

## **NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

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## Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

### Bright Start Strategy

**Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what provisions are being made for childcare for children with disabilities through the Bright Start Strategy.  
(AQW 29229/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister):** Key First Action 6 of the first phase of the Bright Start Childcare Strategy aims to improve the quality of childcare services for children with a disability and to make these services more accessible. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Health and Social Care Board have established a Steering Group to identify a number of pilot initiatives in support of this Key Action. The Steering Group has agreed the following pilots:

- A pilot small grant scheme to enable registered childcare providers to purchase specialist equipment or make adaptations to their premises that will help them meet the childcare needs of children with disability;
- a disability awareness training programme aimed at childcare providers and extended family members who could provide childcare support for children with a disability and/or complex needs;
- a pilot grant scheme to support school holiday childcare for children with disability and/or complex needs.

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### Invest in Play and the Community Work Programme

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Invest in Play and the Community Work Programme are the only projects to be funded by the Social Investment Fund in the Derry Zone.  
(AQW 33147/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Social Investment Fund has an £80 million budget which has been allocated across all 9 zones. As a result, 3 projects from the Derry/Londonderry Zone area plan have been prioritised by the Steering Group, in line with the allocated budget. The 2 projects referred to have been announced for funding following business case approval.

Invest in Play is a capital cluster to improve play facilities with a value of £1.75m at the following locations: Ballyarnett, Ballymagroarty and Daisyfield.

The Community Work Programme is a revenue project to improve employment with a value of £3.3m. It will provide long-term placements targeted upon those on the margins but especially the young (under 25 years) long-term unemployed.

The third project being considered for funding, subject to business case approval, is the Capital Cluster Pitches project. It is intended to increase health and wellbeing with an anticipated value of £4.5m. Final decisions on this and any resulting impact on funding for other projects within the area plan will only be taken on completion of the business case approval process.

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## Age Discrimination Legislation

**Mrs Dobson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the introduction of age discrimination legislation with regard to the provision of goods, facilities and services.

(AQO 6075/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We are currently considering the scope of the proposed legislation and the implications of the various options available to us for taking this matter forward. The intention is that the legislation will prohibit treatment that amounts to unfair discrimination, without removing any of the protections and privileges currently available to different age groups. When we are satisfied that policy proposals have been developed to achieve the intended outcome, we will submit them to full public consultation.

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## **Internet Safety Strategy**

**Mrs Overend** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on developing a cross departmental internet safety strategy.  
(AQO 6080/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Recognising that the issue of internet safety is an area of increasing concern for parents, professionals and society in general, OFMDFM has been in discussion with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding the development of an overarching, strategic and co-ordinated approach to e-safety.

At present, the arrangements for taking forward the development of an overarching strategic approach to child internet safety are under consideration. This is to ensure that the most effective mechanism for the development of a cross-departmental approach to internet safety is established.

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## **Sexual Orientation Strategy**

**Ms Ruane** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Sexual Orientation Strategy.  
(AQO 6083/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Public consultation on the development of a Sexual Orientation Strategy was launched via a number of press advertisements on 14 March 2014. A consultation document to help inform the development of the Strategy is available online at <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/developing-a-sexual-orientation-strategy-consultation-document.pdf> and is accompanied by an online survey. The document and survey are available in hard copy on request.

The consultation process will enable OFMDFM to gather information, evidence and public opinion on what the Sexual Orientation Strategy and associated Action Plan should include. The process will last for 12 weeks ending on 6 June 2014.

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## Department of Education

### Literacy and Numeracy and Inspection Exchanges

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education what joint work is ongoing on an east west basis on (i) literacy and numeracy; and (ii) inspection exchanges.

(AQW 33419/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):** There is a Bi-lateral Concordat between my Department and the Department for Education in England. The Concordat establishes an agreed framework for cooperation between the Departments on all matters in relation to specific business areas.

My Department recognises the importance of co-operation in order to meet our policy and business objectives. I have detailed below joint work which is ongoing on an east west basis:

- My Department liaises with the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DfBIS) on European matters.
- There is on-going liaison and communication regarding policies on qualifications, at official level with England and Wales. Whilst the 3-jurisdiction relationship has changed in recent years from joint decision making with the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation to parallel decision making, the qualification regulators nevertheless meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual interest.
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is preparing a new Education Policy Outlook publication, to be published every two years following the first edition in January 2015. The publication will cover trends in education policy and details of education policy reforms. It will be accompanied by a series of Policy Outlook country profiles documenting each OECD member country's policy landscape. My Department is currently engaging with DfE, as are colleagues in Scotland and Wales, to inform OECD's drafting of a UK country profile.
- Causeway is a British-Irish youth exchange programme which aims to strengthen and improve relationships between young people, and those who work with them, right across Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and the north of Ireland. Funding is provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Dublin), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (London) and the Department of Education (through the

Youth Council).

