

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week ending 15 May, 2015

Progress on new Children and Young People Strategy

<p>AQW 45012/11-15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work-in-progress to develop a new strategy for Children and Young People, post 2016.</p> <p>A public consultation in January 2014 on Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People considered proposals to bring together the Executive's work to deliver on the Children and Young People's Strategy, improve compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and to deliver on its commitments under the Child Poverty Act. Following feedback from the consultation, we took the decision to develop a separate Child Poverty Strategy 2014-2017 (in accordance with the Child Poverty Act 2010), and to engage further with stakeholders and Departments in the development of a new strategy to replace the current Strategy for Children and Young People when it ends in 2016.</p> <p>The process to develop the new strategy is underway. This has included an internal review of the existing strategy; identification of all relevant stakeholders; and preliminary engagement with sector representatives to discuss the role of children and young people within our society. As a result of the engagement to date a number of key issues have emerged that will support more extensive consultation. It is our intention that the new strategy will be designed and developed in co-operation with children and young people; parents and representative community and voluntary organisations.</p>
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Number of young people who took part in the YES Scheme and gained employment

<p>AQW 45198/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr Gregory Campbell (DUP - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the estimated number of young people, who participated in the YES Scheme, that have gained permanent employment since January 2013,</p> <p>Since January 2013, a total of 3361 young people moved into permanent employment under the Youth Employment Scheme. This includes both subsidised and unsubsidised employment opportunities.</p>
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Welfare Reform and the Enabling Success Strategy

<p>AQW 44826/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr John McCallister (IND - South Down)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning, how the Executive's agreement on Welfare Reform, which emanated from the Stormont House Agreement, informed the Enabling Success Strategy</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015 includes a commitment to develop and implement a strategy to reduce economic inactivity through skills, training, incentives and job creation. This commitment is part of the Executive's priority to grow a sustainable economy and invest in the future.</p> <p>'Enabling Success' commits to address what has become a long-term structural problem within our economy through a range of voluntary interventions which will ultimately seek to contribute to an improved employment rate in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Whilst 'Enabling Success' will have to take into account the changing landscape arising from welfare reform going forward, it is not part of the current proposed changes to the welfare system, nor is it motivated by them.</p>
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Question on amendments to Welfare Reform Bill

<p>AQW 45194/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr Steven Agnew (GPNl - North Down)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Social Development whether his Department is undertaking work on amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill which would explicitly establish in primary legislation that specific reductions to social security as implemented in GB could not be applied in Northern Ireland through secondary legislation.</p> <p>The Member will be aware that Northern Ireland legislation corresponding to the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which has been gradually implemented in GB since April 2012 has not yet been approved by this Assembly. Our Welfare Reform Bill was due to have its final legislative stage on the 9th March but that did not happen as a valid petition of concern was tabled against the Bill. However, the simple answer to the Member's question as to whether my Department is undertaking work on amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill which would explicitly establish in primary legislation that specific reductions to social security as implemented in GB could not be applied in Northern Ireland through secondary legislation is No.</p> <p>The Member will be aware of the 'parity' principle often cited in respect of Social Security which effectively governs the funding arrangements for our Welfare system and seeks to ensure that an individual here in Northern Ireland will receive the same benefits and be subject to the same conditionality as an individual elsewhere in the UK.</p> <p>The Member will also be aware of the work that was undertaken on Welfare by the five main parties of this Assembly and led to the Stormont House Agreement. That agreement was in respect of proposed measures which all five parties agreed were considered necessary to mitigate some of the harsher effects of the provisions within the Welfare Reform Bill here in Northern Ireland and which would be funded outside the arrangements with DWP and HM Treasury and from within Block resources.</p> <p>I remain fully committed to that agreement and will strive to ensure its full implementation in due course. I would remind Members of this Assembly that we as a Legislature have devolved responsibility for Social Security matters. It is for this Assembly, having fully debated and considered the concerns</p>
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		<p>around Welfare Reform to put in place measures which we believe can deliver a better Welfare system for our citizens and one which is sustainable into the future. I believe that the agreement reached at Stormont House is the only way this can be achieved.</p>
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Budget allocation to early years provision

<p>AQO 8089/11- 15</p>	<p>Mrs Sandra Overend (UUP - Mid Ulster)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education what percentage of his budget for 2015/16 is being allocated to early years' provision.</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5 billion over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services provided by the Department of Education.</p> <p>I fully recognise the importance of Early Years education particularly for our most vulnerable children which is why, despite the difficult budgetary position, I can confirm that 11.4% of my 2015-16 Resource budget has been allocated to Early Years' Provision.</p> <p>This includes fully funded early years programmes, identifiable funding for nursery schools, nursery units of primary schools and the Foundation Stage, as well as other relevant expenditure such as that allocated to Special Educational Needs Early Years Capacity Building and Extended Schools funding in nursery schools.</p>
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Number of school children transported to school by taxi

