

FROM THE MINISTER



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Dear Sue

I am grateful to the Committee for the work that took place to produce the Stakeholder Review of Teacher Education Report and for the subsequent debate on 3 February. As indicated at my meeting with the Committee on 24 March, I have prepared a formal response to the Committee's recommendations and this is attached at Annex A. For those recommendations which relate to situations where the proposed merger between Queen's and Stranmillis proceeds, I can at this stage only note the Committee's comments. I have recently sent copies of the Committee's report to all providers of Initial Teacher Education for their information.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee on this important issue.

Reg Empey

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SIR REG EMPEY MLA
Minister for Employment and Learning



KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The Committee strongly recommends that the Education and Employment and Learning Ministers bring forward their review of teacher education to the Assembly at the earliest opportunity; thus providing a context for the debate around teacher education and allowing a consensus on the way forward to be established.**

I have provided my comments to the Education Minister and emphasised the importance of finalising the Review as soon as possible to allow it to go to both the Department for Employment and Learning and Department of Education Committees prior to a public consultation.

- 2. The Committee urges the Education and Employment and Learning Ministers to ensure that a long-term view is taken of teacher education provision in terms of flexible capacity and that value for money is pursued in tandem with quality of provision.**

I have stated consistently that my primary concern is the quality of teacher education which has to be balanced with a value for money approach.

- 3. The Committee urges the Education Minister to protect local ITE viability and maintain sufficient local provision when undertaking the review of the TDM. Furthermore, the Committee would urge the Education Minister to discuss this issue fully with the Employment and Learning Minister to ensure that local ITE provision is set at a level which contributes to the facilitation of greater local institutional viability and flexibility of capacity.**

This matter is for the Minister of Education.

- 4. The Committee calls on both Ministers to acknowledge that the local economy is in a period of considerable change the result of which, it must be hoped in the long-term, will be a rebalancing of the economy towards private enterprise and away from reliance on the public sector. The Committee would urge the Ministers to sustain ITE locally at viable levels while the economy here readjusts and demand for ITE places falls to a more normal level, with the consequent fall in "GB returners" and other factors which contribute significantly to the oversupply of teachers here.**

It would be interesting to see the evidence which suggests the level of "GB returners" will fall but in any case the level of Initial Teacher Education provision is a matter for the Minister of Education.

- 5. The Committee recommends that the Education Minister engages with all relevant stakeholders to discuss the use of the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR) and work to remove any flaws in its composition, which might subsequently distort the DE determination of the required number of ITE places.**

This matter is for the Minister of Education.

- 6. The Committee commends the Minister on his maintenance of diversified student numbers at Stranmillis and St. Mary's for 2008/09. The Committee recommends that the Minister continues to engage with the colleges on the issue of diversified places and seeks to come to some more long-term arrangement on the number of places and how these are calculated which is satisfactory to all parties, provides value for money and allows for adequate forward planning by the colleges.**

The number of diversified places is related to the number of Initial Teacher Education places as both represent funding commitments for the Department. My officials have engaged with both Colleges, and will continue to do so, on the potential level of diversified places for Academic Year 2009-10. I also note the Committee's

Recommendation 12 where it states that diversified provision for St Mary's should be between 32 – 36% of the total student population.

7. **The Committee would like to highlight its concern to the Minister that the timing of the two presentations on 17th April 2008 - one from the department about where the new funding formula was likely to leave Stranmillis and one from Queen's University offering potential investment - might not have provided the most objective environment for a decision to be made by the Stranmillis Governing Body on whether or not to merge with Queen's University.**

I note the Committee's concern. My understanding is that the Governing Body of Stranmillis voted unanimously to proceed with the proposed merger. Information on the proposed funding model was shared with both St Mary's and Stranmillis.

8. **The Committee strongly recommends that the Minister discusses St. Mary's concerns about the new funding formula with the college's management, with a view to seeking agreement and an arrangement that best supports the college and helps to secure its future more comfortably.**

My officials are in regular discussion with College management. When Initial Teacher Education intake figures for the next academic year are provided by the Department of Education, my officials will engage further with St Mary's management about the potential funding available. It is important, however, that any discussions take place on the basis of the agreed unit-based model remaining in place. I will meet the management of the College annually as part of the corporate governance arrangements which will afford an opportunity for issues to be raised.

