

# CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

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15/01/2016 - 22/01/2016



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Monday 18 January 2016

North/South Ministerial Council: Education

**Summary:** Minister O'Dowd made a statement in compliance with section 52 of the NI Act 1998 regarding a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in education format. The meeting was held in Armagh on 11 December 2015. The meeting was held in Armagh on 11 December 2015. This statement has been agreed with Minister McIlveen and is made on behalf of both Ministers

**Mr O'Dowd:** Minister Damien English TD and I welcomed the results of a review of the education sector North/South work programme carried out by both Departments at a joint workshop held in June 2015, which confirmed the validity and relevance of the current work programme. We also noted that officials have agreed actions to further develop joint working and cooperation. The Council noted the scope and preparations for the delivery of the shared education theme of the Peace IV programme. Calls for funding are expected early this year.

Ministers welcomed the ongoing collaboration and engagement between the national agencies in both jurisdictions in exploring the potential for collaboration on the ERASMUS+ programme. The Council noted that both Departments will continue to work together to develop concepts that could form the basis of an ERASMUS+ application for 2016 in relation to language learning. The Council noted that Minister O'Sullivan and I had agreed to commission, through a competitive tendering process, an external provider to review the experiences in both jurisdictions in relation to our efforts to address educational underachievement. The commission will cover an 18-month period from date of award of contract to final report to the Departments. I am pleased to confirm that a contract has now been awarded.

The Council noted the publication of two North/South inspectorate reports on good practice in literacy and numeracy in May 2015 and their dissemination to practitioners. Minister English and I welcomed the continuing collaborative work of the inspectorates covering capacity-building for the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) inspection of Irish-medium education; the ETI's assistance with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) inspectorate's development of expertise in

preschool and early years inspections; the quality assurance by the DES inspectorate of the ETI's review of the outcomes of its programmes promoting improvement in English and mathematics; and the ongoing programme of inspection exchanges, joint working on inspections and cooperation between management of both inspectorates.

Turning to special education, I welcome the continuing progress being made by both Departments and the Middletown centre in facilitating the delivery of the centre's range of services since the completion of the expansion project in March 2015. Ministers noted that both Departments are making arrangements for a follow-up inspection of the centre to be carried out during 2016. We also noted the continuing progress on sharing of information and experiences between both Departments across the broader agenda of special educational needs.

The Council welcomed the ongoing cooperation between the teaching councils in both jurisdictions on measures to reduce obstacles to the mobility of teachers. This includes the waiving of fees for the assessment of qualifications of teachers accredited by the General Teaching Council for NI and the simplification of the process for applying for teaching posts in the South. Ministers noted that both Departments have asked the teaching councils to provide a qualitative assessment covering any remaining issues that have an impact on teacher mobility. This will include the impact of the introduction of the two-year postgraduate certificate in education in the South and the impact of European directive 2005/36/EC. The directive provides for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications between member states across a range of professions, including teaching. I can confirm that the assessment from the teaching councils has now been received and is being considered by both Departments. I expect an update before the next NSMC meeting.

It was noted that both Departments are considering a proposal from St Mary's University College, Belfast and Marino College to collaborate to support access to the Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge, the Irish language requirement, by applicants from the North of Ireland. Currently, a teacher from the North who does not have the Irish language requirement qualification is able to apply for teaching posts in the South. After taking up a teaching position, teachers have up to three years to obtain the qualification. Again, I want to see a response to the proposal by March 2016.

I welcome the continuing commitment to a cross-border professional learning collaboration between the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS). Their joint project, which is now under way, involves the cross-curricular use of digital storytelling in a small number of schools from both jurisdictions, using history as a basis for promoting the skills of storytelling and chronology.

The Council noted that Minister O'Sullivan and I officiated at the thirteenth annual Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) on the theme of teacher education and social justice, which took place in Limerick on 15 and 16 October 2015. Minister English and I noted the ongoing activities of the North/South education and training standards committee for youth work. The Council welcomed the ongoing work of the group established by the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Youth Council, which is supported by funding from an ERASMUS+ programme, to optimise ICT for effective youth work. Ministers agreed that the North/South Ministerial Council in education format should meet again in spring 2016.

