

Paul Givan in Government:

A member-funded investigation

14th August 2026

ACT NOW
PEOPLE POWERED CHANGE



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Introduction

On 10 November 2025, Minister for Education Paul Givan faced a no confidence vote in Stormont brought by People before Profit because of his trip to Occupied West Bank paid for by the Israeli embassy. 47 MLAs voted in favour (Sinn Féin, SDLP, Alliance PBP) with 33 against (DUP, UUP, TUV), but the vote failed to attract cross community support and therefore, did not pass.

The no confidence vote was held in response to the Minister's visit to a school in the occupied West Bank at the invitation of and paid for by the Israeli government at the end of October 2025. The trip brought his tenure as Education Minister into serious disrepute. Thousands of Palestinian children have been murdered by the Israeli military after two years of genocide – with no schools or adequate infrastructure left to return to. Many people were outraged by how Paul Givan had used his capacity as Education Minister and the resources of Department of Education to whitewash and normalise Israel's genocide and occupation. In September 2025, only two months before the trip, [UN Commission of Inquiry found](#) that Israeli authorities and Israeli security forces have committed and are continuing to commit genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza.

Act Now members and others took action to hold Paul Givan to account. From Fermanagh and South Tyrone to North Antrim, more than 2,000 Act Now members **sent over 10,000 emails** to local MLAs calling on them to support the motion of no confidence. Initially, Alliance and SDLP were reluctant to support the motion. But after the volume of emails their MLAs received, **it reached the threshold of 30 MLAs** needed to bring the motion of no confidence to the Assembly. Ultimately, the motion did not receive the cross-community support required to pass a vote of no confidence and so the motion fell.

After the motion, Paul Givan *"told members in the assembly the motion was a "toxic mix of antisemitism, anti-unionism and hypocrisy".*

In the wake of this, Act Now launched a fundraiser for an investigation into Paul Givan's track record in government in line with the Ministerial Code. To date, 69 members donated to this fundraiser. Without them, this report would not be possible

This report is published in the wake of [Gordon Lyons, DUP Minister for Communities being found in breach of the Ministerial Code](#) for a Facebook post he made which led to complaints he inflamed tensions over immigration in County Antrim in 2025, during a period of racist riots. A couple of weeks later, an SDLP motion was passed which [expressed no confidence](#) in Gordon Lyons, but again, since this was a vote on a motion which expressed no confidence and not on an actual motion of no confidence, he was not required to resign and refused to do so. The Committee for Communities had the power to bring a motion of no confidence in the minister to the full Assembly; however, even if it did pass at the committee, it was highly likely to be [blocked](#) on the Assembly floor because of a lack of cross-community support from Unionist MLAs.

As the Stormont rules currently stand, a Minister from one of the two main parties, who retains the confidence of his or her own party will not face consequences, even when a majority of MLAs and an independent watchdog requires it.

Where there is a lack of official avenues to hold Ministers to account for their commitments under the Ministerial Code, it is inevitable that the public will seek other means.

This report represents one such example. It cannot and does not seek to be a replacement for the work of the Assembly Commissioner for Standards. Instead, it seeks to pull together a record of a Minister's conduct in the round, over a significant period of time, and ask questions about the behaviour we expect from our political representatives. At a time where confidence in politics and politicians to deliver for Northern Ireland is at an all-time low, it is clear that this is an issue that it is beyond time to address.

The Ministerial Code of Conduct and The Seven Principles of Public Life.

[The Ministerial Code of Conduct](#) as set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 outlines *“the rules and procedures for the exercise of the duties and responsibilities of Ministers and junior Ministers of the Northern Ireland Assembly”*. All Ministers of the Assembly pledge to abide by this Code, which includes a commitment to follow The Seven Principles of Public Life. These are reproduced below

Ministerial Code of Conduct

The Ministerial Code of Conduct referred to at (g) above is as follows.

Ministers must at all times:

- (i) observe the highest standards of propriety and regularity involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relationship to the stewardship of public funds;
- (ii) be accountable to users of services, the community and, through the Assembly, for the activities within their responsibilities, their stewardship of public funds and the extent to which key performance targets and objectives have been met;
- (iii) ensure that all reasonable requests for information from the Assembly, users of services and individual citizens are complied with; and that departments and their staff conduct their dealings with the public in an open and responsible way;
- (iv) follow the seven principles of public life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life;

(v) comply with this Code and with rules relating to the use of public funds;

(vi) operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment;

(vii) not use information gained in the course of their service for personal gain; nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests;

(viii) ensure they comply with any rules on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality that might be offered; and

(ix) declare any personal or business interests which may conflict with their responsibilities. The Assembly will retain a Register of Interests. Individuals must ensure that any direct or indirect pecuniary interests which members of the public might reasonably think could influence their judgement are listed in the Register of Interests.

The Seven Principles of Public Life

These are set out in the Ministerial Code of Conduct above, and the [NI Assembly Code of Conduct](#).

1. Selflessness: Members should act solely in terms of the public interest.

2. Integrity: Members must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

3. Objectivity: Members must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

4. Accountability: Members are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

5. Openness: Members should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

6. Honesty: Members should be truthful.

7. Leadership: Members should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

The Additional Assembly Principles of Conduct

8. Equality: Members should promote equality of opportunity and not discriminate against any person, treating people with respect regardless of race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, political opinion, marital status and whether or not a person has dependents.

9. Promoting Good Relations: Members should act in a way that is conducive to promoting good relations by tackling prejudice, promoting understanding and respect and encouraging participation between people on the grounds of different religion, political opinion, race, gender, age, sexual orientation and disability.

10. Respect: Members should show respect and consideration for others at all times.

11. Good Working Relationships: Members should work responsibly with other Members of the Assembly for the benefit of the whole community. Members' working relationship with Assembly staff should at all times be professional, courteous and based on mutual respect.

