
GBA News – Friday 25th October



Independent Review of Education: Priority Areas Announced by Minister

The Education Minister has set out the Department of Education's response to the Independent Review of Education which includes a fundamental review of the curriculum and implementation of legislation to ensure that all children remain in education or training until they are 18 years old.

In a statement to the Assembly on Monday, the Minister stated:

"My priority is a sustained, evidence-based approach to the improvement of the education system that is focused on the core areas of curriculum, assessment, qualifications, school improvement and tackling educational disadvantage. Reform in each of those areas will be underpinned by

investment in high-quality initial teacher education, teacher professional learning and leadership development, all wrapped, as the panel has recommended, in an intelligent accountability framework."

The Minister has commissioned [Lucy Crehan](#) to carry out the review of the curriculum which will make recommendations to inform the future of curriculum design and delivery in Northern Ireland.

Regarding qualifications the Department intends during the current mandate to review qualifications at Key Stage 4 and post 16. This will include consideration of Occupational Studies, a suite of Level 2 CCEA qualifications which were developed to provide a taster for occupational courses and be delivered in collaboration with FE to provide a bridge to an occupational pathway in FE for those pupils likely to leave school at 16.

As outlined in the detailed [annex to the Minister's statement](#), the Minister does not propose to prioritise reform of transition arrangements to post-primary school during the current mandate.

Over the coming weeks, the Department will publish a detailed strategy for education transformation and also appoint a ministerial advisory panel to support this.

Area Planning Updates

The GBA is currently participating in a series of Specialist Provision in Mainstream schools (SPiMs) workshops via the Area Planning Local Groups (APLGs) to identify pressure areas for SEN places in 2025, 2026 and beyond.

A significant barrier to implementing SPiMs is lack of suitable accommodation. With this in mind and in light of recent SEN capital commitments, APLGs are now seeking further information from schools on their accommodation needs and any other barriers/ support needed.

We will be engaging with our member schools on the matter over the coming weeks.

GBA Meets with Confucius Institute

The GBA recently met with Naomi Trimble, International Liaison & Outreach Partner, [Confucius Institute at Ulster University](#) (CIUU) to discuss the experiences and opportunities available for schools through their Programme.

There are several voluntary grammar schools currently taking part in the programme. An overview of the offerings to schools is listed below:

- **Mandarin language classes** offered to all schools involved in the programme, offering formal YCT or HSK qualifications, and schools can choose the number of hours per week and range of age groups they would like to be taught.
- **Chinese cultural workshops**, with activities suitable for all age groups from 4+. Workshops are cross-curricular, ranging from a wide array of arts and crafts, to trying out Chinese sports, or Chinese cookery demos.
- **Performances** from students from The National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, providing performances in Beijing Opera, Face Changing Opera, and Water Sleeve Dancing.
- **Chinese Bridge Competition**, open to all primary and post-primary pupils on the programme, offering the opportunity to compete as an individual or in a group, with the chance to progress to the annual final in London.

Both performances and cultural workshops are available at any point throughout the academic year, and can be used to complement any school event, such as careers fairs; open evenings; staff development

days, or to celebrate an event such as Day of Languages.

- **Poster competition**, held annually each autumn, to celebrate the Chinese zodiac animals. All pupils in the network can join in (categories are: Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, and Post-Primary). This year will mark Year of the Snake and over 6,000 entries are anticipated.
- **Mobility** opportunities for school leaders and pupils (14 years+) to travel to China for a 2 week educational and cultural trip. Around 4 of these opportunities are available each year and the current calendar is full until early 2026.

Further information is also available [here](#).

VAT on School Fees - Latest Updates

The GBA continues to engage with MLAs, MPs and the Secretary of State about the proposals regarding VAT on fees, goods and services related to private schools in Great Britain. We remain concerned about how these plans will affect the very different school arrangements in Northern Ireland and the potential for inconsistencies and anomalies arising.

We welcome the clarification that capital fees under £140 will not be within the scope of the proposals but will continue to advocate on the outstanding issues for some of our member schools.

