



Houses of the
Oireachtas
Tithe an Oireachtais

TITHE AN OIREACHTAIS

**AN COMHCHOISTE UM
OIDEACHAS, BREISOIDEACHAS AGUS ARDOIDEACHAS,
TAIGHDE, NUÁLAÍOCHT AGUS EOLAÍOCHT**

Clár Oibre 2020

Deireadh Fomhair 2020/21

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION, FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION,
RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE**

Work Programme 2020

October 2020

33/ES/01

Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Work Programme 2020

1 Introduction

The Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science was established following Orders of Dáil Éireann and of Seanad Éireann on 31 July 2020 and 16 September 2020 respectively. Standing Orders 89(4) (Dáil Éireann) and 77(4) (Seanad Éireann) require that “as soon as may be following its appointment and thereafter at annual intervals, each Select Committee shall prepare a work programme and shall lay such programme before Dáil/Seanad Éireann”.

This Work Programme of the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for 2020 was agreed by the Joint Committee at its meeting on 7 October 2020. In accordance with the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, it was agreed that the Work Programme be laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

2 Select Committee

The Dáil Select Committee on Education was established by Order of Dáil Éireann on 31st July 2020.

The function of the Select Committee is to consider -

- (a) Bills,
- (b) Proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 164,
- (c) Estimates for Public Services,
- (d) Other matters as shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil,
- (e) Annual Output Statements, and
- (f) such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select relating to the relevant Departments.

Pre-Legislative Scrutiny

In addition, the Government Legislative Programme makes provision for the publication of Bills. Following changes to Standing Orders (agreed by the Dáil on 17th October 2013), Ministers are now required, except in exceptional circumstances, to bring the general scheme or draft heads of a Bill to a Committee for consideration. Committees are empowered to consider the draft Heads of Government Bills but they are not required to do so. It is the prerogative of the Committee to decide on a case by case basis whether it wishes to engage in pre-legislative scrutiny on any Government Bill.

Legislation

Department of Education:

At Second Stage:

- Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill. 2019:

This Bill has been automatically returned to the Dáil Order Paper for Second Stage.

Heads of Bill in Preparation:

- Residential Institutions Statutory Fund (Dissolution) Bill.
- Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Preparatory work underway:

- Retention of Records Bill

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science:

Heads of Bill in Preparation:

- Higher Education Authority Commission Bill.:

Preparatory work underway:

- Industrial Training Act (Amendment Bill)
- Licensing of Construction Workers Bill.

Estimates and other Financial Matters

The Estimates for Public Services are Ministers' spending plans for the coming financial year. When the Estimates are referred to Select Committees for examination, the Committee has a valuable opportunity to question the relevant Minister about proposed spending. Note: The Select Committee is required to consider the Estimates but are not empowered to amend them.

The Estimate with which the Select Committees must deal in 2020 is the Revised Estimate for Public Services (Education– Vote 26 and Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science – Vote 45)

A Supplementary Estimate may be considered in December if additional monies are required by the relevant Government Department.

It is the Committee's intention to focus on –

- what the Departments have committed to achieving,
- how monies are allocated between services, and
- exploring the policy issues underpinning the various spending provisions as well as to consider these matters as fully as possible.

The proposed approach presents Departmental Estimates on a Strategic Programme basis consistent with the Statements of Strategy. These Estimates have been supplemented with certain performance information regarding the outputs and impacts of Programme expenditure.

In keeping with a whole of year approach, it is the Committee's intention to have an exchange of views with the Minister for Education and the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in advance of Budget 2020 on the emerging position for 2021.

In addition, the examination of Value for Money (VFM) Reviews is another important part of scrutinising Government expenditure.

Referrals of Motions and Other Matters

From time to time, matters may arise and may be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil. It is not possible to say in advance what those matters might be or when they might arise.

3 Joint Committee

The duties of the Joint Committee are discharged in two ways, i.e.

