 and 2023 has resulted in the five main teachers' unions, which make up Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) returning to industrial action in the form of Action Short of Strike. This escalated, when four of the unions took a half-day strike action on 21 February 2023 followed by all five unions engaging in a full day strike on 26 April 2023, a further half-day strike on 29 November 2023 and a full day strike on 18 January 2024.

8.2.11 In terms of non-teaching staff, JNC Trade Unions (who represent non-teaching staff) are seeking implementation of the recommendations from a Pay & Grading review, which they have negotiated with the EA. This review aims to address issues with the current grading structure for non-teaching staff and improve the recruitment and retention of employees.

8.2.12 All the JNC Trade Unions are currently in dispute with the EA over progress with the Pay & Grading review. UNISON, UNITE the UNION, NIPSA and GMB members all commenced Action Short of Strike measures in October / November 2023, and this will continue as part of the ongoing dispute. The major impact to date of the Action Short of Strike measures has been in cleaning and catering services, and classroom assistants in all schools. The impact on children with SEN has been greater.

8.2.13 In addition, Unite the Union undertook two-day strike action commencing 15 November and had a further day's strike on 1 December; UNISON and GMB members participated in a full day strike action on 16 November; and NIPSA implemented a 2-hour stoppage from their members' normal start time on 16 November.

8.2.14 Due to the large number of staff involved, the industrial action caused significant disruption. It resulted in a large number of school closures or partial closures (with Special Schools particularly impacted) and disruption to EA home to school transport (yellow bus), school meals and cleaning services. The strike action also had a major impact on the availability of Classroom Assistants in schools.

EA Pay & Grading Review for non-teaching staff

8.2.15 A business case was submitted to the Department on 6 February 2023 seeking funding to implement a Pay & Grading review of NJC non-teaching grades. This proposes a single pay and grading structure for EA staff, which includes a higher starting salary for lower paid staff; standardised pay scales; and an increase in the pay differential between supervisors and entry level staff.

8.2.16 The cost of these changes is estimated at c.£40.4m and this would be a recurring salary cost. In addition, the proposed changes to the scales would result in a significant increase in incremental progression costs, estimated at c.£10m each year for the next three years. This means that the final recurring cost of the preferred option would rise to £71.4m after three years and remain at that level thereafter.

8.2.17 The above estimate is for EA staff only. However, it is likely that the proposed changes would have a repercussive impact on VG/GMI schools as they currently follow broadly the same grading arrangements as the EA. There is also a risk that trade unions from other Education Sector ALBs, such as CCEA and CCMS, will take action aimed at implementing changes to the NJC grading structures in their organisations.

8.2.18 Given the significant cost associated with this business case and the potential for it to have a repercussive effect on other organisations, there was significant work involved in reviewing this business case. However, a revised business case containing additional evidence and reworked costings was submitted by the EA at the end of November 2023. Departmental officials have reviewed this and concluded that the case demonstrates a real need for change. It was therefore

submitted to DoF on 7 December 2023.

8.2.19 It is not possible to provide a timescale for when DoF will finish their review of the business case or when the changes might be implemented. However, it is clear that a significant increase to the education budget is required to enable the changes to be implemented.

8.2.20 It should be noted that the Pay & Grading review is separate to the annual pay increase for non-teaching staff. On 1 November 2023 the NJC Pay award was agreed for 2023-24. This award increases each pay point on the NJC scale by £1,925 or a minimum of 3.88% and will be backdated to 1 April 2023. The average increase for non-teaching staff in Northern Ireland is 8.1%.

TEACHERS AND WORKFORCE ISSUES

Teachers' Pay and Industrial Action by Teacher Unions

8.2.21 As the Department of Education (DE) is not the employer of teachers, Teachers' terms & conditions, including pay are negotiated through the forum of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) which includes representatives from the teachers' employers, sectoral bodies and DE on Management Side and the five recognised teachers' unions in NI on Teachers' Side. Although DE is represented, it is not responsible for the management of TNC.

8.2.22 The annual teachers' pay bill is £1.3bn (approx. 49% of the total education budget). The Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) submitted a pay claim for a 6% uplift to all salaries and allowances from 1 September 2021; the pay claim also included a claim for enhanced Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Assisted Pregnancy Leave for teachers. This follows a pay uplift in May 2021 salaries of 2% from 1 September 2019 and a further 2% from 1 September 2020. The previous pay award of 2.25% from 2017 and 2% from 2018, which exceeded the Public Sector Pay Policy limit of 1%, led to the ending of the previous teachers' long-running industrial action (action short of strike).

8.2.23 At a meeting of the NITC on Monday 7 February 2022, Management Side made a formal offer of a two-year pay deal from 1 September 2021 worth c.3.2%, which involved the removal of the bottom point of the current teachers' main pay scale and the addition of a further point at the top of the scale. A similar approach would have been applied to the Leadership Group that is, an additional point at the top of each pay range and the bottom point removed.

8.2.24 At a meeting of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) on Wednesday 16 February 2022, the NITC advised that it was rejecting the pay offer citing that it was inadequate; didn't reflect the current inflationary situation or pending national insurance increases; and didn't take into account the work that its members had done during the pandemic.

8.2.25 Management Side advised that due to pay policy restrictions, the maximum offer that could be made was a one-year deal of a 1% revalorisation increase on all

scale points plus contractual incremental progression of 0.8%. However, it was made clear by the NITC that, in its view, the offer was not significant enough and did not represent a substantial improvement on the previous offer.

8.2.26 While both sides have continued to engage in the pay discussions since then, NASUWT balloted its members encouraging them to vote for strike action and action short of strike. The NASUWT commenced continuous action short of strike on Monday 9 May 2022, followed soon after by NEU, UTU, INTO and NAHT. Action short of strike continues and has escalated. Four of the unions took a half-day strike action on 21 February 2023, all five unions engaged in a full-day strike on 26 April 2023, a further half-day strike on 29 November 2023, and a full day strike on 18 January 2024 with 3 other days of strike action announced (dates yet to be confirmed).

8.2.27 Public sector pay policy requires that a pay offer can only be made if it is affordable within the allocated budget. Regrettably therefore, Management Side has been unable to offer teachers a pay award for the past 3 years as it is simply unaffordable within the existing budget settlement.

8.2.28 There are approximately 20,000 full-time equivalent teachers in grant-aided schools - Teacher workforce statistics 2022/23 | Department of Education (education-ni.gov.uk)

- The median salary of a teacher is £41,094 (note this is the Upper Pay Scale 3 figure at Sept 2020).
- The overall pay bill for the teaching workforce is approximately £1.3b.
- A pay rise of 1% for teachers equates to £12.5m.
- A pay rise of 5% for teachers equates to £62m.
- The teachers' unions, (NITC) are requesting a pay rise over the 3 years of circa 30% which equates to almost £400m per annum.
- The Department is not in a position to meet these demands and remain within Public Sector Pay Policy or the budget allocated by the Secretary of State.
- A pay increase for teachers of 1% in 2021 (in line with NI Public Sector Pay Policy limits), 5% in 2022 and 6.5% in 2023 (in line with the equivalent increase for teachers in England) would have a recurring annual cost of £170m.
- The Department will not be able to meet this cost without a significant increase to the education budget.
- The current inflationary and cost of living pressures are making pay negotiations extremely difficult, as pay awards are governed by affordability

and the over-arching NI Executive Public Sector Pay Policy guidance. This is putting a strain on relations with Trade Unions.

Replacement of Teachers' Payroll System

8.2.29 A new Teachers' Payroll system supplied by Fujitsu, was successfully introduced in November 2023 for all permanent teachers paid by DE. The new system has been introduced for the temporary teachers' payroll in February 2024.

Replacement of Teachers' Pension System

8.2.30 A new Teachers' Pension System, supplied by Civica, was introduced in November 2020, having been delayed from April 2020 due to COVID-19. The second phase of the project saw the launch of an on-line portal for pensioner and active members in early 2023 with an employers' portal to follow by the end of March 2023. The Project has now been officially closed following successful delivery.

Workforce Review Project

8.2.31 In April 2020, the TNC ratified the Teachers' Pay and Workload Agreement 2017-19 ending the previous long-running teachers' industrial dispute. In addition to a two-year pay deal, the Agreement committed parties to a number of upfront asks and, critically, to undertaking reviews across nine areas to address teacher concerns about workload and accountability and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system.

8.2.32 The Department funded (c£1m) the Workforce Review Project to progress the reviews in a collaborative manner with the employing authorities, sectoral support bodies and teacher unions over a two-year period. By project end (March 2023), all eight reviews progressed under the project were considered and agreed by the Project's Oversight Group as being sufficiently developed to progress to TNC for its consideration. The ninth review involves a DE-led Review of Statutory Assessment at Key Stages 1-3 and requires additional resources in the form of a dedicated, experienced team. This review is being progressed outside the framework of the Workforce Review Project with the agreement of all parties.

8.2.33 The NITC view the reviews as a once in a generation opportunity to review teachers' terms and conditions and continue to link ongoing workload concerns to current pay discussions. Management envisaged efficiency savings would be realised from at least one review on the use of temporary and supply teachers and the business case for the pay element of the Agreement was predicated on the delivery of efficiencies to support the recurrent costs. However to date, NITC have refused to agree to any of the savings proposals presented.

8.2.34 During the course of the reviews all member unions of NITC returned to industrial action including strike action. In light of the industrial action, NITC's non-agreement to savings proposals and the restrictive budgetary position; implementation of review outcomes will be extremely challenging.

Northern Ireland Teachers' Pensions Scheme-Transitional Protection Arrangements (McCloud Remedy)

8.2.35 Changes to Public Sector Pension Schemes, including the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme, arose from claims made by several judges and firefighters (McCloud and Sargeant cases) in the Employment Tribunal on the grounds that the transitional protection offered to older members when schemes were reformed in 2015, which meant they remained in their old pension schemes (Final Salary), was discriminatory. The Court of Appeal in GB ruled that transitional protection gave rise to unlawful discrimination.

8.2.36 The government accepted the Court of Appeal's judgment and consulted on two options (immediate choice or deferred choice underpin) to remedy the discrimination. In response to consultation, HM Treasury confirmed that the government would proceed with the deferred choice underpin approach meaning all eligible members are members of their legacy scheme for the period between 01 April 2015 and 31 March 2022, known as the remedy period. The DoF consultation, which closed on 18 November 2020, determined the way forward for NI schemes. The DoF response to consultation, published on 25 February 2021, confirmed that there will be no divergence from the GB approach.

8.2.37 Regulations to introduce the first (prospective) part of the McCloud remedy for NI Teachers' Pension Scheme (NITPS) came into operation on 01 April 2022 and ensured the closure of the legacy scheme (final salary) to future accrual from this date and that all active members currently in the legacy scheme moved into the reformed scheme (Career Average Revalued Earnings/CARE) scheme from 01 April 2022. NITPS have successfully implemented these regulations.

