
GBA News – Thursday 27th August 2026



Chairperson's Message

As we begin a new school year, the GBA is pleased to share our priorities for the months ahead. Our focus remains firmly on representing the voluntary grammar sector by supporting principals and governors, advocating on behalf of schools, and ensuring that voluntary grammar schools continue to thrive as autonomous, self-managing institutions.

Throughout the year, we will be working closely with you on the key issues affecting the sector and education system. This includes engaging with school principals on area planning, finance and individual school matters, while working with Northern Ireland education bodies to ensure that voluntary grammar schools have a strong voice in discussions that shape the future of education.

Supporting governors will continue to be at the heart of our work. Building on feedback from our recent governor survey and training programme, we will expand training opportunities over the coming academic year to

provide practical guidance on governance, helping governors to lead effectively while sustaining an ethos that prioritises the well-being, learning and progress of the children and young people entrusted to the care of every voluntary grammar school.

Thank you for your continued support, and we wish every school, principal, governor, member of staff, and every child and young person a successful and rewarding year ahead.

Model Complaints Handling Procedure for the Education Sector - Engagement Event

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) is seeking to engage with school leaders, bursars, and governors on the development of the Education Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) and accompanying Guidance.

To support this work, the GBA is hosting an engagement event with NIPSO to raise awareness of the MCHP and ensure that stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute to the development of the Guidance.

The engagement event will be taking place on Wednesday 14th October at 10.00am in Stranmillis University College.

Please complete the [registration form](#) if you wish to attend. Please note that places are limited and will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Consultation on the Northern Ireland Curriculum

The Department of Education is consulting on a new statutory curriculum for Northern Ireland, covering Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3.

This consultation sets out a new, knowledge-rich curriculum designed to improve clarity, coherence and progression for learners. Responses from stakeholders will inform the final design of the curriculum prior to implementation.

The GBA is hosting a discussion session for voluntary grammar schools on the proposed curriculum reforms on **Wednesday 16th September from 9.30am-11.30am at Stranmillis University College**. DE Officials will be in attendance to provide an overview of the proposals followed by discussion and Q&A.

If you would like to attend, please complete the [registration form](#) by **Friday 4th September at 12pm**. Please note that a limited number of places remain and will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Responses to the consultation can also be submitted online. The consultation documents and details on how to respond are available [here](#).

A Level & GCSE Curriculum Changes: Subjects Being Phased Out

You will be aware of recent reports in the media regarding the discontinuation of some GCSE and A Level qualifications - the BBC News reported:

"Changes to GCSEs and A-levels will mean several qualifications in subjects including German, Economics and Engineering are to be scrapped."

The Northern Ireland exams board, CCEA, said the subjects will not be offered by it from the end of the decade.

Other qualifications to be withdrawn include GCSEs in Leisure Travel and Tourism, Learning for Life and Work and Contemporary Crafts, and the A-level in Professional Business Services."

The Examinations Board said "As with all changes to our qualifications offer, we are engaging directly with schools and colleges to ensure they have sufficient notice and are supported through the transition,"

The GBA is aware of the significant concerns being raised by our schools regarding the changes. We will be engaging with key stakeholders on this matter and would welcome your feedback to help inform those discussions - submit your views [here](#).

Please also see the article below on **CCEA's Reform of Qualifications Review**.

CCEA Reform of Qualifications

The Reform of Qualifications is a significant review and revision of CCEA's suite of qualifications. The review is part of CCEA's regular qualifications review cycle and in line with policy direction set by the Department of Education.

The process begins with **developing a new Regulatory Framework**. This will shape how qualifications are designed, assessed and recognised going forward, while laying the groundwork for developing new specifications.

Timeline for the GCSE and A Level Reform of Qualifications



GCSE	Aug 2026	Jan 2027	May 2027	July 2027		Sept 2028	Sept 2029	Aug 2031	
	Research, planning and consultation, including launch of Reform of Qualifications: GCSE Baseline Survey	Development of draft GCSE qualifications begins	Consultation on draft GCSE qualifications	Further development and accreditation of GCSE qualifications		Publication of new GCSE qualifications (a year before first teaching)	First teaching of new GCSE qualifications	First award of new GCSE qualifications	
A Level				Aug 2027	Jan 2028	May 2028	July 2028	Sept 2029	Sept 2030
				Research, planning and consultation, including launch of Reform of Qualifications: A Level Baseline Survey	Development of draft A level qualifications begins	Consultation on draft A level qualifications	Further development and accreditation of A level qualifications	Publication of new A level qualifications (a year before first teaching)	First teaching of new A level qualifications

CCEA is inviting teachers, learners and other stakeholders to share their views on existing qualifications. There will also be opportunities to contribute directly through temporary contracts with CCEA.

For further information and to respond to the review survey please click [here](#).

Current & Upcoming Opportunities for Schools

Ask a Justice

Applications for the Ask a Justice programme 26/27 will reopen in September 2026.

The sessions provide a unique insight into the work of the Justices and are an excellent opportunity for students with a keen interest in the law.



The programme is open to schools and colleges for Years 12 to 14.

Priority will be given to applications from educational institutions who have not visited the Supreme Court before and those located at a considerable distance from the London area (Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales).

Further information can be found [here](#).

Frederick Soddy Schools Award

The aim of the Frederick Soddy Schools Awards is to encourage field studies by providing financial support specifically for this work.

These awards are given to teachers leading groups of school pupils. Applications are welcomed from UK and Ireland schools planning fieldwork involving a strong element of human geography. Awards are made of up to £700, and cannot support the costs of physical resources. Preference will be given to schools which have not been supported in the previous year's awards.



