



Independent Review
of Education

INVESTING IN A BETTER FUTURE:

THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

VOLUME 3

December 2023



LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of Stakeholders who met with the Panel	3
Appendix 2: List of written submissions	11
Appendix 3: Information on key statutory bodies in Northern Ireland involved in education	13
Appendix 4: Summary of desktop exercise reviewing the network of schools	19
Appendix 5: Key recommendations	25
Appendix 6: Full suite of recommendations from Volume 2	35
Appendix 7: Impact assessments	49

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS WHO MET WITH THE PANEL

During the review, the Panel had the opportunity to meet with numerous stakeholders and organisations. The Panel highly valued each of these engagements and would like to extend their thanks to those who took the time to meet with them, share their perspectives, and present to them on education in Northern Ireland.

Additionally, the Panel expresses its gratitude to the organisations that hosted meetings and visits, especially the schools, colleges, and youth groups that were visited.

The list below outlines the various organisations that the Panel met with, although individual names have not been provided.

Schools and settings

The Panel met with representatives from the following schools and settings. Some of this engagement (but not all) was via a Practitioner Reference Group that met on several occasions throughout the Review to inform Panel thinking. There were also meetings with the Special Schools Strategic Leadership Group and a number of Area Learning Communities.

- Arvalee School & Resource Centre
- Ballyclare High School
- Ballymena Academy
- Ballyoran Primary School
- Bangor Academy
- Belfast Metropolitan College
- Belfast Royal Academy
- Bleary Primary School
- Bocombra Primary School
- Breda Academy
- Bunscoil Phobal Feirste
- Carnlough Integrated Primary School
- Carrick Primary School
- Castle Tower Special School
- Castlereagh AEP (EOTAS)
- Clandeboye Primary School
- Clarawood Special School School
- Clounagh Junior High
- Coláiste Feirste
- Cookstown High School
- Craigavon Senior High School
- Devenish College
- Dickson Primary School
- Dominican College
- Down Sure Start
- Dromore Nursery School
- Drumgor Primary School
- Mill Strand Primary School
- Millburn Community Playgroup
- Millington Primary School
- Mitchell House Special School
- Model Primary School
- Moyallen Primary School
- North West Regional College
- Orchard County Primary School
- Orritor Primary School
- Parkview School, Special School
- Portadown College
- Portadown Integrated Primary School
- Rockport School
- Shaftesbury Nursery School
- Slemish Integrated College
- South Eastern Regional College
- St Bernards Pre School
- St Brigid's Primary School
- St Cecilia's College
- St Genevieve's High School
- St John The Baptist Primary School
- St Joseph's Primary School
- St Kevin's Primary School
- St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor
- St Malachy's College, Belfast
- St Mary's, Limavady
- St Mary's University College

- Dungannon Primary School
- Foram nan Og, Belfast
- Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí
- Gaelscoil na Daróige
- Harberton Special School
- Hardy Primary School
- Hazelwood Integrated College
- Hill Croft Special School
- Holy Trinity Primary School
- Killicomaine Junior High
- Lagan College
- Lakewood School, Special School
- Lisneal College
- Londonderry Primary School
- Lurgan College
- Maralin Village Primary School
- St Pius X College
- St Teresa's Nursery School
- Strangford Integrated College
- Stranmillis University College
- Strathearn School
- Sure Start Edenballymore
- Tandragee Junior High
- Teconnaught Pre school
- Tor Bank School, Special School
- Tullygally Primary School
- Waringstown Primary School
- Windsor Hill Primary School
- Omagh ALC
- Magherafelt ALC
- Lisburn ALC
- East Belfast ALC
- North Belfast ALC

Young People, Learners and Youth Groups

The Panel met with a range of young people, learners and youth groups – such groups are listed below.

The Panel also visited a number of schools and colleges (not detailed below), during which time they met with learners from different institutions.

- Foram na nOg - Gaelionad Mhic Gioll - 9-11 year olds and 12-16 year olds
- Longtower Youth Club, Londonderry – 10-13 years old and over 14 years old
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) Youth Panel
- Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Placement Students
- Northern Ireland Youth Assembly
- Students Organising for Sustainability UK (SOS-UK)
- The Secondary Students' Union of Northern Ireland (SSUNI)
- Student Teachers studying at Stranmillis and St Mary's.
- The Bud Club, Londonderry

Children's Advocates

The Panel met with representatives from the following:

- Altram
- Ballymena & Little Steps Sure Start
- Barnardo's
- Children's Law Centre
- DOWN Sure Start
- Early Years
- GOLD Sure Start
- Include Youth
- MENCAP

- Network Youth
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Save the Children
- Voice of Young People in Care

Universities and Colleges

The Panel met with representatives from the following:

- Stranmillis University College
- St Mary's University College
- Queens University Belfast
- Ulster University
- The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers – Initial Teacher Education
- The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)
- Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC)
- Northern Regional College (NRC)
- North West Regional College (NWRC)
- South Eastern Regional College (SERC)
- Southern Regional College (SRC)
- South West College (SWC)

Departments and other Statutory Bodies

Throughout the Review, the Panel had ongoing engagement with senior officials in the Department of Education, the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Department for the Economy.

The Panel also met with representatives from other Departments, including those outside Northern Ireland.

The full list of Departments met with by the Panel is below.

- Department of Education
- Education Training Inspectorate
- Department for the Economy
- The Executive Office
- Department of Health
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
- Department for Communities
- Northern Ireland Office
- Department of Education (RoI)

Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and other education partners

The Panel met with a number of Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), some of which on a number of different occasions. Meetings included representatives from Senior Management Teams and / or Boards / Councils.

Education Authority (EA)
 Council For Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)
 Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)
 Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
 Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)
 Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS)
 Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC)
 Governing Bodies Association (GBA)
 The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC)
 Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)
 Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA)
 Public Health Agency (PHA)
 Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI)
 Foras na Gaeilge (FnaG)
 National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI)
 National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)
 Library Services, Libraries NI
 Northern Ireland Museums Council
 Northern Ireland Screen
 Ulster-Scots Agency

Political Parties

At the beginning of the review, the Panel invited leaders from all political parties represented in the NI Assembly to attend briefing meetings. After the publication of the Interim Report, a second round of meetings was offered.

Prior to the preparation of the final report, the Panel met with the Party Leaders of each party eligible to nominate to the Executive, if one were to be formed.

The following parties were engaged with during the review:

- Alliance Party
- The Democratic Unionist Party
- Sinn Fein
- The Social Democratic and Labour Party
- Traditional Unionist Voice
- The Ulster Unionist Party

Voluntary, Community and Representative Groups

The Panel met with representatives from the following organisations:

- Bell Foundation
- British Red Cross
- Coalition for Inclusive Education
- Dyslexia Awareness NI
- Executive Office Thematic Group on Travellers and the NI Traveller Health and Wellbeing Forum
- Foyle Learning Community

- Girl Guides
- Goliath Trust
- Integrated AlumNI
- Inter Ethnic Forum, Mid and East Antrim
- NI Human Rights Commission
- NI Humanists
- North West Migrants Forum
- Scouts NI
- The Gaelic Athletic Association
- The Irish Football Association
- The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)

Academia

The Panel met with academia throughout the Review. This was either via one-to-one meetings or via a workshop held with a range of representatives from Queens University Belfast, University of Ulster, Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College.