8.2.38 Regulations to introduce the second (retrospective) part of the remedy for NITPS came into operation on 01 October 2023 will addressing the difference in treatment that occurred between 01 April 2015 to 31 March 2022. Affected members will have the option to take pension built up during this "remedy period" on either a final salary or career average benefits basis. NITPS have successfully implemented these regulations.

8.2.39 The McCloud Team, based in Waterside House, has been set up and the recruitment of additional staff is ongoing as a priority. The team have identified all eligible members subject to remedy and appropriate action to cleanse the data held on the system is ongoing. The team have developed numerous manual processes and are working alongside the system provider to develop the required system change requests.

Northern Ireland Teachers' Pensions Scheme - Equalisation of Survivor Benefits (Goodwin)

8.2.40 DE intends to launch a consultation, at the earliest opportunity, regarding legislation to equalise survivor benefits within NITPS. The consultation process will determine the appropriate date of retrospection for the provisions. This issue is common across Public Service pension schemes and requires remedy.

The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (FETO)

8.2.41 The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO) is the responsibility of the Executive Office (TEO). FETO made it unlawful to discriminate against an individual on the grounds of their religious belief or political opinion in employment and training. However, this did not apply to employment as a teacher in a school (Article 71 "the teachers' exception").

8.2.42 TEO approached the Department in October 2020, and TEO officials agreed to propose a political discussion, to include the TEO and DE SPADs, to secure firm, cross party support.

8.2.43 On 16 April 2021, Chris Lyttle MLA (and Chair of the Education Committee) launched a public consultation on proposals for a Private Member's Bill to "to tackle the exclusion of teaching from fair employment legislation".

8.2.44 Following accelerated passage before the end of the Assembly mandate, the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Bill completed its passage through the Assembly on 24 March 2022.

8.2.45 The Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act (NI) 2022 will come into operation on 12 May 2024 and will remove the remaining part of the exception for school teachers that currently exists under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO).

8.2.46 It will be unlawful to discriminate on these grounds in respect of **all aspects** of the employment of teachers in schools in Northern Ireland, including **recruitment and selection for promotion.** In addition, the recruitment and employment of school teachers will come within the scope of the fair employment employer duties e.g. the monitoring of job applicants and employees by community background.

8.2.47 Employing Authorities (EA and CCMS) will be required to review their recruitment and selection procedures, ensuring that they address the implications of fair employment legislation.

8.2.48 Through the Teachers' Negotiation Committee (TNC) a Fair Employment Working Group has been established to consider the implications of the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act (NI) 2022 to ensure there is a co-ordinated implementation of this legislation. DE is represented on this working group.

8.2.49 The Equality Commission has published guidance for schools which may be downloaded from the Commission's website: School Teachers – A Guide on Recruitment and Selection.

THE GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND (GTCNI)

8.2.50 GTCNI Interim Sponsorship Team (GIST) is the sponsor branch for GTCNI and act as the key point of interaction between GTCNI and the Department.

8.2.51 The Council is currently funded by means of an annual fee of £44 charged to all registered teachers and an individual must hold GTCNI registration before they can be employed as a teacher in any NI grant-aided school.

8.2.52 Under current statute, oversight, accountability and strategic direction for GTCNI should be delivered by a governing Council comprised of 33 members, comprising elected teacher representatives, nominated members from the Teaching Unions, Employing Authorities and other significant educational stakeholders. The Department nominates four Council members selected under a Public Appointments process.

8.2.53 The GTCNI Council suffered for a considerable time from poor internal working relationships, factionalisation and a lack of trust among its members. These behaviours resulted in ineffective decision making, inadequate adherence to normal NDPB governance practices and unsatisfactory audit reports since the problems were first highlighted in 2015. This led to DE placing the organisation into special measures on two occasions (Dec 2015-Sept 2017, Nov 2019-present) and to the Department commissioning several organisational and effectiveness reviews of its operation (2015, 2017 and 2021).

8.2.54 Special Measures included enhanced oversight of all of the body's normal NDPB governance processes; and the establishment of additional monthly oversight meetings between the Department, the Chair, Vice Chair and Chief Executive of GTCNI; alongside the highly unusual step of DE observers attending all GTCNI Council and Committee meetings. Despite this enhanced scrutiny, there was a continued lack of progress in addressing the findings of the first two reviews and a further deterioration of working relationships within the Council. Last reconstituted in October 2019, by December 2021, over a third of its members had resigned or been withdrawn by their nominating body, with many complaining to the Department about bullying and repeated personal attacks on their character and integrity.

8.2.55 Against this background, the (then) Minister of Education, Peter Weir MLA, decided that a further Independent Board Effectiveness Review should be commissioned to examine the operation of GTCNI's Council and Committees. The contract for this work was awarded to Baker Tilly Mooney Moore (BTMM), a company with extensive experience in this area. In November 2021, BTMM reported that they had found deep-seated failures and fractured working

relationships within GTCNI's Council and leadership structures. They concluded that these were so entrenched that there was no prospect of restoring the Council, in its current form, to any reasonable standard of operation. BTMM recommended that GTCNI should be dissolved and replaced; and that in light of its severe dysfunctionality, GTCNI's Council should be stood down immediately. The full report is available upon request.

8.2.56 The (then) Minister of Education, Michelle McIlveen MLA, accepted BTMM's report and recommendations, announcing her decisions to the NI Assembly on 13 December 2021 and committing DE to a public consultation on what, if anything, should replace GTCNI. To protect the delivery of GTCNI's statutory duty to keep and maintain the register of teachers qualified to work in NI, she also decided that GTCNI's staff team would continue to operate under direct DE oversight until such times as legislation could be brought forward to close GTCNI and transfer its functions to a suitable replacement. In support of this position, when GTCNI's Chief Executive Officer left the organisation in May 2022, DE appointed a Departmental official (at G6 level) to act as interim CEO until the planned dissolution and replacement of GTCNI can be completed.

8.2.57 The Minister's authority to make these decisions rested on a previously unused legal power and, as an additional safeguard against a successful legal challenge to her actions (potentially leading to a reinstatement of the Council), DE successfully brought forward the **General Teaching Council (Directions) Bill** giving it authority to direct a restored Council in the conduct of its business, should the need arise.

8.2.58 The sponsor branch undertook the promised public consultation on what should replace GTCNI from 13 June until 30 September 2022. Due to the low level of responses received, a second attempt to engage with the profession was undertaken from 24 February to 28 April 2023. Responses rates were again low, nonetheless, analysing the replies received showed most considered a professional body for teachers to be necessary, that all teachers should be required to belong to such a body, that all of GTCNI's statutory functions directly supported the quality of teaching in NI and should be maintained. A majority of respondents however considered that teachers should not be expected to pay to belong to a professional body.

8.2.59 Following analysis of these responses and subsequent engagement with all UK and Irish teaching regulators, GIST has developed high level proposals for the establishment of a replacement body for GTCNI. Further engagement with the profession to gauge their reaction to these proposals is being planned for early 2024 and this will provide a clear basis on which Ministerial and NI Executive approval to legislate can be secured; permitting the drafting of a GTCNI replacement Bill to commence. This timescale would permit legal drafting to complete and the required public consultation on the draft Bill to occur during 2024-25, with its introduction to the Assembly occurring shortly thereafter.

EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGY & CHILDCARE

EXECUTIVE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE (ELC) STRATEGY

8.2.60 The Childcare Unit leads on the development of the Executive's Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Strategy and managing the Bright Start School Age Grant Scheme, delivered on behalf of DE by the Department of Health.

8.2.61 The previous Education Minister made a Written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 7 September 2022 providing an update on the ongoing work to develop an Executive ELC Strategy, including a proposal to offer every child in their pre-school year a minimum of 22.5 hours pre-school education per week as a core component of any early learning and childcare provision. There are several reviews which will inform the Strategy including the recently completed 'Review of Childcare Services in NI' and a review on early years targeted interventions. Most recently, the Independent Review of Education contained the following recommendations for Early Years:

- '**Expand early years education**- The early years offer a unique learning opportunity for all children. Increased investment early years will extend access and improve quality, enabling early diagnosis and intervention in cases of difficulty. Early childhood health and education needs should be met through an integrated service. There should be phased expansion of early years education. First steps should ensure that all 2-years-olds receive up to 20 hours per week and all 3-year-olds up to 22.5 hours per week. Priority should be given to 2-year-olds and those in disadvantage. The approach to expansion will be for the Department but could include extension of the scope of Sure Start and/or the provision of funded pre-school education for 2-year-olds.
- **Give additional support to allow parents to get back into work**- To support disadvantaged families seeking work and boost the economy, DE should work with other departments to prepare affordable plans for expanded childcare provision, taking account of both family economic circumstances and the stage of child development. Funding options could involve a means-tested sliding scale of charges.'

8.2.62 DE has also appointed consultants to carry out a scoping study on the state of readiness of the pre-school providers to transition to the delivery of the 22.5 hours pre-school per week for all children aged 3-4. In addition to the reviews there has been significant engagement with the early years and childcare sector and other NICS Departments through an established Stakeholder Engagement Forum and early Learning and Childcare Programme Board. The childcare team have also recently held a number of bi-lateral meetings with political parties to establish their views. The information from these sources is being used to inform the development of high-level costed options for Ministerial and Executive consideration.

EARLY YEARS & PRE-SCHOOL

Early Years Policy

8.2.63 Learning to Learn – a policy framework for early years education and learning was published in 2013 and remains the Department's extant early years policy. A refresh of Learning to Learn was planned to be completed in 2021. However, given the overlap between some areas of early years education and childcare, a decision was taken to pause this policy refresh pending further development of an Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy. A planned internal evaluation of Learning to Learn will be completed and any relevant findings from this will inform the development of an Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy (described above).

Pre-School Admissions

8.2.64 The Department aims to provide one year of funded pre-school education in their target pre-school year for every child whose parents want it.

8.2.65 Socially Disadvantaged Circumstances Criterion: DE currently has a legislative admissions criterion that requires all pre-schools to prioritise children whose parents are in receipt of certain Welfare payments (Pre-School Education in Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations (NI) 1999). Consultation in 2021 showed that overall there is no longer support for the indefinite retention of a statutory priority criterion, however, there is a lack of consensus in regard to when this change should happen, with many stakeholders strongly asserting that progress on this issue should be made in the context of standardisation of pre-school sessions. The former Minister decided to retain the current criterion and revisit in the context of standardisation in due course.

8.2.66 Standardisation: Pre-School education places are currently provided through a mixed model of full-time (min 4.5hrs per day) and part-time (min 2.5hrs per day) sessions. Approximately 40% of current provision is offered on a full-time basis. The Fair Start Report published in June 2021 included an action recommending that DE should standardise the length of the pre-school education day to at least 4.5 hours per day, including access to free school meals for eligible children. It is the aim therefore to standardise the pre-school session length in line with this action, subject to budget being secured.

