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Office of First and Deputy First Minister

Efficiency Savings

Mr Basil McCrea (NI21 – Lagan Valley) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister what percentage of their Department's DEL is spent on salaries; and how they intend to reduce this spend in order to make efficiency savings.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The core Department, excluding Arm's Length Bodies, spends 25% of its DEL resource budget on salaries. The Department is working to reduce this spend through careful management of vacancies arising from normal staff turnover, a review of organisational structures within the Department and also through central initiatives being examined by the Executive in light of budget constraints resulting from cuts to the Block grant from Westminster. **(24th November)**

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Delivering Social Change

Ms Bronwyn McGahan (Sinn Féin – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Delivering Social Change Nurture Unit Signature Programme.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Nurture Units Programme is one of the six initial Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes, announced by us in October 2012.

All of the proposed twenty additional Nurture Units are now fully operational and have completed their first academic year.

Latest figures indicate that a total of 135 children have attended the Units, and eleven of which have already been reintegrated back to mainstream classroom. In addition, approximately just over 90% of the parents whose children are within the Units have begun to or have continued to be engaged and / or participate with the schools. These developments are a very positive reflection of the impact and quality of support the Units are already delivering. **(26th November)**

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Kincora House

Ms Megan Fearon (Sinn Féin – Newry and Armagh) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the British government's refusal to include Kincora House in the child sexual abuse panel inquiry.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 30 September this Assembly unanimously agreed that allegations of cover up by intelligence services and MI5 relating to abuse in Kincora boys' home should be investigated by the Westminster independent inquiry panel into institutional failures in respect of child sexual abuse. So naturally we are disappointed that the Home Secretary has decided not to include it.

However, we are pleased that the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State are committed to a full investigation into any and all aspects pertaining to abuse at Kincora Boys' Home by the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse here.

It is too soon to be sure that the Inquiry will find itself able to deal satisfactorily with allegations of cover up by the Ministry of Defence or the Security Services, but we are heartened to note that consideration can be given at any time to bring it into the remit of the Westminster inquiry panel.

It is, of course, of paramount importance that we consult with Sir Anthony Hart, chairperson of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry, on the practicalities of carrying out an investigation into the full range of issues surrounding victims and survivors of Kincora Boys' Home. **(26th November)**

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Department of Education

Shared Education Campus Programme

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the minimum number of pupils that a school is required to have to be accepted on the Shared Education Campus Programme.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): The protocol document for the Shared Education Campus Programme details the criteria which each application will be assessed against. These include the endorsement of the relevant Planning Authority (the local Education & Library Board) who will have to provide assurance that each school involved in the proposal meets the criteria in my Department’s Sustainable Schools Policy. Where this is not the case, the Planning Authority will have to provide a rationale for its endorsement of the proposal, including an explanation as to how the proposed scheme will contribute to the delivery of sustainable education provision in the local area in the years to come.

The Shared Education Campuses Programme protocol document can be found on my Department’s website via the following link

http://www.deni.gov.uk/shared_education_campuses_programme_-_second_call_for_expressions_of_interest_-_protocol_document.pdf (25th November)

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Integrated Sector

Mr Gregory Campbell (DUP – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education how many primary schools from the maintained sector have transferred to the integrated sector, in the last ten year.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): No primary schools from the maintained sector have transferred to the integrated sector in the last ten years. (25th November)

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Autism Specific Support

Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson (UUP – Upper Bann) - To ask the Minister of Education why autism specific support is not provided to pupils from Key Stage 2 onwards; and for his assessment of the impact of the non-provision of support to pupils who have received assistance during Key Stage 1.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): Autism specific support is provided, as appropriate, to all children and young people with Autistic Specific Disorder across the age range (0-19 years). **(25th November)**

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Specialist Autism Support Worker

Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson (UUP – Upper Bann) - To ask the Minister of Education whether he will, in conjunction with the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, assist with the funding of a Specialist Autism Support Worker to assist children at the nine schools offering autism specific classes.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Southern Education and Library Board provides Autism Specific Classes in ten primary schools and two post-primary schools. The Board has been made aware that the Southern Health and Social Care Trust is seeking to recruit specialist therapy assistants to support the work of Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists in some of the primary-based Key Stage 1 autism-specific classes. The Board understands that the Trust is experiencing recruitment difficulties. **(25th November)**

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Surplus Primary and Post-Primary Places

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of surplus places in the (a) controlled; (b) maintained; (iii) integrated; and (iv) Irish-medium sectors, broken down by primary and post-primary schools, since 2011.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information requested is detailed in the table below. The information provided is based on the 2011/12 – 2013/14 school censuses. The 2014/15 school census took place on the 10th October this year and unfilled places data for this year will be available in April.

Unfilled places in primary schools, 2011/12 - 2013/14

	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Controlled	26624	27.4%	24863	25.7%	28837	29.4%
Maintained	28894	28.9%	26839	27.1%	31353	30.9%
Integrated	1551	15.4%	1344	13.3%	1750	17.5%
Irish Medium Schools	977	29.2%	952	27.4%	927	30.1%

Unfilled places in post-primary schools, 2011/12 - 2013/14

	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Controlled	7976	15.7%	8469	16.9%	8050	15.6%
Maintained	10608	21.9%	10052	21.4%	9928	20.6%
Integrated	933	7.7%	1044	8.6%	827	6.8%
Irish Medium Schools	65	11.1%	60	10.0%	55	9.4%

Source: NI school census

Notes: Figures for primary include reception – year 7 classes only.

Maintained includes Catholic Maintained and Other Maintained schools

Integrated includes Controlled Integrated and GMI schools

It is not possible to separate out unfilled places and approved enrolments for Irish medium units, so the data for Irish medium is based on IM schools only.

Irish medium schools have been excluded from their respective management types.

Voluntary schools have been excluded.

The percentage is the number of unfilled places relative divided by the total approved enrolment

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Irish Medium Schools / Irish Medium Units

Mr Nelson McCausland (DUP – North Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Education what percentage of children in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary education attend Irish-medium schools or Irish-medium units.

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

Pupils enrolled in Irish medium schools or units, 2013/14

	No of pupils	%
Primary	3594	2.1%
Post-primary	831	0.6%

Source: NI school census

Notes: Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes. **(25th November)**

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Schools Budget Cuts

Mrs Sandra Overend (UUP – Mid Ulster) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the percentage cut in budget that schools will be required to implement for the 2015/16 financial year.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): As part of the Draft 2015-16 Budget outcome, Education’s 2015-16 Resource Budget is facing cuts, in cash terms, of 4.9% (£94.4 million) compared to the 2014-15 baseline budget.

My officials are currently progressing work on identifying the inescapable pressures facing the education budget next year. Until this work is completed and I have had an opportunity to review fully the implications of the draft budget settlement for Education it would be premature for me to provide details of cuts to schools budgets at this stage. I have addressed my concerns with the Finance Minister and I am intent on enhancing the funds available to Education in the 2015-16 Final Budget.

I remain fully committed to protecting front-line services where possible and to ensuring that the resources available for education are allocated effectively to achieve maximum impact for our children. **(25th November)** [Back to Top](#)

School Attendance

Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP – Strangford) – To ask the Minister of Education, in the light of the Chief Inspector’s comments on poor school attendance amongst pupils in receipt of free school meals, what additional action is he considering to improve attendance amongst these pupils

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): School attendance and achievement are inextricably linked. My expectations for children and young people entitled to free school meals are no less than for any other child.

The NI Audit Office (NIAO) and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) published reports on Improving Pupil Attendance earlier this year. The Memorandum of Reply, published on 4 August 2014, sets out a programme of work for my Department and the Education and Library Boards. This includes the development of a Pupil Attendance Strategy. My Department has already started to engage with stakeholders and to develop the strategy which will be in place by the 2015/16 school year.