The Rules of Conduct

Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) must abide by the following rules of conduct:

1. You shall base your conduct on a consideration of the public interest, avoid conflict between personal interest and the public interest and resolve any conflict between the two, at once, and in favour of the public interest.
2. You shall uphold the criminal law. You fail to uphold the law only if you are convicted of, or admit formally, an offence committed when acting in your capacity as a Member.
3. You shall uphold the law in relation to equality. You fail to uphold the law in relation to equality only if a court or tribunal makes a finding against you, or you accept formally that you have breached the law, when acting in your capacity as a Member.
4. You shall register in the Assembly's Register of Members' Interests details of all registrable interests. A registrable interest means an interest specified in Chapter 1 of the Guide to the Rules. [The categories of registrable interest are set out in Schedule 1]
5. You shall declare, whether in Assembly proceedings or in any approach to a Minister, public representative, public body or public official, any relevant interest which might reasonably be thought by others to influence your approach to the matter under consideration. A relevant interest means an interest to which Chapter 2 of the Guide to the Rules applies, and may include a registrable interest.

6. You shall not accept any gift, benefit or hospitality that might reasonably be thought by others to influence your actions as a Member.

7. You shall not, in return for payment or benefit, advocate or initiate any cause or matter on behalf of any outside body or individual. Nor shall you, in return for benefit or payment, urge any other Member to do so.

8. You shall not seek to confer benefit exclusively upon a body (or individual), from which you have received, are receiving, or expect to receive a financial or material benefit, or upon any client of such a body (or individual).

9. You shall not misuse any payment, allowance or resources available to you for public purposes. You shall strictly observe the requirements of any applicable determination made by any relevant body or by the Assembly Commission and any rules made by the Assembly Commission applying to these or any other payments, allowances and resources.

10. You shall observe and comply with the Rules on All-Party Groups and any policy, guidance or instructions of any kind approved by the Assembly, or issued by the Assembly Commission or Assembly secretariat staff on its behalf or with its authority.

11. You shall use information which you receive in confidence only in your capacity as a Member. You shall never use, nor attempt to use, such information for the purpose of financial gain.

12. You shall disclose confidential or protectively marked information only when you are authorised to do so.

13. You shall not act in any way which improperly interferes, or is intended or is likely to improperly interfere, with the performance by the Assembly of its functions, or the performance by a Member, officer or staff of the Assembly of their duties.

14. You shall not use, or attempt to use, your position as a Member to improperly confer an advantage or preferential treatment for either yourself or any other person; or to avoid disadvantage or create disadvantage for someone else.

15. You shall not subject anyone to unreasonable and excessive personal attack.

16. You shall co-operate at all times with any investigation by or under the authority of either the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards or the Assembly. 17. You shall not disclose details in relation to such an investigation except when authorised by law or by the investigatory authority.

18. You shall not lobby a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, or the Commissioner in a manner calculated or intended to improperly influence their consideration of whether a breach of the Code of Conduct has occurred.

19. You shall take reasonable care to ensure that your staff, when acting on your behalf, uphold these rules of conduct.

20. You shall, if approached by anyone to act in a way that would breach the Code of Conduct, report without delay details of the approach to the The Code of Conduct 9 Committee on Standards and Privileges, and to any other appropriate authority.

21. You shall not urge another Member to contravene any rule of conduct.

Paul Givan's Trip to a school in the Occupied West Bank, and Department for Education Post on visit to Ofek School in October 2025.

Position: Minister for Education (2024–present)

Timeframe: 2025

Relevant Codes/Principles: Integrity, Objectivity, The Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021, Impartiality, Democratic Accountability,

On the 4th of November 2025, 35 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) including People Before Profit, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and Sinn Féin [supported](#) a motion of no-confidence against Minister for Education, Paul Givan. The motion argued that the minister had failed to comply with the Ministerial Code of Conduct, specifically to *“uphold the rule of law based as it is on the fundamental principles of fairness, impartiality and democratic accountability”*, proposing his exclusion from office for 12 months. While 47 out of 80 MLAs voted in favour of excluding Givan, the motion was defeated on cross-community voting rules. Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, motions to exclude a minister from office require cross-community support to pass.

For six days in October 2025, Givan took part in a ‘fact finding’ delegation [to Israel](#) that was planned, organised and paid for by the Israeli Embassy in London. During his visit, the Minister met Israeli officials and visited the Ofek school on occupied Palestinian land in East Jerusalem. In the weeks before his visit to Israel, Givan voted [against](#) a motion condemning the starvation and ongoing genocide in Gaza, [publicly](#) thanked the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) saying *“Israel and the rest of the world owe them a debt of gratitude”*. In [response](#) to condemnation of his actions, Givan called his critics anti-semitic.

During [questioning](#) on the controversial trip by the Assembly, Givan denied the improper use of department resources, claiming a social media posts and a press

release [published](#) on its website, showcasing a visit to a school on an [illegal Israeli settlement](#), were politically neutral.

In Northern Ireland, the use of departmental resources and platforms, including the actions of [civil servants](#), are expected to be politically neutral. Furthermore, the [Code of Conduct](#) calls for MLAs to act with objectivity, while upholding high standards of impartiality in relation to the use of public funds.

[Israeli-funded](#) delegations for political representatives and civil servants are understood by observers to be strategic lobbying, state supported, pro-Israel [propaganda opportunities](#). One organisation coordinating and financing such trips [said](#) they can *“literally turn [politicians] around as pro-Israeli”*.

When [questioned](#) about Givan’s six day trip to Israel, the Education Department’s permanent secretary admitted that they did not know Ofek School was on occupied territory but it *“would have been a factor to take into account”* if he had been aware. It was later revealed that Givan [contravened](#) British government foreign policy in crossing into the occupied West Bank, and did not have support of the Foreign Office while there.

Days after the Minister’s return, The Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) [criticised](#) Minister Givan saying that *“the Minister’s actions in promoting this visit on these platforms is an overtly political and divisive act that serves to diminish confidence in his judgement and respect for the views of the wider education workforce and community”*.

According to [The Functioning of Government \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Act 2021](#), introduced in response to the RHI scandal, which aims to strengthen government transparency, Ministers have to have at least one civil servant with them at all official meetings. During his visit to the Ofek School, which [involved](#) Israeli government officials, Givan did not have a civil servant present [claiming](#) that the rules didn’t apply because it wasn’t technically a meeting, but a tour. It has also been [reported](#) that *“no departmental officials were on the trip or present at any of the engagements, either in person or remotely”*.

During a debate on the matter, a People Before Profit MLA Gerry Carroll [noted](#) that the Education Minister had *“shared an overtly political social media post about the event, insinuating that Israeli parliamentarians think that the North should remain a part of the UK”*. The post he was presumably referring to was made on October 27th on Givan’s [Facebook](#) page and said *“In the Israel Parliament for important meetings. They know where Northern Ireland belongs”*, accompanied by a photo of a Union Jack and Israeli flag together.