8.2.67 Work on standardisation will be taken forward in the context of the development of the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy. A pilot "Amalgamation for Standardisation" was launched in Autumn 2022 to facilitate the introduction of new full-time pre-school classes (by amalgamating two part-time classes into one full-time class) in a small number of schools where enrolment patterns suggested over provision. Six schools have made the change under the pilot to date decreasing the number of part-time pre-school places by a total of 364 and increasing the number of full-time places by 182 effective September 2024. A further three eligible pre-school settings have indicated their interest to implement similar changes under the pilot with effect from September 2025 but would

require financial support to do so. A number of settings that are not eligible under the current pilot have also indicated their interest in providing full time pre-school provision as soon as resource is made available.

8.2.68 A detailed scoping study commenced in March 2023 to accurately assess the costs and implications of standardisation of the full pre-school education programme and set out a realistic implementation timeline. It is due to report early in 2024. Ultimately, Executive agreement and approval will be required on significant policy decisions, including a commitment to the overall budget required for childcare and the standardisation of pre-school sessions.

8.2.69 Pre-School Admissions Process: Stage One of the pre-school admissions process opened for applications on 9 January. Parents who applied for a funded pre-school education place will be notified of the outcome of their applications on 25 April. Stage Two of the process will commence on 25 April with parents notified of the outcomes of applications on 11 June 2024. Applications received late in Stage One and any new applications together with underage applications will be considered in Stage Two. Each year between 21,000 and 22,000 pre-school applications are received from parents and the application process is now mainly carried out online with parents also able to upload evidence documents digitally. An update on the outcomes of the admissions process will be provided.

8.2.70 The School Age (NI) Act 2022 permits parents of children born between 1st April and 1st July (and children whose due date was on or after 1st April but who were born early) to defer their entry to pre-school and in turn primary school by 12 months. Children will only be prioritised as target age for pre-school admissions on one occasion. If a child attends government funded pre-school in the year after their third birthday, and their parents subsequently decide they wish to defer entry to Year 1 of primary school, they will have the option to apply for a second funded pre-school year. They will not, however, be prioritised as target age children within the admissions process for a second time. Detailed guidance on deferral has been provided to the EA and parents.

Sure Start Programme

8.2.71 *Geographical coverage:* Expansion of Sure Start to the 25% most disadvantaged NI areas applied the extant government deprivation measure i.e NI Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010. Prior to NIMDM, Sure Start had expanded based on other need factors. A subsequent NIMDM issued end 2017 - if applied to current geographical coverage, 22 Super Output areas (SOAs) fall within the 25% most disadvantaged areas but are currently not within a Sure Start catchment area. 153 SOAs are in Sure Start coverage but not within 25% most disadvantaged areas per NIMDM 2017. Additional funding (£1.56m in 2021/22, £1.61m in 2022/23 and 2023/24) was allocated to temporarily expand 17 of the existing 38 Sure Start projects to include the 22 SOAs, until a Ministerial decision can be taken on the way forward. Sure Start projects have advised of significant constraints in expanding to the 22 SOAs due to uncertainty around the temporary nature of the funding. Continuation of funding for the 22 areas will take account of the findings of a recent review of Sure Start which included examination of

Sure Start geographical coverage (see below). Currently, Sure Start services are available to all (around 41,500) children aged 0-3 years and their families living within the catchment areas (41,500 includes the temporary expansion areas which offer services to around 2,500 children and families). The review (see next paragraph) estimates that around 48%[11] of Sure Start age children in NI can avail of Sure Start services.

8.2.72 Review of DE Targeted Early Years Interventions: An independent review of DE targeted Early Years interventions, including Sure Start, the Pathway Fund and Toybox project has recently completed; Ipsos UK were appointed via competitive tender to undertake the Review. Findings may have implications for future policy and delivery of the targeted interventions, subject to your consideration.

8.2.73 Policy responsibility: the (former) Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) which administers Sure Start on behalf of DE, transferred to DoH (as the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG)) from 1 April 2022. This transfer may impact future policy and oversight arrangements for the Sure Start programme and is considered within the above-mentioned review of targeted intervention. Sure Start administration also features in a DoH review of children's social care services which was published in June 2023. Policy responsibility for Sure Start had transferred from DoH to DE in 2006.

8.2.74 Budgets: Sure Start budget allocation for 2023-24 remained as for 2022-23. DoH has cited significant pressures in maintaining 2022-23 levels of service without an uplift, together with significant increases in the levels and complexity of additional need presenting within Sure Start.

Expert panel on Educational Underachievement – Early Years

8.2.75 The Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement's report 'A Fair Start' was published on 1 June 2021. One of the key areas identified by the panel is 'Redirecting the focus to Early Years'. It recommended 13 actions to strengthen early years services, including: providing support to all pre-school education settings; developing the workforce; development of a programme for 2 year olds; reviewing staff:child ratios; better collaboration between Education and Health; development of the 'Getting Ready' suite of programmes aimed at engaging parents in their child's development; improving support to children with Special Educational Needs. **The estimated cost of implementing these actions was £49.7m (2021). Full implementation is subject to securing a budget.**

8.2.76 Close collaboration with Health is required on a number of the early years actions, and a steering group with representatives from DE, EA, and DoH has been established to take these forward.

8.2.77 A number of the early years actions continue to be progressed in 2023/24: support to children born prematurely; standardisation of the pre-school offer; a South Belfast Sure Start Ltd (SBSS) Pilot programme supporting Roma children

[11] IPSOS figures are based on NISRA mid-term population estimates.

from pregnancy to age 6; and expansion of the EA's Early Years SEN Inclusion Service. Actions to be funded, including continuance of current projects, in 2024/25 are subject to the Fair Start Programme Board consideration and budget confirmation.

Getting Ready to Learn

8.2.78 The Getting Ready to Learn (GRtL) programme aims to support pre-school settings to engage with parents to establish and maintain positive home learning environments and to become more involved in their child's overall development. It is one of a suite of 'Getting Ready' programmes. The other two 'Getting Ready for Baby' and 'Getting Ready for Toddler' are led by Health.

8.2.79 GRtL commenced in 2016/17 as one of the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) projects under the Delivering Social Change programme. Whilst EITP funding ended in 2018/19, the Department decided to mainstream the programme at a reduced funding level of £500k per annum. GRtL continues to run successfully with 77% of pre-school education settings participating in the programme in 2022/23.

3+ Review

8.2.80 Getting Ready for Toddler, now know at the '3+ Review' commenced in 2016/17 under the Early Intervention Transformation Programme as a joint initiative between Health and Education. This a developmental review of pre-school children carried out by the Health Visitor in collaboration with the pre-school education setting, which aims to support the child's development, and where necessary, ensure appropriate referral to support services at an early stage.

8.2.81 In the 2022/23 academic year, four out of the five Health Trusts delivered the 3+ Review, one was unable to do so due to workforce challenges. 100% roll out of the 3+ Review is planned across all five Health Trust areas for the 2023/24 academic year.

8.2.82 Subject to agreement with TEO, it is proposed that the data on children's development collected during the 3+ Review is the data source for the draft Programme for Government indicator '% of children at appropriate stage of development in their immediate pre-school year'. Discussions are ongoing with statisticians and DoH in relation to this measure.

Irish Medium Pre-school Support Service

8.2.83 There are currently 45 funded Irish-medium pre-schools, 19 statutory and 26 non-statutory with 892 funded places (in 2022/23).

8.2.84 Delivery of quality IM pre-school education requires settings to have specific skills and experience including in early years, immersion education pedagogy, delivery of the pre-school curriculum through the medium of Irish and Irish language competence. Support provided through the English medium support services does not cover all of these areas, and therefore a bespoke support service is required to ensure quality in the IM pre-school sector.

8.2.85 DE funds Altram for an Irish-medium pre-school support service at a cost of £158K per annum. This support service is primarily Early Years Specialist support and training to the staff and management committees of all IM pre-school settings; development of advice, guidance, and resources; and representation of the IM pre-school sector. A contract between CnaG and Altram ended in July 2023 with Altram funded directly for the IM pre-school support service from August 2023 via grant allocation.

EXECUTIVE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRATEGY 2020-2030

Children's Services Co-Operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

8.2.86 The aim of the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 (CSCA) is to improve co-operation between named Children's Authorities and between the Children's Authorities and other children's service providers who provide a children's service or are engaged in activities which contribute to improving the well-being of children and young people. The CSCA requires the first report on the operation of the Act be prepared not more than 18 months after the date the Executive adopts the Children and Young Peoples Strategy. A draft report has been prepared and was due to be considered by the Executive in June 2022. Given the lack of a functioning Executive this could not take place. The draft report will be brought forward for your initial consideration before it is submitted to the Executive.

Children And Young People's Strategy 2020-2030

8.2.87 The Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS) was approved by the Executive on 10 December 2020. The CYPS is the strategic framework underpinning the PfG outcomes through which all departments improve children's well-being.

8.2.88 Following approval from the Executive the first NICS 3-year draft Delivery Plan was published for a public consultation on 13 January 2022. The consultation concluded on the 25 March 2022 and the consultation report which summarises the views expressed by stakeholders was published on 6 December 2022.

8.2.89 Feedback from the consultation will be used in conjunction with the findings or lessons learnt from the publication of the first report to the Executive on the operation of the CSCA to provide a baseline for informing next steps and to support the implementation of the CYPS including updates to the Delivery Plan.

8.2.90 The baseline referred to will also inform the wider monitoring and reporting systems which will support the operation of the CYPS.

8.2.91 As a first step, Dr Mark Browne, Permanent Secretary for the Department of Education (DE), recently wrote to Permanent Secretary colleagues to establish a CYPS Monitoring and Reporting Board seeking departmental representation at Deputy Secretary level. The purpose of the Board is to provide collaborative leadership, oversight and cross-departmental strategic direction on the co-ordination of all policy matters affecting children and young people. The Board is chaired by Ronnie Armour, Deputy Secretary, Head of Resources, Governance and Early Years. The first meeting of the Board took place on 7 December 2023.

8.2.92 A stocktake of progress made to date against the CYPS NICS Delivery Plan 2021 - 2024 was also recently commissioned. The stocktake seeks to identify how actions initially put forward by departments have progressed and an indication of where any have ceased or been scaled back because of budget or other pressures/priorities. Findings were presented at the first meeting of the CYPS Monitoring and Reporting Board in December 2023 and will be brought to you in due course.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 2021 Reporting Exercise

8.2.93 The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) issued its List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR) in March 2021. The United Kingdom (UK) Government reports periodically (broadly on a six year cycle) to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child about the UK's progress in implementing the UNCRC.

8.2.94 The Department of Education (DE) coordinated the UNCRC reporting process on behalf of the NI Executive. The UK State Party Sixth and Seventh Periodic Report, in response to the LOIPR, was submitted to the UN Committee in June 2022. This included responses from NI departments.