Academics from the following organisations were engaged with.

- Queens University Belfast
- University of Ulster
- Stranmillis University College
- St Mary's University College
- The Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion
- The Independent Review of Careers Guidance
- The Ulster University Economic Policy Centre
- The Advisory Commission on Special Education
- The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
- Economic and Social Research Institute

Employers and Association Groups

The Panel met with a number of different organisations that representatives of employers. This included a session with organisations involved in apprenticeships, with a number of apprentices / trainees providing evidence.

- Chamber of Commerce Council
- Civica Northern Ireland
- Combined Facilities Management (CFM)
- Confederation Of British Industry (CBI)
- Construction Employers Federation
- Education and Skills Delivery Partnership, Community Planning, Derry and Strabane Council
- Education and Skills Delivery Partnership, Community Planning, Derry and Strabane Council
- Engineering Sectoral Partnership
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Manufacturing NI
- Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIE Networks)
- People 1st

- Skills Council
- Software Alliance
- The Construction Industry Training Board Northern Ireland (CITB NI)
- The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)
- Workforce Training
- Workplus

Trade Unions

The Panel met with trade union representatives from teaching and non-teaching staff as well as a DE working group leading on Workforce Review.

- The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)
- Unison Union
- General, Municipal, Boilermakers' and Allied Trade Union (GMB)
- Unite the Union
- NASUWT The Teachers Union
- The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)
- Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU)
- National Education Union (NEU)
- National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)
- The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
- The Department of Education Workforce Review - Oversight Group

Other Interested Parties

A number of other meetings were held with representatives from other organisations with an interest in the Review. As follows:

- University of the Highlands
- The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
- Expert Panel into Educational Underachievement (Fair Start Review)
- Education Committee, NI Assembly
- Integrated Education Fund
- Pivotal Northern Ireland
- Post Primary Taskforce
- Review of Children's Social Care in Northern Ireland (commissioned by DoH)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategic Taskforce

Confidentiality

All of our meetings were subject to the Chatham House Rule¹, to facilitate the open exchange of views and ideas. This approach has been central to our ethos in this Review.

¹ The Rule was devised at Chatham House, London, in 1927, to encourage free discussion whilst protecting the privacy of contributors at a meeting.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

We are committed to driving a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion providing the best opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds to thrive. Our stakeholder engagement processes were therefore designed to reduce biases against gender, ethnicity or other protected characteristics, demonstrating our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. (Protected Characteristics covered by law are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation). We proactively took steps to improve the review process by seeking out contributions to the review from under-represented and “hard to reach” groups.

General Data Protection Regulation

The Panel recognise the need to comply with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data as stipulated in the UK by the Data Protection Act (1998) and any subsequent similar acts, including, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)(2018). The spirit of this legislation is that individual stakeholders are entitled to know how and why their personal data is being stored, to what uses it is being put and to whom it may be made available.

The Panel must have stakeholders’ explicit permission to publish personal information. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) defines personal data more broadly as ‘any information relating to an identified or identifiable person’. In this case, the stakeholders’ identifiable data is their name.

The Panel have chosen not to seek permission from individual stakeholders to publish their identities but have instead taken the decision not to publish the names of any individual, young person or child to protect the identity of those who contributed to the Review. Therefore, only the names of organisations, and in some cases their representatives, have been published as part of this report.

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

The list below does not include presentations used during evidence sessions.

Organisations

- Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, Board of Governors
- Association of Controlled Grammar Schools
- Association of School and College Leaders
- Baha'i Community
- Catholic Heads Association
- Catholic Schools' Trustee Service
- Children's Law Centre
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Commission for Victims and Survivors
- Confederation of British Industry
- Controlled Schools' Support Council
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment
- Culture, Arts and Heritage Taskforce
- Dyslexia Awareness Northern Ireland
- Early Years
- Education Authority
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Further Education Colleges Principals Group
- Governing Bodies Association NI
- Institute of Directors
- Integrated Alumni
- Integrated Education Fund
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation
- Libraries Northern Ireland
- Mental Health Champion
- National Association of Head Teachers
- NASUWT: The Teacher's Union
- National Education Union
- Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People Youth Panel
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- Northern Ireland Humanists
- Northern Ireland Museums Council
- Northern Ireland Skills Council
- Oireachtas Joint Committee, Cathaoirleach
- Pivotal (Northern Ireland public policy forum)
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- South Eastern Regional College
- St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore
- Stranmillis University College
- Teach the Future/Friends of the Earth
- Transferor Representatives' Council
- Ulster-Scots Community Network
- Ulster Teachers' Union
- Ulster Wildlife Youth Forum
- Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers Northern Ireland

Individuals

- Denis Rooney
- James Curran
- Martina Jordan
- Naomi Coupland
- Roisin O'Hare

APPENDIX 3: INFORMATION ON KEY STATUTORY BODIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND INVOLVED IN EDUCATION.

Department of Education

The Department of Education's primary statutory duty is to promote the education of the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure the effective implementation of education policy. The Department's main statutory areas of responsibility are 0-4 provision, primary, post-primary and special education and the youth service.

The Department is accountable through its Minister to the Assembly for the effective delivery of its statutory functions and for the effective use of the public funds for which it is responsible. It is supported in delivering its functions by a range of Arm's Length Bodies, each of which is accountable to the Department.

The Department's corporate goals are:

- i. Improving the wellbeing of children and young people – through ensuring that all of our children and young people grow up in a society that provides the support they need to achieve their potential.
- ii. Raising standards for all – through high quality early years provision, excellent teaching and learning in the classroom and effective provision of youth and other children's services, ensuring that all young people enjoy and do well in their learning and their achievements and attainment are appropriately recognised and celebrated, including through qualifications.
- iii. Closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality – addressing the underachievement that can hold our children and young people back; ensuring that young people who face barriers or are at risk of social exclusion are supported to achieve to their full potential; and ensuring that our services are planned effectively on an area basis to provide children and young people with full access to high quality learning experiences, both in school and out of school.
- iv. Developing the education workforce – recognising the particular professional role of early years providers, teachers and school leaders in delivering an effective, age-appropriate curriculum and raising standards and also the important role of other education professionals and those who support them.
- v. Improving the learning environment – making sure that strategic investment supports the delivery of the area plans; that the premises in which young people grow and learn are safe, fit for purpose and conducive to learning; and that the environment provides opportunities for sharing and for building a more cohesive society.
- vi. Delivering high quality education services – ensuring that the arrangements for governing and managing education are modern, accountable and child-centred and that education services are delivered efficiently and effectively in support of schools.

Department for the Economy

The Department for the Economy (DfE) is responsible for:

- i. wider economic policy, including specific areas like Energy, Tourism and Telecoms
- ii. the operation of a range of employment and skills programmes
- iii. oversight and funding of the further and higher education sectors
- iv. various aspects of employment law
- v. the management and operation of various EU funding programmes

DfE is also responsible for the policy, strategic development and financing of the statutory further education sector.

In relation to higher education its role is to formulate policy and administer funding to support education, research and related activities in the Northern Ireland higher education sector.

It also provides an all-age careers information, advice, and guidance service designed to help individuals make choices and about their career paths.