9. **The Committee strongly recommends that the Minister discusses Stranmillis's concerns about the new funding formula with the college's management, with a view to providing clarification as to whether incorporating changes to the mechanism might allow Stranmillis to consider that it can explore other realistic options for its future, in addition to the proposed merger with Queen's University.**

As indicated in the response to Recommendation 8, when Initial Teacher Education intake figures for the next academic year are provided by the Department of Education, my officials will engage with Stranmillis management about the potential funding available. It is important, however, that any discussions take place on the basis of the unit-based model remaining in place. Any decisions about "other realistic options" are a matter for the Governing Body of Stranmillis to bring forward. I will meet the management of the College annually as part of the corporate governance arrangements which will afford an opportunity for issues to be raised.

- 10. The Committee commends the Minister on his decision, articulated during the Committee's debate on the new formula funding on 23rd June 2008 and prompted by the Committee's and colleges' concerns, to bring forward conversion arrangements that provide additional funding for the colleges, giving them a period to reflect on their options.**

I note the Committee's comments.

- 11. The Committee further commends the Minister on his provision of specific funding to St. Mary's for the consideration of strategic options for the college's future. Additionally, the Committee is highly supportive of the positive dialogue that is proceeding between the Minister's department and the management of St. Mary's.**

I note the Committee's comments.

- 12. The Committee recommends to the Minister and the Minister of Education, appropriate to their respective remits, and acknowledging the need to apply value for money, that they consider the following in respect of St. Mary's:**

- A sufficient allocation of ITE places from DE's teacher demand model. A significant fall in numbers of student places entails serious problems for the college. The management has undertaken to maximise student numbers and seek alternative sources of income. Posts have already been suppressed and redundancies made to accommodate the fall in the**

college's funding. The college's management has reported that until alternative sources of income become available to it (such as from CPD work in the future), St. Mary's requires an annual intake of a minimum of 150 BEd. students and 20 PGCE students to ensure its financial viability.

The allocation of Initial Teacher Education numbers is a matter for the Minister of Education.

- **Academic diversification in the form of the BA (Hons) degree in Liberal Arts should remain part of the college's educational provision. However, the college agrees with DEL that provision should fit within an agreed proportion of total student numbers so as not to take away from St. Mary's primary role as a specialist teacher education institution. A range of 32% to 36%, which is similar to St. Patrick's College, Dublin and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, which are both specialist teacher education institutions, would be appropriate;**

I note the Committee's comments that Liberal Arts provision at St Mary's should form between 32 – 36% of the total student population.

- **A funded role in Induction, EPD and CPD for teachers;**

The provision and allocation of Professional Development is a matter for the Minister of Education.

- **Continued assistance with regard to funding for the college should be considered until new income streams are in place.**

I have said that I am prepared to consider "conversion funding" for up to two years. The level of any conversion funding will, however, be dependent upon the amount of funding generated from the unit-based funding model.

- **St. Mary's model of an autonomous, specialist teacher education provider, with a distinctive ethos, educational vision and mission should be**

sustained and enabled to co-exist with other models existing in the university sector.

I have provided funding of up to £30,000 to allow St. Mary's to examine its strategic options.

- **Specialist status in Irish Medium teacher education at all levels. The college's expertise in Irish Medium teaching could be extended to support the Irish Medium sector as a whole, with funding. Irish Medium teaching presents additional challenges, i.e. immersion teaching – principals and teachers need greater guidance - presenting extra costs and that should be recognised.**

The status of St Mary's in relation to Irish Medium teacher education is a matter for the Minister of Education.

- 13. The Committee commends the Minister for writing to the Education Minister to raise the issue of structured provision of Induction, EPD and CPD for teachers and seeking to examine how the colleges might have a funded role in this provision. The Committee urges both Ministers to consider this issue carefully and bring forward plans as part of their review of teacher education that will facilitate the establishment of such a funded, structured provision. The Committee does not prejudge how provision might be allocated across the providers of teacher education, but would encourage both Ministers to look at where the capacity to undertake the provision lies and where it would be most beneficial with regard to greater sustainability for the provider.**

I note the Committee's comments. I wrote again to the Minister of Education about this issue on 19 March 2009

- 14. The Committee further recommends that the Minister and the Education Minister discuss more widely the possibilities around the two colleges providing some sub-degree work - for example, a foundation degree for teaching assistants. In light of the colleges' expertise and links with**

schools/employers and the resource capacity they have, they would seem to be ideal to undertake this work. Such a development might then feed into the broader strategy contained in their review of teacher education.