8.2.95 The UN Committee held its 'Constructive Dialogue' on 18 and 19 May 2023 with the UKG. The UK delegation, comprising of senior officials representing England, Scotland, Wales, NI, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories, responded to a range of issues relating to children's rights. NI was represented by Paul Brush (DE) and Ryan Wilson (Department of Health).

8.2.96 The Committee published its Concluding Observations on 2 June 2023. In the absence of an Executive, we have not sought views from departments on whether or how they would intend to address the various recommendations made, as a number would require Ministerial and/ or Executive consideration. We will, in due course, bring forward proposals on next steps for consideration by yourself and Executive colleagues.

8.2.97 DE officials are currently engaging with counterparts across UKG to discuss the mechanics of future monitoring, potentially within a national reporting approach. However, this would be subject to further discussion and Executive or cross-departmental agreement.

Participation Project

8.2.98 One of the key aims of the Executive Children and Young People's Strategy 2020 – 2030 is to ensure the voice of children and young people is heard and acted upon across government. DE officials are currently working in partnership with Education Authority (EA), Youth Services staff and NICS Departments to take forward a 'Young People's Participation in Decision Making' project. The project aims to establish an inclusive network supporting children and young people to provide their views on policy development and decision making which impact on their lives. Options for this are currently being considered and will be brought forward in due course for Ministerial consideration.

Play

8.2.99 The Children and Young People's Strategy Team has responsibility for the Executive Play and Leisure Policy Statement, in addition to this the team acts as the sponsor branch for PlayBoard NI who are part funded by DE. The enjoyment of play and leisure is one of the eight outcomes of well-being detailed in the Children and Young People's Strategy and PlayBoard NI support play policy work both in education and across government. During the pandemic, PlayBoard NI were allocated Covid Recovery funding to promote the importance and improvement of outdoor play in schools.

8.2.100 One of the UNCRC Concluding Observations relating to rest, leisure, recreation and cultural and artistic activities also highlights the importance of play and similar to the other recommendations will be subject to consideration in due course.

SECTION 8 – SUSTAINABILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE GROUP
Deputy Secretary Heather Cousins (PA Wendy Massey)

8.1 Overview of Directorate

STRULE SHARED EDUCATION CAMPUS

Key Staff

Suzanne Kingon	Director Investment and Infrastructure
Jennifer Morgan	Construction Director (SIB)
[redacted]	Full Business Case Team
[redacted]	Head of Programme Management Office
[redacted]	Joint Head of Business Change Team; Funding and Facilities Management
[redacted]	Joint Head of Business Change Team; Governance and Migration
[redacted]	Education Project Manager (SRO (Interim)/Project Manager (Education Authority)
[redacted]	Communications Manager (SIB)

Key Responsibilities

- The SSEC Programme Directorate is the Contracting Authority responsible for the direct delivery of the SSEC Programme which is one of the Department's top priorities and also a long standing Executive priority.

- The Strule Programme involves significant capital investment into the region's post-primary and special education sectors for the construction of six new schools and associated shared education facilities.

- The Programme is well underway and significant investment (£49m) has already been made with work carried out across many of the individual projects. Phase 1 has been completed and Arvalee Special School opened in 2016.

- The Programme, which is intended to deliver a range of educational, societal and community benefits, includes a number of projects and workstreams taking forward the following key activities:

  - Construction of the remaining five schools and shared facilities;

  - Development of the education model for the Campus;

- Development of arrangements for the ownership, governance, funding and management of the Campus; and

- Considering how best to plan for and manage the future use and/or disposal of the existing sites following relocation.

- As set out in the 'Other Topical Issues' section above, following a Ministerial Direction to progress to the next phase of construction, the Main Works Contract Invitation to Tender concluded on 26 September 2022 with one tender received. Following a Main Works Competitive procedure with Negotiation (CPN) a new tender was received from the bidder on 12 October 2023.

COLLABORATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE DIRECTORATE

James Hutchinson	Director
[redacted]	Head of Integrated Education Act Implementation Team, Climate Change and COVID Inquiry Team
[redacted]	Head of Shared Education and Community Relations Team
[redacted]	Head of Irish Medium and Integrated Education Team

Key Responsibilities

The aim of the directorate is to contribute to the DE vision through encouraging and supporting the development of collaborative practice in the integrated and Irish-medium sectors; and shared education. Through the implementation of the Integrated Education Act the Directorate will oversee a new IE strategy and are currently looking at the results of a public consultation. The directorate is responsible for sponsorship and oversight of two of the Department's NDPBs: NICIE and CnaG. The Directorate is also responsible for the Department's Climate Action Plan (CAP) and delivering the commitments made under the Executive's CAP as well as providing input into the UK wide COVID-19 Public Inquiry.

Shared Education and Community Relations Team

- Responsible for Shared Education and Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy. This includes the development and oversight of the Mainstreaming SE strategy to reflect the requirements of the Shared Education Act (NI) 2016, engagement with SEUPB on closure of SE PEACE IV projects; and the development of the PEACE PLUS Shared Learning Together' programme.

Irish Medium and Integrated Education Team

- Sponsor team for the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and for Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG). Responsible for policy guidance on transformation to integrated status "Integration Works" – currently under review to reflect the requirements of the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and the passage of time since the last publication in 2017.

- IMIE team is co-ordinating the briefing for the current Westminster Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry on integrated education. A Departmental written briefing has been provided and currently an evidence session is scheduled for Tuesday 12 March 2024 at 9.30am at Parliament Buildings. It is

expected that you will be invited to take part in this session – you may choose to be accompanied by the Permanent Secretary if you wish.

Integrated Education Act Implementation Team

- The IE Act implementation team leads effective implementation of the Integrated Education (Northern Ireland) Act 2022. This a short-term task and finish project focused on ensuring Departmental compliance with the Act.

- Initially work has focused on developing, agreeing and setting up governance and project management structures to engage education partners and seeking clarification from DSO on a range of matters within the legislation.

- As required by the legislation, A Strategy for Integrated Education in Northern Ireland and associated Action Plan was published on 26 April 2023.

- A consultation on the Action Plan was launched on 31 August and closed on 30 November 2023. A consultation report is currently being finalised.

- Integrated Education Fund (IEF) challenged the legality of the Strategy and the Action Plan through a Judicial Review. A court review was held on 19 January 2024 where counsel provided an update to the court, emphasising the Department's commitment to the implementation process and noted the Department planned to update the IE Strategy during 2024 on completion of a number of pieces of work.

- Mr Justice Humpries noted the update and queried the value of using court time on the case when a parallel implementation process was running that may provide the IEF with the outcome they sought but recognised there may yet be a role for the court.

- A leave hearing has now been listed for 17 April 2024.

- The Department is required by the legislation to publish a report in Integrated Education by 26 April 2024.

Climate Change Team

- Responsibility for the creation and monitoring of the Department's impact assessments and input in to the Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2023-2027 in accordance with the NICS statutory obligations. Coordinating actions with the Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) to meet the targets set by the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and develop workable solutions within budgetary restraints to allow the reduction of carbon through the curriculum and development of the school estate and transport across the educational sector. Reviewing current policies and seeking alternative solutions to deliver against the first carbon budget.

- Overseeing a series of sectoral plans covering Energy, Transport, Infrastructure, Business& Industrial Processes, Buildings, Waste Management, Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry, Fisheries and Public Sector.

- The Department has identified four of the sectors Transport, Buildings, Waste Management and Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry which it can contribute to and encompasses current policies with significant input from the Education Authority and other ALBs to Department lead initiatives.

COVID Inquiry Team

- The commencement of the UK COVID Public Inquiry legislatively requires the Department and its ALBs to provide written and/or oral evidence to the Public Inquiry. The COVID Inquiry Team was established within the Department to ensure the Department's contribution is effectively co-ordinated with suitable corporate governance structures in place.

- While the Department's response to COVID continues to evolve to becoming "business as usual", the team retains aspects of oversight going forward in terms of the provision of any necessary central guidance to educational settings based upon public health advice.

INVESTMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE DIRECTORATE

Key Staff

Suzanne Kingon	Director
[redacted]	Deputy Director (Major Capital Implementation Team / Estate Operations Team)
[redacted]	Deputy Director (Fresh Start / School Enhancement/Asset Management Programmes)
[redacted]	Head of Major Capital Implementation Team (Acting)
[redacted]	Head of Estate Operations Team
[redacted]	Head of School Enhancement Programme Team
[redacted]	Head of Fresh Start and Shared Education Campus Team
[redacted]	Head of Estate Policy and Financial Management Team
[redacted]	Head of Asset Management Team

Key Responsibilities

Investment and Infrastructure Directorate (IID) is responsible for management of the Department's capital budget and delivery of the Department's capital investment plan (excluding the Strule Shared Education Campus Programme). The key responsibilities are:

- Management and delivery of the key capital programmes:
  - Major works;
  - School Enhancement Programme;
  - Fresh Start Programme;
  - Minor works schemes;
  - Management of voluntary youth capital projects; and

- Monitoring the capital budgetary position, including capital receipts.

- Asset Management:
  - Department's Asset Management Plan;
  - Oversight of the existing Public Private Partnership contracts;
  - Monitoring of the resource budget for schools' maintenance; and
  - Grant claw-back from surplus sites in non-controlled sectors.

TRANSPORT AND FOOD IN SCHOOLS DIRECTORATE

Key Staff

Margaret Rose McNaughton	Director
[redacted]	Head of Transport and Food Poverty Team
	Head of Food in Schools Team
	Head of School Uniform Policy Team

Key Responsibilities

The Transport and Food in Schools Directorate, working in cooperation with Departments, agencies and stakeholders, is responsible for:

- Policy responsibility for free school meals; boarding and clothing allowances (school uniform grants).

- A review into eligibility criteria for free school meals and uniform grant is in progress that is considering options for increasing the number of pupils able to access these supports.

- Support and coordination of DE contribution to DfC led Anti-poverty Strategy including contributing to any future work on a long term sustainable solution to help children in poverty during school holiday periods.

- Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs). A cross-departmental policy review of EMA is in progress, led by Department of the Economy, to consider the administration and the management of the scheme and to ascertain if it is still fit for purpose and meeting the key policy objectives of enabling young people from low- income backgrounds to stay on in full time education.

- Food in schools policy and school meals policy, including nutritional standards.

- Elective Home Education.

- DE School uniform guidance. The Department has been conducting a review of school uniform policy. A consultation document is being prepared setting out a number of options for policy change. It is anticipated that all of the options will require Primary Legislation.

- Policy responsibility for home to school transport.

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS POLICY AND PLANNING DIRECTORATE

Key Staff

Eamonn Broderick	Director (Acting)
[redacted]	Head of School Admissions Team
	Head of Area Planning Policy Team East
	Head of Area Planning Policy Team North Region
Vacant	Head of Area Planning Policy Team South West Region
[redacted]	Head of Area Planning Development Team

Key Responsibilities

School Admissions Team

- School Admissions Team (SAT) sets admissions and enrolment numbers annually for primary and post-primary schools. It also oversees the EA operation of the primary school admissions and post-primary transfer processes.