Education Authority

The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for securing adequate provision for primary and secondary education; and for recreational, social, physical, cultural and youth service activities 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);
- promoting shared education and the community use of school premises;
- securing the provision of youth service facilities and funding the provision of regional youth services; 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.
- student support services
- school meals and transport

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. The EA is also the statutory funding authority for grant maintained integrated and voluntary grammar schools.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has a range of statutory functions including as the largest employer of teachers in Northern Ireland (6000+) in catholic maintained schools, and as a managing authority for these schools. It has several key education objectives, working with the EA and other partner organisations in the delivery of NI Executive and Ministerial targets for education across NI.

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

The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) 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 Department of Education (DE) on matters concerned with the curriculum, assessment, examinations and external qualifications and accrediting and approving qualifications; 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.

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

The Education (Northern Ireland) Reform Order 1989 placed a statutory duty on the Department of Education (DE) to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. Integrated education is defined as “the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic children”. These services are provided by NICIE which receives grants from the Department.

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)

Provisions in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 placed a duty on the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education.

In August 2000, the Department established the body CnaG to encourage and facilitate the strategic development of, and provide guidance and advice to, the Irish medium sector.

Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA)

The Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) was 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. It is a joint initiative between the DE and the Irish Department of Education & Skills (DES), with funding provided on a 50/50 basis. The Centre was developed under the Good Friday Agreement and is an agreed area of co-operation within the North South Ministerial Council.

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.

Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI)

Following the creation of the Education Authority (EA) as a regional body, responsibility for regional youth services funding and support transferred from the YCNI to the Education Authority (EA) on 1 April 2016, with funding for regional organisations earmarked.

Following expiry of the term of office for Board members, YCNI has not been operational since 1 April 2019.

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (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 continues to operate as an executive NDPB of DE, however, following an extremely critical performance review of its Council and Committee structures, undertaken in 2021, the education minister determined that it should be replaced as soon as the required legislation can be brought forward. Its Council was stood down immediately and it currently operates under direct Departmental oversight.

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).

Exceptional Circumstances Body (ECB)

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

The ECB considers cases where an applicant claims that their child must attend a particular post-primary school for exceptional or compelling circumstances, but an application to that school made through the normal process has been refused.

Sectoral Bodies

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC)

A non-statutory body, The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) was established in 2016 and is registered as a limited company. 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.

Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS)

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.

Governing Bodies Association (GBA)

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. In 2016 the then Minister agreed that annual funding may be made available for the GBA under section 4 of the Education Act (NI) 2014 to help professionalise their contribution to area planning.

APPENDIX 4: SUMMARY OF DESKTOP EXERCISE REVIEWING THE NETWORK OF SCHOOLS.

Approach to school modelling exercises

1. It is important to note at the outset that these were theoretical, desktop models and it was necessary to employ a range of assumptions. If a reorganisation of the school network were to occur in real life, the results could be very different. For example, in the exercises where pupils were redistributed to their nearest school, this was based purely on distance from the pupil's home. However, in reality, parents may choose an alternative, more distant, school for their child. Additionally, the data is based on a point in time and changes in demographics and expenditure would have an impact on the outcome if this exercise were repeated in the future.
2. At a system level, however, we are of the view that the outcomes of the modelling exercise will be representative of the likely out-workings of a practical implementation of the principles employed in the model.

Primary schools

3. Pupils were redistributed from schools which had an enrolment below the Sustainable Schools Policy threshold for rural primary schools (105 pupils) until all primary schools were at or above this threshold. Pupils were redistributed to their nearest available school based on the pupil's home address. Enrolment figures and pupil addresses were based on 2020/21 data as this was the most recently available at the time the exercise was carried out. The sector of the school was not taken into account during this exercise.
4. Three types of school were excluded from the testing: the primary school on Rathlin Island (due to geographical reasons), Irish medium schools (as it would be neither appropriate nor practical to expect pupils who are currently attending an English medium school to attend an Irish medium school or vice versa) and the preparatory departments of grammar schools as these are fee-paying schools.
5. Theoretical savings were calculated for the schools that would be removed from the network. These were based on principals, teachers, rates, maintenance and non-teaching staff. The main assumptions related to these are outlined below.
6. It was assumed that each school had a full-time principal. The cost of these principals was calculated by obtaining the average salary of a primary school principal, uplifting it appropriately to account for employer costs (pension and employer's national insurance contributions) and multiplying this figure by the number of schools to be removed.
7. The number of full-time equivalent teachers (excluding principals) in each school was obtained and this was multiplied by the average teacher cost, uplifted for employer costs, to give the savings that could theoretically be generated. Average salaries for both principals and teachers were based on 2021 rates.

8. The rates bill for each school was obtained for 2021/22 and the rates for schools to be removed were totalled to give an estimated saving.
9. The maintenance costs for all schools were obtained and this was halved to give an approximate value for maintenance for primary schools (the other half being for post-primary schools). This was then divided by the total number of primary schools and multiplied by the number to be removed to generate an estimated saving.
10. The annual cost of cleaners, grounds maintenance, caretakers, administrative staff and classroom assistants (not those employed to work alongside a pupil with a SEN statement as they would move with the pupil, but general classroom assistants) were obtained for the schools that would be removed and these were totalled to give an approximate saving. Costs were obtained for 2019/20 to avoid the skewing effect of COVID-19 school closures which may have reduced this expenditure for some schools.
11. Additional costs were calculated for those schools which would be gaining new pupils. These were based on teaching staff, non-teaching staff and transport and are outlined below.
12. If a school's pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) exceeded 25 due to gaining new pupils, additional teachers were allocated to that school to bring the PTR to 25. The cost of these teachers was calculated using average teacher salaries and employer costs, as outlined previously.
13. In discussion with principals and EA staff, it was decided that the costs that would most be affected by additional pupils would be administrative staff and classroom assistants. It was thought that additional pupils were likely to make little difference to the number of caretakers, grounds maintenance staff or cleaners employed.
14. In order to estimate the additional costs for administrative staff and classroom assistants, it was necessary to calculate an average cost per school. Schools were assigned to one of nine enrolment categories (e.g. 1-50 pupils, 51-100, 101-150 etc.), on the basis of enrolment in 2019/20 (as the expenditure data was from this year). Average costs were then calculated for each category.
15. The additional pupils that a school would gain were added to the 2019/20 enrolment, and this new enrolment was compared to the original enrolment. If the school remained in the same enrolment category, it was deemed that no additional costs would be incurred. If the school moved up an enrolment category, the actual cost incurred by the school in 2019/20 was deducted from the average cost of the new category, to give an estimated additional cost to the school. If the average cost for that category was less than what the school had incurred in 2019/20, no additional cost was attributed to the school (nor was a deduction made).
16. The distance between a pupil's home and their current school was calculated and the number of pupils who may be in receipt of free home to school transport was calculated. It was assumed that any pupil who lived more than 2 miles from their school would receive free transport. (In reality, some pupils living more than 2 miles from their school may not receive free transport if they do not meet the requirements of the Department's *Home to School Transport Policy*².) The calculation was repeated after the redistribution of pupils and it was found that there were more pupils requiring home to school transport than before the

2 [Home to School Transport | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk)

exercise was conducted. The cost of this additional transport was calculated by obtaining the cost per head for transport by Ulsterbus (i.e. rural areas) and then multiplying this by the additional pupils who would require transport. It should be noted that some pupils travel by Metro (Belfast city – though the vast majority of pupils who were redistributed in this exercise were outside of the Belfast area) or Northern Ireland Rail or on EA-operated buses and the costs for these vary, though Translink buses represent a large proportion of the Department's expenditure on transport.

