

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week ending 27 March, 2015

- **Age Discrimination Legislation**
- **Age Discrimination Legislation – Goods Facilities and Services**
- **Age Discrimination – Goods Facilities and Services**
- **Age Discrimination Legislation – Goods, Facilities and Services**
- **Age Discrimination Legislation – Goods, Facilities and Services**
- **Age Discrimination Legislation – Goods, Facilities and Services**
- **Age Discrimination Legislation – Goods, Facilities and Services**
- **Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation**
- **Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation**
- **Child Poverty Strategy**
- **Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission**
- **Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence**
- **United Youth Programme**
- **Applied Behaviour Analysis Interventions**

- **Female Genital Mutilation**
- **School Transport**
- **Early Years and Surestart Budget - 2015/16**
- **Standards in Schools**
- **Special Educational Needs**
- **Youth Services**
- **Suicide Prevention**
- **Paediatric Cardiac Services**
- **Paediatric Gastroenterology Department – Royal Victoria Hospital**
- **Applied Behavioural Analysis**
- **Contraceptive Implants**
- **Early Years Service**
- **Age-Appropriate Respite Provision**
- **Sarah’s Law**
- **Access NI Applications**

- **Speed Limit Legislation**
- **Welfare Reform**

Office of First and Deputy First Minister

Age Discrimination Legislation

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the expected timeframe for the roll out of Age Discrimination legislation.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We made a Written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 19 February 2015, announcing our decision to bring forward proposals to prohibit unfair age discrimination against people aged 16 and over by those providing goods, facilities and services.

Subject to Executive agreement, we intend to issue a consultation document in the spring, setting out our policy proposals on this matter. Following consultation, we will then consider the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly.
(23rd March)

[Back to Top](#)

Age Discrimination Legislation – Goods Facilities and Services

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether there are plans to include children and young people in the extension of age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We made a written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 19 February 2015 announcing our decision to take forward proposals to extend anti-discrimination law to give legal protection from unfair age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services. The proposed legislation will apply to people aged 16 and over. **(23rd March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Age Discrimination – Goods Facilities and Services

Mr Chris Lyttle (APNI – East Belfast) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on legislation to outlaw age discrimination in the provisions of goods, facilities and services.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We made a written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 19 February 2015 announcing our decision to bring forward legislative proposals to prohibit unfair age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services. The proposed legislation will apply to people aged 16 and over.

Subject to consideration by the OFMDFM Committee and Executive agreement, we intend to issue a consultation document in the near future setting out our proposals for legislation.

When we have concluded our policy consultation, and agreed a robust policy position, we will then consider all the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly. **(23rd March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Age Discrimination Legislation – Goods, Facilities and Services

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the Programme for Government 2011/15 commitment to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services has not yet been delivered.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We made a Written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 19 February 2015 announcing our decision to bring forward legislative proposals to prohibit unfair age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services. The proposed legislation will apply to people aged 16 and over.

Subject to consideration by the OFMDFM Committee and Executive agreement, we intend to issue a consultation document in the near future setting out our proposals for legislation.

When we have concluded our policy consultation, and agreed a robust policy position, we will then consider all the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly. **(23rd March)** [Back to Top](#)

Age Discrimination Legislation – Goods, Facilities and Services

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the nature of any recent communication with the Commissioner for Older People in respect of extending age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Junior Ministers met the Chief Executive of the Commissioner for Older People on 16 December 2014 to discuss the Programme for Government commitment to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. On foot of this meeting, the Commissioner for Older People wrote to Junior Ministers on 15 and 30 January 2015 seeking further clarification on how this Programme for Commitment would be delivered. **(23rd March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Age Discrimination Legislation – Goods, Facilities and Services

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister why Programme for Government 2011/15 commitment number 44, to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services, has not been delivered.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Programme for Government commitment in respect of age discrimination legislation is number 38, not 44.

We made a Written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 19 February 2015 announcing our decision to bring forward legislative proposals to prohibit unfair age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services. The proposed legislation will apply to people aged 16 and over.