- SAT is also responsible for policy development relating to admissions and enrolment processes and providing advice as appropriate to schools, parents and the EA; making determinations on temporary variation requests from schools to vary their approved admissions and/or enrolment numbers (for one year) to admit named children; and processing admissions complaints received from parents who are unable to get their children admitted to schools that have places available.

Sustainable Schools Policy and Area Planning Teams (APPTs)

- The Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) aims to ensure that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their educational needs in a school that is educationally and financially viable and takes account of the expressed preference of parents for a diverse system of education. Area Planning is about identifying future education needs and developing solutions to meet those needs on an area basis.

- The planning of education provision is a matter for the EA and CCMS, supported by the sectoral body representatives (NICIE, CnaG, GBA, CSSC, CSTS and TRC).

- Three of the four directorate Area Planning Teams (that is Area Planning Policy Teams (APPT)) support the implementation of Schools of the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools (Sustainable Schools Policy(SSP)) through the development of the Area Planning process, support structures and governance arrangements.

- Area Planning of the school estate across Northern Ireland is broken down into 3 localities by Local Government Districts – this structure is mirrored in the EA and CCMS.

    - **East** - Belfast; Ards and North Down; Lisburn and Castlereagh; Newry Mourne and Down;
    - **North Region** - Antrim & Newtownabbey, Causeway Coast & Glens, Derry & Strabane and Mid & East Antrim.
    - **South and West** – Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, Mid Ulster District, Fermanagh and Omagh

- A significant feature of the work of the APPTs is analysis and provision of advice on published Development Proposals (the mechanism by which significant changes to education provision are implemented). DPs follow a statutory process requiring a decision by the Department (typically the Minister) and many are complex and contentious in nature, with a number challenged through the Judicial Review process.

- The work of the fourth team, the Area Planning Development (APD) Team extends across mainstream primary and post-primary and SEN provisions. It focuses on the identification of barriers and development of solutions (including the development and undertaking of pilot exercises) to facilitate and support the implementation of the SSP through a more agile and responsive Area Planning process.

Geographical Information Services (GIS) – (APPT – North)

- A geographic information system (GIS) is a system that creates, manages, analyses, and maps all types of data. GIS connects data to a map, integrating location data (where things are) with all types of descriptive information (what things are like there). This provides a foundation for mapping and analysis that is used in science and almost every industry and for a variety of uses in everyday life. GIS helps users understand patterns, relationships, and geographic context.

- ArcGIS online (AGOL) is facilitating business improvements within the Department and has enabled more detailed spatial analysis to be undertaken, development of web apps, online dashboards, story maps, interactive PDF maps and pupil travel distances etc. The Department's AGOL environment details school census data and has also provided extra benefits in terms of project management and is being used by other Directorates, policy teams within the Department and the Independent Review of Education. Area Planning Team (APT) has developed numerous applications, dashboards and analysis including a Special Educational Needs (SEN) dashboard for Inclusion Directorate and APT are starting to investigate the use of Survey123 (a GIS embedded survey facility) to help collate information for the DP process as well as acquire information form the school estate.

- Within Area Planning, maps provide a powerful communication tool and evidence-base to aid decision making in terms of accessing the impact a DP may have on nearby schools in the area and in terms of the same or other sectors.

STRULE, RESTART, INVESTMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT & FOOD IN SCHOOLS

8.2 TOPICAL ISSUES

UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY

9.2.1 The UK COVID Public Inquiry was launched on 21 July 2022 by Baroness Hallett, Chair of the Inquiry. The Inquiry has been set up to examine the UK's preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to learn lessons for the future. The Inquiry has been established under the Inquiries Act (2005). This means that the Chair has the power to compel the production of documents and call witnesses to give evidence on oath.

9.2.2 The Inquiry began gathering evidence in August 2022, and is anticipated to formally commence hearings in the Spring of 2023 with an aim to produce a final report in 2025.

9.2.3 To date the Inquiry has launched three of the eleven proposed Modules:

- Module 1 – Resilience and preparedness
- Module 2 – Core UK decision-making: political governance
- Module 2C (Northern Ireland specific)
- Module 3 Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on healthcare systems in the 4 nations of the UK.

9.2.4 Since November 2022 the Department have been involved with Module 2C receiving a Section 9 request for the provision of information in relation to decisions made by the Northern Ireland Executive. The Department have provided the requested information within the Inquiries deadline and have received additional correspondence in relation to clarification of the draft Corporate Statement and requesting further information provided.

9.2.5 The Department is working closely with DSO and have representatives on a cross departmental working group advising other Departments on the requests received and working in collaboration to ensure that the NICS are providing consistent approaches. The Department have established a liaison group consisting of the Departments ALBs.

9.2.6 Former Ministers and officials for the Department may be called to provide witness statements and/or attend hearings to provide evidence. The Department has measures are in place to meet any request in line with the Inquiries directions.

9.2.7 A later Module will focus on Education and this will require additional resources and significant input from Arm's Length Bodies and Directorates across the Department.

CLIMATE CHANGE ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2022

9.2.8 The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 places specific duties on the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in relation to the setting of carbon budgets and the preparation and publication of climate action plans (CAP).

9.2.9 DAERA commissioned input from all Department's to inform what policies and proposals will assist in delivering the targets set out in the carbon budget. Carbon budgets are essentially limits on greenhouse gas emissions over the 5-year period of the CAP, the first of which runs from 2023 to 2027. The CAP must set out proposals and policies covering the areas of responsibility of each Northern Ireland department.

9.2.10 The Department has identified four of the sectors, Transport, Buildings, Waste management and Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry, which it can contribute to and the Department's contribution encompasses current policies with significant input from the Education Authority and other ALBs to lead the Departments initiatives.

9.2.11 The Department is required to provide proposals and policies for the reduction of emissions, alongside protection of the environment and the ability to minimise, mitigate or remedy the effects of climate change.

9.2.12 Each CAP must explain how the proposals and policies set out in the plan are expected to affect the workforce, employers, and communities; and include proposals and policies for supporting the workforce, employers and communities.

9.2.13 The Act set challenging timelines for the development of the CAP with the final plan to be laid before the Assembly by 31 December 2023. The Department working alongside various stakeholders and in consultation with SRO's for the various themes of the CAP to prepare Education's plan.

9.2.14 A consultation is due to launch during April 2023 (provided an Executive is up and running and approves the content of the CAP for consultation) to allow sufficient time to scrutinise policies and proposals against the carbon budget and seek Ministerial and Executive approval for the publication of the consultation document. Officials will continue to work with the Education Authority and other ALBs in preparation of the Department's plan including how this may impact on the delivery of the curriculum.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTEGRATED EDUCATION ACT

9.2.15 The Integrated Education (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 (IE Act) obtained Royal Assent on 26 April 2022 following its passage through the Assembly. All provisions, unless otherwise specified, came into force six months after the Act received Royal Assent: 26 October 2022.

9.2.16 The Act extends the current duty on the Department under Article 64 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. Now the duty includes "support" which is defined in the Act. Targets and benchmarks will have to be set for integrated education; a range of consultation duties will be introduced; the Department must identify and provide sufficient places to aim to meet demand for integrated education within the context of area planning and the overall sustainability of the school estate; the Department must publish an Integrated Education Strategy including an action plan, and a further report; Regulations must be made.

9.2.17 It introduces a new duty on the EA, (as far as its powers extend) to encourage, facilitate and support integrated education. It requires the EA to ascertain demand for integrated education (the extent to which parents prefer their children to be educated at an integrated school as opposed to within a non-integrated school).

9.2.18 There is considerable debate on interpretation on the exact requirements of some sections of the Act. Officials have reviewed existing legal advice prepared during the passage of the Bill and obtained additional legal advice from DSO to provide clarification. Further clarification on a number of matters continues to be sought as officials consider the full DSO advice.

9.2.19 The Act has proved contentious with all other sectors.

9.2.20 Stakeholder engagement is being managed by a two-part structure: an Integrated Education Act Implementation Steering Group and an Implementation Working group. The Implementation Steering Group is intended to provide all DE ALBs with strategic insight into the implementation process and act as a means of communicating its impact to all affected bodies. It does not have decision making powers, rather it provides recommendations to DE on a range of policy options on aspects of the implementation which are considered compliant with the Act and are deliverable. In doing so it informs the strategic context within which the more operationally focused Implementation Working group is tasked with operationalising decisions.

9.2.21 The Department published A Strategy for Integrated Education in Northern Ireland and associated Action Plan on 26 April in line with the legislative requirement. The strategy was legally compliant and framed within the wider DE 'Every Child' corporate plan. An online consultation on the Action Plan was carried out (closed 30 November) and two online events were also held in November. A consultation report is currently being prepared. The Act also requires the strategy to be reviewed and a report published by 26 April 2024 including an assessment of performance of functions relating to integrated education.

AREA PLANNING

9.2.22 Area Planning is the process of **strategic planning** of primary and post primary education provision. This supports the implementation of the Department's Sustainable Schools Policy, which aims to ensure that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their educational needs in a sustainable school.

9.2.23 On 29 June 2022, the Education Authority published Northern Ireland's 'Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision' and its first 'Special Education Strategic Plan 2022-27: Planning for Special Education Provision'.

9.2.24 'Special Education Strategic Plan 2022-27: Planning for Special Education Provision' (SESAP) is the first regional plan to focus on creating sustainable special education provision that ensures all pupils in special schools and specialist provision in mainstream schools have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. 'Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision' (SAP) will build upon the valuable work undertaken in the first strategic plan (2017–2020 extended to 2022) to develop a network of sustainable schools.

9.2.25 Both plans provide the strategic direction for the 5-year period to 31 August 2027 and are underpinned by "Operational Plan 1" (OP1), the first of three, Operational Plans that will define the specific area planning activity to be taken forward. OP1 covers the two-year period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2024, OP2 will cover the two-year period 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2026, and OP3 will be the mechanism by which remaining work-streams are brought to conclusion in parallel to the development of the next 5-year Strategic Area Plan.

9.2.26 In parallel to the delivery of SAP, SESAP and OP1, DE officials are examining options to bring increased pace and focus to invigorate the area planning process, building on a number of exercises and pilots that have examined how changes to provision may be implemented outside the statutory Development Proposal (DP) process, which, for some aspects of change, have proven to be time-consuming and onerous. Options are also being scoped for sustainable education provision in rural areas.

9.2.27 Officials are also revising current guidance and advice on Area Planning and DPs to reflect the current legislative requirements of the IE Act 2022, the findings of recent Judicial Reviews of decisions taken on DPs and lessons learned from the AP process and assessment of DPs.