Supreme Court judgement on teaching of religious education in Northern Ireland.

Position: Minister for Education (2024–present)

Timeframe: 2022 – 2025

Relevant Codes/Principles: Selflessness, Objectivity, Equality, Promoting Good Relations, Good Working Relationships.

At the same time as Givan was dealing with the fallout from his controversial trip to Israel, the UK's highest court, the Supreme Court, [ruled](#) that Christian-focused Religious Education (RE) classes, and collective Christian worship practice in primary schools in Northern Ireland were unlawful, and amounted to “*pursuing the aims of [indoctrination](#)*”.

The November 2025 ruling was the third related to the case since it had first been heard three years previously, when a father and daughter [brought a case](#) to the High Court in Belfast, arguing that the predominantly Christian nature of RE classes was discriminatory in relation to the Human Rights Act. The challenge was [successful](#) but the landmark ruling was appealed by the Department of Education (DoE) and overturned.

With the DoE's fresh attempt to appeal the Supreme Court ruling refused, this latest judgement marks the end of a six year battle for the family and legal teams.

The Supreme Court reiterated the Belfast court's initial judgement, [finding](#) there had been a breach of the child's right to an effective education at the school, even when taking into consideration the right of freedom of thought, belief and religion. It [held](#) that RE and collective worship were not taught, or practiced, in “*an objective, critical, and pluralistic manner*”, and could amount to indoctrination.

On the same day as the Supreme Court published its summary, a [motion](#) was tabled in the UK Parliament by Traditional Unionist Voice leader, Jim Allister, and supported

by DUP MLA, Jim Shannon, Independent MLA, Alex Easton, and Tory MP, Andrew Rosindell. The motion expressed “*deep-concern*” with the ruling, claiming it was contrary to Christian ethos in Northern Irish schools, condemning the use of the term “*indoctrination*”, and calling on Givan to do something to protect this ethos.

A few days later, an amended motion was [resubmitted](#), this time tabled by DUP MLA, Gregory Campbell, and included a congratulations to the Minister of Education for his “*statement that he will not permit those who would wish to drive out the Christian ethos from our schools to succeed*”. The TUV leader went on to [characterise](#) the Court’s judgement as a win of “*non-Christian parents over those of Christian parents*”.

As well as committing to protecting schools’ Christian ethos, Givan [told](#) the public that legislation had not changed and it was technically business as usual, reminding the public that legally religious education and daily collective worship had to continue. While the Minister did commit to looking at future reform of the RE syllabus, he also [informed](#) the public that this would be done with the four Christian Churches who had been involved in the initial setting of the curriculum which had just been ruled contrary to the law, and repeatedly stating that Christian-ethos would remain central.

An SDLP MLA [noted](#) that Givan’s response to the discussion and ruling at the Assembly was mixed, at one moment appearing pragmatic and reasonable, and the next talking about hostility to Christians, and mocking Alliance members about witchcraft and paganism.

During the same debate the Minister commented that, “*It is important to state that there are those who have sought to frame the judgement in a way that suits their own particular objective, which often comes from an overtly hostile position towards the Christian ethos*”.

In an opinion piece three days after the Supreme Court ruling, commenting about the judgement, the Minister [warned](#) that “*We should not be naive. There are those in Northern Ireland who are involved in fighting a cultural war. There are those who*

would wish to see faith driven from our schools to be replaced by every progressive cause, including trans-extremism". He concluded that "faith has shaped education in Northern Ireland for generations. Under my leadership, it will continue to do so".

On 1st July 2026, the Department for Education opened a [consultation](#) on a revised RE syllabus in response to the Supreme Court judgement.

Transgender Guidance in Schools

Position: Minister for Education (2024–present), Chair of the Justice Committee ([2020–2021](#))

Timeframe: 2019 – 2025

Relevant Codes/principles: Equality, Promoting Good Relations, Selflessness, Respect, Objectivity, Leadership.

Paul Givan has spoken against the rights of trans people from his position in government on multiple occasions.

In April 2025, the Supreme Court [ruled](#) that the meaning of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ in the Equality Act 2010 related to ‘biological sex’. The [case](#) was brought against the Scottish government by a Scottish charity that campaigns [against trans rights](#).

The Court’s ruling did not change legislation. On 21st May 2026 the Equality and Human Rights Commission laid its [updated services Code of Practice before Parliament](#), which provided practical guidance on how the Equality Act 2010 applies to services, public functions and associations.

However, in a move [condemned](#) by the Northern Ireland Teachers Council (NITC), Givan [withdrew](#) guidance on supporting transgender and gender diverse students in September 2025. This guidance had been in use in schools since 2019, and revoking it effectively removed important provision for vulnerable young trans and non-binary children. Speaking on the issue, Givan went as far as calling people’s gender identities ‘*ideology*’, arguing that the guidance had only been drawn up in response to a push from a minority of activists, and claiming he didn’t believe it to be legal. The Minister successfully [wrote](#) to the Education Authority (EA) to request the immediate withdrawal of guidance from its website.

It’s been [noted](#) that at the same time Givan’s department also removed 2017 research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ students.

An NITC spokesperson [stated](#) that *“the withdrawal of this guidance will create confusion and leave schools without the necessary framework to support these pupils effectively”* and called on the *“Education Minister to reconsider this decision and further call on the Education Authority to stand by their previous commitments on equality and reinstate the guidance today”*.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People (NICCY), whose [remit](#) is the international human rights treaty, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), also spoke out against Givan’s move saying *“the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child remains deeply concerned about the persistent discrimination of children belonging to minority groups, such as transgender and intersex children, in the UK, including Northern Ireland”*. The Commission went on to [comment](#) that despite Givan’s removal of official guidance, *“schools and Boards of Governors continue to have obligations and must continue to uphold these to ensure all children are safe and their rights are upheld while accessing their education”*.

Controversy on criteria for funding under RAISE programme for educational underachievement which led to inclusion of a preparatory school in his constituency.

Position: Minister for Education (2024–present), Chair of the Justice Committee ([2020–2021](#))

Timeframe: 2021 – 2025

Relevant Codes/Principles: Selflessness, Integrity, Fairness, Objectivity, Promoting Good Relations.