Applications close on 30th November 2026. Decisions on applications are normally communicated by mid-March. For further information and to apply, click [here](#).

Your School Your Club

The '[Your School Your Club](#)' programme (YSYC) develops partnerships to provide new or upgrade community access to school facilities.

Sport NI has created a [Project Register](#) for the YSYC funding programme and is keen to hear from schools about a project in the planning or development stages, which will open the school sports facilities to the local community.

Schools can complete the project register form to let Sport NI know of a project they are developing and update Sport NI as the stages of project development progress.

Sport NI regularly review the Register to ascertain which schools can meet the project eligibility criteria and those at a state of readiness.

Please [contact us](#) if you would like further information about the

programme.

UK Parliament Education Visits

The UK Parliament offers free educational visits and interactive workshops in London for students aged 5 to 18. Visits include a guided tour of the Palace of Westminster, curriculum-linked sessions, and a Q&A with a local MP or member of the House of Lords, subject to availability.



There is also a travel subsidy for eligible schools of up to 85% of receipted travel costs up to the value of £2,400.

Next booking day: 23 September 2026 for visits taking place January–July 2027

Schools are strongly advised to register on the booking portal in advance.

Further information is available [here](#).

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Governance Matters

Governor Training Webinars - 2026/27

The Education Authority has recently updated their webinar training series for the next academic year, including modules on addressing bullying behaviour, and community use of schools. The full programme and booking links are available [here](#).

Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007 - Removal of the Supervision Exemption from the Definition of Regulated Activity

The Department recently issued a letter to schools, summarised as follows:

From 1 September 2026, the supervision exemption will be removed from the definition of regulated activity under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007.

This means that volunteers who regularly work with children may now require Enhanced Access NI checks with Children's Barred List checks, even if they are supervised. There is no change to vetting requirements for paid staff, who are already subject to these checks.

Actions schools should take now:

1. Review all roles, particularly:

- Volunteers
- Peripatetic staff
- External providers
- Coaches and extracurricular leaders
- Any roles currently relying on supervision to determine vetting requirements.

2. Identify individuals who may now fall within the revised definition of regulated activity and determine whether they require an Enhanced Access NI check with Children's Barred List check before they begin or continue in their role.

3. Audit recruitment and vetting procedures to ensure all individuals undertaking regulated activity are identified and appropriately vetted before starting work.
4. Update safeguarding and recruitment policies to reflect the new legal requirements and ensure consistent practice across the school.
5. Inform the Board of Governors/Management Committee of the legislative change and provide assurance that arrangements are in place to achieve compliance by 1 September 2026.
6. Plan early for an increase in Access NI applications and possible processing delays.

Please refer to the [full letter](#) for further information.

The UK Government has also published "Regulated activity with children: myth busting the September 2026 Supervision Exemption changes" - available [here](#).

Recent DE Publications

[Leading Together for Excellence - a TransformED NI Strategy For Teaching Professional Learning August 2026](#)

The strategy sets out a comprehensive programme of reform to strengthen teacher development, drive educational improvement and support excellence across the system.

The new strategy delivers a key commitment within the TransformED Strategy and Delivery Plan and replaces the Department's 2016 Learning Leaders strategy.

[Guidance for Boards of Governors on the Formulation and Implementation of Salary Policy](#)

Since 1993, Boards of Governors of schools have had statutory responsibility to develop a Salary Policy related to the particular needs of schools and to keep their Salary Policy under annual review. Guidance was provided by the Employing Authorities to Boards of Governors on the formulation and implementation of a Salary Policy, most recently in 2000. Since then, however, there have been several significant developments in relation to teachers' pay and conditions of service (including Threshold, The Curran Inquiry, Performance Review and Staff Development, Upper Pay Scales) which have implications for the content of a School's Salary Policy.

This revised guidance takes account of these developments.

[Attendance Guidance for 26/27 academic year including changes to use of codes | Department of Education](#)

This document highlights the key changes to usage of attendance and absence codes for the 2026/27 academic year.

[Children and Young People's Strategy Delivery Plan 2025 – 2028 | Department of Education](#)

The delivery plan includes a range of executive and departmental priorities including a 14-19 Framework with 34 actions being progressed collaboratively under three thematic groups, namely Post 16, Curriculum and Qualifications and Careers working groups supported by a jointly resourced Project Management Office.



Minister Launches Consultation on Legislating for Mobile Phone-Free Schools

The Department of Education is seeking views on whether additional measures are required to support schools and EOTAS settings in creating and maintaining mobile phone-free environments during the school day.

In particular, this consultation seeks views on whether legislation should be introduced to restrict or prohibit pupil use of mobile phones and smartphones during the school day, and if so, how any such measures should operate in practice.

Further information on the consultation and details on how to respond are available [here](#).

Area Planning Updates

Operational Plan 3 (OP3) is due to commence in September 2026 and will span one year to accommodate the completion of outstanding projects from previous plans, as well as the inclusion of some new short-term workstreams/ proposals.

Further information on the current strategic and operational plans is available [here](#).

Information on current development proposals is available here:

- [Development Proposals - Pre-publication consultations](#)
- [Published Development Proposals \(awaiting ministerial decision\)](#)

If you are considering a significant change to the size or character of your school please [contact us](#).

Electoral Commission Seeks Views on Citizenship Education

The Electoral Commission is looking for educators, schools and colleges to get involved with piloting new training, guidance and resources to prepare young people to cast their votes with confidence.

Complete the Commission's [survey](#) to participate in the pilot.

Advertising of Teaching and Support roles on the GBA Website

The GBA provides a free advertising service for our member schools. Job vacancies are posted on our website and Twitter page. The Education Authority website also links to the GBA jobs section.

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