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Office of the First and Deputy First Minister

Together: Building a United Community

Mr Danny Kinahan (UUP - South Antrim) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail their plans for

- (i) continuing the legacy of the Primary Integrating/Enriching Education programme along with other shared education projects; and
- (ii) using the project as a pilot to encourage further shared education, as part of their responsibilities under Together: Building a United Community.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education has the lead on delivering the Programme for Government commitments in relation to advancing shared education. We understand that you tabled a similar question to the Minister of Education and he provided a substantive response. AQW 30105/11-15 refers. **(1st September)**

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Together: Building a United Community

Mr Chris Lyttle (ALL - East Belfast) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is a Urban Village under the terms of the Together: Building a United Community; and to detail how it will facilitate meaningful contact and integration for people from a diverse background.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: An Urban Village under the terms of the Together: Building a United Community will be a designated development zone. A local project board will be created and tasked with coordinating and overseeing the planning and design of the urban village. The board will be given the ability to enable large scale urban village development in a coordinated and needs based way. Each urban village will have a community focus. The aim is to produce an agreed design and model for development that is deliverable, sustainable and makes a contribution to the wider social, economic and physical regeneration of the area. The proposals will prioritise community focus to stabilise and create positive change within the community by creating and sustaining increased community social capital therefore leading to an increase in intra and inter-community stability and meaningful and robust improvement in community relations. **(4th September)**

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Good Relations Funding

Mr Chris Lyttle (ALL – East Belfast) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will announce the allocation of the Good Relations Funding, given the need for urgency to adequately resource vital scheduled summer interventions.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There has been significant demand for 2014/15 Central Good Relations Funding. Funding will be released in phases and to date some £1m of funding has been approved and allocated to priority projects.

Our commitment to the delivery of Together: Building a United Community is clearly demonstrated through the decision to increase the allocation to the Central Good Relations Fund by £300,000 from the June monitoring round. Successful applicants in this tranche will be contacted as soon as possible.

It should be noted that the Central Good Relations fund is a small central scheme designed to distribute funding in year. We primarily fund good relations work through the Community Relations Council and all District Councils. The fund does not and will not replace mainstream core or project funding.

Belfast City Council and the Education and Library Boards undertook 125 scheduled summer interventions throughout July and August which were funded by OFMDFM.
(16th September 2014)

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Equality and Good Relations Commission

Mr Mike Nesbitt (UUP – Strangford) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail their vision of the relationship with the new Equality and Good Relations Commission.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our vision of the relationship with the new Equality and Good Relations Commission is detailed in the Together: Building a United Community strategy published in May 2013. **(16th September)**

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Shared Education

Mr Chris Lyttle (ALL – East Belfast) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their definition of a shared education campus; and what is the target date for the delivery of the Together: Building a United Community objective of ten shared education campuses.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education has the lead on delivering the Programme for Government commitments in relation to advancing shared education. We understand that you tabled a similar question to the Minister of Education and he provided a substantive response. AQW 31237/11-15 refers. **(16th September)**

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Delivering Social Change

Mr Alex Maskey (Sinn Féin – South Belfast) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Delivering Social Change Signature Project to provide greater support and advocacy for people with disabilities, their families and carers.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our Department is working hard to deliver on our commitment in the Executive's Disability Strategy to lead on Disability Awareness and Advocacy and to deliver on the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Through the Delivering Social Change Framework we are continuing to work with other departments and key stakeholders to identify and create awareness of the range of advocacy services available to ensure that people with disabilities are given the appropriate help and support to exercise the maximum choice, control and freedom in their daily lives. We will form a Disability Awareness and Advocacy Focus Group which will bring together government officials, key stakeholders from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors and individuals with disabilities to discuss how we can work together to provide a greater awareness of advocacy support for people with disabilities, their families and carers.

We intend to sponsor a major international conference on the rights of deaf people to equality in mental health care and have also sponsored a Symposium on capacity building, advocacy and the rights of people with disabilities to make decisions in all aspects of their lives.

Junior Ministers hosted a major conference for service providers and representatives from the disability sector to discuss how current arrangements meet the needs of people with disabilities.

We are also working to roll out a school resource pack which has been developed to teach children and young people about the rights of people with disabilities. **(17th September)**

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Historical Abuse Inquiry

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the omission from the Historical Abuse Inquiry of both clerical abuse victims and women aged 18 and over in Magdalene Laundries and equivalent institutions, what action they have taken in response to the recommendations in July 2013 of the UN Committee for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In light of the publication of the McAleese report into Magdalene Laundries in the Republic of Ireland last year and the representations made to us, we appointed a senior civil servant to prepare a scoping paper on the Magdalene Laundry type institutions that operated locally to inform us of the potential actions we might be able to take.