17. The total savings and additional costs were totalled and netted off to give an overall saving per annum in resource costs.
18. Additional capital costs were calculated to take into account the accommodation required for pupils who moved schools. It was considered that schools whose enrolment increased by more than 20% would require significant investment. Schools whose enrolment increased by less than this were notionally allocated funding for modular accommodation, with the cost dependent on the number of pupils gained.

Post-primary schools (Years 8-12)

19. At primary school level it is relatively straightforward to calculate the impact of changes in enrolment numbers on teaching staff costs as there is, generally, one teacher per class. However, at post-primary level, there are complexities arising from the wide range of subjects that are available and differing numbers of periods being allocated to each one, depending upon the age of the pupils. Practical classes require smaller class sizes than non-practical ones. Pupils entering years 11 and 13 can choose from a wide range of optional exam subjects. All these factors have to be taken into account when developing the timetable. As such, the assumption of requiring one teacher per class does not hold. In order to build a desktop model that could be applied, in theory, to the entire network of post-primary schools, it was necessary to carry out an in-depth analysis of real-world timetabling data.
20. The model was based on the actual numbers of teachers required to teach a year group, extrapolated up or down for a wide range of enrolments, from 20 pupils per year group to 320. DE's circular on class sizes³ was given due consideration in this part of the exercise. Average teaching salaries for post-primary schools were obtained and uplifted for employer's costs (pension and employer's national insurance contributions). The average teaching cost was multiplied by the number of teachers required to teach the year group and divided by the number of pupils in that year group to give a per pupil cost.
21. It was determined that the most efficient enrolments, in terms of teaching staff costs per pupil, were those that resulted in 30 pupils per class, ideally with a minimum of 120 pupils per year group, i.e. 600 in total for Years 8-12⁴.
22. Post-primary school enrolments in Years 8-12 were adjusted up to a minimum of 600, with multiples of 150 thereafter (i.e. 30 additional pupils for each of the five year groups). Pupil addresses were NOT taken into account in this exercise. Irish medium schools were excluded, for the reasons outlined in the primary school section of this appendix. Dickson Plan schools were also excluded as they have different year group structures (i.e. Years 8-10 for junior highs, Years 10-12 for the senior high and Years 11-14 for the grammar schools). The exercise

³ [Class Sizes in Post-Primary Schools - Practical Subjects - Circular 2016....pdf \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

⁴ It should be noted that the Sustainable Schools Policy threshold for Years 8-12 is 500 pupils.

did not take into account the sector that a pupil was currently attending or whether they were at a single-sex or co-ed school. Enrolment data for 2021/22 was used.

23. Theoretical teaching staff savings were calculated for the schools that would be removed from the network using the model described above. Whilst this exercise was predominantly concerned with Years 8-12, a small number of sixth form pupils attended the schools that would be removed, and their teaching costs were also calculated and added to the saving figure.
24. The non-teaching staff costs for the schools that would be removed were obtained and totalled. This covered cleaners, grounds maintenance, caretakers, administrative staff and classroom assistants (not those employed to work alongside a pupil with a SEN statement as they would move with the pupil, but general classroom assistants).
25. The rates bill for each school was obtained for 2021/22 and the rates for schools to be removed were totalled to give an estimated saving.
26. The energy costs from 2021/22 were obtained for each school to be removed and totalled.
27. Additional teaching staff costs were calculated using the model described above, for all schools gaining pupils.
28. The total savings and additional costs were totalled and netted off to give an overall saving per annum in resource costs.
29. Additional capital costs were calculated to take into account the accommodation required for pupils who moved schools. It was considered that schools whose Years 8-12 enrolment increased by more than 20% would require significant investment. Schools whose enrolment increased by less than this were notionally allocated funding for modular accommodation, with the cost dependent on the number of pupils gained.

Sixth form

30. Timetabling data relating to sixth forms was incorporated into the model described above and it was determined that a minimum of 120 pupils per year group (240 per sixth form) were required to give the most efficient teaching costs per pupil.
31. On this basis, pupils were redistributed from schools which had an enrolment below 240 in sixth form until all sixth forms were at or above this threshold. Pupils were redistributed to their nearest available school with a sixth form, based on the pupil's home address. Enrolment figures and pupil addresses were based on 2022/23 data. The sector of the school and whether it was single sex or co-ed were not taken into account during this exercise.
32. Irish medium schools were excluded from this exercise.
33. Theoretical teaching staff savings were calculated for the sixth forms that would be removed from the network using the model described above. Non-teaching staff savings were not calculated as it was considered that these would be minimal as Years 8-12 would remain in each school.

34. Additional teaching staff costs were calculated using the model described above, for all schools gaining pupils.
35. The total savings and additional costs were totalled and netted off to give an overall saving per annum in resource costs.
36. Additional capital costs were calculated to take into account the accommodation required for pupils who moved schools. It was considered that schools whose sixth form enrolment increased by more than 20% would require significant investment. Schools whose sixth form enrolment increased by less than this were notionally allocated funding for modular accommodation, with the cost dependent on the number of pupils gained. Schools which had been earmarked for significant investment in the Year 8-12 exercise were not double counted here.

APPENDIX 5: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Investing in the education journey

Recommendation 1: Raise the age of education participation.

All learners should, by law, remain in education or apprenticeship/training until age 18.

This could involve full-time education or training, or spending 20 hours or more a week working or volunteering while in part-time education or training.

Recommendation 2: Expand early years education.

The early years offer a unique learning opportunity for all children. Increased investment in 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.

Recommendation 3: Give everybody the opportunity to access basic education throughout their lifetime free of charge.

Courses that offer literacy, numeracy and digital skills development at levels 1 and 2 should be available free of charge to all unqualified adults, as these skills offer access to the labour market. Additionally, courses in English as an additional language should be offered at the same levels to assist newcomer adults.

Recommendation 4: Undertake major reform of the curriculum and keep it under continual review.

The curriculum needs to be based on a clear understanding of how learning occurs. It should inspire lifelong learners capable of successfully participating in an ever-changing society. Both the content and the process of learning are crucial. Learners should advance smoothly from early childhood to lifelong learning without abrupt changes, such as currently exists most notably between the primary and post-primary stages. This will require major changes and significant investment.

The curriculum should be kept under continual review following radical reform involving a reduction in subject content, improvement of transitions and the development of pre-vocational learning from age 14.

In adult life, the main curricular consideration is meeting the learner's needs as the learner perceives them.

Recommendation 5: Modify the transition process.

In order to create a seamless transition, reduce differences between academically selective and non-selective schools, and move towards greater parity of esteem between different types of schools, the process should be reformed to:

- Limit the number of students transferring to post-primary schools based on academic criteria.
- Ensure that the percentage of students admitted through this method who are eligible for FSM reflects the proportion of applications received from FSM-eligible students.
- Consider approaches to better equalise the distribution of newcomer pupils across the grammar and non-grammar sectors.
- Offer increased flexibility at age 14 to allow students to transfer to different institutions if they wish.
- Provide learners with a right to remain in school to take their A levels (or other post-16 qualifications offered by the school) should they wish, either by remaining in their “home” school (should there be sixth form provision) or having a right of entry to another local sixth form provision.
- Eliminate the formal DP process to obtain approval for changes related to pupils transferring via academic selection.
- As soon as is practicable, transition away from using a single test as a means of selection for transfer to post-primary school. Instead use a broader pupil profile.

