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## GBA Meets with Education Minister and Permanent Secretary

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Last week the GBA met with the Education Minister to discuss a number of issues such as the impact of COVID-19 on education, finance, admissions criteria and centre-determined grades. We thank the Minister for engaging with us and look forward to working with him further on these matters.

We would also like to thank the Department of Education Permanent Secretary, Mark Browne, and his Officials for joining yesterday's GBA Executive meeting. Mark outlined some of the key priorities for the Department including the provision of Special Education and addressing the challenges of funding the system. Members also discussed the role of the Board of Governors in

managing a voluntary grammar school and the importance of supporting the work of governors.

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## **Education Authority Board - New GBA Representative**

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On the 1<sup>st</sup> April Ronnie Hassard replaced Sir Gerry Loughran as the GBA's representative on the Education Authority Board. In making the appointment, Education Minister Peter Weir advised that Ronnie "brings with him a wealth of knowledge and expertise which will no doubt prove invaluable to the Board...I would also like to thank the outgoing member, Sir Gerry Loughran, for his dedication and contribution to the work and achievements of the Board in its formative years".

Ronnie has become a much-valued member of the GBA Executive in recent years representing voluntary grammar schools in area planning local groups as well as representing the sector on Management Side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee. He also serves as a Governor of Campbell College. As a former Principal of Wellington College and Ballymena Academy, Ronnie has substantial experience of budgetary management and applying financial management principles in an organisation.

Ronnie will be serving on the following EA committees:

- Performance and Engagement
- Strategic Planning and Performance
- Resources and People, and Membership and Teaching Appointments.

Speaking about his new role, Ronnie said, "It is a privilege to represent GBA and the interests of voluntary grammar schools in this arena. A successful and efficient Education Authority is essential to our education service and for all schools, regardless of sector, status, size, phase or ethos. GBA has shown its willingness to contribute to that success and my aim is to sustain that contribution in what will be very challenging times. We trust that the immediate effects of COVID recede as quickly as possible, but know the financial, social and educational impacts will be much longer lasting".

The GBA Chairperson, Ms Jacqueline Weir, paid tribute to Sir Gerry Loughran following his retirement from the EA Board after 6 years. In thanking him, she said we in the GBA are indebted to him for his tireless support and wise counsel. Sir Gerry's knowledge, experience and influence has been instrumental in representing the interests of the voluntary grammar sector and the education sector in general. He continues to represent the interests of our schools on the GBA Executive Committee and beyond.

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## **GBA Executive Committee - New Vice Chairperson**

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GBA Executive Member, Mr Leo O'Reilly, has recently agreed to becoming Vice Chair of the Committee. Thank you to Leo for taking on the role.

Leo has been Chair of the Board of Governors of Our Lady and St Patrick's College Knock since 2014. He is also a Non-Executive Audit and Risk Committee Member of the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, and a Non- Executive Member of the Independent Monitoring Authority for Citizens' Rights Agreements. He was a former civil servant with over 27 years' experience as a senior civil servant including over 11 years as the Permanent Secretary of three Northern Ireland departments.

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## **Reconstitution of Boards of Governors of Voluntary Grammar Schools**

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The Board of Governors of most voluntary grammar schools are due to be reconstituted in 2021, with the majority taking effect from 29 December this year.

The aim of the reconstitution process is to ensure that the membership of Boards of Governors complies with statutory requirements and as far as possible Boards of Governors have a range of skills and experience that will enable them with the necessary training and support to fulfil their functions in relation to their schools.

Over the next six months the Department will be writing to each of the affected schools to engage with them directly in relation to the appointment / re-appointment of DE governors.

Please use this [link](#) for further information.

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## New Legislation - Addressing Bullying in Schools Act

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A [letter](#) was recently issued to schools by the Department of Education regarding new legislation, [Addressing Bullying in Schools Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#), which will come into operation on the **1st September 2021**.

Following commencement of the Act, it is expected that all incidences of bullying will be recorded, preferably electronically. Guidance to accompany the act and a facility for recording incidents on the C2k platform has been developed for those who wish to use this for recording purposes.

Schools will receive notification of the guidance in due course.

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## Upcoming Events and Programmes from British Council

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Please refer to the links below for detail on upcoming events and schemes from the British Council:

- [Careers education in a pandemic](#) - free Webinar on **12th May** to hear from teachers from around the world on how the Covid-19 pandemic is reshaping pupils' future career plans and how teachers are supporting pupils to plan for the future.
- [Turing Scheme](#) - Schools in Northern Ireland have until **7th May** to apply for funding through the new Turing Scheme - which will give pupils the opportunity to embark on short-term or long-term placements abroad for the 2021-2022 academic year.
- [Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning](#) - this programme helps UK-based schools find partner schools in more than

30 countries across Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. The deadline for funding applications is **14th June 2021**.

The [British Council website](#) is regularly updated with various resources and programmes. Please refer to the website for further information and updates.

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## Teaching & Non-Teaching Vacancies

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The GBA provides a free advertising service for our member schools. Job vacancies are posted on our website and Twitter page. There is also a link to our job listings on the Education Authority website in the job opportunities section.

**As we are currently receiving a high volume of job requests, please use our [job template](#) and allow one working day for posts to be uploaded. This does not include bank holidays and weekends.**

If you would like us to host a vacancy for your school, please [contact us](#).

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## Educational Underachievement - Interim Report Published

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In summer 2020 Education Minister Peter Weir announced the appointment of an Expert Panel to examine the links between educational underachievement and social disadvantage. Since then the panel members have been gathering written and oral evidence from a wide range of stakeholders across Northern Ireland. The GBA provided a written response and met with the panel in November 2020 to discuss the evidence.

In total, the panel received 401 survey responses and heard oral evidence from 344 individuals. There was also a separate process to seek the views of children and young people. An [interim report](#) has now been published which documents an analysis of the data in order to consider what areas of policy changes are needed and which will have the greatest impact on educational underachievement.

The panel's full report is scheduled to be published at the end of May this year. It is expected that the themes derived from the evidence gathered will be developed into a series of recommendations and actions.

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## Northern Ireland Assembly Updates

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### *Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998*

Last week at the NI Assembly, First Minister Arlene Foster was asked what consideration has been given to removing the exception of employment as a teacher in a school contained in the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. In response, Ms Foster said that although preliminary engagement on the matter has been happening, this has been impeded by the current crisis and pressure on staff and ministerial time. It is expected that Officials will re-engage with this work as soon as possible.

Separately, Chris Lyttle of the Education Committee has started a consultation on a proposed private member's bill regarding the exclusion of teaching from fair employment laws.

### *A Level Grades*

MLAs queried whether AS grades awarded in the 2020/21 academic year will count towards next year's A2 grades. The Education Minister responded that he is currently working with CCEA and other stakeholders and hopes to be able to make an announcement regarding the structure of examination grades in 2022 in the next few weeks.

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## Area Planning

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As you will be aware, the GBA represents voluntary grammar schools on the various Area Planning Groups. Discussions regarding the next Strategic Area Plan are underway. If you have any ideas for area solutions in your location please [contact us](#).

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## Shared Education

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Sharing through the curriculum and extra-curricular activity are some ways in which the vision of shared education can be achieved. The Department is also exploring ideas such as shared management of projects across schools from all sectors.

If you would like any views taken forward or have any comments, [please get in touch](#).

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## Newsletter Subscription

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Please feel free to forward our monthly updates to your school Governors. If any of your Governors would like to subscribe, please [send us](#) their email address.

If you wish to unsubscribe to these emails, please [let us know](#).