We have received the report and are currently giving serious consideration to the options that have been laid out before deciding the way forward.

Under the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA), any woman who entered a Laundry before she was 18 could have contributed to the Inquiry, including recounting their childhood experiences to the Inquiry's Acknowledgement Forum and having those experiences acknowledged.

The HIA Inquiry was initiated in the 2009 Assembly debate about historical institutional abuse of children. The definition of an institution for the purposes of the Inquiry formed an important aspect of consultation with victims and other key stakeholders. Setting the parameters in this way does not in any way undermine the trauma that has undoubtedly been inflicted on many other individuals as a result of abuse in domestic and other settings. The categories covered by the HIA Inquiry were selected because of the very particular vulnerable nature of this type of residential care.

The issue of clerical abuse is therefore no less important or emotive than institutional abuse and we are mindful of the equally destructive impact it has had on many individuals.

Anyone whose experiences fall outside the scope of the Inquiry is encouraged to report this to the PSNI and Social Services for investigation. Where appropriate, the alleged perpetrators can then be brought before the courts. This is the primary means by which victims and survivors can seek justice for what happened to them. The Inquiry is intended to investigate systemic failings regarding the provision of care for children living in institutions, as defined in its terms of reference. It is not intended to replace the PSNI or the courts in investigating criminal activity. **(19th September)**

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Department of Education

School Transport

Mrs Judith Cochrane (ALL - East Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to the Private Member's Motion on 4 February 2013 on school transport and AQW 23442/11-15, for an update on the feasibility study into providing free public transport for all school pupils which was to form a component of his Department's wider Review of Home to School Transport Policy.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): In December of 2013 I commissioned an Independent Review of School Transport led by transport expert Dr Sian Thornthwaite. The Terms of Reference for the Independent Panel included, "consideration of the feasibility of providing free (public) transport for all school pupils". The Panel presented its final report to me on 28th August. It contains a considerable number of proposals for change which I now intend to consider before making decisions on the way forward. I will publish the report in due course. **(5th September)**

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Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Ms Claire Sugden (Independent East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to ensure that eleven to eighteen year olds are made aware of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): All grant-aided schools must have a drugs education policy in place.

Through the statutory curriculum, opportunities are provided for children and young people to develop the knowledge and skills to deal with issues such as drug and alcohol abuse. At primary school this is provided through the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding Area of Learning and, at post-primary school, through the Learning for Life and Work Area of Learning. As with all aspects of the curriculum the specifics of what is taught and how it is taught is a matter for each teacher/school.

While the decision on resources to be used for delivery of the curriculum is a matter for each teacher/school, the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in partnership with the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) have made available curriculum resources for primary and post primary schools to support the delivery of the Personal Development Curriculum through a life skills based approach. The current resource for primary schools “Living Learning Together” and post primary schools “Insync” allow for the delivery of universal drug prevention education.

The Department also provides schools with guidance in relation to drugs. CCEA has been commissioned to review and update current guidance. It is intended that this work will be completed during 2014/15.

Funding which is allocated by my Department to the ELBs and the Youth Council for youth provision may be used, as part of an overall youth development programme, to support drugs and alcohol awareness sessions for young people where these are deemed appropriate. In addition, the Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS), which is directly funded by the Department, provides professional counselling to children and young people at vulnerable times in their lives, including those experiencing difficulties as the result of drug and alcohol abuse. It is available to all post-primary schools. In addition, information for pupils developed through the i-Matter programme is issued to all post primary schools and includes information on ‘drugs, alcohol and smoking’ and details or sources of further information and help. **(10th September)**

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Lisanelly Shared Education Campus

Mr Barry McElduff (Sinn Féin West Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education how his Department consults with the local community, including the voluntary sector and youth representatives, regarding the development of the Lisanelly Shared Education campus.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): From the outset my Department has been acutely aware of the need to engage with the local community and in particular with the young people of the area. To date, three full public consultation exercises have been held and there has been on-going engagement with young people through the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) youth service.

Additionally, my officials are currently setting up a formal Community Stakeholder Group which will explore and advise on opportunities for maximising local economic and social benefits from the delivery of this major construction programme.

The Group will also play a central role in developing a structured programme of communication and engagement with a wide range of community representatives, including those from the voluntary sector, on matters relating to the campus development. The Programme Team will also continue to engage with young people through the WELB Youth Service and the schools themselves. **(10th September)**

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Special Education Needs

Mr Danny Kinahan (UUP South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the average length of time taken in each Education and Library Board from the application to publication, of a statement, or re-statement, of special educational needs being provided to parents or guardians, in each of the past five years.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Education and Library Boards have advised that the average length of time taken from a request for a statutory assessment of special educational needs (SEN) to the issue of a final statement or restatement of SEN in each of the last five academic years, rounded to the nearest week, excluding permitted exceptions, is as follows:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
BELB	22	22	22	21	25
NEELB	20	20	19	20	22
SEELB	25	22	23	25	24
SELB	22	21	20	22	21
WELB	24	21	21	23	20

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Special Education Needs

Mr Danny Kinahan (UUP South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education how many children in each Education and Library Board have been

- (i) provided with a statement of special educational needs; and
- (ii) formally reassessed and provided with a new statement, in each of the last five years.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of children who have been provided with a statement of special educational needs in each of the last five academic years is as follows:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
BELB	405	399	410	378	544
NEELB	341	353	420	402	410
SEELB	425	424	331	499	487
SELB	319	326	393	449	465
WELB	286	268	373	357	455

In line with paragraphs 6.30 – 6.32 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, the number of children who have been formally reassessed and provided with a new statement, during the same period, is as follows:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
BELB	0	0	0	1	0
NEELB	0	1	0	2	1
SEELB	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SELB	0	0	0	0	1
WELB	1	0	1	2	3

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Shared School Campuses

Mr Danny Kinahan (UUP South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education what schools his Department or the Education and Library Boards are in communication with regarding shared school campuses.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department, the Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools are in communication with the schools from each of the three successful proposals; Moy Primary School, St John's Primary School, Moy, Limavady High School, St Mary's High School, Limavady, Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College.

All unsuccessful proposals have been provided with feedback against each of the published criteria used to assess their application and were advised that Departmental officials are available to discuss the feedback with representatives of the schools involved in the proposal along with the relevant managing authorities.

The respective Managing Authorities and my officials are currently in communication with the following schools:

- Belfast Royal Academy
- St Malachy's College, Belfast
- Carr's Glen Primary School, Belfast
- St Vincent de Paul Primary School
- Duneane Primary School
- Moneynick Primary School
- Cookstown Primary School
- Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown
- Newtownhamilton High School
- St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
- Royal School Armagh
- St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh
- St Catherine's College, Armagh
- Brookeborough Primary School
- St Mary's Primary School, Brookeborough

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Mental Capacity Bill

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education what input his Department has had into the preparation of the Mental Capacity Bill.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): At key stages in the progressing of a draft mental capacity Bill, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety sought comments from all departments, including from the Department of Education. No specific matters were raised by my Department in connection with the development of the draft Bill. I would also refer the questioner to the answer provided by Minister Poots in his response to AQW 35326/11-15 on the same matter. **(16th September)**

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Literacy

Ms Claire Sugden (Independent – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to ensure that all children, regardless of background, achieve a good standard of literacy by eleven.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): My priorities for education are focused on raising standards and tackling the impact of disadvantage. My policies reflect these priorities. Count, Read: Succeed, the literacy and numeracy strategy, aims to raise attainment levels in both literacy and numeracy and narrow the gap in educational outcomes. The strategy sets out the central role of teachers, supported by parents and school leaders, in their work to raise standards.

We are moving in the right direction. In the PIRLS and TIMSS studies published in December 2012 we were the highest ranking English speaking region in the world in both reading and numeracy - 5th out of 45 countries surveyed in reading and 6th out of 50 countries surveyed in mathematics.

The Learning to Learn framework sets early year’s education and learning services within my overall approach, where the importance of delivering high quality education services for children before and in the first years of compulsory education is recognised. Evidence shows that early years education provision makes a distinctive contribution to helping achieve the wider aims of improving attainment and reducing underachievement, especially in literacy and numeracy. However, we still have too many young people who are not at their expected level in literacy at the end of their primary schooling and schools require additional support to address this underachievement particularly amongst socially disadvantaged pupils. I am therefore continuing to provide funding for a range of additional interventions which focus on those factors which international evidence and best practice tells us will improve outcomes.

These include the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Literacy Project run by Stranmillis and St Mary’s University Colleges. This offers continuing professional development for teachers to develop their capacity to teach reading, spelling and independent writing skills to children of primary age with special educational needs.