Subject to consideration by the OFMDFM Committee and Executive agreement, we intend to issue a consultation document in the near future setting out our proposals for legislation.

When we have concluded our policy consultation, and agreed a robust policy position, we will then consider all the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly. **(23rd March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation

Ms Bronwyn McGahan (Sinn Féin – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the scope of the Goods, Facilities and Services legislation will be finalised.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We made a written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 19 February 2015 announcing our decision to bring forward legislative proposals to prohibit unfair age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services. The proposed legislation will apply to those aged 16 and over.

Subject to consideration by the OFMDFM Committee and Executive agreement, we intend to issue a consultation document in the near future setting out our proposals for legislation.

When we have concluded our policy consultation, and agreed a robust policy position, we will then consider all the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly. **(23rd March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation

Mr Samuel Gardiner MBE (UUP – Bann) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the projected timescale for the introduction of age discrimination legislation with regard to the provision of goods, facilities and services.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We made a written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 19 February 2015 announcing our decision to bring forward legislative proposals to prohibit unfair age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services. The proposed legislation will apply to those aged 16 and over.

Subject to consideration by the OFMDFM Committee and Executive agreement, we intend to issue a consultation document in the near future setting out our proposals for legislation.

When we have concluded our policy consultation, and agreed a robust policy position, we will then consider all the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly. **(24th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Child Poverty Strategy

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the child poverty strategy will be published.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive's first Child Poverty Strategy 2011-14 was published on 24 March 2011. The Executive's 2014-17 Child Poverty Strategy is currently under consideration and it is envisaged that it will go to the Executive shortly. The Strategy will be published as soon as possible after Executive agreement. **(26th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 42333/11-15, whether there are plans to appoint a member, as representative of the Northern Ireland Executive, to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There are currently no plans to appoint a member, as representative of the Northern Ireland Executive, to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. **(26th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Regional Strategy Action Plan as associated with the Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence, including the resources allocated to implement such a strategy.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and the Department of Justice jointly lead on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse.

OFMDFM has been advised that work to progress the actions detailed in the joint Domestic and Sexual Violence Action Plan, which was endorsed by the Inter-Ministerial

Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence (IMG) in April 2012, is still ongoing. It is monitored by the Regional Strategy Group for Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse and its associated Sub-Groups.

In late 2013, IMG members agreed to extend the Action Plan until the publication of the new Strategy.

Given the wide ranging nature of the work and service provision there would be a disproportionate cost in providing the total resource allocation. **(26th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

United Youth Programme

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the progress being made on the United Youth programme of Together: Building a United Community, to ensure that it extends to Young People in rural areas.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: One of the seven core headline actions committed to within Together: Building a United Community is the development of the United Youth Programme. This Programme is designed to offer structured employment, work experience, volunteer and leisure opportunities and is open to young people from both rural and urban areas who are not in education, employment or training.

To date there has been comprehensive and detailed engagement with youth related organisations and young people themselves to ensure the programme has maximum buy-in and consensus.

The co-design process, begun by OFMDFM, is being continued by the Department for Employment and Learning and is being supported by a Design Team.

The first pilot to help inform the design for the United Youth Programme which was rolled out by Springboard has concluded and has now been evaluated. A call for concept proposals, to deliver pilot projects, was issued in early September. Following a development phase in the Autumn, over 150 pilot applications from a wide range of sectors were submitted in December. An assessment of these proposals was completed with assistance from the programme's Design Team.

As a result, 50 successful organisations (57 proposals) have been selected to proceed to a further development stage, following which around 10 pilot schemes will be taken forward to move into delivery mode later in 2015, prior to the anticipated full roll-out of the programme in 2016.

A list of those organisations successful in proceeding to the next stage can be found at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/successthroughskills/united-youth.htm> **(26th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Education

Applied Behaviour Analysis Interventions

Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education what assessment has been made of the use in schools of Applied Behaviour Analysis interventions for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. [Priority Written]

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): The Department of Education does not advocate exclusive adherence to any specific single intervention or theoretical perspective in relation to autism, but maintains the view that provision should be child centred, focused on a comprehensive assessment of the child’s autism and how it affects his or her ability to learn, and in particular to learn alongside other children. Provision for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), including autism, is tailored to meet the identified individual needs of a child.

It is therefore a decision for the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) to determine whether Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), or indeed any other intervention, is the most appropriate provision to meet an individual child’s educational needs. The ELBs will operate programmes of support for cases where ABA has been requested and where they deem it to be appropriate to meet the individual needs of the child. **(23rd March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Female Genital Mutilation

Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education whether teachers are given training on the issue of female genital mutilation.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): My Department has issued Multi Agency Practice Guidelines on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) to all Principals, Designated Teachers, Boards of Governors and the ELB Child Protection Support Service for Schools (CPSSS).

FGM is included in Child Protection training which covers warning signs, appropriate response and signposting to further information and sources of help. **(23rd March)**

[Back to Top](#)

School Transport

Mr Peter Weir (DUP – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the impact on school transport in the South Eastern Education and Library Board as a result of budget cuts in 2015/16.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): On the 1st April 2015 the 5 Education and Library Boards will be dissolved and no longer exist. The new Education Authority will be in place from 1st April 2015 and will be allocated a Block Grant budget of £396.6million to cover costs including transport.

The home to school transport policy will apply to the Education Authority in the same manner as the individual Education and Library Boards. It will primarily be for the Education Authority to determine the amount of funding it will attribute to home to school transport in its budget proposals to my Department. The Education Authority’s overall Budget proposals will be subject to my approval. **(23rd March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Early Years and Surestart Budget - 2015/16

Mr Colum Eastwood (SDLP – Foyle) - To ask the Minister of Education to outline the effect of the reduction to the Early Years and Surestart Budget for 2015/16.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): The requirement to reduce the Department of Education’s expenditure by £97.6million in one financial year has regrettably resulted in reduced funding to some worthy programmes, including within the Early Years sector. I have aimed to minimise any impact.

The Early Years Fund (administered on the DE’s behalf by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO)) was originally established by DHSSPS in 2004 to help sustain certain early childhood services in areas of greatest need which were facing funding difficulties when Peace II funding ended. It has effectively remained as a “closed” Fund since then to applicants that were in areas of greatest need at that time.

I have ensured that funding is available in 2015/16 to enable all recipient groups to receive continued support to the end of the current academic year i.e. 31 August 2015.

I will continue to review my budget to establish if a fund can continue beyond 31 August 2015. However any such fund will have to be open to all applicants and reflect the policy priorities of DE.

I have protected the Sure Start budget as far as possible so that the original reduction of £2m has been reduced to £1m.

The reduction of £1m leaves a Sure Start budget of £24.7m for 2015/16. It is anticipated that the reduction will be realised as far as possible from areas within service delivery where greater efficiencies can be realised, with the aim of protecting front line services.
(25th March)

[Back to Top](#)

Standards in Schools

Mrs Karen McKeivitt (SDLP – South Down) - To ask the Minister of Education what steps his Department is taking to ensure that there is a closer alignment between the Education and Training Inspectorate and School Improvement Services in order to raise standards in our schools.

Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education): Every School a Good School highlights that the primary responsibility for school improvement rests with schools themselves.

My Department is clear in its policy and practice that inspection is an integral part of and aligned with the school improvement process and with the work of other key stakeholders in this area.

Through inspection and the work of the District Inspectors, ETI not only highlights good practice, but also points to areas which require improvement in the interests of learners. It is recognised that in striving to ensure that the characteristics of a good school are embedded universally, schools may require support to develop and deliver the improvement required in order to raise standards. The nature and source of that support may differ depending on the context of the school but at its core will be the school itself, its managing authority and the Inspectorate, working together

There are many examples of how the ETI works closely with schools, their managing authorities and with policy teams in the department to ensure close alignment of our efforts

to raise standards. This now includes the principal's involvement in inspection moderation meetings, the managing authorities presence during schools' inspection feedback, the facilitation of primary and post primary principals conferences, the production of programmes for ESaGS.tv and the dissemination of good practice guides. **(25th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Special Educational Needs

Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson (UUP – Upper Bann) - To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of how the desire to meet targets to identify Special Educational Needs and requirements amongst children impacts on the quality and successful of the assessments utilised.

Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education): There are no targets regarding the identification of children's special educational needs (SEN). The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs states that children with SEN should be identified as early as possible and assessed as quickly as is consistent with thoroughness. **(25th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Youth Services

Mr Pat Ramsey (SDLP – Foyle) - To ask the Minister of Education what plans his Department has in place to ensure the continuation of youth services after youth workers employed by the Western Education and Library Board, who were placed on Protective Notice in January 2015, depart their posts. **[Priority Written]**

Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education): Decisions on the allocation of the Education Authority's youth service budget are an operational matter for the Education Authority.

Future funding of youth services by the Education Authority and the Youth Council will be in line with the Regional Youth Development Plan and Priorities for Youth and within the resources available. **(27th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Health

Suicide Prevention

Mr Gerry Kelly (Sinn Féin – North Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the Public Health Agency procures services for suicide prevention within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area.

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Suicide prevention funding covers regional programmes, that are available to all citizens in Northern Ireland, and local community-led programmes. Regional programmes include Lifeline, the Self Harm Registry, and public information campaigns. Local programmes are delivered by community and voluntary groups and include services such as counselling, alternative therapies, bereavement support, crisis de-escalation, mental health promotion, and signposting to statutory mental health services.

Community funding is divided between recurrent and relatively small scale non-recurrent allocations. Recurrent funding is allocated on a capitation basis to the five Trust localities. Non-recurrent funding is targeted at areas which experience disproportionately higher rates of suicide and is allocated annually based on prevalence rates within parliamentary constituencies.

To date, the Public Health Agency has rolled forward year-on-year the existing contracts with community and voluntary organisations. However, since these services were initially commissioned, the strategic context and number of service providers in the field of suicide prevention has changed. In order to respond to this changing environment and enable all service providers to bid in an open and transparent manner, the Agency has now commenced phased implementation of a new competitive tendering process for community-based services. Phase one (open at present) covers the procurement of community-based psychological intervention for people who self-harm, support for vulnerable groups through a grants programme, and suicide awareness training programmes. **(23rd March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Paediatric Cardiac Services

Mr Trevor Clarke (DUP – South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to his recent statement on Paediatric Cardiac Services, whether the investment set aside for more diagnostic centres will go ahead.

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): In my statement on 3 March 2015, I updated the Assembly on my earlier request for detailed investment proposals to be brought forward which would further develop a cardiology centre of excellence at the Belfast Trust and strengthen the Northern Ireland cardiology network, as vital elements of the overall network.

I also confirmed the availability of a total of £1.2m to invest in the implementation of the new service model, which would involve, as part of those proposals, enhancing the ability to diagnose congenital cardiac conditions throughout Northern Ireland.

One of the functions of the NI Congenital Heart Service Implementation Group which I have established will be to identify the resource requirements for the Belfast cardiology hub and Northern Ireland cardiology network, in line with the IWG report. I therefore expect to be in a position to provide more information about where that investment will specifically be required once that Implementation Group has had ample opportunity to consider this in detail. **(24th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Paediatric Gastroenterology Department – Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr Fearghal McKinney (SDLP – South Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that there is a shortage of consultants in the Paediatric Gastroenterology Department in the Royal Victoria Hospital, what immediate measures will he take to ensure that children are not adversely affected and receive treatment within the current performance targets for waiting times. **[Priority Written]**

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Belfast Trust is in the process of appointing a locum for the consultant who is currently on leave of absence and is in discussion with the Health and Social Care Board regarding an increase in the number of theatre lists to reduce waiting times for patients. **(24th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Applied Behavioural Analysis

Mr Robin Swann (UUP – North Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made by his Department of international standards of training in Applied Behavioural Analysis in Northern Ireland.

