

North South Ministerial Council
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta
Thuaidh Theas
An Chomhrúnaíocht

NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

EDUCATION MEETING

**NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES,
ARMAGH, AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE**

6 NOVEMBER 2020

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty third NSMC Education meeting was held at the NSMC Joint Secretariat Office in Armagh, and by videoconference, on 6 November 2020. The meeting was attended by Norma Foley TD, Minister for Education, Peter Weir MLA, Minister of Education, and Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Minister for Communities. Minister Foley chaired the meeting.

IMPLICATIONS OF UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EU

2. The Council noted the current assessment of the likely implications for the education sector arising from the UK's withdrawal from the EU and welcomed the commitments made to take all necessary measures to ensure that the agreed Common Travel Area (CTA) rights and privileges are protected. Ministers also welcomed the commitments made in relation to the future PEACE PLUS Programme and the work that is underway to develop the programme.
3. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to continued cooperation on education issues following the conclusion of the transition period.

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

4. Ministers welcomed the commitment of all teaching staff in both jurisdictions to deliver remote learning to pupils. They noted the importance and context of the successful re-opening of all schools, a core policy objective in both jurisdictions, in accordance with hygiene and public health protocols.
5. The Council noted the heightened concern of Education Ministers for pupils with complex and additional learning needs and acknowledged the efforts of teaching and other critical support staff to maintain students' relationships and connections with schools.
6. The agreement of the Education Ministers, and their officials, to continue sharing information and advance notice of key decisions where practicable was also welcomed.
7. The Council expressed its appreciation to all staff engaged in the delivery of education in these exceptional times.
8. It also welcomed that Education Ministers will convene a meeting of senior Departmental officials, along with agencies / bodies with responsibility in vital support areas, and report findings to the next NSMC meeting in this sector.

REVIEW OF WORK PROGRAMME

9. The NSMC noted the commitment to review the work programme and the plan to convene a meeting of senior officials from relevant departments, co-chaired by the Secretary General and the Permanent Secretary of the Education Departments, to make recommendations for the future work programme.

UPDATE ON EU FUNDING

10. Ministers noted the impact Covid-19 has had on PEACE IV funded shared education projects. They also noted that, to address the challenges posed by Covid-19, the use of online technologies to promote the objectives of shared education is being explored.
11. The high level engagement that has taken place between Departments on PEACE PLUS; the draft proposals for PEACE PLUS, in relation to the theme of Youth; and the potential for ambitious and innovative proposals

under PEACE PLUS to promote respect and understanding on a cross-border and cross-community basis were noted by the Council.

EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT

12. The NSMC noted the 'lessons learnt' and recommendations from the Final Evaluation Report on the North-South Underachievement Practitioners Engagement Project, which was published by Co-operation Ireland in July 2017.
13. The appointment of an Expert Panel by the Northern Ireland Minister of Education, under the New Decade New Approach Agreement, to examine the links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background and draw up an action plan for change that will ensure all children and young people, regardless of background, are given the best start in life, was noted by Ministers.
14. Research on the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme has been provided as part of the evidence base to the Panel and the Panel will produce an Interim Report and draft Action Plan by 31 March 2021 and a Final Action Plan (including implementation costs and timescales) by 31 May 2021.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

15. Ministers welcomed the progress being made by the two Education Departments and Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) to facilitate and maintain the delivery of the Centre's range of services since the last meeting in 2016.
16. The Council welcomed the efforts of MCA management and staff to remain operational and the continued delivery of elements of their service throughout the period of Covid-19 restrictions. The proposed delivery plan for the Centre, which takes account of the impacts of Covid-19 and the delay in making Board Appointments, was noted.
17. The NSMC noted that MCA has been considering the potential implications of the UK withdrawal from the EU. The Council also noted recent developments in the delivery of Special Educational Needs programmes in both jurisdictions.

SCHOOL YOUTH AND TEACHER EXCHANGES

18. The Council noted North-South exchanges in the area of youth work practices and the ongoing activities of the North South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work.

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

19. The NSMC noted the procedures being explored to facilitate reciprocal recognition of teacher qualifications in the context of the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. It also noted the update on the agreement of Marino Institute of Education and St Mary's University College regarding the delivery of An Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge (SCG).
20. The Council was advised that the 18th Annual Conference on Teacher Education North and South' on the theme of 'Teacher Education in the Covid Moment', took place online on 21 October 2020.

COOPERATION BETWEEN EDUCATION INSPECTORATES

21. Ministers welcomed the continuing collaborative work of the Education Inspectorates covering: capacity building for the Education and Training Inspectorate's inspection of Irish-medium education; the ongoing programme of inspection exchanges and joint working on inspections; the collaborative support in carrying out independent evaluations on projects; and the co-operation between management of both Inspectorates.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

22. The Council agreed to hold the next NSMC Education meeting in early 2021.

**Joint Secretariat
6 November 2020**

Website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org