In May 2024, Education Minister Paul Givan [announced](#) The Raise Achievement to Reduce Education Disadvantage ([RAISE](#)) programme, which aimed to support young people facing educational barriers perpetuated by deprivation.

Funding for the programme has cross-border support, with [£20 million](#) having been allocated by the Irish government's Shared Island Unit since 2024.

Addressing educational underachievement in the north of Ireland, RAISE is coordinated by the Department for Education (DoE). In March 2025, Givan [announced](#) the scheme's first seven initiatives across the programme's [18 designated localities](#). Various datasets and [criteria](#) were used to choose these localities, including *“free school meal entitlement, Special Educational Needs, pupil attendance and GCSE attainment as well as the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation measures of income deprivation affecting children and health deprivation and disability, and Crime and Anti-social behaviour”*.

However, just months into the programme [three schoolchildren](#) initiated legal challenges, [accusing](#) Givan's department of acting against their rights and educational interests.

With the support of solicitors, the claimants raised concerns about the allocation of money, arguing that areas identified as being eligible for funding under the scheme were disproportionately Protestant areas, and discriminated against students in Derry and Belfast. They argued that the criteria for selection used flawed methodology, discriminating against Catholics, and failed to meet its own objectives of decreasing barriers to educational achievement.

It was [argued](#) that free school meal eligibility, arguably a much stronger indicator of deprivation, had been downgraded in favour of GCSE results during shortlisting. In its judgement on the case, the High Court found that *“the Minister elected to use the GCSE criterion as the sole means of selection from the shortlist”*. It was also [noted](#) that Catholics statistically outperform Protestants at GCSE level, potentially skewing the selection process.

Originally, more than 400 schools were identified as being eligible for the programme. However, the department's final [list](#) of 40 schools that had qualified sparked controversy. The list excluded many of the most deprived schools in the North; however, a fee paying school in Givan's constituency, that charges £5k a year per student, was included.

In fact, two schools in Givan's own [constituency](#) were named as eligible for RAISE funding, one being the [third most affluent](#) school in the region. This school is reported to have just 4% of students eligible for free school meals, whereas another school with 60% of students eligible was not on the list.

Although the legal challenges were eventually dismissed by the High Court, in December 2025 the judge [found](#) that *“there is scope for debate as to whether a different method would have arrived at either simpler or more effective outcomes”*.

In the same [ruling](#), the court said that making decisions on government policy would be judicial overreach, adding that *“while a different scheme could have been developed, it was not part of the court's role to critique policy development”*. It ruled that the methodology was not flawed, dismissing the case, concluding that *“It was*

never the case,...that socio-economic deprivation would be sole qualifying criterion for funding”.

We might want to include that this has now gone to the Court of Appeal and the Irish government has decided to [withhold second tranche of RAISE funding](#) until it is concluded.

The expert panel established by the DoE to look at educational underachievement published their [report](#) in mid 2021, recommending a place-based approach to the issue: *“there should be a focus on communities and families in the most disadvantaged areas”.*

Just six months after Givan announced the RAISE scheme, members of the Assembly [called](#) on the Minister to replace the programme and ensure the funding directly benefited pupils with the most need. While [addressing](#) the flawed nature of the Minister’s formula for funding application, Sinn Féin’s Pat Sheehan said that *“less-deprived areas and even some more-affluent areas are due to be included within the programme, while children and young people in many deprived areas in working-class communities are set to be excluded”.*

The NI Assembly passed a [motion](#) highlighting the failure of RAISE in tackling educational underachievement in November 2024. It stated that the RAISE *“programme will not deliver based on objective need”* and called on the Minister to *“replace the RAISE programme with a new programme which will target support to the schools and children that, based on objective evidence, need it most”.* Minister Paul Givan voted against the motion.

In December 2025, Givan [announced](#) £3.78 million for 61 projects to receive funding under the RAISE programme.

School uniforms legislation and opportunities missed to support low income parents

Position: Minister for Education (2024–present)

Timeframe: 2025 – 2026

Relevant Codes/Principles: Objectivity, Equality, Respect, Good Working Relationships.

In February 2025, Givan introduced the [School Uniforms \(Guidelines and Allowances\) Bill](#). The Bill originally intended to make guidelines on uniforms statutory – or legally binding – placing legal responsibility on the Department of Education (DoE). Key provisions included affordability, cost controls, practicality, equality, the introduction or encouragement of uniform and school equipment schemes, and limiting branded items. The Bill, however, did not place a specific cap on the cost of uniforms.

Also, the intent of the bill was that the need for branded clothes items at schools will be minimised, alternatives to purchasing such as lending libraries, uniform banks or subsidy schemes will be encouraged. For children with special educational needs, the cost of uniform adjustments or other accessibility requirements should not be unfair.

The bill aimed to stop uniforms being a barrier for low income households, limiting prohibitive uniform or Physical Education (PE) gear costs falling on families, allowing for the lowest cost, suitable option to be made available.

After progressing through the stages at Stormont, the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Act (Northern Ireland) 2026 received [Royal Assent](#) on the 19th February 2026.

Many politicians and commentators expressed disappointment with the final version of the legislation. The new School Uniforms Act has been [described](#) as “*light touch*” and “*light in detail*” by the [chair](#) of the Committee for Education. While Sinn Féin have

[called](#) it a “*watered down piece of legislation*”, that does not provide substantial or detailed support for families.

In an unprecedented move, during debates on the Bill in the Assembly, the Speaker Edwin Poots [rejected](#) 11 of the 23 cross-committee amendments put forward, without any explanation. These amendments related to gender neutral uniforms, a cap on branded items, and a three year report back mechanism for Education Minister, Paul Givan, to measure success.

During a [debate](#) on the Bill in March 2025, SDLP MLA, Cara Hunter, commented that “*a staggering 94% of parents believe that current uniform prices are unreasonable. The average cost of a uniform, including PE kit, stands at £378 for a post-primary-school child and £173 for a primary-school child*”. The Bill does not ban branded items outright but [suggests](#) they should be minimised, “*carefully considered*”, or at least not be made compulsory. [According to](#) the consultation on the Bill, 88% of respondents were in favour of a price cap on uniforms and PE kits, something the Bill does not legislate for.

Raising more [concerns](#) about the effectiveness of the Bill, Independent MLA, Claire Sugden, suggested that “*affordability means different things to different people, and, without a clear definition, there is a real risk that schools will technically comply whilst still setting expensive uniform requirements*”. She also raised issues with the timeline for implementation, saying families needed cost cuts as soon as possible, and pushed for enforcement on these issues to be accessible to families.

In December 2025, members of the Committee on Education [spoke out](#) against Givan after he failed to follow through on his promise to run the draft guidelines by the committee before publishing and distributing them to schools. The deputy chair of the committee accused him of “*mocking the committee*”.

Criticisms of Givan’s Bill include its absence of provision for gender neutral clothing, lack of detail on what affordability means, lack of clarity on how much uniforms are going to cost, little to no support for low income families, and that the amount of grey areas effectively renders most of the new legislation useless.

Holiday Hunger and cuts to free school meals

Position: Minister for Education (2024–present)

Timeframe: 2023 – 2025

Relevant Codes/Principles: Selflessness, Objectivity, Accountability, Leadership, Equality, Respect.

Holiday Hunger Payments

In the spring of 2023, during a cost of living crisis, and while the Executive was suspended, the Department of Education (DoE) [withdrew](#) ‘holiday hunger payments’ for children entitled to Free School Meals, citing budget restrictions. The school holiday food grant had been a lifeline for many struggling families, with over 100,000 children in poverty in Northern Ireland [according](#) to a People Before Profit MLA. The cut was announced just days before the Easter break, leaving almost no time for low-income families reliant on the payments to make emergency plans.

Despite the restoration of the Executive in February 2024, Education Minister Paul Givan did not reinstate the holiday hunger payment. In the months that followed, [motions](#) by MLAs from across the political spectrum were [tabled](#) in support of these payments, [calling](#) on Givan to take steps to end holiday hunger, reintroduce the payments, widen access to free school meals, address unaffordable uniforms, school kit, and get rid of branded school items.

In November 2025, Givan again took the decision not to restore the holiday hunger scheme, [blaming](#) departmental underfunding, even though he admitted that his department had [not properly conducted research into the impact](#) of the payment cancellations.

But in March 2026, Sinn Féin MLA, Danny Baker, introduced a [Private Members Bill](#) which intends to place a legal duty on the Department of Education to provide support for children entitled to free school meals during school holidays. In July 2026,

the bill successfully [completed](#) the committee stage and it will be considered by the Assembly before the end of the mandate in 2027.

Free School Meals

The Education Minister also [announced](#) that for those on Universal Credit in the *“2025–26 academic year, the eligibility threshold for free school meals and uniform grants will rise to £15,390”*. However, the threshold [used](#) to be £16,000, meaning the rise for 25–26 still leaves less children eligible than in previous years.

Just months before, a [report](#) submitted to the Executive, by Belfast based rights organisation, Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR), found that in June 2024 Givan *“raised the income threshold for eligibility amongst households in receipt of Universal Credit, leading to an expected drop in eligible recipients to 93,400 in 2024/25 and 88,700 in 2025/26”*, effectively cutting access to free school meals for 5,000 families.

In a November 2024 debate, SDLP MLA, Cara Hunter, again [raised](#) the topic at the Assembly, arguing in favour of universal access to free school meals for all children across Northern Ireland by 2030. The move had proven popular during the public consultation on eligibility criteria for free school meals and uniform grants, however Givan said budget constraints would make it impossible.

In the same debate, SDLP’s Mark Durkan MLA [reminded](#) the Assembly that Givan had estimated that universal free school meals would cost £142 million, yet later raised that figure to £202 million, an increase of £60 million, without explanation.

During the debate it was also noted that anecdotal evidence from schools show that in the waiting period where families are assessed for eligibility schools themselves were paying for free school meals for pupils in need, even though there is no mechanism for recouping this should applicants be successful.

At the session, UNISON’s free school meals campaign was [commended](#) as being integral to the motion brought by the SDLP. Supported by Act Now in 2024, UNISON,

Northern Ireland's largest union, launched a [campaign](#) for universal free school meals for all children.

In [response](#) to the motion, Givan failed to directly address many of the issues raised; instead, suggesting the idea of universal free school meal provisioning was '*virtue signaling*'.

Earlier that year, a [report](#) commissioned by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) revealed that current provisioning of free school meal was inadequate, because it did not benefit all children in poverty and disadvantaged working families due to being based on the receipt of certain benefits. The commissioner proposed changes to the current criteria for free school meals entitlement to ensure access by all children in need.

Relationship and sex education in Northern Ireland

Position: Minister for Education (2024–present)

Timeframe: 2024

Relevant Codes/Principles: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Openness, Equality, Promoting Good Relations, Respect, Good Working Relationships.

In April 2024, a motion was brought to the Assembly titled, [Relationships and Sexuality Education](#). The motion aimed to recognise the importance of “*compulsory, standardised, inclusive, high-quality, evidence-based and age-appropriate Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)*” for children. It recognised that teachers and staff need resources and support to be able to deliver this subject, and that when done well this education has a “*role to play in tackling violence against women and girls*” and “*fostering healthy relationships*”. The guidance, as it stood before the motion was agreed, [allowed](#) parents to remove their children from elements of RSE including classes on LGBTQ+ issues, pregnancy prevention, access to abortion, and sexual health.

A survey on RSE education by the Belfast Youth Forum was mentioned in the debate. It found that 73% of surveyed pupils had almost never had an RSE class, while 60% felt that any information they did receive was of little or no use. Additionally, it was mentioned that a report by the Secondary Students' Union of Northern Ireland found that under a quarter of pupils had received adequate education about consent. Paul Givan voted against the motion.

Arguments from members of the DUP and other opposition MLAs accused the motion of trying to usurp the rights of parents, teachers and school governors, or of pitting the rights of children against the rights of parents. DUP MLA, Diane Dodds, claimed that “*not all teachers will want to teach a standardised curriculum. They will want to teach according to their conscience*”. In a move that correlated separate issues, Dodds went on to mention the [Cass Review](#) (the Report and Recommendations to

NHS England of Dr Hilary Cass as Chair of the Independent Review of gender identity services for children and young people) to warn against puberty blockers for young people.

In responding to the motion, Givan foregrounded his comments by listing all the issues that the education system in the North was facing, going on to claim that the motion would address none of these, seemingly more important, issues.

In response to the points raised about tackling violence against women and girls, Givan claimed that it was he who had shown care for women during the debate on the purchase of sexual services, while the Alliance party stood with *“pimps and those who traffic people”* alluding to their vote against the legislation at the time.