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): My Department has not undertaken such consultation or assessment. The Department and the HSC follow the guidelines set out by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) including guidance CG170 on Autism - management of autism in children and young people. This guidance offers evidence-based advice on the care and management of children and young people with autism and does not make specific reference to Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA).

Although my Department recognises that there are a number of interventions for autism, including ABA, it does not advocate any particular approach. This is a decision for clinicians to make, based on individually assessed needs and good practice evidence. HSC Trusts provide a range of individually tailored programmes which are drawn from a wide body of research and evidence and many of these use approaches from the theoretical frameworks which contribute to ABA.

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. Whilst 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 (developing supports, effective and consistent parenting strategies, etc) or the school, to support the young person with autism. **(24th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Contraceptive Implants

Mr Jim Allister (TUV – North Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the high number of children with contraceptive implants provided through the Health Service, for his assessment of the current arrangements and whether parental consent is in place. **[Priority Written]**

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The provision of contraception services for young people by Health and Social Care operates within the law, and under specific guidelines and safeguarding procedures. Health professionals use the “Fraser Guidelines” to determine whether young people under the age of 16 are to be given contraception. Each case is assessed on its own merits and the requirements set out in the Fraser Guidelines must be met.

The “Fraser” requirements applying in these circumstances are that the young person: understands the professional’s advice; cannot be persuaded to inform their parents; is likely to have sexual intercourse with or without contraception; and will likely suffer adverse physical or mental health unless they receive contraceptive treatment. In addition, the health professional must be convinced that the young person’s best interests require them to receive contraceptive advice or treatment with or without parental consent.

NICE clinical guidance on Long-acting reversible contraception recommends that healthcare professionals should be aware of the law relating to the provision of advice and contraception for young people and child protection issues and the Fraser guidelines should be considered when providing contraception for women younger than 16 years.

The guidance also advises that if the patient is under 16, their family or carers should also be given information and support to help the child or young person to make decisions about their treatment. **(26th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Early Years Service

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department will be effected by a two thirds reduction in funding for Early Years services which include initiatives to address physical and emotional health of children and their families.

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): All Executive Ministers are having to make difficult funding decisions in difficult financial circumstances. It would not be appropriate for me to second guess decision-making by the Minister of Education or any other Executive Minister.

In terms of our mutual early year's commitments, my Department is working with collaboratively with the Department of Education and three other departments to deliver a range of new early intervention projects under the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP).

The EITP is underpinned by a £30 million Fund. The Fund is made up of contributions from the Delivering Social Change Programme, all five participating government departments and private philanthropy. The Programme aims to improve outcomes for children and young people across Northern Ireland by embedding early intervention approaches in a transformative way in services for children and families, including services to address children's physical and emotional health. **(26th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Age-Appropriate Respite Provision

Ms Bronwyn McGahan (Sinn Féin – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what age-appropriate respite provision is available in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, particularly in the Dungannon area, for post-19 Special Education Needs, that caters for young people with nursing needs and non-nursing needs. **[Priority Written]**

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): At present the Southern Health and Social Care Trust provide bed-based respite care primarily through Woodlawn House in Dungannon, which is an 8 bedroom respite facility catering for individuals with complex health and/or behavioural needs.

The Trust also commission additional beds from the private sector within the Armagh and Dungannon area. Short breaks in the form of weekend breaks are provided by the Trust through its contract with Enable. **(27th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department of Justice

Sarah's Law

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 42558/11-15, whether any challenges or difficulties would be faced in introducing and enforcing Sarah's Law.

Mr D Ford (Minister of Justice): The PSNI has made the Department aware that there could be potential difficulties in making changes to the current system of disclosure, including problems arising through loss of control of such information. As well as possible risk to the safety of individual offenders, there may be an increased risk of attacks on other individuals as a result of misinformation, and, of more general importance, a decrease in the overall effectiveness of the agencies' efforts to maximise public protection, as offenders go to ground and fail to comply with arrangements to manage the risk they pose. (24th March)

[Back to Top](#)

Access NI Applications

Mr Pat Ramsey (SDLP – Foyle) - To ask the Minister of Justice how long it is expected to take to clear the backlog of Access NI applications.