My Department alone cannot address the underlying issues of non-attendance. Key to the new Attendance Strategy will be the role and responsibilities of parents, schools, the Education and Library Boards, young people themselves, the community, other government Departments and agencies in addressing poor attendance.

The Education Works campaign continues to engage with parents and supports the work on improving attendance by stressing the value of education to families and communities, particularly those from disadvantaged communities. **(26th November)**

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Post-Primary Area Planning

Mr Roy Beggs (UUP – East Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education to outline how the ongoing post-primary area planning process takes into account the effect that Development Proposals to expand a school in one sector can have on the sustainability of schools in other educational sectors.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): Development Proposals brought forward should be consistent with the Area Plans published by the planning authorities. Any proposed change must support the delivery of the vision for education provision in the area and meet the identified needs of the pupils.

Development Proposals relate to specific schools and are considered within the area context and in line with the Department’s Sustainable Schools Policy, which sets out six criteria for assessing the viability of a school. In addition the Department is required to consider the impact that a proposal may have on another grant-aided school. The Department assesses the likely impact that a proposal will have on other schools’ ability to remain sustainable and again this is assessed in line with the Sustainable Schools Policy.

I can assure you that before I make a decision on any proposal I take account of all pertinent information. However, my primary focus is always on the needs of pupils and not institutions. **(26th November)**

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Education Welfare Service

Mrs Dolores Kelly (SDLP – Upper Bann) - To ask the Minister of Education to outline the impact of budget cuts on the Education Welfare Service.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): Resourcing of the Education Welfare Service is a matter for the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). The ELBs fund the Education Welfare Service through their block grant allocation and this is supplemented by my Department.

If there are any resourcing pressures it is expected that the ELBs would bring the matter to the attention of officials.

The Chief Executives of each ELB have reported that there have been no budgetary cuts to the EWS in the current financial year. **(26th November)** [Back to Top](#)

Draft Budget 2015/16

Mr Ross Hussey (UUP – West Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education how his Department's resource baseline, not including ring-fenced resource, was calculated for the 2015/16 Draft Budget.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department's draft budget outcome for non ring-fenced resource totaled £1,849.3 million. This resulted in a £94.4 million reduction from the 2014-15 baseline. In setting Departmental baselines for 2015-16, the 2014-15 opening position was substantively rolled forward, with the removal of certain time-bound allocations. The Executive agreed to a level of reductions from this baseline to provide funding for central and strategic pressures, along with an amount to be allocated in support of key public services. **(26th November)**

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Department of Finance

Draft Budget 2015/16

Mr Basil McCrea (NI21 – Lagan Valley) - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the reasons for the lack of provision for future penalties, or for the development of an IT system, for Welfare Reform in the draft Budget 2015-16

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for Finance): The draft Budget does not account for any future penalties, nor is there any cover for the development of a bespoke welfare IT system for Northern Ireland. The cost of doing both those things would have been around £200 million in 2015-16 alone which is an additional burden on departments that would not have been manageable.

The draft Budget sets aside £70 million for a package of measures to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform. These measures will be refined as part of the ongoing talks and final Budget processes. This will ensure we can implement Welfare Reform, keep welfare payments happening in Northern Ireland and avoid the worst effects of Welfare Reform as they have happened across the water.

This approach of dealing with Welfare Reform as part of the talks process and simultaneously providing a package of measures within the draft Budget that will go a long way in mitigating the worst effects of Welfare Reform, is the right way to proceed.

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Department of Health

Marshall Report

Mr Fearghal McKinney (SDLP – South Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the financial commitment his Department will undertake in relation to implementing the recommendations in the Marshall Report.

Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): A Response Team is being established to consider the recommendations from the Marshall report in detail. As part of that consideration, I have asked for an assessment of the cost of delivering those recommendations, which relate to Health and Social Care.

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E-Safety Strategy

Mr Chris Lyttle (All – East Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) when he sought Executive agreement to commission and fund the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to develop an e-safety strategy and action plan; (ii) what response he has received; and (iii) what deadline he has set for implementation to commence.

Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): In accordance with the protocol governing the confidentiality of Executive business, I am unable to respond to the questions asked. I look forward to progress on this issue shortly.

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Mental Health

Ms Claire Sugden (Ind – East Londonderry) – To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to encourage a culture of awareness and early intervention in mental ill-health in young people, in order to promote alternatives to pharmacological interventions.

Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): A Regional Model for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was published by my Department in 2012. It focuses on early intervention and is currently being implemented. Progress includes the recent establishment of Primary Mental Health Teams in each Trust area to promote the emotional health of children, young people and families in the community. These teams identify mental health and developmental problems in children and young people early in their development and work across boundaries to develop a coordinated response for children’s mental health between agencies.

The Public Health Agency (PHA) commissions and supports a range of services to promote better mental health at an individual and community level. This activity includes the design and delivery of mental health public information campaigns, often with a focus on young people, to address mental health stigma, improve awareness of mental health issues, and encourage help seeking behaviour.

Recent investment has also been focused on the establishment of Primary Care Talking Therapy and Wellbeing Hubs across the region in order to improve access to low intensity psychological care and help deliver more effective intervention at an early stage which, in turn, should reduce reliance on pharmacological interventions. **(26th November)**

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Care Parents / Carers

Mr Fearghal McKinney (SDLP – South Belfast) – To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether care parents and carers of children with complex disabilities is a ‘life-saver’ to the Health Service and should have fair access to respite facilities

Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I readily acknowledge the very significant role that families and carers have, along with healthcare professionals, in caring for children and complex disabilities. Clearly fair access to respite services provides a vital level of support to carers and this presently take place on the basis of individually assessed need. **(26th November)**

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Children’s Palliative Care

Mr Phil Flanagan (Sinn Féin – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to publish a strategy for children’s palliative care.

Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): My Department’s *Strategy for Children’s Palliative and End-of-Life Care in Northern Ireland* is in its final drafting stage, and I am aiming to publish it by the end of this year. **(26th November)**

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Department of Social Development

Severe Disability Premium

Ms Claire Sugden (Ind – East Londonderry) – To ask the Minister for Social Development to detail the measures his Department is taking to ensure that additional strains are not placed on people with a disability through the Severe Disability Premium which will be introduced by Universal Credit.

Mr Storey (Minister for Social Development): Currently there are seven different components within the system of benefits and Tax Credits associated with disability. These are paid at different rates, have different qualifying conditions and are for different purposes. A claimant qualifies for the Severe Disability Premium if they are in receipt of a qualifying benefit and satisfy certain conditions.

The current proposals for the introduction of Universal Credit will see the reform system of multiple disability premiums and additions in Tax Credits and create a much simpler and fairer system for claimants that will ensure support is targeted to those that need it most. Disabled claimants will be supported through two elements under Universal Credit, the limited capability for work element and for more severely disabled claimants, the limited capability for work and work related activity element. Furthermore my Department aims to raise the level of support for those who have been assessed as having a limited capability for work and work related activity that is currently provided to reflect the extra costs of longer durations on benefit.

Under Universal Credit a disabled person will also be eligible for a higher earnings disregard when working out their Universal Credit payment to reflect a claimant's personal circumstances.

Those claimants who are subject to migration onto Universal Credit will also be eligible for Transitional Protection. Transitional Protection is a commitment to ensure that no one moving directly onto Universal Credit will experience a reduction in the benefit they are receiving, where their circumstances remain the same at the point of change. This will also apply to those claimants receiving the Severe Disability Premium.

The Welfare Reform Bill also includes provision to exclude some groups of claimants from the benefit cap - it is intended that this will include households in receipt of the limited capability for work and work related activity element of Universal Credit.

This is in recognition of the additional financial costs that can arise from disability.

A package of measures has been designed to ameliorate the worst impacts of Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland. My predecessor listened to the concerns expressed by different groups in Northern Ireland about the impact of welfare reform and the package of measures was developed with the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Treasury. This package is the envy of both Scotland and Wales. **(26th November)**

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