

## **NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week of 6<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

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## Office of First and Deputy First Minister

### Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Project

**Mr Patsy McGlone (SDLP – Mid Ulster)** - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the current position in relation to the continued financial support for the Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Project.

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme is a two year programme scheduled to finish at the end of June 2015. We are currently considering the future of the programme.

**(3<sup>rd</sup> March)**

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### Play and Leisure Implementation Plan

**Mr John McCallister (IND – South Down)** - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail delivery against targets in the Play and Leisure Implementation Plan to date.

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Play and Leisure Implementation Plan (PLIP) was launched in September 2011 and is scheduled to run until 2016, in line with the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People. The PLIP contains 41 actions, to be delivered by a range of departments, to support the commitments made in the Executive's Play and Leisure Policy Statement of January 2009 and obligations under Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

To date, 17 actions have been achieved and 17 remain ongoing. Actions that have been achieved include the delivery of awareness sessions on play for policy makers and professionals; publication of guidance on the community use of schools; and research into children and young people's experiences in public spaces.

There are 7 actions which have a financial outlay. These actions include the potential audit of workforce needs; the development and dissemination of information on the benefits of challenge and risk in play; and the establishment of a professional bodies working group. Progress on these actions is subject to funding availability. **(3<sup>rd</sup> March)**

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## Female Genital Mutilation

**Mrs Sandra Overend (UUP – Mid Ulster)** - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 38186/11-15, to detail which Department is co-ordinating a cross departmental action plan on Female Genital Mutilation to which they are contributing.

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Given the nature of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), there is no one department co-ordinating a cross departmental action plan on this matter.

Following a public consultation exercise last year, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) published multi-agency guidelines on FGM. These guidelines state that it is unlikely that any single agency will be able to meet the multiple needs of someone affected by FGM. The guidelines set out a multi-agency response and strategies to encourage agencies to co-operate and work together.

A copy of the Guidelines has been placed in the Assembly library. **(3<sup>rd</sup> March)**

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## Department of Education

### Delivering Social Change Signature Project

**Mr Seán Rogers (SDLP – South Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education when phase 2 of the shared education Delivering Social Change Signature Project will open; and whether schools that have taken part in previous shared education programmes will be eligible.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** It is expected that the applications to phase 2 of the Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project will be invited before the end of the current financial year. Work is currently in progress to refine the application process following lessons learned from the phase 1. The Project is aimed at schools that have previously engaged in shared education, including those that previously participated in such programmes (subject to meeting other criteria as outlined in the call for applications - see [www.sepni.gov.uk](http://www.sepni.gov.uk) for details). **(2<sup>nd</sup> March)**

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### Delivering Social Change Signature Project

**Mr Seán Rogers (SDLP – South Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education when phase 1 applicants will be notified if they have been accepted for the shared education Delivering Social Change Signature project.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** Applications to Phase 1 of the DSC Share Education Signature Project are subject to an assessment process being undertaken by ELBs. Recommendations from ELBs will be in considered for endorsement by the Project Board which is scheduled to meet on 10 March 2015. Applicants will be notified when this process has been complete. **(2<sup>nd</sup> March)**

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## Shared Education Programmes

**Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education whether integrated schools of the same management type, and those of different management type, will qualify for shared education programmes.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** Funding opportunities through the DSC Signature Project and Peace IV funding programme will be open to all schools who meet the eligibility criteria.

The DSC Shared Education Signature Project is aimed at schools that have already engaged in shared education provided they meet other criteria as outlined in the call for applications (see [www.sepni.gov.uk](http://www.sepni.gov.uk) for details). Each application will be assessed on a case by case basis.

The Peace IV programme will target those schools that are not already engaged in sharing. Subject to EU agreement, this is expected to launch later this year. **(2<sup>nd</sup> March)**

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## Special Education Needs Co-ordinators

**Ms Caitríona Ruane (Sinn Féin – South Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the number of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in each post-primary school; and whether they are teaching or acting as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in a full time capacity. **[Priority Written]**

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs states that all mainstream schools should have a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO).