In keeping with Dodds, Givan commented that: *“in practice, when such changes to the RSE curriculum took place in England in September 2020, it led to activist groups advising schools and providing them with highly questionable teaching materials. Indeed, many schools adopted radical approaches. In England, under the guise of inclusive and evidence-based RSE, primary-school children have been taught that they all have a gender that depends not on the reality of their bodies but on how their interests match up with stereotypical ideas about boys and girls. It is no stretch of the imagination to think that some of the thousands of children who were referred to England’s scandal-hit and now-closed Gender Identity Development Service might not have been had they not received those lessons.”*

Givan finished his closing remarks in response to the motion by mentioning DUP, Tory and Labour party support for the Cass report. He [suggested](#) that *“neither pupils nor teachers should be compelled to use pronouns other than those that reflect biological sex”*. It should be noted that [the Cass Review](#) found that using someone’s chosen name or pronoun was of immense benefit to their mental health, reducing suicidality and other distress.

Additionally, in the same debate, after an Alliance MLA recounted the hardships he faced as a gay pupil at school, including that he felt indoctrinated as opposed to

educated, Givan replied that *"it clearly did not work"*. A Sinn Féin MLA [called](#) on the speaker to rule on the inappropriate comment.

Criticisms of the Education Minister's treatment of LGBTQ+ people continued a few months later, when he was again [challenged over](#) refusing to meet with an LGBTQ+ support organisation to discuss RSE, but agreed to meet with The Christian Institute – a charity that has [campaigned](#) in support of conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ people, and is strongly [opposed](#) to RSE.

Academic selection views and allegation of promotion of SEAG test

Position: Minister for Education (2024–present)

Timeframe: 2024

Relevant Codes/Principles: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Leadership, Equality, Promoting Good Relations.

In the north of Ireland, a private company running unregulated school transfer tests for young people aged 11 has been found to be responsible for accentuating academic and social disadvantage for young people.

Those who perform well in transfer tests (from primary school to post-primary school) go on to education in grammar schools, while those who perform less well continue to education in secondary schools. The [impact](#) of this is that often children from disadvantaged backgrounds get lumped into non-grammar schools where expectations for achievement are lower, furthering social exclusion and access to opportunities.

Several national and international rights organisations have spoken out against, or called for complete abolition of, the process of Academic Selection in Northern Ireland, including the [UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), [The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland](#), [Participation and the Practice of Rights](#) (PPR), and [The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission](#).

The Department of Education's own policy group [found](#) that the current system exacerbates social inequalities, funnelling children from already disadvantaged backgrounds into a small number of lower achieving schools.

The SEAG (Schools' Entrance Assessment Group)

In late 2023, after years of controversy, the original two [separate](#) AQE and GL transfer tests were [replaced](#) by one common [SEAG Entrance Assessment](#). This was to be run by private company, The Schools' Entrance Assessment Group (SEAG), with papers continuing to be produced by GL Assessment, the private firm that had previously run the GL tests. GL Assessment is ultimately owned by US-based, multinational Renaissance Holding Corporation.

The SEAG test is used by less than half of schools in the north of Ireland. In January 2026, there were [63 post-primary schools](#) that used academic selection and the SEAG test.

In October 2025, [almost](#) a year after the first SEAG test took place, a senior teacher and Sinn Féin's Pat Sheehan MLA accused the Department of Education under Paul Givan, of acting out of line when it was [revealed](#) that his Deputy Permanent Secretary wrote to a school encouraging the uptake of the SEAG assessment system. In this instance, the issuing of letters to schools on behalf of a private company that supports and profits from an unregulated academic selection system, was perceived by them to be outside of the remit of Givan's department.

At the beginning of 2026 Givan came out in strong support of the system. He told the Northern Irish public he had [no plans](#) to abolish the controversial tests, and that the testing system is not within his remit.

Lisneal College Scandal and the Minor Works Scheme

Position: Minister for Education (2024–present)

Timeframe: 2025

Relevant Codes/Principles: Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty, Leadership.

Lisneal College Scandal

In early 2025, Givan was accused of cronyism after his department allocated £700,000 to a school to upgrade a sports facility under the Minor Works Scheme. Many MLAs questioned why the money was granted to Lisneal College while other schools across the North who had also applied to the scheme in order to fix issues such as leaking roofs, toilet repairs or other health and safety concerns, were rejected. Members of the Education Committee said that Givan's actions lacked transparency. Nonetheless, the Minister for Education denied any wrongdoing, stating that it was the Education Authority (EA), who he oversees, who had made the decision.

Adding to the controversy, it was revealed that Givan and fellow DUP MLAs had met with the principal of Lisneal College, who had received the funding, just months before the money was allocated. When challenged over whether he or his officials discussed the application with the EA before or after his meeting with the principal, Givan avoided directly answering the question – *“did you or your officials, at any stage before or after your meeting with the principal of Lisneal College, discuss the application with the EA or its board representatives”?* – saying *“it will take more than a one-word answer”*.

A Freedom of Information request for the minutes of that June 2024 meeting with the Lisneal principal showed that the proposed sports facility was in fact discussed.

Three months after that meeting, the EA allocated funding to Lisneal College to upgrade the facility. It later [transpired](#) that in February 2025, the principle of Lisneal College, who had been present at the meetings, was seconded to Givan's department for three years.

Just months before the scandal broke, [Givan told Sinn Féin twice](#) that there was no money available for much needed school upgrades. Furthermore, in January 2025, the Belfast Telegraph [revealed](#) that every school in Derry city that had applied for funding under the minor works scheme in the last decade had not been awarded the money.

Freedom of Conscience Amendment Bill (2015)

Position: Chair of the Justice Committee ([2011 – 2014](#)) and ([2020–2021](#))

Timeframe: 2015 – 2022

Codes/Principles contravened: Equality, Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Promoting Good Relations.

In early 2015, Paul Givan, submitted a Private Member's Bill to the Assembly seeking to introduce a freedom of conscience clause into equality legislation. Sparked by an incident where Ashers bakery declined to take an order for a cake that said 'Support Gay Marriage', the proposed conscience clause aimed to allow business owners and service providers to refuse service to LGBTQ+ people on religious belief grounds. Ashers bakery was taken to court by the Equality Commission on behalf of the customer.