SHARED EDUCATION CAMPUSES

9.2.28 Under the Shared Education Campus Programme (SECP) three shared projects involving Controlled and Catholic Maintained schools are progressing. In respect of the post-primary schools, construction was completed on the Limavady Shared Campus in August 2023. The design and build contract to deliver the Ballycastle Shared Campus was signed in April 2023 with works programmed to commence on site in spring 2024. On the primary school side, a business case is being progressed by the Education Authority in respect of the Brookeborough Shared Campus.

STRULE SHARED EDUCATION CAMPUS

9.2.29 In February 2018 the previous Main Works Contract (MWC) procurement competition was suspended due to the withdrawal of one of the two remaining bidders.

9.2.30 In order to re-confirm that the Programme remained value for money (VfM), the Strule Directorate produced a Second Addendum to the Outline Business Case 2 (OBC2). This incorporated a fundamental review and updating of the key planning assumptions, including programme construction costs, risks, benefits, pupil number projections and the buildings' Schedules of Accommodation.

9.2.31 As a number of concerns remained following internal scrutiny, it was not possible to sign off the Addendum from a value for money (VfM) perspective. Since the campus is the first large scale shared campus there is no comparable benchmark by which to assess the VfM of the campus, however, this does not mean that the campus is not VfM.

9.2.32 Given the numerous educational, societal and community benefits associated with the Strule campus, the Executive endorsed former Minister Weir's proposal to issue a Ministerial direction to make further investment of up to £181m in the Strule Programme and progress to the next, and final, stage at a meeting on 17 September 2020.

9.2.33 HM Treasury confirmed release of Fresh Start Agreement funding for the Programme through to 2025/26 in December 2020.

9.2.34 Following consideration of the issues involved, former Minister McIlveen issued a direction to advance to the next stage in the SSEC Programme in July 2021 which enabled the programme to progress to the next phase of construction.

9.2.35 The previous Main Works procurement competition was closed and the Department formally commenced a fresh Main Works procurement competition to appoint a contractor to construct the remaining five schools and shared facilities for the campus with the release of the Invitation to Tender on 13 December 2021.

9.2.36 [redacted].

9.2.37 A Full Business Case (FBC) is currently under development for the Strule Shared Education Campus (SSEC) Programme which will include an analysis of all costs and benefits of the Programme (construction and non-construction).

9.2.38 [redacted].

9.2.39 [redacted].

9.2.40 Work is continuing across all other projects and workstreams including:

- development of the arrangements for the ownership, governance, funding and management of the Campus,

- working with existing school site owners to consider how best to plan for and manage the future use and/or disposal of the existing sites following relocation, progressing delivery of all remaining construction projects such as, road improvements on the Gortin Road/Mountjoy Road, Grass Pitches and Bridge Contract and the Ordnance Contract.

8.2.41 It has recently been announced as part of the political talks that the Fresh Start Funding has been withdrawn and is to be included in the c£600m of existing and new UKG funding. A live tender has been submitted for the programme but clarity on the funding is required to enable completion of the FBC and contract award. Any delays to this pose a high risk that the tender could be lost.

STATUTORY DUTIES – SHARED / INTEGRATED / IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION

Mainstreaming Shared Education

8.2.42 The Shared Education (Northern Ireland) Act 2016 places a statutory duty on the Department and the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education, and to consider Shared Education in policy and operational work.

8.2.43 The Department contributed to a range of funding streams:

- £25m Delivering Social Change 'Shared Education Signature Project' (SESP) (2014-22), jointly funded by DE, The Executive Office and The Atlantic Philanthropies;
- €£3.2m for the 2019/20 academic year for delivery and evaluation of a Shared Education pilot funding model for those partnerships previously funded through the DSC SESP;
- £3.8m for the Shared Education Transition Phase (covering the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years); and
- €35m was initially awarded to fund the PEACE IV Shared Education Programme (with funding from EU and match funding from the DE (NI) and the Department of Education (Republic of Ireland). This funding supported two Shared Education programmes. Collaboration through Shared Education (CASE) for primary and post-primary schools and Sharing from the Start (SfS) for pre-school settings. The projects exceeded their targets and are now moving towards the closure of the programme, including evaluations and the completion of a PPE.

8.2.44 In addition, a total of €51.3m is due to be made available to support SE in the upcoming PEACE PLUS programme under Theme 3 'Empowering and Investing in Young People, Shared Learning Together programme.

8.2.45 To date, around 63% of our schools are involved in Shared Education. The third Advancing Shared Education report was laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly in March 2022, in accordance with the Shared Education Act. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Shared Education delivery with the majority of face to face pupil contact suspended during the period March 2020 to June 2022. As a result, there was an 80% reduction in the overall number of children and young people involved; falling from 87,385 participating at June 2019 to 17,476 at June 2021. However, the schools continue to have an appetite to engage in Shared Education and the number of pupils involved is rising again.

8.2.46 Moving away from time bound funded projects and ensuring Shared Education is fully embedded and becomes normal and accepted practice right across the education system is a key commitment for the Department. The Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy, developed on a co-design basis with a range of key stakeholders, was launched in September 2022 and sets out the vision for Shared Education over the longer term. Implementation of the Strategy is being taken forward through associated delivery plans.

8.2.47 The *Shared Learning Together* programme which will seek to expand, amplify and build upon the success of the existing PEACE IV Shared Education programme. The delivery agents for this programme will be secured via a competitive process. Two calls for 3.1 Shared Learning Together programme (formal and non -formal worth €51.2 in total) and separate call for 3.3 Youth and Mental Health programme (worth €25m) were published in June 2023. In November SEUPB confirmed that Accountable Departments can commence an initial review of the applications to provide a policy view.

8.2.48 Due to ongoing and prior delays with programme opening, the Shared Learning Together programme is not likely to be operational before 24/25 academic year.

8.2.49 2023/24 Mainstreaming Shared Education (MSE) budget provided by Finance was £2m, £2.3m less than bid and circa £1-1.5m less than current identified need. £1.121m of the £2m budget has been allocated to the EA to complete term 3 of the 2022/23 academic year as planned, supporting pupil engagement in 341 former SESP schools; the remaining £879k has also been allocated to support pupil engagement in the first two terms of the 2023/24 academic year.

Supply of Teachers at Irish-Medium Post-Primary Level

8.2.50 The Irish-medium (IM) sector has raised concerns regarding the supply and retention of suitably qualified IM teachers at post-primary level and of supply teachers across all stages of education. The Department is working to address these with education partners including Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, schools, the teacher training colleges and the Education Authority. DE has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education.

8.2.51 A Fair Start Action Plan included recommendations relevant to this issue and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta has employed an officer on a fixed term contract to work across the sector and pull together costed action plans which can be prioritised and develop options in relation to this work.

TRANSPORT AND FOOD IN SCHOOLS

Update to Nutritional Standards for Food in Schools

8.2.52 The current nutritional standards for school lunches and other food and drinks in schools have been in place since 2007 and require updating to bring them in line with current government advice on healthy eating as outlined in the Food Standard's Agency's Eatwell Guide.

8.2.53 Following analysis of the consultation responses, the then Minister approved the finalised standards in 2021 and the way forward, subject to the necessary funding and approvals. It was initially anticipated that c£3.3m additional

funding would be required each year to implement the revised standards, however there has been significant levels of inflation across staffing/utility/food costs since this was considered.

8.2.54 As no budget has yet been allocated to enable the implementation to be progress, the 2007 nutritional standards remain in place in schools.

8.2.55 The overall financial sustainability of the EA's school meals service is now in sharp focus because of the significant rises in the cost of producing a school meal. A key aspect of their service delivery model is attracting paying pupils to take a school lunch and generate income for the EA. This need to attract pupils has made it very challenging for the EA to comply with the current nutritional standards and to therefore require them to move towards the more stringent revised nutritional standards could have serious financial consequences as demand from paying pupils is highly likely to fall. It therefore may be necessary to have further consideration of the revised standards that were previously agreed in order to ensure the recent challenges in terms of the financial sustainability of the EA's school meals service is fully taken into account.

Review of Free School Meal and Uniform Grant (FSM/UG)

8.2.56 The existing criteria for FSM/UG have been in place since the introduction of Universal Credit in September 2017. It was planned that the impact of the Universal Credit criterion would be reviewed after the rollout of Universal Credit was complete. This was to have been March 2022 but has been has postponed by DfC.

8.2.57 The Department is continuing a review of free school meals and uniform grant eligibility criteria, in particular the earnings thresholds that apply to the Universal Credit and Child/Working Tax Credit criteria. The purpose of the review is to ensure that free school meals and uniform grants are available to support the most vulnerable children in our society. The review will consider a number of options, including rises to the income thresholds, the introduction of forms of universal FSM provision and a hybrid of both. It was initially planned for a public consultation to be carried out in the 2023 however a decision on this has been deferred given the challenging budgetary provision within the Department. Work on a detailed business case is ongoing.

Review of School Uniform Policy

8.2.58 Towards the end of her tenure former Minister McIlveen requested that the Department consider Primary Legislation to allow the drafting of statutory guidance for schools on uniform policy.

8.2.59 The Department has been gathering evidence on current school uniform policies and associated costs to inform policy choices for a future incoming Minister of Education. We have engaged the services of Dr Rachel Shanks from The University of Aberdeen to assist in developing a consultation

document. Dr Shanks has assisted the Scottish Government in developing its proposals to reduce the costs of uniforms.

8.2.60 A consultation document is being prepared setting out a number of options to inform policy choices and measure public opinion on school uniforms. Subject to Minister's agreement it is expected that this consultation will commence in early Spring 2024.

Catering Challenges for the Education Authority

8.2.61 The EA have reported a number of issues around the sustainability of their catering provision within schools. The rising costs of energy, materials and labour have increased the costs incurred by the EA. These costs have been absorbed by the EA to date. They have also reported difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff to work in their canteens. The Food In Schools Team are monitoring the situation and meet regularly with the EA to discuss these matters.

School Holiday Food Grants

8.2.62 School Holiday Food Grants are covered in Early/Week 1 Issues in section 2.1 of this document at paragraphs 2.1.32 -2.1.37 and in table 2.3, Urgent Executive Business.

Anti-poverty Strategy

8.2.63 The Department will work closely with DfC in the development its anti-poverty Strategy with a particular focus on school children. This should include work on a long term sustainable solution to help children in poverty during school holiday periods.

Review of Education Maintenance Allowance

8.2.64 A cross-departmental policy review of EMA is in progress, led by Department of the Economy, to consider the administration and the management of the scheme and to ascertain if it is still fit for purpose and meeting the key policy objectives of enabling young people from low- income backgrounds to stay on in full time education.

Review Of Home to School Transport Policy

8.2.65 This policy review was part of the Education Transformation Programme and was suspended by the Minister due to COVID-19. At the time of suspension, the team were preparing an outline business case (OBC) with input from other

relevant Departments reflecting the impact of school transport on wider PfG outcomes such as air pollution and traffic congestion. It included detailed bespoke data analytics provided by the Strategic Investment Board.

