

## **NICCY Summary: NI Assembly Written Answers for Week Ending 24th January 2014**

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## Shared Housing and Shared Education Projects: Economic Pact

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail what projects will be funded from the further £100 million RRI borrowing available across 2014-15 and 2015-16 for shared housing and shared education projects as part of the Economic Pact. (AQW 29408/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** OFMDFM is currently co-ordinating a bids exercise to identify suitable projects for RRI funding under the Economic Pact. The Lisanelly Shared Educational Campus, which will bring together six schools serving almost 4,000 pupils in the Omagh area has been agreed. The Department of Education will shortly be launching a programme aimed at identifying further projects suitable for support. In addition, officials are currently assessing a number of proposals for shared neighbourhood schemes that have been identified by the Department for Social Development.

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## Delivering Social Change

Mrs Hale asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of Delivering Social Change. (AQO 5259/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Delivering Social Change framework was set up by the Executive to tackle poverty and social exclusion. It represents a new level of joined-up working across Government departments to drive through initiatives which have a genuine impact on the ground and achieve real, long lasting benefits.

Implementation of the initial 6 Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes, announced in October 2012, is progressing well. The Department of Education is leading on the Signature Programme to improve literacy and numeracy levels within schools. This programme will see 233 additional teachers placed in 267 primary and post- primary schools to deliver tuition to children who are currently struggling to achieve even basic educational standards. Over 200 of the posts are now filled and recruitment of the remaining teachers is ongoing.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has lead responsibility for 2 of the signature programmes – the provision of additional Family Support Hubs and Support for Parents. The Family Support Hubs Programme will see 16 existing Family Support Hubs being maintained and 10 new Family Support Hubs being established. In the Northern Trust Area, 2 new Hubs have been established and a third is at an advanced stage of implementation. Work is ongoing to identify potential locations for the 7 Family Support Hubs in the Belfast area. It is anticipated that all 10 new Hubs will be online by April 2014.

In respect of the Support for Parents Signature Programme, a suite of programmes have been developed which will see guidance, training and information being provided for up to 1,200 families. The Department for Social Development and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment are jointly taking forward the Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs Signature Programme. Eleven Hubs will be established in currently vacant commercial premises and will offer a range of business advice and practical support to social enterprise entrepreneurs. Good progress has been made with leases for 9 of the Hubs having been agreed; the remaining 2 hubs will be agreed this month. It is envisaged that providers of supporting services will be appointed in March 2014 in preparation for the majority of the Hubs being operational in April 2014.

The Department for Social Development in collaboration with the Department of Education have established 20 new nurture units within school settings. The establishment of these additional nurture units allows us to play a key role in improving the lives and educational attainment of our most vulnerable children by targeting support where it is most needed. One hundred and sixteen children have now undergone observation and assessment and are currently attending the units.

The Department for Employment and Learning is taking forward the Community Family Support Signature Programme which aims to support parents and prevent younger family members from falling into the Not in Employment, Education or Training category. The programme was successfully piloted earlier this year and the upscaled programme was launched in November. This will reach up to 720 disadvantaged families.

In addition to the initial Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes, on 8 October 2013 Junior Ministers Jennifer McCann and Jonathan Bell announced the Play and Leisure Signature Programme. This will support initiatives in championing play, greater local access to space for play; and planning and support for play at a community level.

Delivering Social Change is about focusing on a smaller number of actions which can really make a difference. Departments are now working together on priority issues to maximise outcomes and improve the lives of everyone living here, and particularly those who need help the most.

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### Third Sector Organisations: Funded by the Department

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) all third sector organisations funded by the Department who provide services to the public; and (ii) the value of each contract. (AQW 29410/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** The third sector organisations funded directly by the Department are detailed in the table below.

| <b>Organisation</b>  | <b>Grant -Aid</b> |
|--|-------------------|
| ChildLine  | £260,000          |
| Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children            | £1,228,000        |
| East Belfast Partnership – Easter School 2013                | £9,030            |
| Greater Shankill Partnership – Summer Transition School 2013 | £20,372           |
| North Belfast Partnership – Easter School 2013               | £20,371           |
| North Belfast Partnership - Summer Transition School 2013    | £13,525           |
| South Belfast Partnership – Easter School 2013               | £17,614           |
| South Belfast Partnership – Summer Transition School 2013    | £11,616           |
| West Belfast Partnership – Easter School 2013                | £5,906            |
| West Belfast Partnership – Summer Transition School 2013     | £35,274           |
| The Pushkin Trust  | £25,000           |
| Business in the Community – Time to Read                     | £50,000           |

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## Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the legal force of a ruling of a Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal; and whether parents are compelled to comply with the rulings in relation to school choice.