The Delivering Social Change programme to improve literacy and numeracy is providing an additional teaching resource to 151 primary schools, a community education initiatives programme across all sectors which aims to foster links between schools and their local

communities and a Literacy and Numeracy CPD for teachers of English and maths at Key Stages 2 and 3 focusing on high quality teaching and transition from primary to post primary.

The Education Works advertising campaign is aimed at informing and reminding parents of the importance and value of becoming more involved in their child's education for example by reading with their children.

Save the Children's recently published report 'Read on. Get on' sets a target of all children reading well at the age of 11 by 2025, and it is interesting to note that the key areas for action are already part of my strategic approach to raising literacy standards.

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Bus Service: Kilcoo

Mr Jim Wells (DUP – South Down) - To ask the Minister of Education why the South Eastern Educational Library Board will not provide a bus to take children who live in the Kilcoo area to Drumadonnell Primary School.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) inform me that eligible SEELB pupils residing in Kilcoo that attend Drumadonnell Primary School have historically been accommodated on a Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) bus. However, as this bus is operating at capacity with SELB pupils this year, the SELB were no longer able to accommodate SEELB pupils. The SEELB have now made alternative arrangements for the 6 eligible pupils referred to in this response to be transported to and from Drumadonnell Primary School in a contract vehicle. **(16th September)**

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Special Educational Needs

Mr Joe Byrne (SDLP – West Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education how he will ensure that the new Special Education Needs and Inclusion Bill statementing process will meet the needs of each individual child.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): I hope shortly to bring a draft special education Bill to the Executive for consideration. I am committed to working with colleagues in order to achieve the introduction of the Bill to the Assembly, where it can be progressed and debated. I firmly believe that the Bill, the associated regulations and a revised statutory code of practice, will bring forward a rounded and considered package of proposals to improve the management, by both schools and education and library boards, of children’s special educational needs.

Specifically, the draft Bill would retain a statutory framework based on the special educational needs of the individual child. My proposals do not dilute or remove the current statutory basis for statements. Importantly, the Bill would reduce the statutory timeframe for education and library boards to complete a statement from 26 to 20 weeks, subject to the existing statutory exceptions, in order to provide earlier assessment and intervention. It is proposed that a statement would be set out in the form of a coordinated support plan, which would ensure a more focused approach on progress and outcomes for the child and input from both children and parents.

The draft Bill would also propose to strengthen the statutory duties on Boards of Governors of grant-aided schools to prepare and keep under review a personal learning plan for each SEN pupil, including those with statements. This would focus schools on the child’s progress, the outcomes to be achieved and the regular review of their needs.

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Welfare Reform: UNCRC

Mr George Robinson (DUP – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education what cuts will be made to his budget as a result of the lack of agreement on Welfare Reform.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): I negotiated strongly to seek to protect education from budget cuts in line with the protection afforded to health. I welcome the decision by the Executive, as part of June Monitoring, in agreeing to the proposals.

The future success of our economy and of society in general depends on there being a high quality education service that can compete with the best internationally. Equally, all of our young people have the right to a quality education that enables them to reach their full potential, a right enshrined not only in our own legislation but in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Following the outcome of Budget 2011-15 it was clear that I would need to make over £300m of savings across the budget period, to simply balance my budget. Whilst I sought to protect frontline services, it was necessary to initiate a series of strategic cost reductions exercises, which have resulted in over 2,900 school and 450 non-school based redundancies.

Although considerable efforts have been made to reduce the pressures on the education budget, the financial outlook continues to be very challenging and I believe I can and have, demonstrated commitment to prudent budget management, while maximising the use of resources available to me. **(17th September)**

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Department of Employment and Learning

Budget Cuts

Mr Robin Swann (UUP - North Antrim) - To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the proposed steps his Department will take to meet any reduction in its budget.

Dr Farry: My Department is urgently examining the implications of decisions taken by the Executive to reduce the Department's budget and what this will mean for all our spending programmes, including the Department's Arm's Length Bodies. Cuts of this magnitude will inevitably impact on the Department's ability to deliver its skills and employment agenda, supporting individuals, employers and the economy generally. Once decisions have been taken, I will be advising stakeholders. **(9th September)**

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Special Educational Needs

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning what assurances he can give that funding for students with special needs or learning disabilities will be ring-fenced from current spending cuts.

Dr Farry: At this stage, the full extent of any potential budgetary reduction facing my Department in 2015/16 remains uncertain. Cuts have already been imposed in-year. Unfortunately, I cannot give an assurance that any funding, even for those with special needs or learning disabilities, will be exempt from the resulting financial pressures. However, while my Department will continue to prioritise the need to ensure that these students are appropriately supported and resourced, the scale of the potential cuts means that even core services are likely to be affected.

Widening participation is a key priority for my Department and I remain wholly committed to the widening participation agenda. **(16th September)**

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Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Welfare Reform

Mr George Robinson (DUP – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what cuts will be made to his budget as a result of the lack of agreement on Welfare Reform.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wrote to the Executive and Health Committee on 28 August to outline the financial position facing my Department in 2014/15 and my significant concerns about it. Following the outcome of the June Monitoring Round and in the absence of additional funding being provided to my Department, I also outlined a range of options available to the Executive to address a financial gap of at least £140m.

Given the serious and detrimental impact that these options would have on patients and clients, I do not support their implementation. The failure to agree Welfare Reform is unforgivable, as the financial penalties being imposed by Treasury would be better directed at meeting the real and pressing health and social care needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our society. **(15th September)**

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Mental Capacity Bill

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the collaboration between his Department and the Department of Education in preparing the Mental Capacity Bill.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Comments have been sought from all Departments, including the Department of Education, at key stages of the development of the draft Mental Capacity Bill. Most recently, the draft Bill was circulated to all Departments prior to being published for consultation in May this year. Further engagement will take place as the draft Bill is finalised for introduction into the Assembly following the outcomes of the consultation, and throughout the remaining stages of the legislative process.

My Department will also be working closely with other Departments with a role to play in planning for the implementation of the Bill. This will include the development of a Code of Practice and subordinate legislation. **(17th September)**

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Mental Capacity Bill

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what work has been done to ensure that the relevant recommendations from the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability are reflected in the Mental Capacity Bill.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Following the decision taken in 2009 to develop the comprehensive legislative framework recommended by the Bamford Review, the Department put in place an inclusive project management structure, involving many of the stakeholders previously involved in the Bamford Review, including the Chair of that Review.

Detailed policy papers were presented, revised and agreed within that structure over a number of years and it is this inclusive approach which has informed the content of the draft Mental Capacity Bill, recently the subject of a full public consultation which ended on 2 September. My officials are currently analysing the responses to that consultation and an outcomes report will be published later this year. **(17th September)**

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Downs Syndrome

Paul Girvan (DUP – South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what level of service should be provided for young children with Down Syndrome.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Children Order (NI) 1995 creates a duty to provide services to disabled children and to give them the opportunity to lead lives which are as normal as possible. A range of services to fulfil to this duty are provided on the basis of assessment of need. A person centred approach is taken, which may involve a range of disciplines.

Down Syndrome, while recognised as primarily a learning disability, may also reflect a number of other diagnoses associated with the condition which may be more significant in terms of impact such as: visual; hearing; or cardiac defects. Services may be provided from a range of disciplines, for example, paediatrics, speech and language, occupational therapy and family support. Many of these services work in conjunction with other services such as Early Years provision, Pre-school Education, Education and Library Board provision, and Community or Voluntary services.

Information on disability services and services accessible to families who have a child with disability can be found on the Family Support NI website. **(18th September)**

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Autism: In-patients

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given to providing residential or inpatient care to young people with autism who are prone to violent episodes and are not manageable in the home environment.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The There are currently two specialist residential units in Northern Ireland, the Iveagh Centre which focuses on the needs of children with Learning Disability, who display challenging behaviour, and the regional in-patient unit at Beechcroft, which supports children and young people with a range of mental illnesses and emotional health and well-being needs.

Children with autism and their families can access support provided by the Trusts through the disability services, and/or community and voluntary sector providers.

The focus of all intervention in relation to children, including children with autism, is supporting children within their families. Central to any intervention is the requirement to provide a person centred and effective assessment of need. **(18th September)**

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Autism: In-patients

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in the absence of residential or inpatient care for people with autism who are prone to violent episodes, what options are available to families who cannot manage their child's aggression in the home.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): There are currently two specialist residential units in Northern Ireland, the Iveagh Centre which focuses on the needs of children with Learning Disability, who display challenging behaviour, and the regional in-patient unit at Beechcroft, which supports children and young people with a range of mental illnesses and emotional health and well-being needs. Children with autism and their families can access support provided by the Trusts through the disability services, and/or community and voluntary sector providers.

The focus of all intervention in relation to children, including children with autism, is supporting children within their families. Central to any intervention is the requirement to provide a person centred and effective assessment of need. **(18th September)**

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Speech and Language Therapy

Mr Paul Girvan (DUP – South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the provision for Speech and Language Therapy, including Makaton Signing, within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust; and the age groups covered by this provision.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):

Annex A

Speech and Language Therapy Provision– Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) are the lead experts regarding communication and swallowing disorders. They lead on the assessment, differential diagnosis, intervention with and management of individuals with communication and/or swallowing disorders. SLTs aim to help each individual achieve their optimum level of communication. They work closely with families/carers and other professionals. SLTs have a leading role in training others to support people with communication difficulties and in developing environments which support good communication.