Paul Givan's private member's bill aimed to change the following::

- *That a voluntary organisation carrying out fostering or adoption services should be able to refuse service to LGBT people on the grounds of religious beliefs.*
- *That businesses could refuse a customer service based on their sexual orientation or support for the LGBT community, based on religious grounds.*

At the end of 2014, Givan [launched](#) a 12-week [consultation](#) on the proposed bill. Published while equal marriage was still illegal in Northern Ireland, the document framed the issue as one of clashing rights, namely religious rights vs sexual orientation rights. In the consultation document, Givan argued that *"the failure to prevent the rights of one strand being applied in a manner that damages another through different treatment under the law in the liberal democratic tradition has sadly become most pronounced in the context of the exercise of sexual orientation rights in relation to religious rights"*. According to Givan, the consultation received approximately [1,000 replies](#). A couple of months later, it was [reported](#) that 230,000 people signed a petition against the Bill.

Givan's proposed amendments [aimed](#) to make it legal for a business or service "to restrict the provision of goods, facilities and services; or to restrict the use or disposal of premises" in order "to avoid endorsing, promoting or facilitating behaviour or beliefs which conflict with the strongly held religious convictions". The consultation document claimed that the changes would mean an evangelical photographer wouldn't have to take photos of a gay wedding, a muslim book printer wouldn't have to print LGBTQ+ books, and ""would mean that a Catholic adoption agency would not be required by law to choose between either being willing to act in violation of their faith by placing a child with a same sex couple, thereby endorsing a same-sex union and same-sex parenting, or ceasing operations".

Speaking on this issue, Givan [said](#) that the government "should not have a duty to force people in business to do things against their religious beliefs", and at the time spoke about the support he had for the Bill from the Catholic and Presbyterian Churches.

Givan's proposed amendments were widely [condemned](#) as disrespectful to the LGBTQ+ community, backstepping on equality, and a continuation of "DUP threats to discriminate against the LGBT community".

In February 2015, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) [responded](#) to the consultation on the Bill, making clear that it did not support the proposed amendments to the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006. Givan [described](#) the commission's legal proceedings against the bakery as 'bullying', and claimed it was intolerance against Christians that had led to the case.

In detailing their refusal to support the Bill the ECNI said that, "we believe that if introduced, the proposed amendments would significantly weaken protection for LGB (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual) individuals against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. There is also the potential for the exceptions, if introduced, to weaken protection not only for LGB individuals but also for those who associate with LGB individuals, such as family members or friends, and/or those who are perceived to be LGB".

The Commission found that the consultation also contained non-objective, leading questions, failed to consider negative impacts of legislative changes on LGBTQ+ people, their families and friends, did not fit with equality law in Northern Ireland, and could potentially contravene human rights law. Overall, they concluded that the Bill would weaken protections for LGBTQ+ people, significantly restrict LGBTQ+ people's access to services when compared to their peers in other parts of the UK, and that elements were at odds with some elements of equality legislation in the Republic of Ireland.

Amongst the many other responses to Givan's Bill was a report submitted by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), who advised *"that the underlying premise of the proposed Bill, which is that freedom to manifest one's religion is undermined by the protection of individuals from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, is unfounded"*.

It went on to note that the European Court of Human Rights had previously concluded that UK legislation on the issue was balanced, and that Givan's proposal would be incompatible with ECHR standards. Furthermore, it found that the proposed Bill was outside the remit of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The NIHRC advised that the *"manifestation of a religious belief that involves discrimination against a protected group does not have the protection of human rights law"*.

The Bill was ultimately [voted against](#) it in the Assembly after a motion was [tabled to reject it](#) in March 2015 by the Alliance party.

In January 2022, after seven years and [four distinct](#) legal proceedings against Ashers Baking Co., the case was [dismissed](#) on a technicality at the European Court of Human Rights. Givan welcomed the decision.

Reflecting on the Supreme Court's 2019 judgement on the case, the Chief Commissioner for the Equality Commission noted that Ashers was financially, and otherwise, [supported](#) throughout by the conservative, evangelical charity - [The Christian Institute](#). This UK charity has previously [claimed](#) that a transgender

'ideology' exists which "seeks to completely destroy the distinction between men and women that God in his wisdom has created".

In March 2024, Paul Givan was [criticised](#) for his close relationship with The Christian Institute, with LGBTQ+ organisations accusing him of preferential meeting arrangements with the religious group, this time in regards to relationship and sex education.

Abolishing the Irish Medium Education (Líofa) bursary scheme 2016

Position: Minister of Communities ([2016-2017](#))

Timeframe: 2016 – 2017

Relevant Codes/Principles: Selflessness, Objectivity, Equality, Promoting Good Relations, Respect, Good Working Relationships.

In December 2016, as Northern Ireland's Communities Minister, Paul Givan cut funding to an Irish language learning scheme. The [Líofa Gaeltacht Bursary Scheme](#), run by the Department for Communities, is [open](#) to students and adult learners from low income families, providing financial assistance to those wanting a chance to immerse themselves in the Irish language.

With the DUP [under fire](#) over the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) [scandal](#) that saw millions of pounds wasted, Givan announced the bursary cut just days before the January 2017 collapse of the Executive, [citing](#) efficiency savings.

Activists [demonstrated](#) against the announced closure of the Irish language scheme, calling their public protest 'Bursaries not Boilers' drawing attention to the RHI scandal that squandered almost £500 million, compared to the £50k Líofa scheme.

It was later [revealed](#) that Givan had been [warned](#) by a senior Department for Communities official about the implications of closing the Líofa Scheme supporting families from disadvantaged backgrounds, and had failed to conduct an important government equality assessment regarding the cut. The ministerial briefing paper sent to Givan highlighted several reasons why the scheme was successful and was meeting multiple government objectives.

Following widespread condemnation, and accusations of sectarianism, Givan announced that he had found the money to keep the scheme open, [tweeting](#) that

cutting the scheme was *“not a political decision”*. Furthermore, the Minister suggested that he reversed the decision in order to stop Sinn Féin from using it as political leverage.

Laura Lee complaint regarding conduct at Justice Committee hearing

Position: Chair of the Justice Committee ([2011-2014](#))

Timeframe: 2013 – 2018

Relevant Codes/Principles: Respect, Promoting Good Relations, Objectivity, Leadership, Equality, Openness.