(AQW 29636/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** Article 23A of the Education ( NI ) Order 1996 places a duty on education and library boards to comply with orders made by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal. Article 23(5) of that Order provides that a person who without reasonable excuse fails to grant discovery of documents or fails to comply with a requirement to attend as a witness commits a criminal offence. Notwithstanding the legal redress available to any party to an appeal to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal, Article 16 (4A) of the Education (NI) Order 1996 does not require the name of a school or institution to be specified if the child’s parent has made suitable arrangements for the special education provision specified in the statement to be made for the child.

If the child’s parent does not make suitable arrangements as specified above or place the child in the school as directed by the ruling of a tribunal then the parent may be in contravention of Article 45 (1) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, that is:

*“The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.”*

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## Spend on Teaching the Irish Language

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education how much is spent annually on teaching the Irish language as a subject in schools.

(AQW 29752/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** Modern languages are a statutory requirement at Key Stage 3, and a qualification choice at Key Stage 4 and sixth form. Schools can choose to deliver any of the languages of the 27 EU member states, including Irish.

To support primary schools wishing to deliver language learning the Primary Language Programme was introduced in 2007 to give pupils at Foundation Stage/Key Stage 1 the opportunity to learn an additional language in school. There are currently 88 primary schools learning Irish through this programme.

It is up to individual schools to decide how to deploy the resources available to them from their delegated budgets to fund the delivery of all subjects in the curriculum. The Department does not hold information on the languages schools choose to teach or how much each school spends in this area.

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## Education and Library Boards: Educational Psychologists

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many educational psychologists were employed in each Education and Library board in each of the last three years.

(AQW 29775/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** The number of educational psychologists employed in each Education and Library Board, in each of the last 3 years, (headcount as at 15 January) is listed below:

|       | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|-------|------|------|------|
| SEELB | 31   | 37   | 37   |
| SELB  | 34   | 34   | 35   |
| WELB  | 21   | 22   | 23   |
| BELB  | 34   | 35   | 36   |
| NEELB | 26   | 30   | 30   |

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## **Education and Library Boards: Educational Psychologists**

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the average waiting times for a pupil to be seen by an Educational Psychologist in each Education and Library Board; and the reasons for any differences.

(AQW 29776/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** The Education and Library Boards have confirmed that the average waiting time between a pupil being referred to an educational psychologist and having their first appointment, during the period June 2013 to December 2013, is as follows:

**BELB** - 18 days

**NEELB** - 37 days

**SEELB** - 116 days

**SELB** - 63 days

**WELB** - 60 days

These figures refer to Stage 3 (non-statutory assessments) as outlined in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP).

With regard to the waiting time for an assessment in terms of statutory requirements, at Stage 4 of the COP, the ELBs consider the need for a statutory assessment of special educational needs which will include an assessment by an educational psychologist. ELBs have 16 weeks from the date that the ELB notifies the parents that it is considering making an assessment or from the date that the request to carry out an assessment is received by the ELB from the parent or the school to complete the assessment.

The reasons for differences in average waiting times between the ELBs are largely due to natural fluctuations in staffing levels caused, for example, by illness, maternity leave or retirement.

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## **Education and Library Boards: Child Abuse or Neglect**

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education what is the threshold for which a child abuse or child neglect allegation will be deemed serious enough by the Education and Library Boards to inform the PSNI and Gateway services.

(AQW 29798/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Referrals are made to PSNI or the Gateway teams when there is concern that a child may have been the victim of abuse. Signs and symptoms of abuse are set out in DE circular 1999/10 'Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection' and in the DHSSPS guidance 'Cooperating to Safeguard Children'.

Referrals are normally made by schools' staff, as the parties in direct contact with the child and the Education and Library Boards' Child Protection Support Service for Schools acts in support of schools' staff through the provision of advice and training on child protection matters.

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## **Assessments for Special Educational Needs**

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many assessments for Special Educational Needs were conducted within the North Eastern Education and Library Board in 2013; and what was the average waiting time from referral.

(AQW 29843/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) has advised that 375 statutory assessments of pupils' special educational needs were completed in 2013. The average waiting time for those 375 pupils' assessments, from referral to completion, was 20.32 weeks.

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## Common Funding Formula Consultation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education for an update on the outcome of the Common Funding Formula consultation, which concluded on 25 October 2013.  
(AQW 29875/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** At the closing date of 25 October, nearly 15,000 consultation responses were received to the main consultation. A full analysis of those responses is currently underway and as I have previously stated, I will not be making any final decisions until a full analysis of all these consultation responses has been carried out. I will give careful consideration to the views of all those who responded.

The changes to the Common Funding Scheme (CFS) remain on track for delivery for the new financial year and I intend to make my final decisions and advise schools of their actual allocations as soon as possible. I will arrange for a consultation summary to be published on the DE website, shared with the Education Committee and placed in the Assembly Library in due course.