The proposed consultation on the review of teacher education will allow options such as foundation degrees to be explored.

- 15. The Committee calls on the Minister to, once again, bring all his influence to bear on Stranmillis University College and Queen's University to ensure that the institutions engage as fully as possible with staff and student representatives; involving them in any and all decision-making processes that are to be undertaken. The Committee commends the Minister for placing an emphasis in correspondence to the two institutions on the importance of consultation with students and staff.**

I note the Committee's comments and have made it clear to both institutions that open and regular communication is essential.

- 16. The Committee recommends that the Minister works actively with Stranmillis University College and Queen's University to address any student concerns if, subject to all due process, there is a merger between the institutions.**

I note the Committee's comments.

- 17. The Committee recommends that the Minister ensures that the views of the students represented by the NUS-USI and the Stranmillis Students' Union continue to be sought by Stranmillis University College and Queen's University and are given due consideration throughout any merger process.**

I have made it clear to both institutions that I expect there to be open and regular communication with student bodies.

- 18. The Committee recommends that the Minister works actively with Stranmillis University College and Queen's University to address any staff concerns if,**

subject to all due process, there is a merger between the institutions. The trade unions must be given their rightful place to represent their members.

I note the Committee's comments.

19. **The Committee strongly urges the Minister to do everything within his power to ensure that the Stranmillis site is used for educational purposes only; and that all existing caveats about the use of the site are re-examined to copper-fasten this exclusive usage.**

Any merger would require legislation that would require Committee and Executive approval. This will allow all interested parties to examine the caveats in place regarding the use of the site.

20. **The Committee strongly urges the Minister to ensure that Queen's University's promises to Stranmillis with regard to the proposed merger are delivered on if, subject to all due process, the merger proceeds.**

I note the Committee's comments.

21. **The Committee recommends that the Minister does everything within his power to ensure that all stated merger principles which relate to protections for staff, the integrity of the Stranmillis site and the preservation of the 4 year BEd., are carried through if, subject to all due process, a merger occurs.**

I note the Committee's comments.

22. **The Committee urges the Minister and the Education Minister if, subject to all due process, the proposed merger between Stranmillis and Queen's University takes place, to do everything reasonably within their power to ameliorate any adverse impact on the other teacher education providers.**

The determination of numbers of teacher education students is a matter for the Minister of Education.

- 23. The Committee urges that the Minister, in the event of the proposed merger taking place, seeks the reassurance of the Queen's authorities that the satellite Students' Union at Stranmillis will be preserved and its existing provision be protected and enhanced.**

I note the Committee's comments.

- 24. The Committee recommends that the Minister takes on board the range of concerns that have been expressed by stakeholders and the Committee regarding the preservation of the Stranmillis University College's distinct ethos if, subject to due process, a merger with Queen's University proceeds.**

I note the Committee's comments.

- 25. The Committee recommends that the Minister again highlights to Stranmillis that there is time for the college to re-examine and reconsider other existing options, as well as new options, and that his department will consider offering support for this to be undertaken, as has been the case with St. Mary's.**

The examination of options is a matter for the Governing body of Stranmillis.

- 26. The Committee recommends that the Minister and Education Minister note the Transferors Representatives' Council's concerns about the possible effect on numbers of teachers from the Protestant tradition entering the teaching workforce, should the proposed merger between Stranmillis and Queen's University proceed, and that the Education Minister engages with the TRC to explore their concerns surrounding the integrity of the Controlled sector.**

I have met with the Transferors' Representatives' Council and am aware of its concerns. I appreciate fully that there is a range of questions of ethos which will have to be addressed within the context of Initial Teacher Education.

- 27. The Committee commends the Minister for the £1.3m that his department has given to groups working with the deaf and looks forward to discussing the proposals that his officials, in conjunction with groups such as CACDP, are currently preparing, seeking to address some of the issues that have been identified for deaf people.**

Officials have received formal submissions from the Association of Sign Language Interpreters, Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID), Signature (formerly CACDP), Hands that Talk, British Deaf Association and the National Deaf Children's Society. A number of approaches were also made to the Department from individuals with a specific hearing impairment and day-to-day experience of Sign Language. As a result, a formal meeting with a number of deaf tutors to discuss their concerns and proposals took place on 18 March 2009. Officials are currently considering all of the responses and information obtained from the relevant stakeholders and deaf tutors and will shortly be writing to the institutions who will ultimately deliver the training provision.