8.2.66 Former Minister Weir made the decision to further pause the review to await the recommendations of the independent review of education as school categories/sectors in the education system are fundamental to determining who is eligible for transport.

8.2.67 Any overall reduction in transport eligibility and/or expenditure is likely to result in significant media attention and have a significant financial impact on Translink.

SECTION 9 – EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

ETI Chief Inspector – Faustina Graham (PS [redacted])

9.1 Overview of Inspectorate

[redacted]	Assistant Chief Inspector (Early Years, Primary, Post-primary, Special, Education Other Than At School, Independent Schools, Initial Teacher Education, Special Educational Needs, Shared Education and Safeguarding))
[redacted]	Assistant Chief Inspector (Further Education, Work-based learning, DAERA, CJI, Home Office and Youth)
[redacted]	Assistant Chief Inspector (Empowering Improvement Programme and Development of Inspection)
Cathy Galway	Director of Corporate Planning, Policy and Improvement

Key Responsibilities

- The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is a unitary inspectorate, which provides an independent inspection and policy advice service. Whilst ETI is formally a part of the Department of Education (DE), it also provides inspection services for the Department for the Economy (DfE) and other commissioning Departments, assists them in the discharge of their responsibilities and provides policy advice to the Ministers and officials in these Departments.

- The functions are set out in the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (Article 102). Inspection plays a central role in school/organisation improvement and the raising of standards. It is also an important part of arrangements for the accountability of the education and training systems to the Executive, Assembly and public for the quality of education provision and standards.

- The ETI's mission is to "empower improvement for learners" and in so doing, to provide the highest standards of service. It monitors, evaluates and reports on the quality of education and training provision in: early years; primary and post-primary schools; special education; further education; work-based learning; youth; initial teacher education; and education other than at school (EOTAS), as well as contributing to policy, planning and improvement work. It undertakes individual organisation inspections as well as cross-cutting thematic evaluations. Recently commissioned work includes, for example, evaluations of physical education in primary schools; the preventative curriculum; the Engage

programmes; teacher professional learning in meeting the special educational needs of learners; and provision at level 3 in further education.

- The purpose of all inspection activity is to build capacity within the organisations inspected to provide high quality education and outcomes for learners. This is achieved by: promoting processes of self-evaluation which will endure beyond the period of the inspection; evaluating and reporting objectively and fairly on the quality of provision in the best interests of the learners; helping to inform and establish improved ways of working through professional dialogue; and identifying, affirming, reporting, and disseminating examples of highly effective practice to celebrate educational successes from which others may learn.

9.2 EDUCATION AND INSPECTORATE TOPICAL ISSUES

INSPECTION AND IMPROVEMENT

10.2.1 The Northern Ireland Teacher's Council (NITC) withdrew co-operation with ETI in October 2016, ahead of the escalation of industrial action across schools in January 2017. Between January 2017 and March 2020 almost all of the teaching unions were engaged in industrial action in relation to pay and workload which involved non-cooperation with inspection. In April 2022, industrial action re-commenced to involve all of the teaching unions and has escalated to strike action on occasions. The action short of strike has impacted adversely on the ability of ETI to carry out its statutory function in schools and colleges, and also on the extent, pace and impact of school improvement work. This has led to significant and concerning increases in the 'time since last inspection' for a large proportion of primary and post-primary schools. Northern Ireland is the only jurisdiction in the UK and Ireland without legislation to support and protect fully the inspection process. It is a recommendation of the IPSOS "Independent Review of Special Educational Needs" Report that this anomaly be addressed by the Department and more recently the report of the Independent Review of Education highlighted that in other UK jurisdictions, it is an offence to obstruct the process of inspection and recommended that similar provisions should be enacted in Northern Ireland.

10.2.2 ETI is committed to being the voice for "equity and excellence for all learners" by identifying, reporting and promoting innovative practice and informing improvement through professional dialogue. Despite the industrial action, inspection activity is continuing across a broad spectrum of educational phases. Inspection work has continued, and progressed, in early years, youth, further education and work-based learning. In schools, follow-up inspections, thematic evaluation visits, District Inspector visits and development of inspection visits to self-nominating schools/organisations have continued to take place. ETI has also been able to provide evidence and assurances to DE and DfE, in the current context, to help influence and inform policy advice and to effect positive change in the interests of children and young people. ETI has recently published an evaluation of teacher professional learning in meeting the special educational needs of learners, which identifies examples of effective practice and the key challenges to be addressed and areas for consideration to inform policy development and practice.

10.2.3 Over the past two years, ETI has undertaken a comprehensive review of its inspection process. As part of this, ETI has completed a wide-scale consultation and engagement with schools, other education and training providers and a range of stakeholders (including pupils, parents/carers, key Departmental officials, teaching unions, employing authorities, arm's length bodies etc). Just over 400 schools/organisations responded to a detailed online consultation questionnaire and 40 focus group meetings have been completed. The feedback has been analysed, considered in depth and has informed the much-revised process, including function and purpose of

inspection, the inspection model prototypes and the associated development of the models for inspections of the future, which are now at an advanced stage of readiness. A number of pilot inspections have commenced in the Autumn term of 2023 in the early years, work-based learning and youth phases.

10.2.4 ETI is rebuilding the trust of the education system and the internal and external capacity to plan for and undertake programme of school inspections at an appropriate time. Schools and organisations have responded positively to the development of inspection work undertaken by ETI and many have engaged enthusiastically in co-design work around the new inspection models. In 2022, for example, 252 schools self-nominated to assist ETI in this co-design process, of which 141 were visited by inspectors to trial new models of inspection and ways of working, and to take feedback. In addition, there has been constructive, ongoing engagement with NITC.

10.2.5 The development, trialling and implementation of new inspection models work around inspections of the future continues at pace, and much has already been achieved to ensure alignment with the significant changes in how high quality education is and will be delivered and how inspection can best contribute to meeting the needs of children and young people. [redacted]

School Improvement

10.2.6 The absence of teacher cooperation with school inspections has resulted in a lack of formal scrutiny, in particular, of the quality of education provision in schools which remain in DE's Formal Intervention Process (FIP) and the ETI's follow-up inspection process. However, in consultation with the teaching unions, the schools in DE's Formal Intervention Process have in the main cooperated with inspection. [redacted]

System-level evaluations

10.2.7 To reflect the contemporary issues facing our education system, ETI has identified key themes which will guide its work during this academic year. Themes relevant to the work of DE include: the statementing process for special education needs learners; emotional health and wellbeing; digital skills and use of digital devices; follow-on to the PE in the primary curriculum evaluation; and modern languages at key stage 3.

Capacity Building Programme

10.2.8 ETI's 'Empowering Improvement – Stepping Forward Together' (2022) Project focused on effective self-evaluation practices and the evaluation of learning and teaching by middle leaders. Over 1300 practitioners from around 700 schools/organisations volunteered to participate in the project, including those who work in early years' settings, primary, post-primary and special schools and EOTAS centres. ETI received positive feedback from the schools and teachers who participated in this professional learning to date, showing a high demand for ETI-led initiatives and support. Scoping work around a potential similar programme of capacity-building for senior leaders is underway, although dependent on availability of resources and the ongoing situation around industrial action.

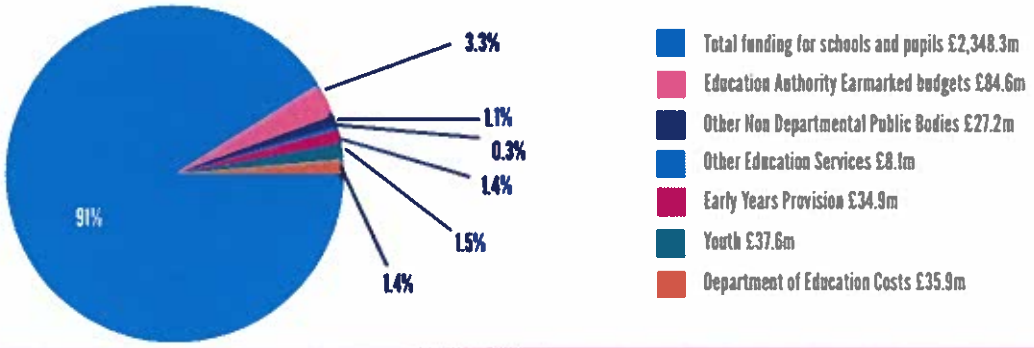
Annex A
Key Budgetary Facts

Key Budgetary Facts

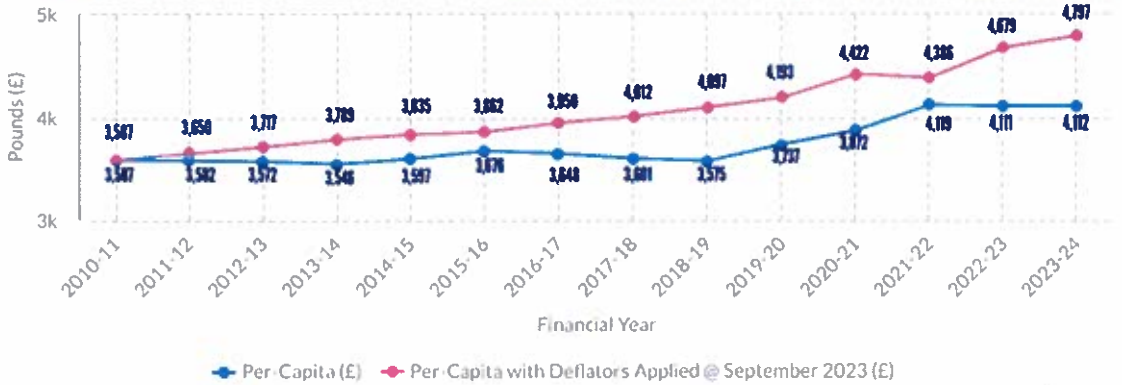
DE Resource Budget

Finance information set out in this document is based on the most up to date data available

2023-24 Opening Resource Budget (£2,576.5m)

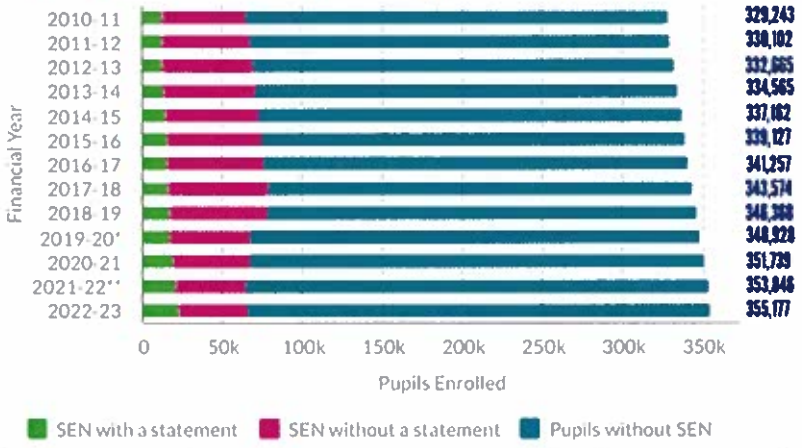


Aggregated Schools Budget* (ASB) Real Terms per Capita (14% real terms reduction in per pupil funding)



*** Opening ASB**

Total Pupil Enrolments (including SEN pupils with and without a statement of Need) 2010-11 to 2022-23



Total enrolment numbers in schools have increased by 7.9% from 329,243 in 2010-11 to 355,177 in 2022-23.