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## Free School Meals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to increase the provision and uptake of free school meals.  
(AQW 29973/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** Children from families on low incomes and those living in poverty face significant barriers in accessing and benefiting from a good education. The provision of healthy free school meals helps address the particular challenges that these children face in accessing and participating fully in school life, in improving their learning outcomes and ultimately their lifetime opportunities. It is a key measure, therefore, through which my Department contributes to the statutory target to eradicate child poverty here by 2020 and to the Programme for Government commitment to tackle disadvantage.

On 11 June 2013 I announced my intention to adjust the eligibility criteria for free school meals so that from September 2014, the same eligibility criteria for free school meals for both primary and postprimary pupils will apply. This will benefit an estimated additional 15,000 children from lower income households.

A number of actions are being taken forward by my Department, working with the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the School Catering Service to ensure that all those entitled to receive free school meals receive this important benefit. For example, the Resource Allocation Plans for each of the ELBs include targets to maintain or increase the uptake of all school meals and of free school meals. Each year the ELBs issue press releases, send out renewal applications and issue letters and posters to schools, the Social Security Agency, the Citizens Advice Bureau and libraries.

The School Catering Service continuously seeks to increase uptake of school meals undertaking a range of activities including, for example, the installation of cashless catering systems in a number of post-primary schools to reduce any stigma associated with free school meals, sending menus home and placing these on school websites, providing meal deals, arranging theme days and taster sessions for parents and pupils.

My officials are also working with colleagues in the Department of Social Development to take forward a joint project to encourage the uptake of free school meals as part of the work of the Inter-Departmental Group on Benefit Uptake (IDGBU).

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### **Review of Post 19 Special Educational Needs**

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on

(i) the review of post 19 special educational needs in respect of

- (a) further educational needs;
- (b) disability employment service; and
- (c) transitions; and

(ii) how this is progressing in South Tyrone.

(AQW 29762/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** My Department is committed to ensuring that all students with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities, who have the ability to participate in further education provision, can access quality educational opportunities. I am content that all further education colleges continue to provide such opportunities, including those colleges which serve the South Tyrone catchment area.

I am aware that access to such provision can be an issue, especially in rural areas. Therefore I instructed my officials to examine access to transport for students with a learning difficulty and/or disability, aged 19 and over. My Department will consider a course of action and develop proposals, once this initial piece of work has been completed.

The Disability Employment Service is fully committed to playing its part to ensure that young people with disabilities are provided with the tailored support and assistance they need to help them achieve their employment goals. A strategic review of my Department's Disability Employment Service (DES) is underway. To inform this review, an overarching Disability Employment Strategy is being developed with the aim of having a draft Strategy available by April 2014, which will then be subject to a public consultation. A Working Group has been established to take forward the Strategy and membership includes a number of key representatives from the local disability sector. In addition, a number of user engagement events have been scheduled throughout Northern Ireland, to ensure that the views of people with disabilities are also considered as part of the development of the strategy.

The Health and Social Care Board commissioned a review of Day Opportunities and recently concluded a public consultation on proposals on a "Regional Learning Disability Day Opportunities Model" for consideration. DEL officials have met with Health colleagues to discuss their proposals and how we, with others, can work together to facilitate improving the Transition services across a number of key Departments' responsibilities.

My Department's Careers advisers are actively involved in the transition planning process and during the 2012/13 academic year, attended 1055 transition planning meetings. Working with multidisciplinary teams, including teachers and educational psychologists, they contribute to the young person's Transition Plan by providing impartial careers guidance on the range of educational, training and employment opportunities available to them. In South Tyrone the Careers Service has a partnership agreement in place with Sperrinview School and attended all transition planning, annual review meetings and parents evenings to which they were invited during the 2012/13 academic year. The Careers Service also provides services to learners attending Parkanaur College in partnership with DEL colleagues from the Disability Employment Service. This includes supporting learners as they progress towards completion of their training to assist them in making the transition back to their home area in planning the next stage of their career.

The Careers Service has developed and implemented a social inclusion policy which focuses on addressing the needs of young people facing, or vulnerable to, social exclusion, including young people with a severe learning difficulty. It has established working relationships with the relevant statutory, voluntary and community sector bodies across Northern Ireland with a shared interest in supporting clients vulnerable to social exclusion.

I have raised the issue of transition with the Inter-Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability in November 2013. As a result, OFMDFM are co-ordinating discussions between all relevant departments under the auspices of the Executive's Disability Strategy.

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### **Welfare Reform**

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the process regarding the penalty arising from the failure to implement welfare reform.

(AQW 29678/11-15)

**Mr Hamilton:** The Chief Secretary to the Treasury wrote in June 2013 advising that it was the intention of the UK Government to adjust the Northern Ireland Executive DEL allocation should welfare reforms not be agreed by January 2014. HM Treasury has not yet advised how this penalty will be applied. However, in anticipation of a penalty being applied, the Executive has agreed, on my recommendation to make a provision of £15 million to cover the remaining three months of this financial year.