1. items of business referred to it by one or both Houses, and
2. it can select business for consideration itself, from the areas within its terms of reference. In practice, the Joint Committee's work will comprise the examination of EU business and key policy priorities.

Engagement on EU Matters

The Joint Committee shadows the Department of Education and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the remit of these Departments, in the European context, forms the basis of the Joint Committee's remit in terms of scrutiny of European matters. In fulfilling its role in examining EU business, the Joint Committee engages in the following activities:

- (i) Scrutiny of EU Legislative Proposals and Non-Legislative Proposals;
- (ii) Engagement with Ministers in advance of EU Council meetings;
- (iii) Engagement on the Statutory Departmental Scrutiny Report with the Secretary General of each Department;
- (iv) Attendance at the Inter-Parliamentary Meeting of EU Parliamentary Committee Chairpersons; and
- (v) Engagement with European Bodies such as the EU Commission and the EU Parliament and its Committees.

Key policy priorities

The Joint Committee is empowered to consider such other policy issues as it may select within its terms of reference. In the period October 2020 to December 2021, in addition to core business such as legislation etc., the Committee will focus on key priority topics within the remit of both Departments.

The following are some of the key policy issues identified by the Joint Committee for examination:

General

- Discussion on the progress on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda that come under the remit of the Department of Education and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and how to build the provisions of Standing Order 100(4) into the ongoing work of the committee
- Examination of the need for Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education
- Addressing discrimination of minority ethnic and religious communities struggling with inclusion in the Irish education system at all levels
- Decent work for those working at all levels of the education sector including (a) resolving issues regarding pay equality & conditions for school secretaries, (b) review of the Role of School Principals and (c) review of the Work Loads of Teachers
- Progress made in implementing the recommendations contained in the published Report of the Oireachtas Special Committee on Climate Action, that come under the remit of the Department of Education and the Department of Education, Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science
- The impact of Brexit on the Irish education system
- Adequacy of the Departments Digital Strategy and enabling real remote learning options for all levels of education including considering the impact to remote access for;
 - marginalized communities who may require funding
 - the lack of connectivity for students in Rural Ireland
 - options for opting out of in-person learning in favour of remote
- Key priorities for science, research and development and innovation in Education and in particular;
 - (a) a review of Innovation 2020 and
 - (b) the need to establish a National Innovation Council

Primary Level and Secondary Level

- The Impact of Covid 19 on primary and post primary education, and, specifically:
 - Special Needs Provision;
 - Educational Disadvantage;
 - Class sizes and the current pupil/teacher ratio.
 - Child and Youth Mental Health;
 - 2020 Leaving Certificate (LC) Calculated Grades and 2021 Leaving Certificate Preparations;
 - Digital Learning

- Ensuring that Schools are open in a manner which is safe and sustainable¹
- Protocols to be put in place for at risk students and staff
- Understanding and Combating Bullying in Irish Schools and promoting Positive Mental Health with specific reference to the Report of the former Joint Committee on Education and Skills entitled 'Positive Mental Health'
- Consideration of Reduced Timetables (Resumed) and specifically;
 - the Interim Report by the former Committee on Education and Skills
 - the impact of reduced timetables on children with special needs and traveller children
- Review of homework in Primary Schools
- Review of School Completion, and Home School Community Liaison
- Educational Disadvantage and specifically (a) DEIS Model; (b) Early Childhood Intervention and (c) Traveller Children in Primary and Secondary Schools
- Special Needs Provision and the examination of the lack of resources for those with additional needs, including a review of;
 - ringfencing funding to make sure every child who needs one has full access to an SNA autism services;
 - the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
 - School Inclusion Model (SIM)
 - state recognition of a broader range of intellectual disabilities
 - Review of the adequacy & methods of allocation of resources in special education
 - Employment conditions and recognition for SNAs
 - Issues regarding Special Needs Assistants
- Leaving Certificate Reform and, specifically, proposals regarding Continuous Assessment and the addition of vocational subjects into the curriculum
- Review of the RSE Programme
- Examination of the Retention of Records Bill
- Role of the education system in Child and Youth Mental Health