<p>AQW 45612/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr Gregory Campbell (DUP - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education how many children in attendance at primary schools during 2014 were normally transported to school throughout the school year via taxi at public expense.</p> <p>Based on figures provided by the Education Authority, in the 2013/14 academic year (the latest for which data is available), 806 eligible pupils attending primary school were assisted by taxi, of which 389 were pupils with statements of Special Education Needs.</p> <p>A taxi is only provided if it is required as part of a statement of special education need or where it is the most economic form of assistance available.</p>
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Nursery school selection criteria

<p>AQW 45584/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr Alex Easton (DUP - North Down)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to changes the nursery school selection criteria.</p> <p>All admissions criteria are set by pre-school providers themselves: however legislation requires that the top criterion for each provider prioritises children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.</p> <p>Research has shown that children from socially disadvantaged circumstances experience more difficulty at school than other children, so they are given priority in the pre-school admissions process as part of wider efforts to tackle educational underachievement.</p> <p>Learning to Learn – a Framework for Early Years Education and Learning includes an action to implement remaining actions from the Review of Pre-School admissions including one to examine the definition of socially disadvantaged circumstances with a view to reflecting changes to the benefits system especially relating to low paid working parents. Proposals for the way forward will be informed by any changes resulting from Welfare Reform.</p>
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Teaching young people about mental health support services in N Antrim

<p>AQW 45574/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr David McIlveen (DUP - North Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education what strategy his Department has in place to educate young people about support services for mental health issues in North Antrim.</p> <p>There are a number of ways in which the mental health of young people can be supported within schools, not just in North Antrim but in schools throughout the North;</p> <p>The statutory curriculum clearly states that pupils should be taught about the importance of learning about mental health and well-being. It provides opportunities for young people to develop their knowledge on how to sustain their health and learn about a healthy lifestyle. This includes supporting pupils in better understanding mental health problems, including causes, prevention, and developing strategies to deal with any problems which they, or someone they know, may experience throughout their lives.</p> <p>The ‘iMatter’ Programme aims to encourage the entire school community to be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils. Under this programme a suite of homework diary inserts and posters on topics of concern to young people such as self esteem, substance abuse and coping with stress, worry and anxiety, are distributed to schools. The diary inserts are also available on the Department of Education website at www.deni.gov.uk and can be downloaded directly by young people.</p> <p>Also, an ‘i-matter’ message of the month issues to schools for dissemination to pupils – the message for May 2015 for example is on the subject of exam stress and contains links to organisations offering further advice and support.</p> <p>There is considerable evidential and research information to confirm the position that counselling in schools supports the emotional health and wellbeing of young people. Pupils experiencing stress or emotional problems find it difficult to reach their potential. This is why the Department funds the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS). Pupils can</p>
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		<p>self-refer to the Counsellor within their school, who is there to provide a 'listening ear' and who works as an integral part of the schools pastoral care system.</p>
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Extra measures for pupils with hearing loss

<p>AQW 45527/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr Pat Ramsey (SDLP - Foyle)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education what extra support measures are being taken to address the lower educational attainment rates of those school pupils who suffer from hearing loss.</p> <p>The Education Authority (EA) provides a comprehensive level of support, tailored to the individual needs of each child, to help hearing impaired children across the ability range achieve their full potential. Support is available from diagnosis and on a continuing level throughout school, appropriate to the pupil's needs. Support can include whole school training and advisory support for relevant school staff with specific advice regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the pupil's hearing loss and the implications on learning; maintenance of hearing aids and associated equipment; management of the pupil within the classroom; strategies for developing the pupil's attention and listening skills; strategies for maximising linguistic opportunity; strategies for improving memory skills; strategies to assist the pupil access the curriculum; strategies to develop social skills and self-esteem. <p>Attainment is not, however, solely influenced by hearing loss but can also be attributed to a range of factors including age of diagnosis, use of prescribed amplification devices and the pupil's cognitive ability.</p> <p>The EA has advised that in addition to the wide range of measures provided to support young hearing impaired people from diagnosis to school leaving age, appropriate access arrangements at GCSE level may also be provided including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a modified examination paper and/or extra time; Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and examination officers
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		will be reminded of special access arrangements available to the pupil; a live speaker in an aural examination; a sub-titled version of a video/film.
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Role of School Age Mother's programme coordinator