Recommendation 6: Provide new curricular pathways for all at 14.

All learners, starting from age 14, should explore a wider range of educational pathways including pre-vocational and technical education and learning about the world of work. To achieve this, schools need to collaborate more effectively while also working closely with the FE sector to provide increased choice and flexibility.

Recommendation 7: Ensure assessment supports progression.

Processes should be put in place to ensure statutory assessment takes place throughout a learner’s time in primary and post-primary school. A unique learner profile should give teachers and parents the necessary information to work with learners to make informed decisions regarding their future pathways.

There should be mandatory limitations on the use of qualification outcomes, such as GCSE and AS Level performance, as *barriers* to educational progression in schools.

The new assessment and qualifications body should oversee vocational qualifications, ensuring that the qualifications used in Northern Ireland meet the needs of learners and employers and that the system is understood.

Recommendation 8: Reform the Careers Service to promote understanding of the world of work.

The existing Careers Service should be reconfigured, re-invigorated and reskilled. Suitably trained, full-time careers officers should be embedded in ALCs to offer careers guidance and advice to young learners and to act as links to local employers.

A careers portal should be developed that is open to contributions from employers, professional bodies and educational institutions.

Recommendation 9: Retain local talent.

The number of places available at Northern Ireland universities should be progressively increased until the ratio of undergraduate places (in Northern Ireland universities) to the age cohort matches that in the rest of the UK. To fund this growth, the fee level must be modified. The process should commence as soon as feasible with a progressive 10% rise. Fee parity with England should be accomplished within a decade.

The expansion in places should focus on courses which fill skills gaps, meet economic needs and enhance the opportunities available to students.

Investing in support for our learners, educators and parents

Recommendation 10: Invest in education.

Education is the single most important investment in the future of society and the economy. Increasing the current level of investment will generate future savings in areas such as health, welfare and criminal justice.

The Executive should immediately increase the annual education resource budget by £155m to address the per-pupil funding gap with England and Wales.

We have identified a further £136m shortfall related to higher levels of learners with a statement of educational need in Northern Ireland in comparison with England. Meeting these needs in an affordable manner is likely to require both restructuring of the current processes for intervention as well as an additional allocation to meet some portion of this funding gap.

Furthermore, we recommend an additional annual capital allocation of £25m (above current capital budget levels for an estimated period of 5 years) to address current needs in the provision of SEN facilities in both special and mainstream schools.

In addition to the funding outlined above, which is required to bridge the financial gap with other jurisdictions, there is a need to invest in education to implement the recommendations of this Report. This will require an Executive-led Education Investment Strategy. Additional funding should be made available progressively over future years by means of both additional budget allocations and through implementation of the recommendations in this Report which will generate efficiencies.

DE should invest in an education “intelligence” function, ensuring there is the technical capacity and appropriate access to research to make informed decisions, horizon scan, collect data, monitor programmes, interrogate spending and leverage emerging technologies.

The Executive should put in place multi-year budgets for education.

Recommendation 11: Transform SEN support to cater equitably for the needs of all learners.

The current policies, practices, and legislation are failing to deliver support for learners with SEN. At the same time, expenditure is out of control in a way that threatens the quality of service for all learners. Thorough reform is urgently required. The use of resources should be based on equitable treatment of all pupils.

There must be greater access to specialist support within schools, with a particular focus on support at Stages 1 and 2. At Stage 3, the educational institution should have flexibility in the use of allocated resources. The practice of automatically allocating classroom assistant hours should cease. A comprehensive Learner Support Workforce Programme should be developed and implemented to increase the number of specialist provision professionals (such as trained SEN teachers, Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists etc.) whilst reducing the number of classroom assistants.

Learners with statements of SEN should not be considered as supernumerary to admission or enrolment figures. This approach should allow institutions to prepare to meet the needs of these learners. The goal should be to adopt a “SEN first” model that ensures that learners with a statement of SEN receive school placements in a timely manner.

DE should define what it sees as “inclusive education” taking account both of the local context and international best practice.

Recommendation 12: Value the education workforce.

A Workforce Strategy must be developed to address workforce shortages and workload issues, with the aim of attracting and retaining teachers. The strategy should focus on empowering and supporting future leaders. A review of the Jordanstown Agreement is overdue, with new terms and conditions required to reflect changes in the education landscape.

Education must invest in professional development of its entire workforce to ensure a culture of continuous improvement and sharing of best practice. This requires an increase in resource and ensuring teachers have the necessary time to undertake professional development. The centrally held resource should be increased and then allocated to schools. Within their overall resource as thus augmented, schools would have to determine the priority attached to professional development. All educational institutions must develop policies for professional review and development. The impact of CPD should be carefully monitored.

The GTCNI must be re-established to oversee adherence to professional standards and conduct. As soon as practicable, this requirement should be extended to cover all professionals and para-professionals employed within the publicly funded education service, other than in universities – with the GTCNI becoming an Education Workforce Council.

Recommendation 13: Provide expert curriculum advice.

Considerable resources and attention need to be invested in curriculum development, review, and advice. CCEA’s responsibilities should be divided between two separate organisations - one for curriculum and the other for assessment and qualifications.

An interim Curriculum Taskforce should lead on the identified areas of reform until the new Curriculum Council is created. The taskforce should prioritise addressing the issue of excessive curriculum content and also lead on other identified priorities.

Recommendation 14: Facilitate learner-centred interventions.

Learner support services delivered by the EA are not functioning as expected. To provide responsive developmental and educational services to learners, educators, and parents, a new early intervention and learner support body should be created. This could be accomplished by separating the management and educational functions of the EA.

The new body will be responsible for all the essential services a learner may require during their education journey. These services include parental support and engagement, Sure Start management and Pre-School Education Programme, learner support services (i.e., those for learners with SEN), child protection and safeguarding, youth services, emotional health and

wellbeing, education improvement and professional development, and careers education.

As an interim measure, the EA should restructure internally to create a management services group (for transactional services) and an early intervention and learner support group (for educational support), each with a single senior responsible officer. Over time, the organisation would divide into a single Authority (responsible for employment and other transactional support services) and a separate early intervention and learner support agency, responsible for all essential services a learner may require during their education journey.

Recommendation 15: Give additional support to allow parents to get into work.

The Executive should apply additional funds received following the planned expansion of funded childcare in England to evidenced interventions that support affordable childcare and/or expanded early years services that will benefit Northern Ireland society as a whole.

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.

Recommendation 16: Prioritise wellbeing.

There is a need for greater investment in health and wellbeing interventions and pastoral care. To address complex needs and support the wider school workforce, schools should be enabled to employ specialist staff, such as social workers. This will require new funding and joint working with colleagues in health. Every school should have direct access to counselling services and crisis workers, either through dedicated posts within schools or resources shared between schools.

Emotional health and wellbeing should be prioritised in the curriculum, from early years right through to post-16. All learners should have the opportunity to acquire crucial life skills.

Recommendation 17: Combat disadvantage.

It is essential that all learners be provided with the necessary support to thrive in education.