**Source:** <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-18-01-2016.pdf>

## Enterprise, Trade and Investment

### InterTradelreland Report

**Summary:** Mr Ó Muilleoir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the new InterTradelreland report 'Mapping the Potential for All-Island Sectoral Ecosystems'.

**Mr Bell (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** I thank the Member for his question. I welcome the publication, in November, of InterTradelreland's 'Mapping the Potential for All-Island Sectoral Ecosystems'. I launched it with my fellow Enterprise Minister, Richard Bruton, at the North/South Ministerial Council on 2 December 2015. The detailed report, which is the first of its kind, maps geographic concentrations of firms in the same sector across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and it makes recommendations on how the full potential of these ecosystems can be realised through new cross-border initiatives.

To assess whether there are economic merits to developing sectoral ecosystems on a crossborder basis, InterTradelreland carried out a more detailed case study analysis on three identified growth sectors: medical devices, pharmaceuticals and software. The case studies have identified potential opportunities for cooperation for mutual benefit, particularly in areas such as research and clinical trial coordination; opening up opportunities to advanced training of staff on a cross-border basis; and widening sub supply goods and services markets. I will be discussing the report and its recommendations with my counterpart, Richard Bruton, at the next North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting.

**Source:** <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-18-01-2016.pdf>



**Tuesday 19 January 2016**

**Economic Growth Initiatives**

**Summary:** Barry Cowen TD asks the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to outline the cost of developing a cross-Border development zone in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**Richard Bruton:** The concept of a specific Border Development Zone as a means of fostering economic recovery in the cross-border region of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was initially proposed by the *Centre for Cross Border Studies* (CCBS) in their Bradley/Best economic study of 2012 and I am aware that the CCBS has undertaken further research on the topic in the

intervening period also. I also note that the Deputy's party proposed such a Zone in a policy document last year. The possible development of a Border Development Zone could raise significant issues involving EU State Aid Rules and other EU provisions and it would also, of course, require detailed negotiations between both administrations on this island. There would also be significant resource issues, which would be challenging. I am not aware that detailed costings have been carried out in relation to the proposal. I expect that these would obviously depend of the exact nature and functions of such a body. As you will be aware, this Government have initiated a significant reduction in the number of Bodies and Agencies, in order to achieve more effective administration and delivery of services, so that a very strong case needs to be made to justify the creation of new bodies. I would again emphasise that any new structures to be put in place would require the full agreement of the Northern Ireland authorities. Both administrations on the island are focussed on developing the existing mechanisms and on making them work better.

Developing new, regionally-based, economic structures could be a significant policy development, and one requiring careful consideration. The need to avoid duplication would be paramount, in the interests of utilising scarce State resources efficiently. It is therefore worth noting that there are already several mechanisms in place to pursue cross border economic development.

I strongly believe that we should continue to build on the structures already in place and on what has been achieved in that region. The work of the Cross Border Body, *InterTradeIreland*, has been foremost in this regard, with a significant range of enterprise development initiatives and programmes in place. My Department jointly funds and provides oversight to this Body, together with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Belfast, and it represents a very effective mechanism for tackling business development on an all-island basis. In addition, there is on-going co-operation between *Enterprise Ireland* and its Northern Ireland counterpart agency, *Invest Northern Ireland* on areas of mutual interest.

Over recent years, a range of projects under the Enterprise Development theme of the INTERREG IVA Programme (2009-2015) have made a significant impact on developing small businesses in the region. My Department co-funded this strand of this INTERREG Programme, under which a total of 28 individual projects have been initiated. I now look forward to the roll out of the successor Programme for the period up to 2020, which will support Research and Innovation initiatives.

The operation of the North South Ministerial Council, in which I fully participate, both in its Plenary format and also in the Trade and Business Sectoral format with my counterpart from the Northern Ireland Executive, is an ongoing forum which can develop practical North South initiatives.

**Source:** <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-01-19a.423&s=cross-border#g424.q>