The Role of the SLT

The SLT works with children and adults who have communication and/or eating or drinking difficulties. This includes: -

- Spending time talking to families and carers to find out the specific communication needs of their family member and the impact of the communication difficulty on everyday life.
- Assessing the individual's communication ability. This assessment may occur in a variety of settings, for example, at home, clinic or school.
- Deciding if therapy/support is appropriate at this time and discussing these decisions with the individual and his/her family.
- Where therapy/support is appropriate, working jointly with the individual and where appropriate, family and carers to devise agreed goals and discussing who is best to deliver this support.
- Working with other professionals and members of the multidisciplinary team involved in an individual's care.
- Introducing other modes of communication, for example, the use of objects, pictures and signing, communication aids, if appropriate.
- Providing family and carers with the skills they need to support the family member's communication.
- Evaluating the outcome of the intervention programme to determine if speech and language therapy has made a difference and if further therapy is required.

Speech and Language Therapy support may include: -

- Advice and information.
- Training for family/carers.
- Group therapy.
- Individual therapy.
- Home/school programmes supporting the individual.
- Training of other professionals.

For children and adults experiencing difficulties with eating, drinking or feeding (dysphagia) the SLT will support them by: -

- Carrying out a detailed assessment of his/her eating, drinking and swallowing skills at home and where appropriate other settings, e.g. school/nursing home.
- Offering guidance to ensure safe eating and drinking, using appropriate strategies that promote safe and adequate nutritional support.
- Working with other members of the multidisciplinary team involved.

Who do SLTs support?

SLTs work with: -

- Babies with feeding and swallowing difficulties

Children with: -

- Mild, moderate and severe learning difficulties.
- Physical difficulties.
- Language delay.
- Specific language impairment.
- Specific difficulties in producing sounds.
- Hearing impairment.
- Cleft palate.
- Stammering.
- Autism.
- Voice disorders.

Adults with: -

- Communication or eating and swallowing disorders following neurological impairments and degenerative conditions including stroke, head injury and Parkinson's Disease.
- Head, neck or throat cancer.
- Voice problems.
- Learning difficulties.
- Stammering.

Where do SLTs work?

Speech and Language Therapy Services are provided in: -

- Community clinics.
- Hospital wards.
- Outpatient departments.
- Special schools and units.
- Adult centres.
- Nursing and residential homes.
- Day centres.
- Child development centres.
- Sure Start Schemes and Larne Parental Project.
- Community Rehabilitation and Stroke Services.

- Clients' homes.
- Multi disciplinary support teams to schools.

2. Makaton Signing

Makaton is available in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust from infancy (through baby sign) and further Makaton support is available to children, of all ages, and their environment.

Training is provided to parents and in education settings as and when required as part of a total communication package. Makaton is available to adults as specific needs are identified and addressed. **(18th September)**

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Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (Sinn Féin – Foyle) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Professor Kathleen Marshall is leading the Independent Inquiry into CSE in Northern Ireland. The Inquiry is being undertaken in phases and started with a Call for Evidence, which closed in March 2014. The Inquiry Team has sought the views and experiences of children and young people, their parents and communities through a parallel strand of engagement and a number of stakeholder events, with both the statutory and voluntary sector, took place in early June 2014. The purpose of the events was to inform stakeholders about initial findings and key messages from the Call for Evidence and engagement to date.

In its second phase the Inquiry held both oral hearings and a programme of engagements with key organisations in the health and social care, criminal justice and education sectors. A further stakeholder event, for both statutory and voluntary sectors, took place on 10 September 2014. It is expected that the Independent Inquiry will conclude and report in November 2014. **(18th September)**

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Autism: Services

Mr Steven Agnew (Green Party – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to extending legislation concerning learning disability to include children with autism at the moderate or high functioning end of the spectrum in order to widen the services which they can access.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): There is no legislation which sets out specific services to be provided to children with a learning disability or other individual disability or condition. Access to health and social care services generally is determined by assessment of an individual's needs. There is no automatic link between children on the autistic spectrum and those with learning disability, although ASD and learning disability may co-occur in some instances.

The Autism Act (NI) 2011 however, provided for the development of the cross-departmental Autism Strategy (2013-2020) and Action Plan (2013-2016). This Strategy and Action Plan provides for the improvement in services and support for *all* people with autism and their families and carers. **(18th September)**

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Foster Care

Ms Claire Sugden (Independent – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children who have been placed in foster care in

- (i) Northern Ireland; and
- (ii) East Londonderry, in each of the last three years.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Figures on the number of Looked After Children placed in foster care are not available by Constituency. The lowest geographical output available is at Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust area. As the East Londonderry constituency falls within both the Western and Northern HSC Trust areas, figures on the number of children who were placed in foster care have been provided for both Trusts.

Table 1: Children Placed in Foster Care in the Northern HSC Trust, the Western HSC Trust and Northern Ireland at 31 March (2011 – 2013)

Area	2011	2012	2013
	No. Children Placed in Foster Care	No. Children Placed in Foster Care	No. Children Placed in Foster Care
Northern HSC Trust	426	447	510
Western HSC Trust	291	325	350
Northern Ireland	1,862	1,946	2,112

Source: Health and Social Care Board Delegated Statutory Functions Returns
(19th September)

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Department of Regional Development

Sustainable Modes of Travel

Mrs Judith Cochrane (ALL - East Belfast) - To ask the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Programme for Government 2011-15 target to invest in and promote more sustainable modes of travel and create the conditions to facilitate at least 36 per cent of primary school pupils and 22 per cent of secondary school pupils to walk or cycle to school as their main mode of transport by 2015.

Mr Kennedy: The Department remains on target to meet its PfG commitment of investing over £500m to promote sustainable modes of travel in the budget period up to the end of this financial year. The savings the Department is expected to make following the finalisation of the June monitoring round has had an impact this year but the Department still expects to achieve this target over the budget period. It is, however, not possible to speculate at this time on the impact that the imposition of any further savings may have on this target following the outcome of the October monitoring.

In relation to the PfG commitment for active school travel, the Department, along with the Public Health Agency, continues to fund Sustrans to promote cycling and walking within schools as part of the Active Schools Travel Initiative. The Initiative will deliver a programme of cycling and walking skills to 180 schools across Northern Ireland over the next three years at a cost of £1.2million. The programme will work with parents and teachers to support schools to develop a culture of active travel. It is important any child cycling or walking to school has the necessary skills to enable them to walk or cycle safely. My Department needs to invest in delivering the necessary vital skills required to enable pupils to travel actively and safely. The Active School Travel Initiative will go some way to creating the conditions to facilitate children actively travelling to school.

At present my Department is not in a position to report on the trend on children walking and cycling to school as the baseline data for year one has just been compiled. A report on the active travel participation of those schools that took part in the Initiative is expected later in the autumn. My Department will also seek to draw on information within the Travel Survey of Northern Ireland to assess active travel to school over all of Northern Ireland.

(9th September)

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Department for Social Development

Welfare Reform

Ms Rosaleen McCorley (Sinn Féin - West Belfast) - To ask the Minister for Social Development, in relation to Welfare Reform, why he has not adopted the same position as the DUP in Westminster.

Mr McCausland: Unlike Sinn Fein, my DUP colleagues fought in the House of Commons to ensure that Welfare Reform did not negatively impact the people of Northern Ireland. Since the Bill was passed in Westminster, I have worked hard with the support of my DUP colleagues to secure flexibilities for Northern Ireland to protect the most vulnerable in our society. **(9th September)**

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Welfare Reform

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (SDLP - South Belfast) - To ask the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has made an assessment of the impact of the proposed Welfare Reform measures on a constituency basis and across all recipient groups.

Mr McCausland: Protecting the vulnerable is a key priority and at the very core of reforming the welfare system. I have developed a package of measures which will not only help simplify the social security system but more importantly it will involve measures which protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Part of developing this package of measures and ensuring it protects the most vulnerable, involved making an assessment of the impact of the proposed Welfare Reform measures across all benefit recipient groups. There was no previous assessments made into the effect changes to the welfare system would have on all recipient groups in Northern Ireland and, given my objective to protect the vulnerable I commissioned detailed analysis by Departmental statisticians. Assessments were not carried out on a constituency basis but they were measured across all recipient groups in Northern Ireland.

The research included examining the Personal Independence Payment, Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit, Benefit Cap and changes to Housing Support.