- At the eleventh British Irish Council summit in September 2008, the Council adopted Early Years Policy as a new work sector with the Welsh Government as the lead administration. This area of work brings together policy officials from each Member Administration. There are currently four areas of focus of this Workstream:
  - èè Collaboration between all agencies concerned with health, education and social services to provide a 'joined-up' service for children and their parents/carers and to make better use of resources;
  - èè Transition arrangements (between home and child care settings, and then to school) to improve outcomes;
  - èè The early years work force; and
  - èè Evaluation and obtaining better value for money. Recent meetings have discussed improving quality, data sharing and workforce development in the Early Years sector.
- Arrangements for inspection exchanges have been put in place between the inspectorates from the north of Ireland, the south of Ireland, Scotland and Wales to facilitate exchanges during the 2013/2014 academic year. In February 2014, the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) Managing Inspector for Primary joined an inspection in Scotland and arrangements are in place for a member of the Education Inspectorate in Scotland to join ETI inspections during May 2014. The ETI will be contacting Estyn (the inspectorate in Wales) in the near future to make arrangements for school inspector exchanges in the 2014/2015 academic year.

In relation to literacy and numeracy, specific programmes are being implemented to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy particularly in socially disadvantaged areas however this has not required any joint work on an east west basis.

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## Students from the Islamic Faith

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Education what provision is made within schools to allow students from the Islamic faith to pray.

(AQW 33480/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Under the Department's policy on schools and Collective Worship, it is open to schools to make arrangements to cater for pupils of different faiths/beliefs; this includes provision for students from the Islamic faith to pray. The department does not hold information on the provision that individual schools provide, this is a matter for Principals and Board of Governors to determine with the support of the Education & Library Boards.

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## Home Education

**Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Education whether there has been a study to assess the differences in later educational outcomes between children who received their pre-school education in a controlled or maintained setting and those whose pre-school education was delivered in a voluntary or private setting; and if not, whether his Department will consider commissioning such a study.

(AQW 33535/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Effective Pre-School Provision in Northern Ireland Project (EPPNI) was a longitudinal research study of children's progress and development from age three to eleven years, and how progress related to their pre-school centre experience and family background. In its findings at the end of Key Stage One the study noted, among other things, that high quality preschooling was related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children. At the end of Key Stage Two Mathematics and English found that there was clear evidence of positive pre-school effects persisting to the end of Key Stage Two for children who attended a nursery school/class or playgroup. Copies of both Reports are available in the Assembly Library.

The Chief Inspector's Report provides evidence of high quality provision. In light of that my focus is on continuing to improve the quality of pre-school provision, irrespective of where it is delivered. Learning to Learn, which was published last year, sets out a series of actions intended to support all children having equal opportunities to achieve their potential through high quality early years education and learning experiences.

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## **Southern Education and Library Board's Autism and Intervention Service**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Education when the current moratorium on public sector jobs in the Southern Education and Library Board's Autism and Intervention Service, under the umbrella of Children and Young Persons Services, will be lifted, given that it was introduced awaiting the implementation of Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 33537/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** May I make clear that Vacancy Control is not a moratorium on jobs, rather the policy advises that employing authorities should avoid creating new posts, unless there is an inescapable requirement to ensure service delivery, and that arising vacancies should initially be filled in a temporary capacity only. The purpose of the Vacancy Control policy remains extant – to protect staff in posts which may, as a result of future restructuring, be considered to be redundant.

The Department has continuously reviewed the policy to take account of the issues that have arisen as a result of the enforcement of vacancy control for much longer than originally anticipated. I have agreed to undertake a further review of the policy and I am considering a paper outlining the views of the Association of Education and Library Boards. I will also be seeking input from other RPA affected education sector bodies and trade union colleagues. However, it will not be possible to lift vacancy control completely until the way forward for the restructuring of education administration is known.

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## **Staff Seconded to EASIT**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of staff still seconded to EASIT, including their associated work streams, salaries and contractual arrangements. (AQW 33589/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** The creation of ESA remains a Programme for Government target. However, in advance of the agreement necessary to progress the Education Bill, the ESA Implementation Team has recently been reduced. A core team has been retained as an integral part of DE to:

- Plan for the impact of the new local government boundaries from April 2015, if ESA has not been established;

- Assist with planning and implementing necessary budget efficiencies;
- Support a number of regional programmes that have been identified as Ministerial priorities including School Development, Governor Support and ICT Modernisation;
- Update HR policies and procedures for the education sector; and
- Be ready to implement ESA following the necessary agreement.

ESAIT has reduced from 29.3 FTE staff plus the CEO Designate in 2013 to the current team of CEO Designate plus 15 FTE seconded staff. In addition, ESAIT no longer incurs the costs associated with staff in the SEELB who were supporting the implementation of a new finance system.

The ESA CEO Designate is currently acting as Interim CEO of the SELB and 7 of the team are also engaged in work to support DE and the ELBs in a number of areas. Seconded staff are on temporary contracts until April 2015. ESAIT salaries currently total £790,000.

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### Language Support Arrangements in Primary Schools

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 33216/11-15, to detail the main categories of support delivered under this funding scheme over the last three years. (AQW 33610/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** The Regional Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) offers support to schools in four main areas: pastoral care; curriculum access; language acquisition; intercultural education. This support is tailored to the specific needs of the school.

IDS develops and delivers training for teachers and classroom assistants, providing resources and follow up support. It provides translated documents and an interpreting service for schools to ensure effective homeschool communication.

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## **Draft Northern Ireland Elective Home Education Policy**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Education what engagement his Department has had with families that educate their children at home during the consultation on the draft Northern Ireland Elective Home Education Policy.  
(AQW 33614/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** Legislation places specific responsibilities on parents and on the five Education and Library Boards in the area of the education of children other than at school including those who are educated at home. The Boards have directly prepared guidance which reflects those legislative responsibilities and they are currently consulting on this guidance.

As part of that consultation I have made clear that I expect them to ensure engagement with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible including young people and their families and to ensure also that the feedback they receive is considered very carefully in reviewing the draft guidance.

The Boards have adopted a range of methods to facilitate engagement and consultation with all those who have an interest in Elective Home Education. I understand that each Board has written to the parents of all children who have notified them that they are presently electing to home educate their children and also to other key stakeholders to advise of the consultation exercise. Further details are provided in each Board’s Consultation Strategy document. This is published on each Board’s websites alongside their draft guidance and the Boards will also make this available in various formats upon request.

I have made clear that I will wish to review each Board’s guidance once it has been subject to consultation and reviewed and refined in response to the engagement that has taken place.

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## Home Education

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the draft joint policy on elective home education published by the five Education and Library Boards.  
(AQW 33619/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** Legislation places specific responsibilities on parents and on the five Education and Library Boards in the area of the education of children other than at school including those who are educated at home.

The Boards have directly prepared guidance which reflects those legislative responsibilities and they are currently consulting on this guidance. The consultation process provides an opportunity for views and ideas to be provided to the Boards on how they best strike the balance between ensuring that the rights and needs of children themselves are appropriately protected and facilitating parental preference for home education.

As Education Minister my focus is on ensuring the needs of children and young people are met. Therefore, I have made clear that I expect the Boards to ensure engagement with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible including young people and their families as part of that consultation and to ensure also that the feedback they receive is considered very carefully in reviewing the draft guidance. I have also made clear that I will wish to review their guidance once it has been subject to consultation and reviewed and refined in response to the engagement that has taken place.

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## Reconstitution of the Education and Library Boards

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans for the reconstitution of the Education and Library Boards.

(AQW 33625/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** In the absence of the political agreement necessary to advance the Education Bill to establish the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), I have instructed Department of Education officials to cease work on ESA, and focus on work required to make education administration compatible with the changes to local councils, that take full effect from 1 April 2015.

I intend to bring a paper to the Executive shortly, to identify the way forward. To help provide continuity and leadership during the transitional period, I have also asked all existing ELB members, including the SEELB Commissioners, to accept an extension of their current term of appointment until 31 March 2015.

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## Area Based Planning

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education how many school places have been

(i) created; and

(ii) removed

since the establishment of Area Based Planning.

(AQW 33640/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd: (i)** Since Area Based Planning commenced I have approved Development Proposals to create a total of 2,980 school places; 1,524 primary places, 1,040 post primary places and 416 statutory nursery places.

**(ii)** In the same period I have approved Development Proposals to remove 9,131 school places; 4,091 primary places, 4,988 post primary places and 52 statutory nursery places.

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## Department for Employment and Learning

### Review of Youth Training

**Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail why the Skills for Life and Skills for Work Level 1 strands of Training for Success have been excluded from the scope of the Review of Youth Training.

(AQW 33530/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** The review of youth training will examine level 1 provision in the context of progression. I fully recognise that clear progression pathways and support mechanisms are vital for young people to progress from the entry level and level 1 options into the new youth training offer, just as the new youth training offer will facilitate entry into further education and training at level 3 and above, and will consider how best to achieve this.

Pending the outcome of the Review the Department continues to be fully inclusive, delivering all levels of provision, including a range of initiatives delivered at entry level and level 1 through the Training for Success strands Skills for Life and Skills for Work Level 1, and through Pathways to Success, the department's strategy for young people who are not in education, employment or training. Therefore, whilst the review is not examining provision at entry level and level 1, it should be viewed as only one specific part of the wider learner pathways available to young people in Northern Ireland.

As with the current Training for Success programme, future provision at entry level and level 1 must ensure that training provides high levels of pastoral care, support, encouragement and concern for the holistic welfare and development of the participant.

The review of youth training is also being undertaken in tandem with the development of the United Youth offer. Again, this offer will seek to provide a fully inclusive framework of education and training opportunities and progression routes for young people across all levels.

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## **Skills for Life and Skills for Work**

**Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline what plans he has to review provision within the Skills for Life and Skills for Work Level 1 to ensure that it is of an equally high quality to the refreshed Level 2 training offer.

(AQW 33531/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** Contracts for the delivery of the Skills for Your Life and Skills for Work Level 1 strands of the Department's Training for Success programme are due to run until 31 March 2016. Consideration of future provision will take account of the work being carried out on the review of youth training (level 2 provision) and the development of the United Youth offer; both of which seek to provide a fully inclusive framework of education and training opportunities and progression routes for young people across all levels.

It is likely that the personal and development needs of young people who have disengaged from learning and/or have significant barriers to education; training or employment will continue to be central to future provision, as will high levels of pastoral care, support, encouragement and concern for the holistic welfare and development of the participant.

The quality and performance of the current provision will continue to be monitored by my Department in partnership with the Education and Training Inspectorate. A programme of regular and robust reviews of Suppliers' performance is in place with the aim of ensuring consistently high standards of delivery, outcomes and value for money.

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## Department of Finance and Personnel

### Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what evaluation his Department has made regarding value for money of funding of the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCOTENS); and the decision to further renew its funding by the Department of Education and the Department of Employment and Learning.  
(AQW 33403/11-15)

**Mr Hamilton:** My Department has not made any evaluation regarding the funding of the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South, nor on the decisions of other departments to renew funding for it.

My Department would not engage in decisions of this nature and scale unless they were the subject of a bid for additional funding to it, or if it deemed the funding to be novel or contentious.

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## Department of Health

### Beechlea Care Home, Enniskillen

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether issues surrounding the school attendance rates of children resident in Beechlea care home, Enniskillen have been identified; and what action has been taken to increase their attendance rates.

(AQW 33392/11-15)

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I have been assured by the Western Health and Social Care Trust that the education of all looked after children is a priority for the Trust. Arrangements for the promotion of the education of children accommodated within Beechlea children's home are set out in its Statement of Purpose and Function and will be dependent on the needs of each young person.

As part of the pathway planning process, the education of each young person is discussed and agreed at the first planning meeting and subsequent review meetings. In addition, every looked after child is required to have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which establishes effective recording and reporting practices and is a transferable account of the young person's needs, support and progress in education.

Residential staff, and key workers in particular, liaise closely with schools through the appointed looked after children support teacher and with Education & Welfare officers or home tutors to monitor the young person's progress and try to resolve any difficulties that occur.

Finally, by way of the Adoption and Children Bill due to be introduced in the Assembly next year, it is proposed to amend the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 to include a specific duty to promote the educational achievement of all looked-after children.

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## Consultant Community Pediatricians

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the nature of the difficulties in the recruitment of Consultant Community Pediatricians at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 33556/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust advises that it has been actively seeking to fill the roles specified in the question. There were six recruitment competitions held from April 2013 through to February 2014. There was only one Consultant hired through these competitions as the other applicants either did not meet the criteria/standard required or accepted a position elsewhere. There is a nationally recognised lack of suitably qualified candidates to fulfil pediatric roles that deliver clinics in the community.

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## Children in Care

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children in care in each of the last five years.

(AQW 33585/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** Table 1 below details the number of children in care in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Table 1: Children in Care in Northern Ireland at 31 March (2009 – 2013)

Year	No. of Children in Care
2009	2,463
2010	2,606
2011	2,511
2012	2,644
2013	2,807

Source: Children Order Return LA1 2009 – 2010, Health and Social Care Board Corporate Parenting Returns 2011 – 2013

These figures are published in 'Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2012/13' which can be found on the Department's website at the following link:

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats\\_research/stats-cib/statistics\\_and\\_research-cib-pub/children\\_statistics/stats-cib-children\\_order.htm](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/children_statistics/stats-cib-children_order.htm) [Back to Top](#)