<p>AQW 45515/11-15</p>	<p>Mr Peter Weir (DUP - North Down)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to outline the role in the North Eastern region of the coordinator for the School Age Mothers' programme.</p> <p>I understand , from the Interim Chief Executive of the Education Authority that the coordinator for the School Age Mothers' programme is responsible for the co-ordination and delivery of educational support for pupils who are pregnant or are a young parent, living in the North Eastern Region. This would include individual support, both at home and in-school for the pupil, group work, and multi-disciplinary and interagency support.</p> <p>The coordinator liaises with the pupil, family, school, and other services in regards to developing, implementing and monitoring an education support plan tailored to their individual needs.</p>
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iPad allocation to primary pupils

<p>AQW 45412/11-15</p>	<p>Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP - Fermanagh and South Tyrone)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education what criteria is used for iPad allocation to children in Primary Schools in County Tyrone.</p> <p>All grant-aided schools receive their core ICT provision through the C2k service. It is a matter for schools to determine how best to use that provision and if they wish to supplement it.</p> <p>The current C2k contract does not include the provision of iPads/tablets; however, if they wish to do so, schools may use their delegated budgets to purchase additional equipment, including iPads/tablets.</p>
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Benefits of extended schools programme

<p>AQW 45368/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr Fearghal McKinney (<i>SDLP - South Belfast</i>)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the benefits of the extended schools programme in improving levels of educational achievement for disadvantaged children and young people.</p> <p>I consider the Extended Schools programme as a key vehicle in helping to deliver on the Department's core objectives of raising standards and narrowing the achievement gap.</p> <p>Annual monitoring and evaluation of Extended School activities report that the programme is proving beneficial by helping to remove barriers to learning, so that children can achieve their full potential, and also increasing the value placed on education by parents and the wider community. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) have also been involved in ongoing evaluation of the Extended Schools programme and to date the feedback has been positive. In July 2010, ETI published a report '<i>An Evaluation of Extended Schools</i>' http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-post-primary/surveys-evaluations-post-primary-2010/an-evaluation-of-extended-schools-july-2010.pdf which indicated that '<i>In almost 90% of cases where Extended Schools are serving disadvantaged communities effectively (performance levels are good or better) significant improvements are evident in the educational outcomes and the personnel and social well-being of pupils</i>'. ETI also reported that "<i>in the examples of outstanding practice observed, Extended Schools is most successful in transforming the life chances of individual pupils.</i>'</p>
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Future of Youth Council for N Ireland

<p>AQW 45301/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr Peter Weir (<i>DUP - North Down</i>)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education what role the Education Authority will have in the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Public consultation on options for the future of the Youth Council (YCNI) is currently underway. Following the closure of this consultation on Friday 12 June, I will consider the responses received in order to assist me in making my decision on the way forward.</p>
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Early Years funding

<p>AQW 45221/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr George Robinson (DUP - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education whether he factored in the impact on areas of high social deprivation when withdrawing £1.7 million funding from Early Years projects.</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5bn over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services such as Education. I have taken every action possible to protect Education funding and those frontline services within the Department of Education's (DE) remit, however, it is simply impossible to protect everything. The reduction in funding for the Early Years Fund was subject to an equality screening exercise.</p> <p>The Early Years Fund was intended to help sustain certain early childhood services in areas of greatest need which were facing difficulties when Peace II funding ended. The DFP Review of the Early Years Fund (2013) found that the Fund, which is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children, has effectively remained as a “closed” Fund since introduced by DHSSPS in 2004. It is therefore not equitable to allow it to continue in its current form as only currently funded groups can apply to receive support.</p> <p>There are children equally deserving of support across the north who must also be allowed equal opportunity of access to support. It is essential that any funding is allocated in a fair and transparent manner to ensure that those who need it most can avail of it.</p> <p>I have committed to review my budget to establish if a Fund can continue beyond 31st August, however, it is important that any new funding will be open to all applicants, not just current recipients and be aligned to the priorities of DE. If funding becomes available, this will be a priority for my Department</p>
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Funding for local community playgroups

<p>AQW 45218/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr George Robinson (DUP - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to outline the rationale for endangering the survival of local community playgroups, such as Orchard Community Playgroup in Ballykelly, by withdrawing funding that could result in a loss of child playgroup places and employment. [Priority Written]</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5bn over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services provided by the Department of Education (DE). I have taken every action possible to protect Education funding and those frontline services within the DE remit. However, it is simply impossible to protect everything.</p> <p>I have endeavoured to minimise the impact as far as possible and so I have ensured that funding is available in 2015/16 to enable all 153 recipients of the Fund to receive continued support to the end of the current academic year (i.e. 31 August 2015).</p> <p>The Early Years Fund is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) on DE's behalf. The Fund has effectively remained as a "closed" Fund since introduced by DHSSPS in 2004, to applicant groups that were in areas of greatest need of support to become sustainable at that time, following the ending of Peace II funding. Undoubtedly, therefore, there are equally deserving children in the north that could benefit from such support.</p> <p>I will continue to review my budget to establish if a fund can continue. However any such fund will have to be open to all, not just current recipients and reflect the policy priorities of DE. If additional money becomes available this funding will be a priority for my Department.</p>
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Early Years Fund and Early Years provision

