

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EXPERT PANEL TO EXAMINE AND PROPOSE ACTIONS TO ADDRESS LINKS BETWEEN PERSISTENT EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Aim

1. The aim of this Terms of Reference is to deliver one of the priorities identified within the “New Decade, New Approach” (NDNA) deal agreed by the main NI political parties on 10 January 2020.
2. Part 1 of the deal document¹ sets out the priorities of the restored Executive, including measures to transform public services. It included the following commitment as an immediate priority for the restored Executive:

The Executive will establish an expert group to examine and propose an action plan to address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, including the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys.

New Decade, New Approach Deal; January 2020; Page 7

3. This was further developed in Appendix 1 of the document, which set out “Year 1” Programme for Government 2019/20 Priority Actions across a range of areas including education, childcare and Tackling Paramilitarism. The education priority actions included the following:

Establish an expert group to examine the links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background and draw up an action plan for change that will ensure all children and young people, regardless of background, are given the best start in life.

New Decade, New Approach Deal; January 2020; Page 40

Background

4. Educational underachievement linked to economic disadvantage is an issue that has persisted for many years despite numerous policy interventions and significant financial investment by the Department of Education and others. Whilst some progress has been made, it is generally recognised that underachievement is due to its inextricable link with poverty in society, which is a much wider issue than education alone. A selection of previous reports on this policy area is attached at Annex A. The Expert Panel is encouraged to draw upon these and other sources of information to inform its review. The emphasis throughout its work should be on deliverable actions.
5. Over the past 12 years, there has been a year on year increase in the proportion of both school leavers with free school meal entitlement (FSME), and those without, achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C, including equivalents including English and maths.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deal-to-see-restored-government-in-northern-ireland-tomorrow>

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EXPERT PANEL TO EXAMINE AND PROPOSE ACTIONS TO ADDRESS LINKS BETWEEN PERSISTENT EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

- a. In 2017/18, 48.6% of school leavers with FSME achieved this benchmark (up from 26.4% in 2005/06), while the equivalent for non-FSME school leavers was 78.1%.
 - b. The gap in attainment between those with FSME and those without remained broadly consistent at around 33% each year, rising to around 35% in 2013/14 and falling to 29.5% in 2017/18. Protestant boys with FSME have consistently had the lowest attainment level of all pupils.
 - c. In 2017/18, there were 976 (57.2%) Protestant FSME pupils who did not achieve 5+ GCSE (A*-C), including equivalents including English and maths².
 - d. In 2017/18, there were 1,586 (48.4%) Catholic FSME pupils who did not achieve 5+ GCSE (A*-C), including equivalents including English and maths³.
6. It is worth noting also that in 2017/18, the percentage of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs (A*-E) including equivalents including English and maths, was as follows:
- a. 73.6% FMSE school leavers.
 - b. 91.4% non-FSME school leavers.
7. In terms of pupils who left school without any GCSEs, 1.6% of FSME pupils (89 pupils) did so compared with 0.5% of non-FSME pupils (75 pupils).

Objectives

8. The Expert Panel will :
- examine the links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background;
 - give particular consideration to the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys, and specific actions to address this particular gap;
 - produce an interim report;
 - draw up an Action Plan for change that will ensure all children and young people, regardless of background are given the best start in life;
 - estimate the cost of implementing the Action Plan.

Scope

9. The work of the Expert Panel represents an opportunity to make significant progress in addressing the links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, including the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys. The Action Plan must be deliverable in the current economic and political context. The Expert Panel will therefore focus on the wide range of issues on which consensus can be found.

² School Leavers Survey 2017/18 Page 21 Table 7

³ School Leavers Survey 2017/18 Page 21 Table 7

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EXPERT PANEL TO EXAMINE AND PROPOSE ACTIONS TO ADDRESS LINKS BETWEEN PERSISTENT EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

10. The scope of the Expert Panel includes early years provision (and earlier where appropriate) through to the end of post-primary education, as well as family / parent and community involvement / engagement. It recognises that other Government departments, agencies, 3rd sector organisations etc. will have an important role to play, both as solutions are developed (including drawing on existing programmes / interventions) and in the implementation of the Action Plan.
11. Under the Children's Services Co-operation Act and to help inform the Expert Panel's thinking on the issues, the secretariat to the panel will engage with other government departments, local government and 3rd sector organisations to establish the extent to which educational underachievement is being addressed.
12. Given the wide range of issues which impact upon educational underachievement as a result of socio-economic disadvantage, the Expert Panel should seek the views of schools, parents, children and young people thereby giving voice to these stakeholders and highlighting the important role played by families, parents and communities.