- ¹There will be reference to the recommendations contained in the Covid Committee Report on the reopening of schools

- The future of Irish language education with specific reference to the Irish Medium Education Sector
- The need for a new '*modern languages in Primary School*' Initiative
- School patronage at primary and post primary school level, including an examination of the Community National School model and new models at secondary level
- Class sizes and the pupil/teacher ratio
- Introduction of a Healthy Eating Programme at Primary and Post Primary Level
- Measures to reduce school costs by (a) encouraging use of the School Book Rental Scheme; and (b) introducing clear guidelines to schools on cost effective and sustainable practices to reduce the costs of schoolbooks, uniforms, ICT and sports equipment
- Review of the School Building Programme and Energy Efficiency Upgrade Pilot Programme
- Issues around Feeder Schools and School Catchment areas at primary and post primary level
- The provision, content and delivery of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), to include identifying innovative measures to support school leadership and the quality of teaching

Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

- The effects of Covid 19 on further and higher education institutions and, specifically;
 - 2020 admissions and the reopening of institutions
 - funding and the continued enrolment of international students (including foreign language students)
- Key priority issues in the Higher Education Sector to include reopening of colleges and future funding reforms
- The effect of rising costs of accommodation on students and their families and the impact on equality of access to third level education.
- National Student Accommodation Strategy
- The development of Technical Universities, including the West and North-West Technical University
- The ability of the Irish higher education sector to acquire and retain International Research Funding with specific reference to the EU Horizon Programme post Brexit

- Review the Apprenticeship Model and the need to (a) rebrand it as a viable career option with equivalence to higher education qualifications (b) restructure non-traditional apprenticeships; (c) encourage more female apprentices and (d) provide the requisite apprenticeship training for a just transition to a green economy
- Future Funding of Higher Education with specific reference to (a) the Cassells Report (2016) and the 3 funding options therein
- Future of the EU Erasmus programme and the impact of Brexit and Covid 19
- Reform of the scientific and innovation research models in higher education institutions with specific reference to increasing the number of PhD candidates in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) related disciplines
- Developing STEM talent with clear pathways on to Further and Higher Education (in liaison with the Department of Education)
- The Higher Education Public Private Partnership (PPP) Programme in the Technological University/Institute of Technology sector, including the establishment of a Technology University in the South East
- Progress made regarding commitments in the *New Decade New Approach Agreement* to initiate coordinated approaches to higher education provision in the North West and broader cooperation in the higher education and research sectors, in liaison with the Minister for the Economy in Northern Ireland
- Measures to support a north-south programme of research and innovation, including an all-island research hub, through Universities Ireland
- Proposals for a Connaught/Ulster Alliance in Higher Education
- Progress in implementing the measures in the Programme for Government to challenge sexual violence and sexual harassment in Higher Education, building on the progress achieved under the Framework for Consent in Higher Education Institutions and the need to extend the measures to Further Education Institutions
- Educational issues facing asylum seekers and those in direct provision with specific reference to the issue of access to third level education
- Examine proposals for a new literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy to support all learners to include a review of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
- Examine the National Strategy for Further Education and Training and, specifically, (a) Digital Transformation (b) emergence of new skill requirements (c) Pathways to Life Long Learning (LLL) and (c) international models of best practice

Chairpersons Designate of State Boards

In accordance with the Government Decision of May 2011, which put new arrangements in place to ensure greater transparency in the appointment of persons to State boards and bodies, the Joint Committee will meet with the Chairpersons designate, as the nominations arise.

It presents an opportunity for Chairpersons designate to discuss the approach they will take as Chairperson with the Committee and to give their views as to what contribution they can make to the agency or body to which they are proposed to be appointed.

Paul Kehoe, T.D.
Chair,

7 October 2020