The Belfast Education and Library Board has advised that there were less than five non-teaching SENCOs identified in its last audit in March 2014.

The remaining Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that this detail is not held at ELB level. **(2<sup>nd</sup> March)**

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## Cyber Bullying and Social Media Exploitation Awareness

**Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Education what programmes exist within secondary level education to raise awareness of cyber bullying and social media exploitation.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** The Department takes these issues very seriously and issued an e-Safety Guidance Circular to all schools in December 2013. It stated that ‘eSafety must be built into the delivery of the curriculum’ and recommended that schools use external expertise, where appropriate, to help address these complex issues. It is, however, a matter for each school to determine which programmes and resources best suit their particular needs.

All secondary schools promote the personal development of pupils as part of the topic ‘Learning for Life and Work’ (LLW). Bullying/cyber-bullying and e-safety are widely covered during LLW. LLW resources for schools have been developed by CCEA, which include ‘safety and managing risk’ in the real world and online. Other materials on specific e-safety issues have been prepared and made available to all teachers through the Classroom 2000 (C2K) network.

Awareness raising programmes, training and resources are provided by a range of organisations such as the PSNI and the NI Anti-Bullying Forum. Voluntary organisations also support schools by providing talks to pupils and parents on these issues.

As part of “Safer Internet Day 2015”, a toolkit was provided to schools which included information, advice and lesson plans on issues including sexting, using webcams, using Social Networks, inappropriate content and chatting with strangers online.

Specialist training and support are also available to schools via the Education and Library Boards’ child protection, education welfare and behaviour support services; and from the Child Protection Support Service to Schools (CPSSS). **(2<sup>nd</sup> March)**

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## **Classroom Assistance Policy**

**Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone)** - To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 42159/11-15, whether there is a policy within his Department or the Education and Library Boards whereby only Stage 5 SEN pupils are permitted to be considered for classroom assistance.

**Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education):** There is no policy within either the Department of Education or the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) which states that only pupils at Stage Five of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs can be considered for classroom assistance. Current legislation does not prevent a school or Board from considering classroom assistance for a pupil at any stage of the Code of Practice. **(2<sup>nd</sup> March)**

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## Special Education Needs Figures 2014/15

**Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone)** - To ask the Minister of Education whether he will provide, or place in the Assembly library, a copy of the figures for the 2014/15 census of primary and post-primary pupils with Special Educational Needs, broken down by Education and Library Board.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** The 2014/15 school census final figures were released on 26th February 2015. A breakdown of special educational needs in primary and post-primary schools by ELB can be found overleaf.

### Number of primary and post-primary pupils with special educational needs, by ELB, 2014/15

#### Primary

	<b>Belfast</b>	<b>Western</b>	<b>North Eastern</b>	<b>South Eastern</b>	<b>Southern</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Statemented pupils</b>	863	774	882	1,232	1,353	<b>5,104</b>
<b>SEN stages 1-4</b>	5,984	5,729	6,717	6,640	6,042	<b>31,112</b>
<b>SEN stages 1-5</b>	6,847	6,503	7,599	7,872	7,395	<b>36,216</b>

## Post-primary

	<b>Belfast</b>	<b>Western</b>	<b>North Eastern</b>	<b>South Eastern</b>	<b>Southern</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Statemented pupils</b>	1,004	1,210	1,031	1,099	1,622	<b>5,966</b>
<b>SEN stages 1-4</b>	6,618	4,988	4,084	4,491	3,589	<b>23,770</b>
<b>SEN stages 1-5</b>	7,622	6,198	5,115	5,590	5,211	<b>29,736</b>

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1. Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.
2. Figures include pupils at stages 1 – 5 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

**(2<sup>nd</sup> March)**

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## School Closure Procedure

**Mr Gerry Kelly (Sinn Féin – North Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Education to outline the procedure used by schools when deciding to close for a snow day.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** The Department recognises that decisions on whether or not to close a school can only be made at local level by the Principal who has the knowledge and experience to assess the situation affecting their school. The specific procedure for deciding whether or not to close will therefore vary across schools.