Whereas SEN pupils with a statement have increased by 74.8% from 13,898 in 2010-11 to 24,291 in 2022-23.

***A review of SEN categories was implemented in 2019-20. Pupils with a specific medical diagnosis who do not have an associated special educational need are no longer recorded on the SEN register. This has resulted in a reduction of SEN pupils without a statement in 2019-20.**

****From 2021-22, children with Special Educational Needs are recorded under the 3 stages of the SEN Code of Practice, rather than the previous 5 stages. This has resulted in a reduction of SEN pupils without a statement - https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/de-circular-202106-three-stages-special-educational-provision**

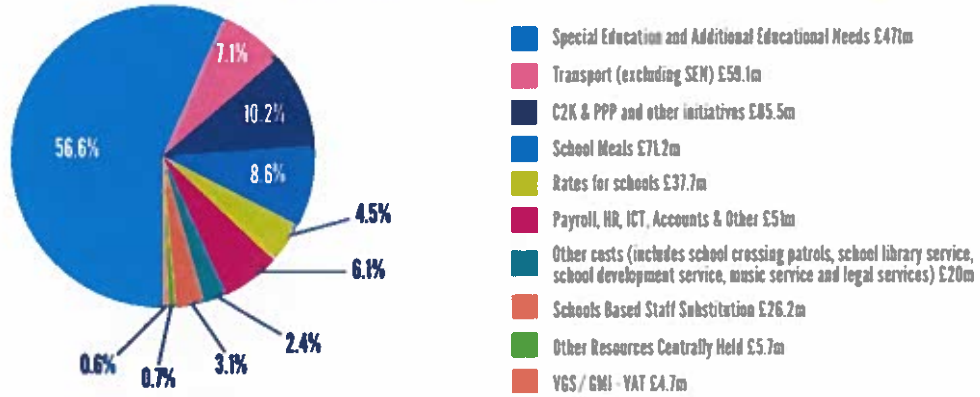
NISRA Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Key Budgetary Facts

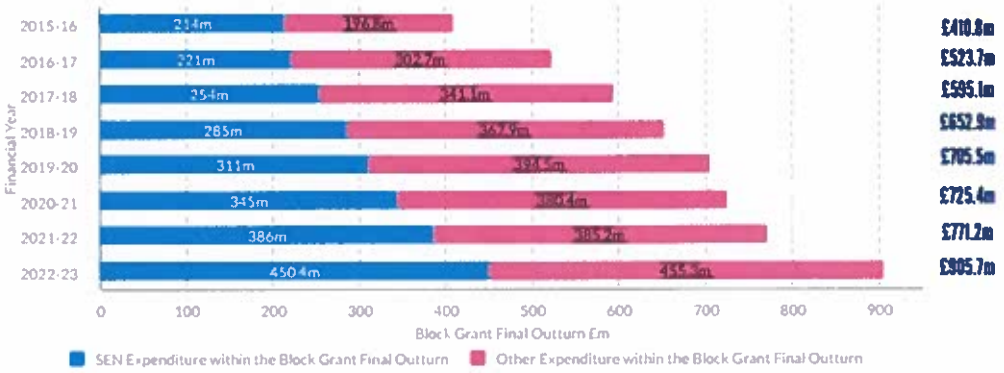
EA Resource Budget

Department of Education

EA 2023-24 Block Grant Opening Budget- Split Between EA Services (£832.1m total)

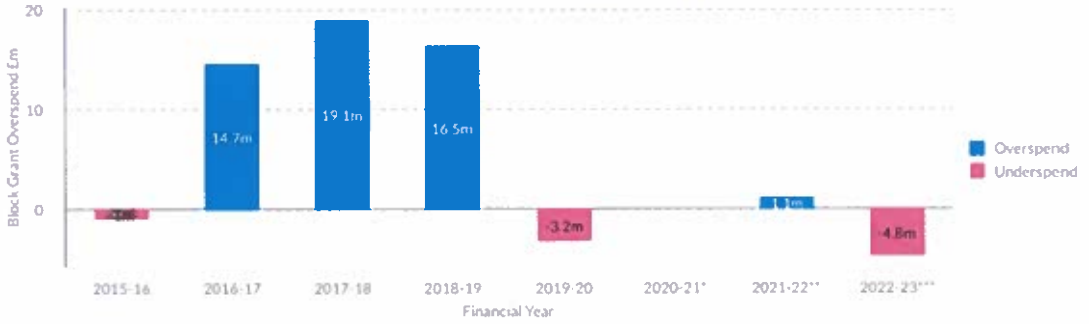


EA Final Outturn Since 2015-16 (Including Element Attributable to SEN)



Notes
2016-17 - £119.5m of Earmarked funds subsumed into the EA Block Grant
2017-18 - Phase 1 of the Funding Authority role for YG/GMI schools transferred to the EA, along with the associated budget £25.5m, £18m of which related to SEN.
2018-19 - Phase 2 of the Funding Authority role for YG/GMI schools transferred to the EA, along with the associated budget £18.6m.
2020-21, 2021-22 & 2022-23 –Amounts attributable to SEN exclude earmarked funding to schools for SENCo's to assist with the introduction of the SEND Act (NI) 2016.
2020-21 & 2021-22 exclude COVID-19 funding allocated for SEN.
2022-23 excludes earmarked funding for the EA's SEN and Disability Transformation Programme

EA Block Grant Over/Under Spend



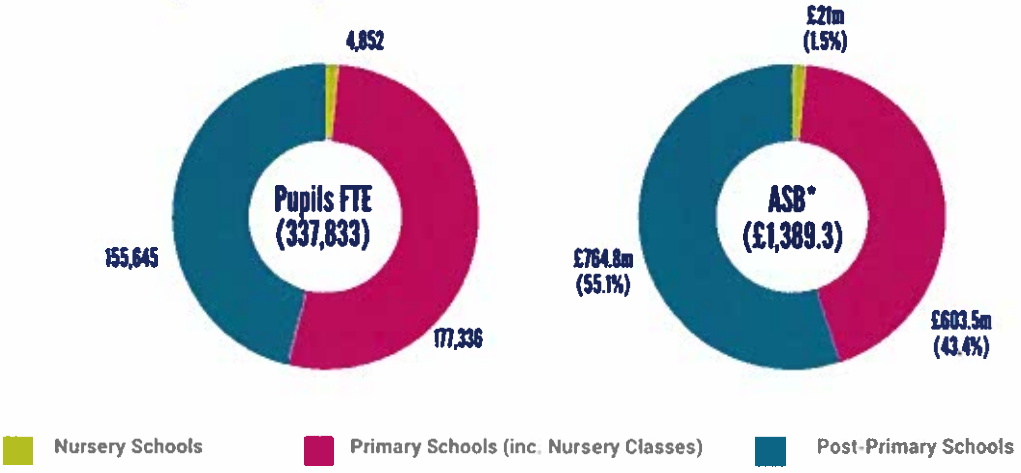
Notes:
***The response to COVID-19 impacted 2020-21 and to a lesser degree 2021-22.**
****£61.3m additional in-year Block Grant funding was allocated to the EA. These allocations were one off and significant pressures remained going into 2022-23. In addition whilst an overspend in ASN expenditure of £1.7m was reported other underspends in EA earmarked budgets allowed the EA to report an overall underspend of c£3m (0.1%) in 2021-22.**
***** The EA's 2022-23 Final Budget Block Grant budget of £832.1m was not confirmed until December 2022 (i.e. shortly after the Secretary of State's budget) and allocated an additional £126.7m. The EA also received additional one-off, in-year allocations of £78.5m. Overspends in ASN expenditure of £3m and earmarked budgets of c£1.5m were offset by an EA Block Grant underspend of c£4.8m, leaving an overall underspend of c£9.3m (0.89%)**

Key Budgetary Facts

Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB)

2023-24 ASB by School Phase

Priority has been given to maintaining the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) Cash values at 2023-24 levels for both funding streams



Nursery and Primary AWPU cash value maintained at £2,356.83

Post Primary AWPU cash value maintained at £2,414.43

AWPU: Age Weighted Pupil Unit
FTE: Full-Time Equivalent
* Opening ASB

Per Capita Funding*

Nursery per capita funding increased by £6 from £4,317 in 2022-23 to £4,323 in 2023-24 ↑

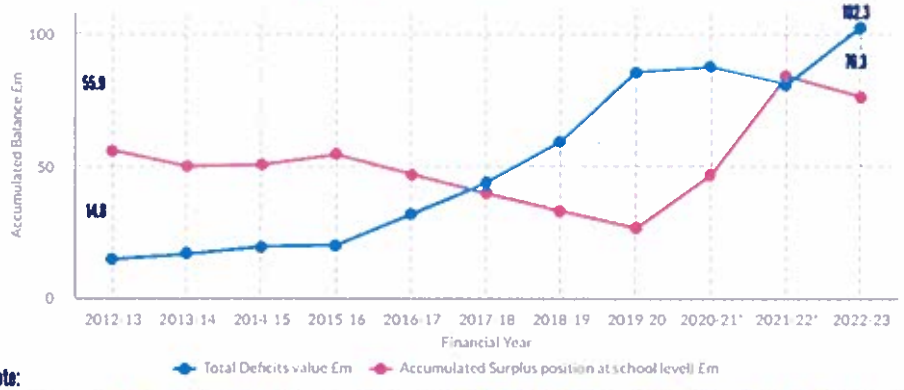
Primary per capita funding decreased by £1 from £3,404 in 2022-23 to £3,403 in 2023-24 ↓

Post-primary per capita funding decreased by £14 from £4,928 in 2022-23 to £4,914 in 2023-24 ↓

*Per Capita Funding is the total ASB distributed via the Common Funding Formula, divided by the FTE pupil numbers in grant aided schools, for the respective sectors.

The per-pupil spend for the financial year 2023-24 is estimated at £6,995, which equates to a decrease of £230 (c. 3.2%) per pupil compared to the 2022-23 figure of £7,225 per pupil. This includes assumptions regarding pay awards and pupil numbers.

Schools Surpluses and Deficits Accumulated Balance



The number of schools in deficit has increased from 197 in 2012-13 to 428 in 2022-23. ↑

The number of schools in surplus has decreased from 856 in 2012-13 to 552 in 2022-23. ↓

*School Financial positions in 2020-21 & 2021-22 were impacted by COVID-19.

Note:
Data relates to Controlled and Maintained schools only. Similar data is not available for Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools.