

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week of 26th September, 2014

- **Special Education Needs Assessment**
- **Education Needs**
- **Learning Support Units**
- **Controlled Schools**
- **Controlled Schools Budget**
- **Education and Library Board Savings**
- **Shared Education Funding**
- **Integrated Education**
- **Area Planning**
- **Home to School Transport**
- **Irish Language**
- **Education and Library Board Area Plans**
- **Autism Figures**

- **Road Safety Messages**
- **2015/16 Budget**
- **October Monitoring Round**
- **Infrastructure Delivery**
- **Speech and Language Therapists**
- **Paediatric Cardiac Services**
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health**
- **Adoption and Fostering**
- **Children's Cardiac Services**
- **Mental Capacity Bill**

Department of Education

Special Education Needs Assessment

Mr David Hilditch (DUP – East Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the average time is for a statement of need to be put in place; and whether there are any plans to improve this.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that the average length of time taken from a request for a statutory assessment of special educational needs (SEN) to the issue of a final statement of SEN in the 2013/14 academic year, rounded to the nearest week, excluding permitted exceptions, is as follows:

BELB	25
NEELB	22
SEELB	24
SELB	21
WELB	20

A key proposal of the ongoing Review of SEN and Inclusion, agreed by the Executive, is the reduction of the statutory timeframe, excluding permitted exceptions, for ELBs to complete a statement from 26 weeks to 20 weeks.

Reducing the statutory timeframe will allow for earlier assessment and intervention and will enable effective and timely supports to be put in place for SEN children as required.

(23rd September)

[Back to Top](#)

Education Needs

Mr David Hilditch (DUP – East Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education why there is not provision, such as an equivalent school to Cedar Lodge, for those children who do not have learning difficulties but who are unable to be educated in a mainstream setting, even when extra assistance is provided.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): As detailed in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN), no child should be placed in a special school (such as Cedar Lodge) except by a board, as specified in a statement of SEN, or for the immediate commencement of a statutory assessment of SEN. A child that does not have learning difficulties, as defined in the Code of Practice, will not be able to meet either of these criteria and should therefore not be able to receive provision within a school equivalent to Cedar Lodge. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Learning Support Units

Mr David Hilditch (DUP – East Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education why learning support units are not available for primary school children in the Newtownabbey area.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): The North Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that there are currently seven learning support units (LSCs) in primary schools in the board area. Prior to 2006 these LSCs were referred to as special units and catered exclusively for pupils with a moderate learning difficulty (MLD). However, following the introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (NI) 2005 (SENDO) which strengthened the rights of children with special educational needs (SEN) to be educated in mainstream schools, the Board reviewed this element of SEN support. To facilitate a continuum of provision the Board agreed to re-designate the previous MLD unit provision as LSCs thereby enabling them to cater for a wider range of special educational needs.

When the MLD units were originally established cognisance was taken of the fact that there were already two existing special schools catering exclusively for pupils with MLD - Rostulla School in Jordanstown and the former Dunfane School (now part of the Castle Tower complex) in Ballymena. The former MLD units were therefore geographically located to provide MLD provision across the whole board area with the majority of the units therefore being located in the north of the board area where there was no other specialised MLD provision. **(23rd September)** [Back to Top](#)

Controlled Schools

Mr Trevor Lunn (ALL – Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Education whether the new support body for controlled schools will provide support to controlled integrated schools.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department will fund the proposed Controlled Sector Support body to offer support to all controlled schools. The functions of the body will also incorporate building co-operation and engaging with other sectors in matters of mutual interest, including promotion of tolerance and understanding.
(23rd September)

[Back to Top](#)

Controlled Schools Budget

Mr Trevor Lunn (ALL – Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Education for an estimate of the annual budget that will be allocated to the new support body for controlled schools.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): Work on establishing the Controlled sector support body will commence after the introduction of a Bill to the Assembly to replace the 5 Education and Library Boards and their staff commission with one organisation. At that point work will begin with representatives of the controlled sector to determine among other things, the expected annual budget for the Controlled Sector Support Body.
(23rd September)

[Back to Top](#)

Education and Library Board Savings

Mr Trevor Lunn (ALL – Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the estimated level of savings that will result from the creation of a single Education and Library Board.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): While the business case for the establishment of the new Education Authority (which will replace the five Education and Library Boards and the Staff Commission) has not yet been finalised, it is anticipated that savings will be realized comparable in scale to those expected from ESA (£185m over its first 10 years).
(23rd September) [Back to Top](#)

Shared Education Funding

Mr Trevor Lunn (ALL – Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the source of funding for the three agreed Shared Education Campus projects; and whether the full funding for the projects has been agreed.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): I announced the first tranche of successful projects to be supported under the Shared Education Campuses Programme on 1 July 2014.

The three projects will be taken forward to a full Economic Appraisal which, once submitted, will be considered within the normal business approval processes and in line with NI Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation guidelines, including value for money and affordability.

Until full Economic Appraisals have been developed, it is difficult to estimate the capital costs associated with the three proposals. As with other major capital projects, formal allocation of the budget for these projects will not be made until Economic Appraisals are approved and the Department of Education’s capital budget for future years has been confirmed. At this stage, capital budgets from April 2015 onwards have not yet been agreed for all Departments. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Integrated Education

Mr Trevor Lunn (All – Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Education, given that the recent judgement following the Judicial Review for Drumragh Integrated College stated that the Needs Model assumes no growth in the integrated sector, when this model will be reviewed and amended in response to the judgement and the statutory duty on his Department in regard to Integrated Education.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Learned Judge Treacy did not call for the Needs Model to be reviewed. The Court accepted that it was appropriate to use a needs model for planning purposes. It did note that it would be easier for decisions which were in line with the long range plan to be approved than for decisions that are out of line with the long range plan.

The Needs Model does what it was designed to do. It was not designed to calculate estimates for growth in any sector beyond those derived from the population projections and the current patterns of enrolment. However, the distribution of the calculated need for places across the sectors is the starting point for planning purposes. The calculated need can be amended through discussions between the planning authorities, i.e. the Boards and CCMS, and representatives of the Integrated sector. The calculated need may also be increased by up to 10% system-wide to accommodate a degree of parental choice. This has been made clear to all sectors.

It is important, therefore, that those representing the Integrated sector make a robust case in planning discussions to ensure that genuine need for local expansion in the sector is expressed in amended need figures which in turn will be reflected in the area plans. The area plans, including figures derived from the needs model, are long-term but not static. They will be reviewed as circumstances change and as more up-to-date data becomes available. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Area Planning

Mr Trevor Lunn (ALL – Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Education, given that the process of Area Planning is ongoing, to detail

- (i) how often this process will be reviewed;
- (ii) whether the findings for primary and post-primary schools will be published annually by Education and Library Boards; and
- (iii) the action his Department will take if any of the Education and Library Boards fail to implement the stated policy in relation to Area Planning in a timely manner.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): The current area planning process was set up as an interim one in advance of the establishment of Education Skill Authority (ESA). As no agreement was reached on ESA, I now have the Executive’s agreement to bring forward legislation to create a single body to replace the existing five Education and Library Boards. Therefore, the area planning process and related guidance will need to be reviewed if legislation is passed. Meanwhile I will continue with the interim arrangements until there is greater clarity on the establishment and operation of the new body.

The Area Profiles are published annually by the Education Boards and are available on their websites. This ensures everyone with an interest has access to up-to-date information to enable them to get involved in the debate on future provision.

Area Planning is a process through which a network of viable and sustainable schools will be developed. It is fundamentally based on the Sustainable Schools Policy, the primary objective of which is to ensure all children and young people get a high quality education in schools that are educationally and financially viable. Any proposals to implement a significant change as a result of the area planning process still need to follow the statutory Development Proposal process. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Home to School Transport

Ms Claire Sugden (Independent – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education when he will publish the report on the Independent Review of Home to School Transport.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):

The Independent Review Panel presented its final report to me on 28th August. It contains a considerable number of proposals for change which I now intend to consider before making decisions on the way forward. I will publish the report in due course.

(23rd September)

[Back to Top](#)

Irish Language

Mr Phil Flanagan (Sinn Féin – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education how his Department works with Foras na Gaeilge to deliver Irish language tuition in schools in County Fermanagh.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):

The Primary Languages Programme was introduced in 2007 to give pupils at Foundation Stage / Key Stage 1 the opportunity to learn an additional language in school. The Programme offers primary schools the opportunity to work with peripatetic language tutors to deliver Irish, Spanish and Polish. There are currently four schools in County Fermanagh registered for this programme in Irish.

The Department has received proposals from Foras na Gaeilge to develop the teaching of Irish in non-Irish medium primary schools supported by training and resources. The Department is currently considering the feasibility of this proposal. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Education and Library Board Area Plans

Mr Trevor Lunn (ALL – Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Education whether his Department is required to approve the Area Plans for each Education and Library Board; and if so, whether primary and post-primary plans, published in 2013 and 2014, have been approved.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): To date, my Department has exercised a scrutiny and challenge role in relation to Area Plans and has been working closely with the Boards and the other school managing authorities, particularly through the Area Planning Steering Group. This will continue until there is greater clarity on the establishment and operation of the new body. **(24th September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Autism Figures

Mr Ross Hussey (UUP – West Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education how many children are recorded as having autism spectrum disorder, broken down by Education and Library Board.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information requested is detailed in the table overleaf. The information provided relates to the 2013/14 school census, the 2014/15 school census takes place on the 10th October this year, provisional figures will be available in December, finalised figures in February.

Pupils with autism spectrum disorder by Education and Library Board area, 2013/14

Belfast	Western	North Eastern	South Eastern	Southern	Total
1,327	846	1,294	1,807	917	6,191

Source: NI school census

Notes:

- Figures include funded children in voluntary and private preschools, nursery schools, primary (including nursery, reception and year 1-7 classes), post primary and special schools.
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder includes autism and/or aspergers syndrome.
- Figures include pupils at stages 1 – 5 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.
- Data refers to any special educational need rather than primary need. **(24th September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Environment

Road Safety Messages

Mr Roy Beggs (UUP – East Antrim) - To ask the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the effectiveness of the road safety message on young people in East Antrim.

Mr Durkhan (Minister of the Environment): The Road Safety Strategy to 2020 sets out four strategic targets and 224 action measures to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

The implementation process is shared work, involving many parts of government – and all of us as citizens. Some 118 of the Strategy action measures have already been completed or embedded in ongoing business, and there have been positive reductions against the Strategy’s four targets. At the end of last year, and when compared with the 2004-2008 average:

- road deaths had reduced by 55%
- serious injuries had reduced by 35%
- child deaths and serious injuries had reduced by 43% ; and
- deaths or serious injuries of young people had reduced by 52%.

I am however extremely concerned by the fact that road deaths have risen this year. My Department continues to take a range of actions to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads. We focus on problem areas, such as drink driving, speeding, carelessness and inattention; and on groups which are over-represented in the casualty figures. The Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, which I introduced into the Assembly in May, seeks to address a number of these issues.

For most of us, using the roads is our most dangerous daily activity. I am committed to working with many partners across and beyond government to ensure effective implementation of the Road Safety Strategy. **(25th September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Finance

2015/16 Budget

Mr Alastair Ross (DUP – East Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his timetable for presenting the 2015/16 Budget to the Assembly.

Mr Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel): In order to give departments time to plan for 2015-16 an agreed Final Budget would need to be in place by early January 2015. Working backwards, the Executive would need to agree final proposals in December. In order to allow sufficient time for Ministerial bi-laterals and a full twelve week public consultation process a draft Budget would therefore need to be in place in the coming weeks.

I will shortly bring a draft Budget scenario to the Executive for agreement, in advance of the consultation process. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

October Monitoring Round

Mr Robin Newton (DUP – East Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the 2014 October monitoring round.

Mr Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel): There are significant pressures facing the Executive's Resource DEL budget this year. The June Monitoring round resulted in reductions to departmental Resource DEL of 2.1 per cent and indicated that further reductions would be required in the October Monitoring round to address the £87 million reduction to our Resource DEL as a consequence of not implementing Welfare Reform.

There are also significant inescapable pressures across a number of departmental budgets meaning that the level of Resource DEL reductions required in the October Monitoring round is now likely to exceed the 2.3 per cent previously anticipated. I am therefore keen that the quantum of any further in-year reductions are agreed sooner rather than later, providing departments with early clarification on what they must deliver. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Infrastructure Delivery

Mr Patsy McGlone (SDLP – Mid Ulster) - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact the current funding crisis will have on his 'road map' to better infrastructure delivery, as set out in June 2014.

Mr Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel): The majority of infrastructure projects have been funded from the capital budget. It is positive that capital DEL levels for 2014-15 are over £247m (31%) higher than those announced as part of the 2011-15 Budget. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has consistently affirmed the longer term policy of growing capital DEL at the expense of resource DEL. In this regard, it is anticipated that capital DEL will grow in line with GDP.

As the 2014-15 budget reductions have been applied to resource DEL, there is significant pressure on those projects which are not funded by capital. As this may include maintenance and repair projects, I appreciate that there may be implications for the operational maintenance of Northern Ireland's existing infrastructure. However, the prioritisation and ordering of infrastructure projects is a matter for each Minister and their department to consider.

As Chair of the Procurement Board, I established a Sub-Group to examine all stages of the commissioning and delivery of infrastructure projects. In response, the Sub-Group has prepared an Action Plan. The Action Plan addresses a number of key areas, namely; prioritisation of key, strategically significant projects that are important to Northern Ireland; a more centralised approach to infrastructure delivery so that experience and expertise can be used to successfully deliver major capital projects; and a change in culture within departments and their sponsored bodies to create a 'delivery focused culture'.

The Action Plan is designed to correct a number of significant issues identified by the Sub-Group that are reducing the likelihood of the successful delivery of infrastructure projects. Without the implementation of the Action Plan these systemic impediments will remain. A more centralised approach to procuring and delivering construction building projects will reap the benefits of bringing together experience and expertise as well as generating economies of scale and collaboration. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Health

Speech and Language Therapists

Mr Fearghal McKinney (SDLP – South Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many whole time equivalent Speech and Language Therapists are members of community mental health teams managing Dementia patients.

Mr Poots (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Belfast Trust has 0.5 WTE funded for a specialist SLT in the Dementia In-Patient Outreach Assessment Unit for People with Dementia and Behavioural Problems, who as part of their duties, supports clients with both communication and swallowing difficulties.

The Southern HSC Trust employs 2.8 WTE SLTs to provide a service to all adults with swallowing difficulties, including those with dementia; this support is provided in other Trust areas as part of the adult SLT caseload.

There are currently no SLTs working as members of community mental health teams supporting people with dementia. **(22nd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Paediatric Cardiac Services

Mrs Judith Cochrane (ALL – East Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 33205/11-15 and AQW 35100/11-15, for an update on whether he has received the recommendations regarding pediatric cardiac services which the Expert Group were expected to report by 1 July 2014; and to detail the expected date of publication.

Mr Poots (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The International Working Group (IWG), led by Dr John Mayer, has finalised its independent assessment of current and future needs for cardiology and cardiac surgery for congenital heart disease in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland. My Department has received the report and it is currently under consideration with the Department of Health in the ROI, with a view to agreeing arrangements for the joint publication of the report in both jurisdictions.

I anticipate that a visit by Dr Mayer may be possible within the next month and that the IWG's report will be published at this time. My Department is discussing the arrangements for this with the Department of Health in the ROI and I will announce the timetable for the publication as soon as possible. **(22nd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Extra Contractual Referrals in each of the last five years.

Mr Poots (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Information is only available on expenditure for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Extra Contractual Referrals in each of the last three years as set out in the table below: this expenditure is for treatment only and does not include patient travel.

Year	£m
2013/14	1.50
2012/13	1.42
2011/12	1.14

(23rd September)

[Back to Top](#)

Adoption and Fostering

Ms Claire Sugden (Independent – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to work with Health and Social Care Adoption and Fostering to ensure that, where possible, siblings who are placed into foster care are not separated.

Mr Poots (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Children (NI) Order 1995 and associated guidance promotes that siblings, as far as reasonably practicable, are accommodated together in foster care placements.

In circumstances where an emergency placement is required for a sibling group of children and a placement is not available that can accommodate all the siblings together, steps are taken to ensure that sibling relationships are maintained through regular contact or a future change of placement.

Where it is determined that separate placements are in the children's best interests, robust sibling contact arrangements will be established and the case monitored through the Looked After Children's review process where changes to these arrangements can be made if deemed necessary.

The Regional Adoption and Fostering Service continues to actively promote the benefits of fostering with the aim of recruiting and supporting suitable foster carers and kinship carers for children, including siblings, throughout Northern Ireland. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Children's Cardiac Services

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (Sinn Féin – Foyle) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the report into Children's Cardiac Services.

Mr Poots (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The International Working Group (IWG), led by Dr John Mayer, has finalised its independent assessment of current and future needs for cardiology and cardiac surgery for congenital heart disease in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland. My Department has received the report and it is currently under consideration with the Department of Health in the ROI, with a view to agreeing arrangements for the joint publication of the report in both jurisdictions.

I anticipate that a visit by Dr Mayer may be possible within the next month and that the IWG's report will be published at this time. My Department is discussing the arrangements for this with the Department of Health in the ROI and I will announce the timetable for the publication as soon as possible. **(23rd September)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Justice

Mental Capacity Bill

Mr Peter Weir (DUP – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Justice to detail the timescale for the proposed Mental Capacity Bill.

Mr Ford (Minister of Justice): The timetable for the Mental Capacity Bill is a challenging one and, as such, is being kept under close review. Subject to Executive agreement, it is the intention of the two Departments to introduce the Bill as early as possible in 2015, to enable enactment by March 2016. Following enactment, it is envisaged that a further year will be required prior to the Bill becoming fully operational, in order to introduce supporting secondary legislation and provide necessary training. **(25th September)**

[Back to Top](#)