Claire Hanna MP has submitted a question to the UK Treasury which highlights how state schools with boarding departments in England will not have to pay VAT whilst grant aided schools with boarding departments in Northern Ireland may fall within the scope of the proposals. The question is currently awaiting response and will be available on the following link:

Claire Hanna Q: [Written questions and answers - Written questions](#),

Current Consultations

Draft Programme for Government

An eight-week public consultation on the draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most' is ongoing and will close on 4 November 2024.

Information on the consultation is available on the [draft Programme for Government for 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most' Public Consultation webpage](#).

The GBA is currently developing a response to the draft document and we will share this with you via our monthly newsletter.

NI Assembly Education Committee RSE Inquiry

The Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education is carrying out a Mini-Inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools, and would like to hear your informed views and experience on the matter.

Comments can be submitted via email to: committee.education@niassembly.gov.uk until Tuesday 29th October 2024.

Further information is available [here](#).

Managing Health and Safety in the Education Sector

By HSENI

It is essential that leaders within the education sector have a comprehensive understanding of their health and safety responsibilities and good practice. Leaders must consult, cooperate and coordinate activities with other duty holders who share health and safety duties on the same matter.

The employer's health and safety functions are often delegated to members of staff to fulfil on behalf of the employer. However, overall legal accountability for the health and safety of employees and others cannot be delegated and remains the responsibility of the employer. Employers must undertake regular monitoring to ensure that local management arrangements are in place to ensure risks are managed responsibly and proportionately.

Where you have employee health and safety representatives or a safety committee, they can play a valuable role in contributing to the development of a positive health and safety culture.

Every workplace has health and safety risks that must be managed. Some of the key areas within the school environment include:

- Slips, trips and falls
- Musculo-Skeletal Disorders
- Asbestos
- Workplace transport

Further information on individual risks can be found online at www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/education

HSENI can be contacted via email: mail@hseni.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Assembly Updates

Education Questions

The Education Minister answered oral questions from MLAs on a range of matters which included capital investment, minor works and school transport. The Minister reiterated the current budgetary pressures around capital and refurbishment projects, stating:

"Many schools across the estate are in urgent need of investment, and I am delighted to have progressed seven SEP projects to procurement earlier this year. Unfortunately, the number of projects that I am able to progress is restricted due to the challenging budget position and SEN placements. I assure you that I will continue to make the case for increased investment in the education estate to allow much-needed projects to be delivered."

The full Question Time session is available [here](#).

Education Committee

The Committee Inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) continued this month with briefings/ discussions from a number of organisations including NI Commissioner for Children and Young People, Catholic Schools Trustee Service, Transferors' Representatives Council, NSPCC, Rainbow Project and the Children's Law Centre.

In other business, the Committee met with NI Public Service Ombudsman representatives Sean Martin, Deputy Ombudsman/Director of Investigations, and Ms Julie Healy, Head of Improvement, Engagement, and Impact to discuss complaints handling and best practice.

The Committee also heard briefings this month from DE officials regarding the School Sports' Programme task and finish group and the RAISE programme.

Further information on the work of the Education Committee is available [here](#).

If you would like to receive our weekly political updates, please [contact us](#).

Shared Education

Please click [here](#) for the latest edition of "Sharing Works" which showcases examples of good practice in Shared Education and provides updates on Peace Plus and the Mainstreaming Shared Education strategy.

Advertising of Teaching and Support roles on the GBA Website

The GBA provides a free advertising service for our member schools. Job vacancies are posted on our website and Twitter page. The Education Authority website also links to the GBA jobs section.

****PLEASE NOTE THAT OUR JOB TEMPLATE HAS BEEN UPDATED FOR THE 2024/25 ACADEMIC YEAR AND IS AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD [HERE](#)****

If you would like us to host a vacancy for your school, **please contact us**, **with the completed job template for each post**, and allow at least **TWO WORKING DAYS** for posts to be uploaded.



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