The Independent Review of Education In Northern Ireland

Official Response from

February 2022

About Voice Community

Voice Community welcome the opportunity to engage with the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland and we look forward to working closely with the Department of Education, Northern Ireland (DENI) to further develop their plans.

Voice Community are the education and early years section of Community Union representing thousands of serving teachers and support staff, headteachers, lecturers, nursery and early years workers, nannies and other education professionals in nurseries, pre-schools, schools, colleges, and universities across the whole of the UK.

We provide legal and casework support to our members and regularly engage with them in determining our response to policy proposals.

Community Union are affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), to the Irish TUC, Scottish TUC and Welsh TUC as well as the General Federation of Trades Union (GFTU).

This response was prepared by:

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What does good education look like?
As a framework for inviting views, we have developed this suggested description of good education.

Good education should support and equip children and young people to:
- Develop their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.
- Develop their moral and spiritual awareness, together with personal, social and emotional skills.
- Become ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives.
- Become healthy and confident individuals.
- Become ethical, informed citizens of Northern Ireland and the world.
- Prepare to play a full part in life and work and to adapt to change.
- Aspire to a better future for their community and wider society and play their part in seeking to achieve it.

Are there any items in the description with which you disagree?
Please limit your answer to 50 words.
No, there are no parts of this statement that Voice Community disagree with.

Are there any statements that you would wish to add to the description above?
Please limit your answer to 50 words.
There is nothing that is obviously missing from this list.

Is there anything else you want to say about this description?
Please limit your answer to 50 words.
The broad description is strong, and it is positive that it does not focus on particular skills, knowledge or abilities that might impose a focus or direction for education. We are pleased that the emphasis is on development of the whole person, not simply on outcome and achievement.

We suggest that good systems for the delivery of education, training and support to children and young people in Northern Ireland should:

- Make efficient and effective use of resources.
- Promote equality of opportunity.
- Promote good community relations.
- Promote respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.
- Respect the cultural identity, language and values of children and their families.
- Take all reasonable action to enable children to be educated in line with parents' / young person's choice.
- Meet the needs of the economy and of employers in Northern Ireland and beyond.
- Command the trust and confidence of the population of Northern Ireland.

Are there any items in the description with which you disagree?
Please limit your answer to 50 words.
Whilst it is prudent for education to support young people to have the skills, knowledge and abilities necessary to be employable, it is critical that education and the needs of the economy are not inextricably linked such that education is at risk should the economy fail.

Are there any statements that you would wish to add to the description above?
Please limit your answer to 50 words.
Voice Community are supportive of creativity. Imagination and creativity are key parts of any education system and when invested in and developed, can lead to innovation in business - this, after all, is how remote learning platforms have come about in recent years.

Is there anything else you want to say about this description?
Please limit your answer to 50 words.
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Strengths of education in Northern Ireland
What do you think are the three best things about education in Northern Ireland today?
Please limit each answer to 20 words.
If you wish to provide fewer than 3 answers, please enter "n/a" in unused boxes.

Teachers are trusted professionals and supported with high-quality professional development
The curriculum is learner focussed
Teacher judgement (formative assessment) is valued in school and by parents

Weaknesses of education in Northern Ireland
What do you think are the three biggest weaknesses of education in Northern Ireland today?
Please limit each answer to 20 words.
If you wish to provide fewer than 3 answers, please enter "n/a" in unused boxes.

There is distrust in the public assessment and accountability system
Workload amongst teachers and leaders is high
Difficulties of integration within education settings

Key Issues

The Review Panel has been tasked with developing a vision for education in Northern Ireland as well as considering key aspects of education across the following three themes:

- The education journey of children and young people.
- The support provided to all education settings and those who work in them.
- The structure of education in Northern Ireland.

Education Journey

We need to understand the needs of children and young people as they progress through education and to ensure that these needs are met at each stage.

We have listed below a number of issues which we may need to consider as part of this work. We want to know which you think are the most important, and whether there are other important issues that you think should be added.

Please tick the key issues (maximum 3) that you feel should be prioritised by the Panel.

- ☐ Early years
- ☐ Academic selection
- ☐ Educating children and young people from different communities separately
- ☐ Transfer to further and higher education or careers
- ☐ Experience of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities
- ☐ Structure and delivery of curriculum
- ☐ Assessment - how we measure outcomes
- ☐ Qualifications
- ☐ Provision of education other than at school (EOTAS)
- ☐ Provision of youth services
- ☐ Supporting mental health and well-being
- ☐ Meaningful participation of children and young people
- ☐ Learning from experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic
- ☐ Role of technology
- ☐ Other issues not listed – please specify (50 words max)

It is also worth considering vocational learning and how this can be an accepted and valid part of a mixed curriculum. Since everyone is different, with different skills and interests. It is not beneficial for schools, nor society to value one type of education over and above all others

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Support for schools, colleges, etc.
Teachers, lecturers, youth workers and others who work in education need to be supported, empowered and resourced to help our children and young people learn and develop.

This refers to how schools, colleges (to include Further Education) and other education settings are funded, how they are managed and what help is given to staff and pupils and students.

Below is an initial list of issues that we may need to consider as part of this work.

Please tick the key issues (maximum 3) that you feel should be prioritised by the Panel.
(Required)

- ☐ ==Helping pupils and students who require additional support==
- ☐ ==Help for teachers/lecturers/education leaders with curriculum/teaching methods/assessment==
- ☐ The delivery of initial teacher education and ongoing professional development
- ☐ The role of education inspection
- ☐ The condition of educational buildings
- ☐ Making use of new technology
- ☐ ==Helping teachers and lecturers learn from each other==
- ☐ Learning from arrangements during the COVID-19 disruption
- ☐ Other issues not listed – please specify (max 50 words)

The system as a whole
This refers to how government and its partners manage and organise education and whether these arrangements need to be improved.

We have listed below a number of issues which we may need to consider as part of this work. We are interested in your views on these, and on any others which you think are particularly important.

Please tick the key issues (maximum 3) that you feel should be prioritised by the Panel.
(Required)

- ☐ Ensuring that education meets the needs of the NI economy
- ☐ ==Investment in early years interventions==
- ☐ Provision of youth services and Education Other than at School (EOTAS) in NI
- ☐ ==The relationship between schools and further and higher education==
- ☐ The future of integrated education
- ☐ Ensuring the provision of education in Northern Ireland is affordable
- ☐ Ensuring education plays a role in increasing awareness of climate change
- ☐ The appropriateness of multiple sectors and managing authorities
- ☐ Creating a "single education system". (If you select this as a priority – please set out in less than 100 words what you mean by a 'single education system'.)
- ☐ Other issues not listed - please specify (50 words max)