To support Principals in making their decision, the Department has provided schools with a checklist which includes a list of the issues they need to consider when deciding whether or not to close their school. The main consideration is the possibility of risks to the health and safety of pupils and staff.

Each year the Department issues a letter to all schools to remind them of the need to have an action plan in place detailing how schools will deal with any exceptional closures that may arise and this reminder signposts them to the checklist which is available on the Department’s website. **(3<sup>rd</sup> March)**

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## Special Education Needs and Disability Bill

**Mr Pat Ramsey (SDLP – Foyle)** - To ask the Minister of Education what discussions has he held with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding the forthcoming Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** I have engaged in discussions with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on a range of matters relating to provision for children with special educational needs, during the development of the current policy proposals for the way forward on special educational needs and inclusion.

My core SEN proposals were considered and agreed by the Executive in July 2012 and I have proceeded with the drafting a Bill to reflect this agreement. In February 2015, I brought a Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill to the Executive for consideration.

The Bill contains clauses covering both the core proposals, as agreed in 2012, and a number of associated policy areas which I had advised I would consider; all are aimed at

enhancing the current SEN policy framework. In advance of each of these Executive meetings, I circulated the draft proposals to all Executive colleagues.

There has also been ongoing engagement at official level as proposals of the Review of SEN and Inclusion were being developed. A number of meetings have taken place and presentations given on the key elements proposed for inclusion in a draft Bill. **(3<sup>rd</sup> March)**

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### School Patrols

**Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson (UUP – Upper Bann)** - To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40818/11-15, whether he will ensure that each withdrawn patrol is reassessed in relation to the risks posed to pupils cycling or walking to and from each school.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** The provision of school crossing patrols is a discretionary function. Patrols are, therefore, provided in support of the parental duty to ensure the safety of their child(ren) when walking to school. Patrols are provided where a location has been assessed as exceeding the threshold(s) set out in assessment guidelines. The guidelines are based on those of Road Safety GB, previously Local Authority Road Safety Officers Association (LARSOA). These guidelines incorporate elements from the existing widely adopted criteria for the assessment of potential zebra and pelican crossing sites, and consider factors such as traffic flow and the number of pupils crossing. Therefore, patrols are usually established at locations where there are high numbers of pupils and a heavy volume of traffic. Additionally, school crossing patrols are only permitted to marshal pedestrians and not cyclists.

Reassessments of patrols are routinely conducted when a patrol person leaves their post. School crossing patrols may be removed where a location no longer exceeds the threshold(s) set out in the guidelines.

With regard to the impact upon pupils following the removal of a patrol, Boards ensure that the reassessed crossing point is within tolerances experienced by pupils on any other route without a crossing patrol. **(3<sup>rd</sup> March)**

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## Strategic Review of Integrated Education

**Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education for an update on the Strategic Review of Integrated Education.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** I am currently considering the need for and scope of a future review of integrated education. **(4<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Education and Training Inspectorate

**Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education what frameworks will be used by the Education and Training Inspectorate to evaluate shared education programmes, including raising the educational standards of pupils.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** Over the four years of the Signature Project relating to Shared Education, ETI will use a framework to evaluate Shared Education which it has developed, in consultation with key educational stakeholders. In practice, ETI will evaluate the quality of:

- the strategic aims and objectives of the partnership through the school development plan, action plans and discussion with senior management;
- the outworking of the partnership ethos through the learning environment and pastoral provision, policies and practice;
- the leadership and management of shared education provision at all levels within the school and of the Shared Education partnerships between that school and other schools;
- learning and teaching through direct classroom observation – achievement and standards, knowledge, understanding, skills, thinking, attitudes and dispositions;
- pupils’ work: oral; written, multimedia and displays.