Structure

13. The Expert Panel will be led by an external independent Chair. The Chair and five additional members will be drawn from independent experts in the area of educational underachievement linked to socio-economic disadvantage. The emphasis will be on practical experience of successful delivery on the ground.
14. The Expert Panel will invite submissions from all interested parties who have experience of the issues associated with educational underachievement linked to socio-economic disadvantage through the supporting secretariat. This will include all education sectors (controlled, maintained, integrated, Irish Medium, Voluntary Grammar Schools, Grant Maintained Integrated Schools, special schools, independent schools, pre-schools, Further Education and Higher Education institutions), and other stakeholders such as government departments, local government, the voluntary and community sector, business representative organisations, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, and the Equality Commission NI.
15. The Expert Panel can, if it so wishes, draw upon the existing Transformation Advisory Group, which was set up under the Department of Education's Education Transformation Programme to provide strategic advice on policy reviews and service delivery reform including the priorities for transformation and progress on key actions. The Transformation Advisory Group is co-chaired by the Department of Education and the Education Authority and includes key education and wider stakeholders.
16. The Expert Panel will be supported by a secretariat provided by the Department of Education.

Task

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EXPERT PANEL TO EXAMINE AND PROPOSE ACTIONS TO ADDRESS LINKS BETWEEN PERSISTENT EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

17. There exists a considerable body of literature on persistent educational underachievement linked to socio-economic background including numerous studies to investigate the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys (see Annex). The Expert Panel will draw upon these previous studies and proceed rapidly to the development of solutions. Significant focus should be given as to which solutions are most effective together with how they have been implemented working in tandem with communities, families, parents to deliver the most effective approaches i.e. best practice.
18. The Expert Panel will produce:
 1. an Interim Report and draft Action Plan by 31 March 2021⁴; and
 2. a Final Action Plan (including implementation costs and timescales) by 31 May 2021⁵.
19. The actions proposed in the Action Plan should be specific, prioritised, deliverable and capable of achieving measurable outcomes in key priority areas.
20. The Expert Panel will report to the Minister of Education.

Expert Panel Membership

21. The Minister of Education will appoint Panel Members who are considered to be experts in their field and have demonstrated both an understanding of both educational underachievement and its links to socio-economic background. The Panel will be balanced in terms of practical experience and research in this field.

Timescales / Frequency of Meetings

22. The Expert Panel will determine the frequency of its meetings with a view to ensuring that the timetable set out at paragraph 18 is met. It is anticipated that the Expert Panel will commence its work in September 2020.

Engagement with Key Stakeholders

23. The Expert Panel will develop a stakeholder engagement plan to guide engagement with stakeholders, communities, schools, departmental and other relevant organisation representatives at the appropriate time as the project unfolds.

⁴ The Minister of Education may extend the dates for the production of the Action Plan if necessary.

⁵ The Minister of Education may extend the dates for the production of the Action Plan if necessary.

Annex A

Selection of previous reports

Year	Title	Organisation
2020	Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland: Evidence Summary https://www.stran.ac.uk/research-paper/creu-2020-evidence-summary/	Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement
2020	Reducing Educational Disadvantage Strategy <i>[not yet published]</i>	DE
2019	NI Peace Monitoring report (section 8) https://www.community-relations.org.uk/publications/northern-ireland-peace-monitoring-report	Community Relations Council
2018	Taking Boys Seriously: Best Practice Report from the first joint conference of the Controlled Schools' Support Council and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools hosted by Ulster University https://www.csscni.org.uk/news/taking-boys-seriously-project-update	CSSC and CCMS / UU
2018	Hope for Every Child – A Report examining how we can improve outcomes for all our young people in Northern Ireland http://www.mydup.com/publications/view/hope-for-every-child	DUP
2018	Statement on Children's Rights in Northern Ireland https://www.niccy.org/socrni	NICCY
2017	Tackling the Poverty-Related Gap in Early Childhood Learning in Northern Ireland https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/education-and-child-protection/tackling-poverty-related-gap-ni.pdf	Save the Children
2017	Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation (ILiAD) https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/investigating-links-achievement-and-deprivation-iliad and https://www.stran.ac.uk/research/search-our-research/	Queen's University Belfast
2017	Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper https://www.niccy.org/publications/2017/august/02/educational-inequalities-position-paper/	NICCY
2016	No Child Left Behind – A report on Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/education/cllr-peter-martin.pdf	Councillor Peter Martin [DUP]
2015	Key Inequalities in Education https://www.equalityni.org/KeyInequalities-Education	ECNI
2014	Firm Foundations	John Kyle (PUP)
2013	Tackling Underachievement through Effective Leadership http://onlineccms.com/index.php/schools/for-principles-governors/school-policies/tackling-underachievement-through-effective-leadership	CCMS
2012	Taking Boys Seriously – A longitudinal study of Adolescent Male School-Life Experiences in Northern Ireland https://pure.ulster.ac.uk/en/publications/taking-boys-seriously-a-longitudinal-study-of-adolescent-male-sch-3	University of Ulster
2011	Educational disadvantage and the Protestant working Class: A Call to Action	Dawn Purvis MLA and the Working Group on Educational disadvantage and

**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR PROPOSED EXPERT PANEL TO EXAMINE AND
PROPOSE ACTIONS TO ADDRESS LINKS BETWEEN PERSISTENT EDUCATIONAL
UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND**

Year	Title	Organisation
		the Protestant working class
2010	Advice given to MLAs by the Education Advisory Panel on the issue of Underachievement	Educationists Advisory Panel established by the Assembly Cross-Party Education Group