The Fair Start Programme should be funded and implemented.

The Engage Programme should be evaluated, and a business case developed to assess the widest potential benefits to Northern Ireland of mainstreaming such an approach to provide ongoing targeted support for learners at risk of disadvantage.

In our Report we make numerous recommendations that would positively contribute to combatting disadvantage. These include:

- Investing in early childhood education.
- Introducing pre-vocational pathways from 14 years old.
- Removing qualification requirements that prevent progression.
- Prioritising wellbeing.
- Investing in continuing professional development.
- Measuring success other than attainment at 16 or 18 years.
- Raising the age of educational participation to 18 years old.
- Developing a thriving college sector with valued vocational qualifications.
- Providing educational opportunities for under-qualified adults.

Investing in the education system and structures

Recommendation 18: Establish a single Department for the entire education journey.

We recommend the formation of a unified department with the sole responsibility of overseeing the entirety of a learner's education journey. This would entail merging the existing responsibilities of DE with some of those within DfE, specifically with regard to education, learning and skills.

Recommendation 19: Reform school management arrangements.

A single authority should be created, in the first instance for Controlled and Maintained schools with the opportunity for other sectors to join⁵.

In parallel, a more customer-focused service delivery organisation should be established to provide educational support to institutions and learners.

A crucial first step towards achieving this goal would be to establish a dedicated Directorate within the EA with the specific responsibility of managing Controlled schools.

Recommendation 20: Reconfigure the network of schools.

A new approach to the area planning process is necessary to create a school network that meets the needs of all learners and promotes social cohesion, while also providing a comprehensive curriculum in a cost-effective manner.

An Area Planning Commission should carry out a review of the existing network of schools in Northern Ireland. This Commission should prepare a plan for a revised network of schools with more efficient and sustainable admission and enrolment numbers, capable of offering a complete curriculum experience to all learners. Proposed changes to the network of schools should be made on a 'sector-blind' basis prioritising the needs of learners and efficiency of delivery.

This process has the potential to create new jointly managed community schools by merging schools from different sectors. Maximum annual savings of approximately £100m could be generated for reinvestment in education.

In the longer term, a single strategic planning authority should be established to oversee the ongoing development of this revised network of schools.

Recommendation 21: Promote learners learning together.

As soon as is practicable, all learners at all stages should have the opportunity to learn alongside individuals from other communities and backgrounds in the same classroom. We have made a number of recommendations throughout the Report which will expand these opportunities:

- Increasing the number of integrated schools or jointly managed community schools. All families should have such options within a realistic travelling distance as soon as possible.

⁵ We envisage that this will be established on phased basis with the consent of the various parties.

- The proposed reconfiguration of the network of schools offers the theoretical potential to create 177 new or reconfigured jointly managed community schools and sixth forms with expanded numbers of learners from different communities attending the same school and learning together.
- All schools should take steps to ensure a greater mix of religious background in their pupil population. These steps should include active encouragement of applications from any under-represented community, reviewing admissions criteria to eliminate any unintended barriers and ensuring that the ethos and workings of the school are genuinely welcoming to all.
- The new single department should report annually on the community mix of learners at an individual school level and schools should report annually on the proactive steps they are taking to ensure a broader community mix in their pupil intake.
- Area learning communities should put greater emphasis on fostering joint learning opportunities. This involves learners being educated together in person in the same classroom but there is also merit in joint extra-curricular activities.
- Where there is clearly an educational and value-for-money case, shared education campuses should be actively promoted as mechanisms to improve community cohesion in the longer term.

These recommendations, implemented together and in full, will make a meaningful improvement in the level of community mixing in schools.

Recommendation 22: Promote a cost effective, thriving and value for money college sector.

Colleges are a vital part of the education system but there is insufficient understanding of their role. They are the main suppliers of vocational education and thus a crucial support for the economy. They also provide a route forward for adults with poor educational qualifications.

There is a need to simplify the system of qualifications, enhance collaboration with both schools and universities, secure closer involvement with business and industry, ensure greater cost-effectiveness in service delivery and reform governance structures.

A single college governance model with fully integrated shared services but operating via local campuses should replace the current regional colleges. In order to promote responsiveness to local economic circumstances and ensure value for money, increased decision-making powers should be delegated to campus level.

Recommendation 23: Use broad measures of success.

A variety of measurement tools should be used to assess the performance of individuals, institutions and the entire system. These assessments should seek to place greater emphasis on a broader range of educational outcomes and on the value added by the institution.

Recommendation 24: Strengthen accountability.

Proportionate accountability is in the interests of learners, the wider public and all providers of education.

A dashboard of measures, covering all important intended outcomes of education should be introduced. Standardised assessments from an early stage of schooling will assist evaluation of the system as a whole and self-evaluation by each school, as well as being used to help individual learners progress. Boards of governors play an essential role in reviewing critically performance data for their schools.

Inspection is an essential element of the system of accountability as well as helping schools with the process of continuous improvement. The current position where some staff and schools have not been engaging with the ETI inspection regime for an extended period cannot be allowed to continue. In other UK jurisdictions, it is an offence to obstruct the process of inspection. Similar provisions should be enacted in Northern Ireland.

Recommendation 25: Introduce a legislative framework that enables innovation.

Existing legislation should be consolidated to create a Single Education Act that incorporates any new legislation required to implement the recommendations of this Report.

Regulations should give flexibility to meet changing circumstances.

APPENDIX 6: FULL SUITE OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM VOLUME 2

Early Years

Expand early years education

The early years offer a unique learning opportunity for all children. Increased investment in 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-year-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 into work

The Executive should apply additional funds received following the planned expansion of funded childcare in England to evidenced interventions that support affordable childcare and/or expanded early years services that will benefit Northern Ireland society as a whole.

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.

Disadvantage

Combat disadvantage

It is essential that all learners be provided with the necessary support to thrive in education.

The Fair Start Programme should be funded and implemented.

The Engage Programme should be evaluated and a business case developed to assess the widest potential benefits to Northern Ireland of mainstreaming such an approach to provide ongoing targeted support for learners at risk of disadvantage.

In our Report we make numerous recommendations that would positively contribute to combatting disadvantage. These include:

- Investing in early childhood education.
- Introducing pre-vocational pathways from 14 years old.
- Removing qualification requirements that prevent progression.
- Prioritising wellbeing.
- Investing in continuing professional development.
- Measuring success other than attainment at 16 or 18 years.
- Raising the age of educational participation to 18 years old.
- Developing a thriving college sector with valued vocational qualifications.
- Providing educational opportunities for under-qualified adults.

Learner Support, Inclusion and Well-being

Prioritise wellbeing

There is a need for greater investment in health and wellbeing interventions and pastoral care. To address complex needs and support the wider school workforce, schools should be enabled to employ specialist staff, such as social workers. This will require new funding and joint working with colleagues in health. Every school should have direct access to counselling services and crisis workers, either through dedicated posts within schools or resources shared between schools.

Emotional health and wellbeing should be prioritised in the curriculum, from early years right through to post-16. All learners should have the opportunity to acquire crucial life skills.

Transform SEN support to cater equitably for the needs of all learners

The current policies, practices, and legislation are failing to deliver support for learners with SEN. At the same time, expenditure is out of control in a way that threatens the quality of service for all learners. Thorough reform is urgently required. The use of resources should be based on equitable treatment of all pupils.

There must be greater access to specialist support within schools, with a particular focus on support at Stages 1 and 2. At Stage 3, the educational institution should have flexibility in the use of allocated resources. The practice of automatically allocating classroom assistant hours should cease. A comprehensive Learner Support Workforce Programme should be developed and implemented to increase the number of specialist provision professionals (such as trained SEN teachers, Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists etc.) whilst reducing the number of classroom assistants.

Learners with statements of SEN should not be considered as supernumerary to admission or enrolment figures. This approach should allow institutions to prepare to meet the needs of these learners. The goal should be to adopt a “SEN first” model that ensures that learners with a statement of SEN receive school placements in a timely manner.

DE should define what it sees as “inclusive education” taking account both of the local context and international best practice.

Facilitate learner-centred interventions

Learner support services delivered by the EA are not functioning as expected. To provide responsive developmental and educational services to learners, educators, and parents, a new early intervention and learner support body should be created. This could be accomplished by separating the management and educational functions of the EA.

The new body will be responsible for all the essential services a learner may require during their education journey. These services include parental support and engagement, Sure Start management and Pre-School Education Programme, learner support services (i.e., those for learners with SEN), pupil wellbeing and protection, youth services, emotional health and wellbeing, education improvement and professional development, and careers education.

As an interim measure, the EA should restructure internally to create a management services group (for transactional services) and an early intervention and learner support group (for educational support), each with a single senior responsible officer. Over time, the organisation would divide into a single authority (responsible for employment and other transactional support services) and a separate early intervention and learner support agency, responsible for all essential services a learner may require during their education journey.

Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications

Undertake major reform of the curriculum and keep it under continual review

The curriculum needs to be based on a clear understanding of how learning occurs. It should inspire lifelong learners capable of successfully participating in an ever-changing society. Both the content and the process of learning are crucial. Learners should advance smoothly from early childhood to lifelong learning without abrupt changes, such as currently exists most notably between the primary and post-primary stages. This will require major changes and significant investment.

The curriculum should be kept under continual review following radical reform involving a reduction in subject content, improvement of transitions and the development of pre-vocational learning from age 14.

In adult life, the main curricular consideration is meeting the learner's needs as the learner perceives them.

Provide expert curriculum advice

Considerable resources and attention need to be invested in curriculum development, review, and advice. CCEA's responsibilities should be divided between two separate organisations – one for curriculum and the other for assessment and qualifications.

An interim Curriculum Taskforce should lead on the identified areas of reform until the new Curriculum Council is created. The taskforce should prioritise addressing the issue of excessive curriculum content and also lead on other identified priorities.

Ensure assessment supports progression

Processes should be put in place to ensure statutory assessment takes place throughout a learner's time in primary and post-primary school. A unique learner profile should give teachers and parents the necessary information to work with learners to make informed decisions regarding their future pathways.

There should be mandatory limitations on the use of qualification outcomes, such as GCSE and AS Level performance, as *barriers* to educational progression in schools.

The new assessment and qualifications body should oversee vocational qualifications, ensuring that the qualifications used in Northern Ireland meet the needs of learners and employers and that the system is understood.

Transitions and Progression

Use broad measures of success

A variety of measurement tools should be used to assess the performance of individuals, institutions and the entire system. These assessments should seek to place greater emphasis on a broader range of educational outcomes and on the value added by the institution.

Modify the transition process

In order to create a seamless transition, reduce differences between academically selective and non-selective schools, and move towards greater parity of esteem between different types of schools, the process should be reformed to:

- Limit the number of students transferring to post-primary schools based on academic criteria.
- Ensure that the percentage of students admitted through this method who are eligible for FSM reflects the proportion of applications received from FSM-eligible students.
- Consider approaches to better equalise the distribution of newcomer pupils across the grammar and non-grammar sectors.
- Offer increased flexibility at age 14 to allow students to transfer to different institutions if they wish.
- Provide learners with a right to remain in school to take their A Levels (or other post-16 qualifications offered by the school) should they wish, either by remaining in their “home” school (should there be sixth form provision) or having a right of entry to another local sixth form provision.
- Eliminate the formal DP process to obtain approval for changes related to pupils transferring via academic selection.
- As soon as is practicable, transition away from using a single test as a means of selection for transfer to post-primary school. Instead use a broader pupil profile.

Provide new curricular pathways for all at 14

All learners, starting from age 14, should explore a wider range of educational pathways including pre-vocational and technical education and learning about the world of work. To achieve this, schools need to collaborate more effectively while also working closely with the FE sector to provide increased choice and flexibility.

Reform the Careers Service to promote understanding of the world of work

The existing Careers Service should be reconfigured, re-invigorated and reskilled. Suitably trained, full-time careers officers should be embedded in ALCs to offer careers guidance and advice to young learners and to act as links to local employers.

A careers portal should be developed that is open to contributions from employers, professional bodies and educational institutions.

Raise the age of educational participation

All learners should, by law, remain in education or apprenticeship/training until age 18.

This could involve full-time education or training, or spending 20 hours or more a week working or volunteering while in part-time education or training.

Further and Higher Education, LifeLong Learning

Promote a cost effective, thriving and value for money college sector

Colleges are a vital part of the education system but there is insufficient understanding of their role. They are the main suppliers of vocational education and thus a crucial support for the economy. They also provide a route forward for adults with poor educational qualifications.

There is a need to simplify the system of qualifications, enhance collaboration with both schools and universities, secure closer involvement with business and industry, ensure greater cost-effectiveness in service delivery and reform governance structures.

A single college governance model with fully integrated shared services but operating via local campuses should replace the current regional colleges. In order to promote responsiveness to local economic circumstances and ensure value for money, increased decision-making powers should be delegated to campus level.

Retain local talent

The number of places available at Northern Ireland universities should be progressively increased until the ratio of undergraduate places (in Northern Ireland universities) to the age cohort matches that in the rest of the UK. To fund this growth, the fee level must be modified. The process should commence as soon as feasible with a progressive 10% rise. Fee parity with England should be accomplished within a decade.

The expansion in places should focus on courses which fill skills gaps, meet economic needs and enhance the opportunities available to students.

Give everybody the opportunity to access basic education throughout their lifetime free of charge

Courses that offer literacy, numeracy and digital skills development at levels 1 and 2 should be available free of charge to all unqualified adults, as these skills offer access to the labour market. Additionally, courses in English as an additional language should be offered at the same levels to assist newcomer adults.

Supporting the Education Workforce

Value the education workforce

A Workforce Strategy must be developed to address workforce shortages and workload issues, with the aim of attracting and retaining teachers. The strategy should focus on empowering and supporting future leaders. A review of the Jordanstown Agreement is overdue, with new terms and conditions required to reflect changes in the education landscape.

Education must invest in professional development of its entire workforce to ensure a culture of continuous improvement and sharing of best practice. This requires an increase in resource and ensuring teachers have the necessary time to undertake professional development. The centrally held resource should be increased and then allocated to schools. Within their overall resource as thus augmented, schools would have to determine the priority attached to professional development. All educational institutions must develop policies for professional review and development. The impact of CPD should be carefully monitored.

The GTCNI must be re-established to oversee adherence to professional standards and conduct. As soon as practicable, this requirement should be extended to cover all professionals and para-professionals employed within the publicly funded education service, other than in universities – with the GTCNI becoming an Education Workforce Council.

Structures and Single System

Establish a single department for the entire education journey

We recommend the formation of a unified department with the sole responsibility of overseeing the entirety of a learner's education journey. This would entail merging the existing responsibilities of DE with some of those within DfE, specifically with regard to education, learning and skills.

Reform school management arrangements

A single authority should be created, in the first instance for Controlled and Maintained schools with the opportunity for other sectors to join⁶.

In parallel, a more customer-focused service delivery organisation should be established to provide educational support to institutions and learners.

A crucial first step towards achieving this goal would be to establish a dedicated Directorate within the EA with the specific responsibility of managing Controlled schools.

Promote learners learning together

As soon as is practicable, all learners at all stages should have the opportunity to learn alongside individuals from other communities and backgrounds in the same classroom. We have made a number of recommendations throughout the Report which will expand these opportunities:

- Increasing the number of integrated schools or jointly managed community schools. All families should have such options within a realistic travelling distance as soon as possible.
- The proposed reconfiguration of the network of schools offers the theoretical potential to create 177⁷ new or reconfigured jointly managed community schools and sixth forms with expanded numbers of learners from different communities attending the same school and learning together.
- All schools should take steps to ensure a greater mix of religious background in their pupil population. These steps should include active encouragement of applications from any under-represented community, reviewing admissions criteria to eliminate any unintended barriers and ensuring that the ethos and workings of the school are genuinely welcoming to all.
- The new single department should report annually on the community mix of learners at an individual school level and schools should report annually on the proactive steps they are taking to ensure a broader community mix in their pupil intake.

⁶ We envisage that this will be established on phased basis with the consent of the various parties.

⁷ Volume 2 details the theoretical potential to create 99 new primary schools, 22 post-primary schools and 56 sixth forms that would be managed on a cross-sectoral basis. This is based on a modelling exercise and "real world" delivery may result in different numbers.

- The new single department should report annually on the community mix of learners at an individual school level and schools should report annually on the proactive steps they are taking to ensure a broader community mix in their pupil intake.
- Area learning communities should put greater emphasis on fostering joint learning opportunities. This involves learners being educated together in person in the same classroom but there is also merit in joint extra-curricular activities.
- Where there is clearly an educational and value-for-money case, shared education campuses should be actively promoted as mechanisms to improve community cohesion in the longer term.

These recommendations, implemented together and in full, will make a meaningful improvement in the level of community mixing in schools.

Institutional Governance

Strengthen accountability

Proportionate accountability is in the interests of learners, the wider public and all providers of education.

A dashboard of measures, covering all important intended outcomes of education should be introduced. Standardised assessments from an early stage of schooling will assist evaluation of the system as a whole and self-evaluation by each school, as well as being used to help individual learners progress. Boards of governors play an essential role in reviewing critically performance data for their schools.

Inspection is an essential element of the system of accountability as well as helping schools with the process of continuous improvement. The current position where some staff and schools have not been engaging with the ETI inspection regime for an extended period cannot be allowed to continue. In other UK jurisdictions, it is an offence to obstruct the process of inspection. Similar provisions should be enacted in Northern Ireland.

Reconfigure the network of schools

A new approach to the area planning process is necessary to create a school network that meets the needs of all learners and promotes social cohesion, while also providing a comprehensive curriculum in a cost-effective manner.

An Area Planning Commission should carry out a review of the existing network of schools in Northern Ireland. This Commission should prepare a plan for a revised network of schools with more efficient and sustainable admission and enrolment numbers, capable of offering a complete curriculum experience to all learners. Proposed changes to the network of schools should be made on a 'sector-blind' basis prioritising the needs of learners and efficiency of delivery.

This process has the potential to create new jointly managed community schools by merging schools from different sectors. Maximum annual savings of approximately £100m could be generated for reinvestment in education.

In the longer term, a single strategic planning authority should be established to oversee the ongoing development of this revised network of schools.

Introduce a legislative framework that enables innovation

Existing legislation should be consolidated to create a Single Education Act that incorporates any new legislation required to implement the recommendations of this Report.

Regulations should give flexibility to meet changing circumstances.

Funding

Invest in education

Education is the single most important investment in the future of society and the economy. Increasing the current level of investment will generate future savings in areas such as health, welfare and criminal justice.

The Executive should immediately increase the annual education resource budget by £155m to address the per-pupil funding gap with England and Wales.

We have identified a further £136m shortfall related to higher levels of learners with a statement of educational need in Northern Ireland in comparison with England. Meeting these needs in an affordable manner is likely to require both restructuring of the current processes for intervention as well as an additional allocation to meet some portion of this funding gap.

Furthermore, we recommend an additional annual capital allocation of £25m (above current capital budget levels for an estimated period of 5 years) to address current needs in the provision of SEN facilities in both special and mainstream schools.

In addition to the funding outlined above, which is required to bridge the financial gap with other jurisdictions, there is a need to invest in education to implement the recommendations of this Report. This will require an Executive-led Education Investment Strategy. Additional funding should be made available progressively over future years by means of both additional budget allocations and through implementation of the recommendations in this Report which will generate efficiencies.

DE should invest in an education “intelligence” function, ensuring there is the technical capacity and appropriate access to research to make informed decisions, horizon scan, collect data, monitor programmes, interrogate spending and leverage emerging technologies.

The Executive should put in place multi-year budgets for education.

APPENDIX 7: IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

In our report we make recommendations that would, if accepted and implemented, have a significant impact on the education sector, its stakeholders and the wider public. Of course, our intention is to deliver a more effective education system and a better educational experience for everyone. However, we are acutely aware that there would potentially be unintended consequences or impacts that need to be identified and managed.

On receipt of our report, the Executive will need to consider which recommendations it wishes to adopt, reject or analyse further. We expect this will involve the development of an action plan that, in turn, will lead to the preparation of appropriate business cases and implementation plans. We also expect a key element to include appropriate impact assessments. We considered whether to complete strategic level impact assessment as part of our Review but based on available guidance and advice we have determined that it was not feasible to do so. However, assessing the impact of policy options will be crucial for the Executive and other decision-makers when considering our recommendations.

We are clear that our recommendations raise important considerations regarding equality rural needs and the environment.

- **Equality Impact Assessments / S75 Duties:** Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998⁸ places a statutory requirement on Departments to consider the impact of new measures, policies, procedures or measures on equality of opportunity. There are many areas of our report where such considerations will be required including recommendations regarding a new approach to special educational needs and potential changes to the network of schools and management arrangements.
- **Rural Needs Impact Assessments:** Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016⁹ places a statutory duty on the public authorities to have due regard to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas in the development, implementation, revision or adoption of policies, strategies and plans and in the design and delivery of public services. This will be of particular relevance regarding plans to right-size the network of schools.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment:** Changes to the education estate and network of schools could have an environmental impact and this will need to be assessed. The responsible body should submit an Environmental Statement to the Planning Service in DAERA. The developer may then be referred to Northern Ireland Environment Agency who will determine the requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment which arises from Directive 85/337/EEC as transposed by The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999.

We recommend that the lead authority for the delivery of any recommendations within our report undertake those impact assessments.

8 [Northern Ireland Act 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

9 [Rural Needs Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