Discussions will also be held with pupils, parents, teachers, senior management, governors and community representatives. **(4<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Joint Management of Schools

**Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education to outline the process by which two schools can move to joint management; and whether two schools can move to joint management without the two churches' agreement.

**Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education):** Guidance for jointly managed schools is still under development and will be published in due course. Once published, the guidance will outline the process by which schools can move to joint management as well as stressing the pre-requisite for community support. **(5<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Funding

**Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education how he will ensure that no integrated school is disadvantaged if Community Relations, Equality and Diversity funding is discontinued.

**Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education):** As per my answer to AQW 42998/11-15, any decision to end Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) earmarked funding would be with a view to all schools continuing to carry out diversity work within their Local Management of Schools (LMS) budget allocation. If this decision is taken, schools of all management types will be treated equally. **(5<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Measuring School Performance

**Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP – Strangford)** - To ask the Minister of Education for an update on progress in relation to his dashboard of measures for measuring school performance.

**Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education):** To date the work on the dashboard has primarily encompassed desk research, literature reviews and internal discussion on the range of indicators that might be included.

The Department has written to key stakeholders inviting them to be part of a panel which will work with departmental officials to consider what should be included in the Dashboard of Measures, how it can be presented and the timescales for implementation. **(5<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## **Education and Training Inspectorate Report Recommendations**

**Mr Seán Rogers (SDLP – South Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education which recommendations from the Committee for Education's Report on Education and Training Inspectorate will be taken forward.

**Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education):** The Department's response to the Committee for Education's Report on the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement can be found on the Assembly website at the following link.

- <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/education/calls-for-evidence/inquiry-into-the-education-and-training-inspectorate-eti/>

It provides details of whether each recommendation has been accepted, in full or in part, and, where relevant, details of current actions being taken. **(6<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Department for Employment and Learning

### Training for Young People with Special Education Needs

**Mrs Pam Cameron (DUP – South Antrim)** - To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the provision of training for young people with special educational needs, once they reach the age of 19.

**Mr S Farry (Minister for Employment and Learning):** My Department is committed to ensuring that all young people with special education needs who can benefit from training, can avail of the opportunities on offer. Training is offered through a range of education, skills and employment provision.

My Department offers these young people a number of options through a range of programmes and services. This includes Training for Success, Apprenticeships, Further and Higher Education, the European Social Fund programme, Careers guidance and employment support services.

I am well aware that young people with special education needs can face a range of barriers that prevent them from availing of the opportunities on offer. That is why my Department and its providers place great importance on offering support facilities right across our services.

Our aim is straightforward. We want to provide tailored support and assistance that helps these young people achieve their desired training, skills or employment outcomes. Our support provides financial help and targets assistance at individuals. The individual assistance can include adaptations to training or learning environments, the provision of a support worker, extended eligibility criteria or more flexible participation arrangements. In addition to our current provision, in recent times I have initiated a number of strategic approaches which cumulatively will enhance our provision. This includes the outworking of the review of careers support, the review of Youth Training, an Employment and Skills Strategy for People with Disabilities, the delivery of wide ranging support services under the new European Social Fund programme and also the new Economic Inactivity Strategy.

The initiatives will put in place new and improved provision which young people with special education needs can access in order to achieve their skills and employment goals.

**(4<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Department of Finance and Personnel

### Voluntary Exit Scheme

**Mrs Judith Cochrane (APNI – East Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans are being put in place to prepare managers, who will not be leaving through the Voluntary Exit Scheme, to manage change.

**Mr S Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel):** Responsibility for managing change as a result of the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme rests with individual departments. I am confident that managers within the NICS have the resilience and ability to deal with the challenges that will arise as a consequence of the pay bill reduction required in the current financial year. Furthermore, the Department will agree a comprehensive training programme with the Centre for Applied Learning, the NICS generic provider for Learning and Development, to support managers at all levels across the organisation to manage change. **(4<sup>th</sup> March)**

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### Voluntary Exit Scheme

**Mrs Judith Cochrane (APNI – East Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether any Department would have the capacity to deliver support services for staff leaving through the Voluntary Exit Scheme, given the recent budgetary constraints.