<p>AQW 45153/11- 15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) the conditions attached to his Department's Early Years Fund as established in 2004; and (ii) how long his Department have had sole responsibility for Early Years provision.</p> <p>The Early Years Fund is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) on DE's behalf. The Fund has effectively remained as a “closed” Fund since introduced by DHSSPS in 2004, to applicant groups that were in areas of greatest need of support to become sustainable at that time, following the ending of Peace II funding. The Fund was transferred to DE along with certain Early Years policies in 2006.</p> <p>The original aims of the Fund were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to help sustain certain early childhood services in areas of greatest need which were facing funding difficulties when Peace II funding ended, and to support a number of Capacity and Development posts aimed at enhancing quality and good governance within the early childhood sector. <p>Applicant groups were required to demonstrate that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide direct early years care and education to children. Provide a service in areas of low provision, disadvantaged areas or where the service is considered critical for children Ensure inclusion and diversity; and Ensure a standard of excellence in relation to quality. <p>DE does not have sole responsibility for early years work. Services for young children aged 0-6 and their families are funded, managed and delivered by a range of Departments.</p>
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Early Years Fund consultation

<p>AQW 45152/11- 15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to detail the due process and Departmental guidelines regarding consultation procedure; and why there was no separate consultation prior to the announcement of significant cuts to his Department's Early Years Fund.</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5bn over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services such as Education. I have taken every action possible to protect Education funding and those frontline services within the Department of Education's (DE) remit. However, it is simply impossible to protect everything.</p> <p>While there was no legislative requirement for public consultation on the draft Budget I was keen on hearing the views of stakeholders across the education sector with a view to building a consensus on mapping the way forward for education. My Department's 2015-16 Draft Budget consultation document was published and launched for public consultation on 26 November 2014 setting out my initial assessment of the impact of the Draft Budget 2015-16 for the Department of Education. Over 23,000 responses to the consultation were received, which provided me with a significant basis of evidence to inform my final 2015-16 Budget spending plans and help shape the final Budget outcome. In reaching final decisions on the 2015-16 Budget allocations, I:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused on protecting frontline services as far as possible, promoting equality and raising education standards; Secured the continuation of specific programmes that reflect the Department's statutory responsibilities; Continued to tackle social disadvantage; and Ensured that support for children with Special Education Needs is prioritised. <p>On the 13th January 2015 there was an assembly debate specifically on the Education budget. The majority of MLAs voted to protect school budgets as a priority. During this debate I pointed out that education</p>
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		<p>was much broader than the classroom.</p> <p>I have taken every action possible to protect Education funding and those frontline services within the DE remit, however, it is simply impossible to protect everything.</p> <p>I fully recognise the importance of Early Years education particularly for our most vulnerable children which is why, despite the difficult budgetary position, I have committed 11.4% of my 2015-16 Resource budget to Early Years' Provision to ensure that key services are protected as far as possible.</p>
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EIA for Early Years Fund

<p>AQW 45151/11- 15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education whether an equality impact assessment was carried out prior to the announcement of significant cuts to his Department's Early Years Fund.</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5bn over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services such as Education. I have taken every action possible to protect Education funding and those frontline services within the Department of Education's (DE) remit, however, it is simply impossible to protect everything.</p> <p>The Early Years Fund was intended to help sustain certain early childhood services in areas of greatest need which were facing difficulties when Peace II funding ended. The DFP Review of the Early Years Fund (2013) found that the Fund, which is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children, has effectively remained as a "closed" Fund since introduced by DHSSPS in 2004. It is therefore not equitable to allow it to continue in its current form as only currently funded groups can apply to receive support.</p> <p>The reduction in funding for the Early Years Fund was subject to an equality screening exercise, which was published on the Department's website.</p>
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Pre-school advisory groups discussions