This research then allowed me to develop a package of measures including a series of flexibilities and transitional protections to ameliorate the more negative aspects of the reform of the welfare system and ensure the vulnerable are protected. The research meant the flexibilities were designed to meet the needs of the people in Northern Ireland and these flexibilities include making payments to both parties in the household instead of a single payment, making payments twice a month instead of a monthly payment, and the direct payment of housing costs to landlords. **(9th September)**

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Budget Cuts

Mr George Robinson (DUP East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister for Social Development what cuts will be made to his budget as a result of the lack of agreement on Welfare Reform.

Mr McCausland: As a result of the intransigence of some around the Executive table, Northern Ireland Departments will be hit with a Welfare Reform penalty of £87m this year, rising to £114m next year.

The scale of cuts to be applied to individual Departments will be for the Finance Minister to agree in conjunction with Executive colleagues. This will be dependent on the level of reduced requirements and/or pressures identified in the upcoming October monitoring round, in tandem with other Executive commitments.

As a result of June monitoring, my Department's budget was cut by some £13.5m (2.1%). Current indications are that a further 2.3% (£16m) will need to be taken from budgets in October to meet the Welfare Reform penalties. This cut will be confirmed as part of the October Monitoring process. In total therefore I am facing a reduction of at least £29m in my budget.

There is no doubt that the failure to implement Welfare Reform is impacting on the most vulnerable in society, who will bear the burden of any reduction in my Department's services that will result. I am still considering the options available to me and I will clearly want to do everything I can to avoid reductions in frontline services.

In the absence of agreement on Welfare Reform, these constraints are expected to not only continue, but to worsen as we move into 2015/16. The consequence will undoubtedly be further cuts to vital services and could mean potentially severe cuts to the Housing Executive direct grant provision, the potential for significant increases in Housing Executive Rents, longer waiting times for Housing maintenance repairs because the maintenance budget has had to be slashed, potential job losses across the Department, cuts in Neighbourhood Renewal funding and cuts to voluntary and community work. DSD provides a range of services to vulnerable groups across Northern Ireland and it will be some of the most vulnerable in our society who bear the brunt of these cuts.

(11th September)

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Poverty

Mr Barry McElduff (Sinn Féin - West Tyrone) - To ask the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's definition of poverty, including children living in poverty; and how many families and children are living in poverty in West Tyrone.

Mr McCausland: The Child Poverty Act 2010 sets out four measures of poverty for the United Kingdom. The four measures are Relative Poverty, Absolute Poverty, Combined Low Income and Material Deprivation Poverty and Persistent Poverty.

My Department reports on three of these measures of poverty, Relative Poverty, Absolute Poverty and Combined Low Income and Material Deprivation Poverty for Northern Ireland using data collected in the Family Resources Survey (FRS). These three measures of poverty can be defined as follows:

- **Relative Poverty:** An individual is considered to be in relative poverty if they are living in a household with a net equivalised income below 60% of United Kingdom median income in the year in question.
- **Absolute Poverty:** An individual is considered to be in absolute poverty if they are living in a household with a net equivalised income below 60% of the (inflation adjusted) median income in 2010/11. This is a measure of whether those in the lowest income households are seeing their incomes rise in line with inflation.

- **Combined Low Income and Material Deprivation Poverty:** An individual is considered to be in poverty if they are living in a household with a net equivalised income below 70% of United Kingdom median income and has a material deprivation score of 25 or more reflected by enforced lack of goods and services.

The most up-to-date statistics available for West Tyrone, for the period 2009-12, are as follows:

- 21% of individuals were living in relative poverty before housing costs
- 27% of children were living in relative poverty before housing costs
- 20% of individuals were living in absolute poverty before housing costs
- 26% of children were living in absolute poverty before housing costs

The figures quoted above are based on a 3 year average for the period 2009-10 to 2011-12 due to small sample size in West Tyrone.

On the combined Low Income and Material Deprivation measure the size of the sample is too small to provide analysis for West Tyrone. Due to a methodological change to combined Low Income and Material Deprivation measure in 2010-11 a 3 year average cannot be used to compensate for the small sample in West Tyrone, as the data for each individual year is not directly comparable.

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Department of Justice

National Crime Agency

Mr Gregory Campbell (DUP - East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Justice what plans he has to explain in detail the consequences of the failure to fully implement the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland.

Mr Ford: I have regularly made clear my concerns at the consequences of the NCA not being able to operate in the devolved sphere in Northern Ireland.

On 8 September I issued a paper to the main political parties and others setting out proposals on the operation and accountability of the NCA. I hope this will provide a basis to resolve the current situation. I have offered to meet the parties to discuss the proposals and the consequences of not reaching agreement. The Chief Constable of the PSNI and Director General of the National Crime Agency have also offered meetings.

(11 September)

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