Governance

Note: This article describes the situation when the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive are in operation. At the time of writing, in October 2019, there are no executive ministers. Efforts to form an Executive continue. The [Northern Ireland Assembly](#) is dissolved and consequently there are no assembly committees in operation. Updates on the situation will be posted to the Northern Ireland Office’s [Northern Ireland political stability](#) document collection.

Certain matters have been transferred from the UK Parliament to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Education and skills is one of the policy areas which has been transferred. The [Northern Ireland Executive](#) has overall responsibility for the education and skills system in Northern Ireland.

Within the Executive, two departments have responsibility for policy, strategy and funding for different phases of education:

- the Department of Education ([DE](#)) for pre-primary, primary and secondary (post-primary) education and the youth service

- the Department for the Economy ([DfE](#)) for [further education](#), employment and skills programmes (including apprenticeships) and higher education.

Arm’s length bodies of the Department of Education, with responsibilities for different areas of education, include:

- the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment ([CCEA](#)), which
is responsible for advising government on the curriculum and assessment and for developing, regulating and awarding qualifications

- the Education Authority (EA [8]), which has responsibility for organising publicly funded school education, is the employing authority for teachers in controlled schools [9], is responsible for school transport and school uniform allowances and provides a curriculum support service to schools

- the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS [10]), which provides the upper tier of management and is the employing authority for teachers in Catholic maintained schools [11]

- the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCN [12]), which maintains a register of all teachers working in grant aided (publicly funded) schools

- the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE [13]), which promotes and supports the integrated model of education, whereby pupils from both Protestant and Catholic traditions, and those of other faiths and none, are educated together

- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG [14]), the representative body for Irish medium education

- the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI [15]), which is part of the Department of Education, and responsible for the inspection of schools, further and adult education and work-based learning.

The Education Committee [16] which operated under the 2016-17 Executive was established to advise and assist the Ministers on matters within their responsibility. The committee undertook a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the Department for Education and played a key role in the consideration and development of legislation. The committee was dissolved ahead of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections on 2 March 2017 and has not yet been re-constituted due to the failure to agree a new power-sharing executive [17] (See 'Current Debates and Reforms [18]').

Schools enjoy a high degree of autonomy over delivery of the curriculum and financial management. Further education (FE) colleges [19] are self-governing corporations. Higher education institutions are private bodies that, subject to their degree-awarding powers, are free to design their programmes and awards and to determine the conditions on which they are awarded. They are also responsible for their own staffing, admissions and research. However, most of them depend, to some degree or other, on state funding.

Other non-governmental stakeholders become involved in policy-making in particular areas. Employers and their organisations and sector skills councils contribute to policy and practice in apprenticeships and skills. Teachers’ unions and professional associations are concerned with such issues as teaching and learning, assessment, workload and pay and conditions.

**Further information**

Further information on administration and governance is available from the Eurydice national descriptions.
Cross-sectoral cooperation

The main mechanism for cross-sectorial cooperation is the Ministerial Taskforce, which can be set up on an ad hoc basis and include in its membership and list of stakeholders the particular departments, organisations and representatives most concerned in the issue at hand.

The Public Accounts Committee [22] which operated under the 2016-17 Executive was established to examine expenditure and value for money across all government departments. The committee was dissolved ahead of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections on 2 March 2017 and has not yet been reconstituted due to the failure to agree a new power-sharing executive [17](See ‘Current debates and reforms [18]’).