**Mr S Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel):** The overarching objective of the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme is a permanent NICS pay bill reduction in the 2015/16 financial year. It is a voluntary scheme, which will compensate staff who choose to apply and are selected to leave.

A wide range of support services which are already provided within existing departmental capacity, are available to staff choosing to leave via the Scheme. One example is the Department of Employment and Learning's Career and Employment Service and such sources of information will be signposted to staff. **(4<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## **Voluntary Exit Scheme**

**Mrs Judith Cochrane (APNI – East Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is being done to prepare staff who might leave through the Voluntary Exit Scheme for the outside job market.

**Mr S Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel):** The overarching objective of the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme is a permanent NICS pay bill reduction in the 2015/16 financial year. It is a voluntary scheme, which will compensate staff who choose to apply and are selected to leave.

The normal support mechanisms to anyone wishing to seek alternative employment are available to staff choosing to leave via the Scheme, for example through the Department of Employment and Learning Careers Service and Employment Service. While sources of information already available, including employment-related information, will be signposted to staff, it is entirely a decision for the individual as to which future career path, if any, they wish to pursue on leaving the NICS. **(4<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Department of Health

### Applied Behavioural Analysis

**Mr Chris Lyttle (APNI – East Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment his Department has made of Applied Behavioural Analysis as an appropriate and effective intervention for children with autism.

**Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** My Department recognises that there are a number of interventions for autism, including Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), but does not advocate any particular approach. This is a decision for clinicians to make, based on individually assessed needs and good practice evidence.

The range of individually tailored programmes which HSC Trusts provide, are drawn from a wide body of research and evidence. Many of these interventions use approaches from the theoretical frameworks which contribute to ABA (e.g. positive behaviour management strategies and understanding of communicating through behaviour). Following assessment Trusts work collaboratively with children and their families to provide a systemic-based therapeutic intervention, which includes working with children, young people and their families in their communities.

It should be noted that, while most ABA programmes focus solely on the child, the approach adopted by HSC Trusts means they can work with the child but also the parent (focussing on developing supports, effective and consistent parenting strategies, etc) or the school, to support the young person with autism. **(6<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## **Delivering Social Change Signature Programme**

**Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Support For Parents Delivering Social Change Signature Programme, including the number of families who have benefited from this programme since 2012.

**Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Significant progress continues to be made on four parenting support programmes being delivered through the Public Health Agency (PHA) as part of the Delivering Social Change programme. These provide additional high quality support to new and existing parents living in areas of deprivation through positive parenting programmes. Two of the four programmes are delivered direct to families.

By the end of December 2014 26 Parenting Your Teen programmes have been delivered to 313 parents and 632 children, with 89% of families completing the programme. A further 117 families had completed the Strengthening Families programme.

The remaining two programmes aim to improve the quality of services delivered to families. Funding is being used to increase the number of organisations who deliver the Incredible Years programme in NI to the highest quality and adherence to programme fidelity standards. In addition, by the end of December 2014, a total of 342 early years and HSC professionals had undertaken Infant Mental Health training through one of 3 new training programmes being funded. The investment in Infant Mental Health Training has also enabled the establishment of a regional Infant Mental Health Plan that will determine the level of investment required beyond the current scale of training resourced under Delivering Social Change. **(6<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Provision, Funding and Facilities

**Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current health provision to treat and support people who are recovering from eating disorders; and what funding has been allocated to programmes and facilities that provide this care, in each of the last three years.

**Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Eating Disorder Services are provided through a stepped care approach which ranges from early detection and intervention, to community-based treatment, to specialist inpatient provision.

Community-based Specialist Eating Disorder Services are available across all five HSC Trusts (with Belfast Trust providing services for the South Eastern Trust) for both adults and children and young people.