In 2013, DUP MLA, Lord Morrow, [proposed](#) the Human Trafficking & Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill which included a controversial clause that would make it an offence to pay for sex work. Academics, the Northern Ireland Department of Justice, members of the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) and several campaign and advocacy organisations were [opposed](#) to the Bill. In a [written submission](#), the Belfast Feminist Network (BFN), a collective representing over 900 people, stated that the Bill would likely increase risks for sex workers.

Debates, oral hearings and written submission were received throughout the Bills consideration. At one hearing in January 2014, Laura Lee, a spokesperson for the Irish Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) was invited as a guest witness. During the [session](#), Lee experienced hostile treatment from the chair of the Justice Committee, Paul Givan, while she gave evidence on the proposals.

After Lee stated that she offers reduced rates to clients with disabilities, Givan asked her if she would *“not rather do it for free?”*, adding *“why would you exploit a disabled individual and make them pay?”* After the hearing, Lee [received](#) several messages from disabled customers expressing their anger on Givan's ableist comments.

He went on to ask her seemingly unnecessary questions about her father's concern for her, repeatedly alluding to his worries concerning paramilitary action against Lee, and about her feelings if her partner were to purchase sex work.

In addition, Givan [stated](#) that his stance was a moral position, one that didn't need to be based on evidence, saying that *"some of us do not need any research or any evidence. For some of us, the very principle of purchasing sex from a woman is sexual violence, full stop. That is a principled position, and some people do not need to have an evidence base to come to the conclusion that men are currently empowered to continue to subject that type of activity upon women"*.

During the hearing, Givan's colleague, Jim Wells MLA [added](#) that *"you must always treat the evidence from so-called prostitutes' collective groups with extreme suspicion"*.

A month later, Lee had filed a formal complaint to the Commissioner for Standards about the Chair, quoting the Minister's Code of Conduct. In her letter she explained that Givan's questioning during the hearing had made her feel sick, [saying](#) *"I submit that there are several instances in which Paul Givan MLA breached that rule. He asked about my personal sex life, my relationship with my father and – most damning of all – he said that I 'target vulnerable disabled men"*.

A few days after Lee gave evidence, Lucy Smith, founder of a charity that campaigns for access to justice for sex workers, appeared in front of the Committee for Justice on the same topic. While highlighting the violence experienced by some sex workers, she [commented](#) that she was *"upset by the way that Laura Lee was treated by some members of this Committee"*.

At [another](#) Justice Committee oral hearing, two researchers on commercial sex in Northern Ireland were invited to give evidence. Again, Givan grilled the guests, attempting to force one of the researchers to disclose their research participants identities, and threatening to report them to their university for comments made about the DUP being homophobic.

The questioning faced by the researchers prompted Queen's University Belfast to consider whether it should advise academics against participating in Assembly Committees. One of the researchers was later contacted by a senior DUP member

telling him that Mr Givan had been reprimanded. A few months later Givan was [replaced](#) as committee chair for unspecified reasons.

One of the sex work researchers, Susann Huschke, [wrote](#) about her experience of giving evidence to the committee. She said *"There was no way of explaining our methods and the research process to people like Paul Givan and Jim Wells (DUP representatives in the Justice Committee). They had made their minds up a long time ago about what sex work is and what is to be done about it, and were not going to be swayed by anything that we found in our study, or by anything sex workers themselves had to say about it"*.

In 2018, the second Queens University researcher [published](#) his experience of conducting research on sex work in Belfast, and commented on the *"extreme levels of hostility"* faced by Lee during the 2014 questioning by Givan and other DUP colleagues.

The Bill was [finally passed](#) in October 2014, making it illegal to purchase sex in Northern Ireland. As such, Northern Ireland [became](#) the only region in the UK where people can be prosecuted for paying for sex. The Bill was [supported](#) by Christian [lobby group](#), Christian Action Research Education (CARE), who are opposed to abortion, LGBT rights, and sex education. This lobby group has [close links](#) to the DUP, having provided former party leader, now convicted pedophile, Jeffery Donaldson, with [intern](#) researchers.

Lee [won](#) the right to bring a judicial review against the Act in 2016. Lee died in 2018 before it could come to court.

Conclusion

*At their inauguration, public leaders
must swear to uphold unwritten law and weep
to atone for their presumption to hold office –*

*and to affirm their faith that all life sprang
from salt in tears which the sky-god wept
after he dreamt his solitude was endless.*

From the Republic of Conscience, Seamus Heaney

Paul Givan's political career has spanned over twenty years. He has spent time as a Lisburn Councillor, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Lagan Valley, chair of the Justice Committee and the Standards and Privileges Committee, Minister for Communities, Minister for Education, and even First Minister for a short stint before his protest [resignation](#) over the Northern Ireland Protocol in 2022.

During this time, he has conducted himself in a manner which, on the face of it, appears to conflict with the [Codes of Conduct](#) by which he is bound.

It is predictable that such observations may be met with disdain and disregard by the Minister and those in his party.

In that case, consideration should also be given to another dimension made clear in this report – his failure to deliver outcomes. Time and again opportunities to make life better for a myriad of people who live in Northern Ireland who simply need a break – and they have not been taken. From parents struggling to afford school uniforms, and meals over the summer holidays, to disadvantaged young people seeking to benefit from Irish Language immersion, to young trans people attending school in Northern Ireland, time and again opportunities for Paul Givan to make people's lives better have been missed, watered down or blatantly attacked.

To take office and exercise power is a privilege that should be approached with humility and care. The flaws built into the operation of power-sharing mean that Stormont is failing to hold Members and Ministers to account for failures to uphold the basic standards required of them.

Through this report, Act Now's members made it possible for us to set out Paul Givan's track record for examination by all. The stakes are high. In Northern Ireland we have the highest NHS waiting lists in the UK, over 50,000 people on social housing waiting lists, a lack of provision for children with Special Educational Needs, and a chronic problem with violence against women and girls. More and more people are expressing their discontent with Stormont's dysfunction with [70% of people here expressing the view that Stormont does not function well as a government](#). In recent months, [Alliance](#), Sinn Féin and the [Pivotal think tank](#) have published proposals for reform at Stormont, and four parties (except Sinn Féin) appeared at the Westminster Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to discuss the topic. With an Assembly election scheduled for no later than May 2027, there is every sign that this is a conversation whose time may have come.