Mr D Ford (Minister of Justice): The number of AccessNI checks pending with the police changes on a daily basis. However as of 25th March, the position is as set out in the table below:

Number of days checks outstanding	Number of checks outstanding
Less than 25 days	1,333
Between 25 and 39 days	61
Between 40 and 59 days	91
Over 60 days	7982
Total	2,283

1. AccessNI expects the majority of these checks to be returned within 18/19 days of referral to PSNI.

2. This figure includes 23 cases where PSNI are in direct contact with the applicant about the specific reason for delay

There is regular contact between AccessNI and PSNI staff to review progress and backlogs. PSNI have a recovery plan in place with steps being taken to reduce the number of outstanding cases, including the deployment of additional staff. However, these staff will require time to be trained in the correct assessment of information for disclosure purposes and therefore it will be several months before the backlog can be reduced significantly. AccessNI will continue to work with PSNI and to monitor the situation
(27th March)

[Back to Top](#)

Department for Regional Development

Speed Limit Legislation

Mrs Judith Cochrane (APNI – East Belfast) - To ask the Minister for Regional Development whether he will introduce legislation to place a 20mph speed limit in the vicinity of lit or operational school crossing signs which have been installed through the safer routes to school programme.

Mr D Kennedy (Minister for Regional Development): In June 2014, my Department introduced a new policy on the installation of a variety of road safety measures at schools where excessive speed has been identified as a problem. This followed the success of pilot part-time 20mph limits.

In determining whether a school could be considered for road safety improvements, a number of factors such as collision history, traffic speed and volume as well as the existence of footways, cycle lanes, controlled crossings, parking facilities and street lighting are taken into account.

Schools that have been treated with Road Safety improvement measures, including safer routes to schools measures, within the previous 5 years will not be considered for further measures.

Given the above, we will see an increase in the number of schools where a scheme involving part-time 20mph speed limits is implemented. **(24th March)**

[Back to Top](#)

Department for Social Development

Welfare Reform

Mr Patsy McGlone (SDLP – Mid Ulster) - To ask the Minister for Social Development, in relation to Welfare Reform negotiations, what measures, including enhanced childcare for working parents, are being discussed which will support people returning to work.

[Priority Written]

Mr M Storey (Minister for Social Development): Whilst the ongoing Welfare Reform negotiations are not specifically focused on measures which will support people to return to work, Universal Credit makes provision, including enhanced childcare provisions for working parents, to make it simpler to move into and remain in employment. In particular, support for the costs of childcare will be available to all lone parents and couples, where both members are in work regardless of the numbers of hours worked. This compares favourably with the current support offered via the Tax Credit system whereby couples can only claim help with childcare costs where one or both work at least 16 hours per week.

Under Universal Credit, there will also be an increase to the amount allowed for childcare costs of up to 85% from 2016. Again, this compares favourably with the current situation whereby working parents may only claim up to 70% of child care costs via the Tax Credit system.

Universal Credit will also offer a simpler system for all claimants as it will replace some benefits as well as tax credits thus making it easier for people returning to work to claim according to their circumstances. Treatment of earnings will also be more generous under Universal Credit than at present with earnings disregards which will reflect circumstances to a greater extent than now and a single taper rate of 65% at which benefit will be reduced to take account of earnings.

At Budget 2013, the Government announced the introduction of a new scheme, Tax-Free Childcare, designed to provide financial support to help working families with the cost of childcare. The scheme will be based on a system of childcare accounts. The Government will automatically top up amounts in the account at a rate of 20p for every 80p paid in by the parent up to £2000 per year.

More recently the Government has doubled the maximum amount that parents of disabled children will be able to receive to help to pay for their childcare costs, from £2,000 to £4,000 per child per year. **(26th March)**

[Back to Top](#)