Inpatient treatment for adults with an eating disorder is facilitated in existing hospitals with in-reach support provided by specialist community-based eating disorder teams. This ensures a continuum of care when patients are discharged.

Inpatient care for children and adolescents with eating disorders is usually provided at Beechcroft, the Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient Unit. If the patient's condition is primarily physical, clinicians may decide that the best place for treatment is an acute hospital setting. If a patient requires more intense specialist treatment for anorexia, Trusts can access beds in England, Scotland and Ireland through the Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) process.

A total of £2 million per annum is allocated to specialist Eating Disorder Services, and this has been the case since 2008/09. This figure does not include inpatient care or the cost of treatment for eating disorders provided outside Northern Ireland (**6<sup>th</sup> March**)

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## Department of Justice

### Sarah's Law

**Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone)** - To ask the Minister of Justice what further consideration has been given to the introduction of Sarah's Law; and what challenges or difficulties would be faced in introducing and enforcing such a law.

**Mr D Ford (Minister of Justice):** Ongoing review has shown that the current administrative disclosure arrangements are working well.

Disclosure of information to protect children already takes place and will continue under normal police operating practices. Parents and others who have immediate concerns about any individual whom they fear is posing a risk to the safety of a child should go to the police or social services at any time about their concerns. The PSNI have in place local public protection teams to deal with these issues. Children's services in Health and Social Care Trusts also have a role to protect children and work closely with police where a risk to a child is identified, under the Protocol for Joint Investigation by Social Workers and Police Officers of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Child Abuse – Northern Ireland. Social Services are also represented on the local public protection teams.

The relevant criminal justice agencies have not raised any recent public protection concerns that need to be addressed by making changes to the arrangements. I have, therefore, no current plans to alter the administrative system of disclosure at this time as there are no pressing reasons for legislative provision. I will, however, continue to keep the arrangements under review. **(4<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Cyber Bullying and Harrassment

**Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Justice how his Department is working with arm's-length bodies to address cyber bullying and harassment.

**Mr D Ford (Minister of Justice):** The Department of Justice, through the local Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) network, has done much to develop internet safety and tackle the growing prevalence of cyberbullying and some of its very harmful consequences.

This work is directed at safeguarding young people in the digital world and educating them so they feel safe when accessing e-technologies. PCSPs, in partnership with Health Trusts and PSNI, have developed a range of e-safety resources for children, parents and practitioners on internet and on-line safety, sexting, cyberbullying and reporting abuse.

The Youth Justice Agency is represented, at committee level, on the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland which has been commissioned to develop a Northern Ireland e-safety strategy on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive. I look forward to the publication of this strategy and will consider how my Department can best contribute to its success.

Harassment and bullying are already criminal offences in Northern Ireland, whether perpetrated directly or in the form of cyber bullying. The maximum penalty for harassment is two years imprisonment, which may be increased to seven years where there is the threat of violence, or 10 years where a person threatens to kill another.

In addition, recent changes to the law introduced by the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 have increased the penalties for certain offences under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 to a maximum of two years imprisonment.

Whilst I have no further plans to change our laws at this time, along with my officials, I will be keeping developments in other jurisdictions under review. **(6<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Department for Social Development

### Child Maintenance Service Payments

**Mr Colum Eastwood (SDLP – Foyle)** - To ask the Minister for Social Development whether there are plans to re-evaluate the 25 per cent margin of change required in gross income before a reassessment is carried out to determine the amount payable in Child Maintenance Service payments.

**Mr M Storey (Minister for Social Development):** As part of our Child Maintenance Reforms, a process of Annual Review has been introduced for all applications on our new Statutory Scheme. The purpose of this Annual Review is to take account of any income or household changes in the past 12 months that may affect the Child Maintenance assessment.

Any income changes outside of this process will only affect the assessment if they are significant, exceeding 25%. That is a fundamental aspect of the new scheme and there are no plans to review it. Parents who make their own Family Based Arrangements, are of course free to take account of any income changes as and when they occur. **(4<sup>th</sup> March)**

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