<p>AQW 45133/11- 15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education what discussions his Department has had with pre-school advisory groups, since September 2014, to assess the need for maintaining and increasing pre-school provision.</p> <p>The Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAG) of each Region in the Education Authority (EA) are responsible for ensuring that there is adequate pre-school provision in local areas.</p> <p>The Department and the PEAGs maintain regular contact throughout the pre-school admissions process: this includes discussion of the PEAGs' annual assessment of need; regular reviews of progress as the process moves forward and consideration of how to address emerging pressures.</p> <p>In calculating projected need for places, the PEAGs plan on the basis of 92% of the birth rate of the relevant pre-school cohort which represents approximately the percentage of eligible children who apply. It is not possible to match demand for places exactly with supply for a range of reasons including the- non compulsory nature of pre-school education and variations in how parents express their preferences, for example to accommodate childcare arrangements.</p>
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Number of children who benefit from Early Years fund

<p>AQW 45132/11- 15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to detail the number of children who currently benefit from Early Years funded organisations in Northern Ireland. [Priority Written]</p> <p>The Early Years Fund is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) on DE's behalf. According to monitoring information supplied to DE by EYO in relation to 2014/15, 2559 children directly benefitted from the Fund.</p> <p>The Fund has effectively remained as a "closed" Fund since introduced</p>
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		<p>by DHSSPS in 2004, to applicant groups that were in areas of greatest need of support to become sustainable at that time, following the ending of Peace II funding. Undoubtedly, therefore, there are equally deserving children in the north that could benefit from such support.</p> <p>I will continue to review my budget to establish if a fund can continue. However any such fund will have to be open to all, not just current recipients and reflect the policy priorities of DE.</p>
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Responsibility for early years provision

<p>AQW 45064/11- 15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the fragmentation in responsibility for early years provision and childcare across Departments and arms-length bodies.</p> <p>The key issue for me is not necessarily the number of bodies with responsibility in this area, rather the way in which they work together for the benefit of children and young people.</p> <p>Within education, the creation of the Education Authority provides new opportunity to streamline our delivery of education provision for younger children and to work more closely with other departments and public bodies.</p> <p>Across departments, the Delivering Social Change framework is also providing a mechanism for effective cross-departmental working on early interventions including early years.</p> <p>In recognition of the benefits from aligning children’s services more closely with education, the Executive has also decided that, as part of the wider programme of restructuring of departments here, a new Department of Education will be established that will also have responsibility for certain children’s services. Work is ongoing to determine the children’s services that might transfer to the new Department of Education.</p>
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Impacts of cuts to Early Years fund

<p>AQW 45062/11- 15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education how he will ensure that all children and families have equal opportunity to benefit from the school readiness and social pedagogy approaches of early years groups, who are facing closure due to cuts to his Department's Early Years fund.</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5bn over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services such as Education. I have taken every action possible to protect Education funding and those frontline services within the Department of Education's (DE) remit, however, it is simply impossible to protect everything.</p> <p>The Early Years Fund was intended to help sustain certain early childhood services in areas of greatest need which were facing difficulties when Peace II funding ended. The DFP Review of the Early Years Fund (2013) found that the Fund, which is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children, has effectively remained as a “closed” Fund since introduced by DHSSPS in 2004. It is therefore not equitable to allow it to continue in its current form as only currently funded groups can apply to receive support.</p> <p>There are children equally deserving of support across the north who must also be allowed equal opportunity of access to support. It is essential that any funding is allocated in a fair and transparent manner to ensure that those who need it most can avail of it.</p> <p>I have committed to review my budget to establish if a Fund can continue beyond 31st August, however, it is important that any new funding will be open to all applicants, not just current recipients and be aligned to the priorities of DE. If funding becomes available, this will be a priority for my Department.</p> <p>Any new DE funding to support Early Years will be strategically aligned</p>
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		<p>to the Department’s “Learning to Learn” (a framework for Early Years Education and Learning). Alignment will ensure improved outcomes for young children and their families and ensure high quality early learning experiences which lay important foundations for future learning and development.</p> <p>I fully recognise the importance of Early Years education particularly for our most disadvantaged of children which is why, despite the difficult budgetary position, I have committed over £216m toward Early Years education for 2015/16 to ensure that key services are protected as far as possible.</p>
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Effects of Early Years funding cuts