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## **Family Law: Access to Children**

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the consideration he has given to changing family law to enable penalties to be put in place by parents who do not grant each other access to their child following a break up.

(AQW 29709/11-15)

**Mr Hamilton:** Under our current law, the court can impose penalties on those parents who breach a contact order, for example a custodial sentence or a fine. It has been suggested that additional enforcement measures should be available. However, it has also been suggested that more should be done to help parents to better understand their responsibilities toward their child and avoid disputes about contact. In the coming months I hope to elicit views on the issues, with a view to determining whether any legislative amendments are required.

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## **Introduction of Universal Credit**

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel in regard to the introduction of universal credit, to ensure that any changes being considered for rate relief will continue to provide rate rebates to low income households.

(AQW 29796/11-15)

**Mr Hamilton:** The second consultation on the future of rate rebates closed recently, a report on the consultation is available on the Department's website. I will be considering the responses shortly and providing direction on the way forward. I do however support the view that rate rebates should continue to protect households least able to pay domestic rates.

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## Bamford Review

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the actions contained in the Bamford Review.

(AQW 29532/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** Progress against the Bamford Action Plan 2012-15 is monitored on a six-monthly basis by the Bamford Inter Departmental Senior Officials Group, and by the Inter-Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability.

When I launched the Bamford Action Plan 2012-15 in March last year, I committed to publishing regular monitoring information to highlight progress. The first monitoring report has been drafted and was approved by the Inter-Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability in November 2013. An easy read version of this report is currently being prepared, and I hope to publish both versions within the next few weeks.

In general terms, there has been good progress made on the Bamford Action Plan 2012-15, with 83% of the 76 actions on target for completion, and the remaining 17% are progressing, with some delay against the target date. The monitoring report, when published, will provide a detailed update against each of the 76 actions.

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## Music Therapy in Special Education

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Review of the Allied Health Professionals' Support for Children and Young People with Statements of Special Educational Needs in Special Schools and Mainstream Education has requested, or plans to consider, evidence from parents of children with the most complex needs on the inclusion of music therapy in special education.

(AQW 29769/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The Review's focus is primarily on the services provided by Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Physiotherapy, Dietetics, Orthoptics and Podiatry for children with Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN). In addition, it has been agreed that there will be an opportunity for engagement with representatives from other Allied Health Professions (AHP), including those providing music therapy, who work with children with SEN Statements.

Furthermore, the Public Health Agency will seek views on the provision of AHP services, including music therapy, from the parents of children with Statements of Special Educational Needs.

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### **Programme for Government 2011-15: Pupils that Cycle to School**

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how they are ensuring that the Executive meets the Programme for Government 2011-15 target to increase the number of pupils that cycle to school.

(AQW 29531/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** The Programme for Government 2011-15 makes a commitment to 'by 2015 create the conditions to facilitate at least 36% of primary school pupils and 22% of secondary school pupils to walk or cycle to school as their main mode of transport'. In order to deliver this commitment my Department, in partnership with the Public Health Agency, is funding a three year Active School Travel Initiative which involves delivering a programme of cycle and walking skills training to pupils in 180 schools across Northern Ireland.

The programme is being delivered by Sustrans and its objective is to encourage school children to adopt cycling and walking as their main mode of travel to school. A robust programme of monitoring and evaluation has been developed by my Department's Statistics and Research Branch to measure achievement of the PfG targets and provide improved information on the progress made under the Active School Travel Initiative.

I have also established a Cycling Unit within my Department to ensure that cycling provision is a key element in both transport strategy and delivery. In addition, my Department continues to invest in the Safer Routes to School programme which is an initiative aimed at encouraging the use of sustainable transport options to school such as walking, cycling, public transport or car sharing to school. We are also exploring opportunities to work with other Departments to improve walking and cycling infrastructure and facilities at participating schools.



My Department continues to work with other stakeholders in the forthcoming Giro d'Italia Big Start to ensure that it provides a lasting legacy for cycling among our school children. We are actively involved in the schools sub-group which is chaired by the Department of Education.

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### Opportunities for School Children to Cycle

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the steps his Department is taking to facilitate the opportunities for school children to cycle to and from school. (AQW 29640/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department, in partnership with the Public Health Agency, is funding a three year Active School Travel Initiative to deliver a programme of cycle and walking skills training to pupils in 180 schools across Northern Ireland. The programme is being delivered by Sustrans and its objective is to encourage school children to adopt cycling and walking as their main mode of travel to school. A robust programme of monitoring and evaluation has been developed by my Department's Statistics and Research Branch to measure achievement of the PfG targets and provide improved information on the progress made under the Active School Travel Initiative.

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