<p>AQW 45061/11-15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the ripple effects of the cuts to his Department’s Early Years funding, in (i) allowing women to return to work and training; (ii) as a bridge to further funding to expand initial groups; (iii) in contributing to the social fabric of communities; and (iv) in providing early years education in isolated areas.</p> <p>The Early Years Fund is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children on DE’s behalf. It was introduced by DHSSPS in 2004, to support certain early childhood services in areas of greatest need to become sustainable at that time, following the ending of Peace II funding. It was transferred to DE in November 2006 along with other Early Years policies. The purpose of the funding has remained since transfer to DE.</p> <p>The DFP review of the Early Years Fund (2013) indicated that DE should reassess its purpose against current key strategic drivers such as the Programme for Government (PfG), the Department’s priorities, and the pressures that now exist across all Government funding. There are children equally deserving of support across the north who cannot benefit from the Fund in its current form and whose situation must also be considered. It is essential that any funding is allocated in a</p>
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		<p>fair and transparent manner to ensure that those who need it most can avail of it.</p> <p>Any new funding will be open to all applicants, not just current recipients and be strategically aligned to “Learning to Learn” (a framework for Early Years Education and Learning). Alignment will ensure improved outcomes for young children and their families. If funding becomes available, this will be a priority for my Department.</p> <p>I fully recognise the importance of Early Years education particularly for our most disadvantaged of children which is why, despite the difficult budgetary position, I have committed over £216m toward Early Years education for 2015/16 to ensure that key services are protected as far as possible.</p>
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Future service provision following cuts to Early Years Fund

<p>AQW 45060/11- 15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education, following cuts to his Department's Early Years fund, how he will ensure that groups will be able to sustain a high quality early years services to vulnerable children and families in areas of great need.</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5bn over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services such as Education. I have taken every action possible to protect Education funding and those frontline services within the Department of Education's (DE) remit, however, it is simply impossible to protect everything.</p> <p>The DFP Review of the Early Years Fund (2013) found that the Fund, which is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children, has effectively remained as a “closed” Fund since introduced by DHSSPS in 2004, to applicant groups that were in areas of greatest need of support to become sustainable at that time, following the ending of Peace II funding. It is therefore not equitable to allow it to continue in</p>
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		<p>its current form as only currently funded groups can apply to receive support.</p> <p>I fully recognise the importance of Early Years education particularly for our most disadvantaged of children which is why, despite the difficult budgetary position, I have committed over £216m toward Early Years education for 2015/16 to ensure that key services are protected as far as possible.</p> <p>I have committed to review my budget to establish if a Fund can continue beyond 31st August, however, it is important that any new funding will be open to all applicants, not just current recipients and be aligned to the priorities of DE. If funding becomes available, this will be a priority for my Department.</p> <p>Any new DE funding to support Early Years will be strategically aligned to the Department's "Learning to Learn" (a framework for Early Years Education and Learning). Alignment will ensure improved outcomes for young children and their families and DE will ensure that all funded Early Years services are subject to a thorough inspection process to maintain quality of provision.</p>
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Allocation of pre-school places

<p>AQW 45056/11- 15</p>	<p>Mr Jim Allister (TUV - North Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education what assessment he has made of his policy of prioritising pre-school places in favour of socially disadvantaged children denying such children and others not determined as socially disadvantaged the opportunity to mix and learn together, with resulting deficit to both.</p> <p>Priority is given to children from socially disadvantaged circumstances in the pre-school admissions process because research has shown that they experience more difficulty at school than other children: this is part of wider efforts to tackle educational underachievement.</p> <p>Prioritising children from socially disadvantaged circumstances does not deny</p>
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		<p>children the opportunity to mix in a pre- school setting. For 2014/15 pre- school admissions, approximately 25% of children were given priority on this criterion.</p> <p>The Pre-school Education Programme provides a rich variety of challenging play activities and other experiences in a stimulating environment for children from all social and community backgrounds.</p> <p>Learning to Learn – a Framework for Early Years Education and Learning includes an action to implement remaining actions from the Review of Pre- School admissions including one to examine the definition of socially disadvantaged circumstances with a view to reflecting changes to the benefits system especially relating to low paid working parents. Proposals for the way forward will be informed by any changes resulting from Welfare Reform.</p>
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Department of Education budget cuts

<p>AQW 45003/11-15</p>	<p>Mr Jim Allister (TUV - North Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education what is the scale of cuts, in both actual and percentage terms, being implemented in his Department's budget in 2015/16, specifying the level of cut in each programme.</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5bn over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services such as Education. I have taken every action possible to protect Education funding and those frontline services within the Department of Education's remit. However, it is simply impossible to protect everything.</p> <p>Details of the information you have requested regarding cuts to my Department's budget are contained within my 2015-16 Savings Delivery Plan which has been published on my Department's website at www.deni.gov.uk and can be found via the link below: http://www.deni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_final_budget_2015-16_savings_delivery_plan.pdf</p>
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Timeline for changes to the Youth Council

<p>AQW 44948/11-15</p>	<p>Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP - Strangford)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to outline the anticipated timetable for change to the Youth Council following the conclusion of the current consultation.</p> <p>Following the conclusion of the current consultation on proposals for the future of the Youth Council on 12 June, I will consider the responses received to inform the final decision on the future of the Youth Council. Any change in approach would require primary legislation to repeal the Youth Service (NI) Order which would be subject to the legislative process within the Assembly.</p>
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Update on publication of guidance on flexibility in school starting age

<p>AQW 44944/11-15</p>	<p>Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP - Strangford)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education when he will publish guidance on flexibility in the school starting age.</p> <p>I have asked for the Education Authority (EA) to bring forward guidance on this issue. My officials have not yet agreed timescales with the EA but will do so as soon as practicable.</p>
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Impact of cuts on early years specialists

<p>AQW 44939/11-15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of how cuts to the Early Years Fund will impact on Early Years Specialists; and to detail the number of Early Years Specialist positions which will be threatened.</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5bn over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services provided by the Department of Education (DE). I have taken every action possible to protect Education funding and those frontline services within the DE remit. However, it is simply impossible to protect everything.</p>
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My Department's 2015-16 budget consultation process invited all stakeholders within the Education sector to express their views on the 2015-16 Budget for Education. Over 23,000 responses to the consultation were received, which provided me with a significant basis of evidence to inform my final 2015-16 Budget spending plans. At Final Budget stage my Department was facing a £97.6m 2015-16 funding gap and to mitigate the risk that insufficient savings would be realised, additional savings were identified which included the £2m budget reduction to the Early Years Fund (EYF). At this stage it was not possible to engage further with stakeholders.

I have endeavoured to minimise the impact of the reductions as far as possible and so I have ensured that funding is available in 2015/16 to enable all 153 recipients of the EYF to receive continued support to the end of the current academic year (i.e. 31 August 2015).

The EYF includes a contribution to Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) towards their Early Years Specialist (EYS) team. This contribution is also extended to August 2015.

Specialist Early Years support can be provided by a qualified teacher with specific experience or a suitably qualified and experienced specialist in Early Years provision. EYSs may be self employed and work independently, or be employed by an organisation, or the group in which they provide support. EYSs are not required to register therefore there is no central list containing either the total number of those persons providing such support or within particular areas in the north. In 2014/15 EYO received £235,000 as a contribution towards the EYS programme which they offer to the pre-school sector. EYO is the only organisation which receives support from the EYF for EYS support. Undoubtedly, however (as with the main Fund allocations) there are groups which are equally as deserving of financial support for EYS provision across the north.

Although the contribution towards the EYS programme in EYO from the Fund may not be available after August, it should be noted that pre-

		<p>school groups are free, as has always been the case, to choose from where they source their EYS support, or fulfil the function themselves, if they have suitably qualified staff to do so.</p> <p>Voluntary and private settings providing funded places within the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) are required to have support (at least five hours per month) from an EYS.</p> <p>I have allocated sufficient funding to the Education Authority to meet the projected need for pre-school places for children in their final pre-school year. The cost of employing the EYS is included within the PSEP funding, currently £1801 per child per year.</p> <p>I fully recognise the importance of Early Years education particularly for our most disadvantaged of children which is why, despite the difficult budgetary position, I have committed over £216m toward Early Years education for 2015/16 to ensure that key services are protected as far as possible.</p> <p>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, not just current recipients and reflect the policy priorities of DE. If additional money becomes available, this funding will be a priority for my Department.</p>
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Consultation with stakeholders before announcement of Early Years Fund cuts

<p>AQW 44937/11-15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 44266/11-15, to detail all relevant stakeholders who were consulted, specifically in regards to cuts to the Early Years Fund, prior to his Department's announcement.</p> <p>The Executive's Budget has been reduced by the Westminster Government by £1.5bn over the last five years. As a direct result of this reduction there is significantly reduced money to spend on frontline services such as Education. I have taken every action possible to</p>
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protect Education funding and those frontline services within the Department of Education's (DE) remit, however, it is simply impossible to protect everything.

As mentioned previously, my Department's 2015-16 budget consultation process invited all stakeholders within the Education sector to express their views on the 2015-16 Budget for Education. Over 23,000 responses to the consultation were received, which provided me with a significant basis of evidence to inform my final 2015-16 Budget spending plans.

At Final Budget stage my Department was facing a £97.6m 2015-16 funding gap and to mitigate the risk that insufficient savings would be realised, additional savings were identified which included the £2m budget reduction to the Early Years Fund.

The DFP Review of the Fund (2013) found that the Early Years Fund, which is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children, has effectively remained as a “closed” Fund since introduced by DHSSPS in 2004, to applicant groups that were in areas of greatest need of support to become sustainable at that time, following the ending of Peace II funding. It is therefore not equitable to allow it to continue in its current form as there undoubtedly are other children equally deserving of support across the north.

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, not just current recipients and reflect the policy priorities of DE. If additional money becomes available, this funding will be a priority for my Department.

Looked after children staffing and funding

<p>AQW 44934/11- 15</p>	<p>Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP - Strangford)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to list the current staffing teams in each Education Authority Region for Looked After Children, including associated costs; and to detail how these teams will be funded in 2015/16.</p> <p>The Interim Chief Executive of the Education Authority has provided the following information in relation to staffing teams for Looked After Children (LAC) in each region.</p> <p>Belfast Region Number Cost (£) LAC Education Welfare Officer 2 LAC Youth Worker 1 LAC Support Teacher 1 LAC Education Project Worker 1 (fully funded by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)) 127,512</p> <p>South Eastern Region Number Cost (£) Senior Education Welfare Officer 1 Education Welfare Officer 1 Clerical Officer 1 LAC Support Teacher 1 LAC Support Teacher 1 (fully funded South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT)) 134,000</p> <p>Southern Region Number Cost (£) Adviser 1 (proportion of salary contribution) Senior Teacher ETA 1 (additional points) Assistant Advisory Officers 3 (proportion of salary contribution) Teachers ETA 2 (proportion of salary contribution) Youth Worker 1 (part-time proportion of costs) Substitute Teacher Costs Senior Clerical Officer 1 (proportion of salary contribution) 269,161</p> <p>North Eastern Region Number Cost (£) Senior Education Welfare Officer 1 Education Welfare Officers 3 (full-time)</p>
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		<p>Education Welfare Officers² (part-time) Education Psychologist¹ day per week 259,000 Western Region NumberCost (£) Adviser 1 (proportion of salary contribution) 1 Assistant Advisory Officer 1 (proportion of salary contribution) 2 Education Support Workers (part time) 2 Youth Worker (part time)¹ 1 Clerical Support(2.5days) 1 £232,784</p> <p>My Department has provided £380k earmarked funding to the Education Authority towards Looked after Children Teams in the current financial year. The decision on how support for Looked After Children will be delivered and funded in each Region rests with the Interim Chief Executive of the Education Authority. I understand that the detail of this is not yet finalised.</p>
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Clinicians trained to diagnose autism in each Health Trust area

<p>AQW 45464/11-15</p>	<p>Mr Jim Allister (TUV - North Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many clinicians are trained to diagnose autism in each Health Trust and Social Care Trust; and whether this is sufficient to meet demand.</p> <p>The number of clinicians trained to diagnose autism in each Health and Social Care Trust is detailed in the table below. These posts cover both Diagnosis and Intervention Services.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="555 1601 1396 2011"> <thead> <tr> <th>TRUST</th> <th>NO OF TRAINED CLINICIANS (WTE)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Belfast</td> <td>11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Northern</td> <td>11</td> </tr> <tr> <td>South Eastern</td> <td>9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	TRUST	NO OF TRAINED CLINICIANS (WTE)	Belfast	11	Northern	11	South Eastern	9
TRUST	NO OF TRAINED CLINICIANS (WTE)									
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		<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Southern</td> <td>23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Western</td> <td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TOTAL</td> <td>68</td> </tr> </table> <p>Childrens ASD Services (HSC Board)</p> <p>The current number of clinicians trained to diagnose autism is not sufficient to meet overall demand. Given the significant increase in demand, additional Clinical Staff would be required to provide assessments or follow on care in line with the 13 week standard. However, given the current financial constraints no further investment has been identified to meet this need at present.</p>	Southern	23	Western	14	TOTAL	68
Southern	23							
Western	14							
TOTAL	68							

Meeting diagnosis of autism assessment targets

AQW 45463/11-15	<p>Mr Jim Allister (TUV - North Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how often the target of a maximum thirteen week wait from receipt of diagnosis of autism from the first assessment has not been met in the last twelve months.</p> <p>In line with ministerial standards, the Health and Social Care Board monitor waiting times for the commencement of assessments for autism and the commencement of intervention post diagnosis. These figures are collected at the end of each month.</p> <p>It is assumed that this question refers to those waiting more than thirteen weeks for intervention following a diagnosis of autism. Adding the month end figures together could lead to double counting; therefore it is not possible to provide the requested figure.</p> <p>Figures at 31 March 2015 show that 170 children had been waiting longer than 13 weeks for intervention following a diagnosis of autism. This figure has been supplied by the HSC Board and has not been validated by the Department.</p>
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Update on volunteering strategy

<p>AQW 45547/11-15</p>	<p>Ms Claire Sugden (IND - East Londonderry)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Social Development when the independent interim evaluation of his Department's five year volunteering strategy will be published.</p> <p>The evaluation of the Volunteering Strategy is currently underway and it is anticipated that the final report will be published in early summer.</p>
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