

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week of 7th November, 2014

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Office of First and Deputy First Minister

Junior Ministerial Posts

Mrs Judith Cochrane (All – East Belfast) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the financial strain and resource limitations faced by all Departments and the Executive's acknowledgement that the work of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has the most pressing need, whether they will consider rebalancing ministerial priorities and making a strategic decision to reallocate junior ministerial posts to the DHSSPS.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The number and functions of Junior Ministers are kept under review in the light of our assessment of changing needs and priorities. We have, however, no plans at this time to effect such a reallocation of posts. **(7th November)**

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Together: Building a United Community Strategy

Mr Chris Lyttle (All – East Belfast) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister why, despite making the removal of all interface barriers by 2023 and the roll out of a nursery school buddy scheme key commitments of the Together: Building a United Community strategy published in May 2013, they are providing no sustainable long term funding to the existing Community Relations in Schools Buddy Scheme which brings children and parents of Holy Cross Nursery, Ardoyne and Edenderry Nursery, Shankill together across the Crumlin Road Interface for facilitated, meaningful contact that has significant community support, well over a year after this key commitment was made.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education (DE) is taking forward the commitment, set out in the Together: Building a United Community strategy, to roll out a Buddy Scheme in all publicly funded nursery and primary schools.

DE officials met with Community Relations in Schools (CRIS) representatives in late 2013 to discuss the CRIS programme. They have also engaged with Education and Library Boards colleagues to discuss how a buddying scheme might be delivered across Northern Ireland. Proposals for the DE scheme are at an early stage of development.

CRIS is a partner, along with a number of primary and nursery schools in North Belfast, in the 'Active Respectful Communities: Ardoyne and Shankill Together' (ARC) initiative,

which received funding from OFMDFM and Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) under the Contested Space/Interface Programme from 2011-2014.

This Programme was instigated by OFMDFM and AP with the intention of deriving learning from positive good relations outcomes in contested spaces, and ascertaining which elements of best practice might be mainstreamed into future intervention strategies. It was not intended to supplant or replace existing core funding initiatives.

OFMDFM has allocated a small grant to CRIS from the Central Good Relations fund in 2014/15 to fund a cross-community adult good relations programme. (**7th November**)

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Department of Education

Dyslexia Figures

Mr Peter Weir (DUP – North Down) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the number of children in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools that have dyslexia.

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

Primary and post-primary pupils with dyslexia, 2013/14

School Type	Figure
Primary	3,125
Post-primary	5,345

Source: NI school census

Notes:

Figure for primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.

Figures include pupils at stages 1-5 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

Data refers to any special educational need rather than primary need (**4th November**)

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Pupil Support – Emotional Health

Mr Adrian McQuillan (DUP – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education what support his Department has in place to assist pupils with emotional health problems.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Department of Education (DE) promotes positive mental health and well-being of pupils in schools through a range of developments. The Revised Curriculum for primary and post-primary schools has elements designed to develop the young person as an individual and to enhance young people’s own awareness of the stressors in their lives and their capacity to deal with them.

The “iMatter” Programme is intended to support the entire school community to be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils. Under the programme a suite of homework diary inserts and posters on topics of concern to young people such as self esteem and coping with stress, worry and anxiety, and outlining sources of help are prepared and distributed annually. Pupils are also alerted to a topical “Message of the Month” each time they access the C2K system. The Department issued a “Guide to Managing Critical Incidents in Schools” in February this year. The Guide is aimed at ensuring a regional approach to dealing with critical incidents and is designed to help schools be prepared and to ensure effective management before, during and after the event. The Guide is available on the DE website.

DE is a member of and funds the local Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) which brings together local statutory and voluntary organisations to help schools and organisations working with young people to develop appropriate strategies to prevent and deal with bullying behaviours. In August 2013 the Forum published “Effective Responses to Bullying” to support schools in the management of alleged bullying incidents. Further information is available at www.niabf.org.uk.

The Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) has been accessible to young people of post-primary age in mainstream schools since September 2007 and in special schools from January 2011. On average 1432 pupils per month use the ICSS Service. As part of the current arrangements for support following a critical incident, pupils in primary schools have access to counselling support. Work will start later this year on how access to the counselling service might be extended to primary aged pupils.

In October 2012 the Delivering Social Change programme provided funding for a series of six Signature projects. One of these projects, the “Nurture Unit” Signature Project, which is being taken forward jointly by DE and DSD, involved the establishment of 20 new nurture units. Nurture Units offer a short term, focussed intervention strategy which addresses barriers to learning arising from social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, in an inclusive, supportive manner. The units aim to improve the child’s ability to engage effectively with adults and their peers so that, following their time in the Nurture Unit (typically 2-4 terms) they are able to re-integrate and participate effectively within their mainstream class. In addition to the 20 new nurture units established under the Signature Project, DE is also funding existing nurture units in 10 schools where funding had ceased or would be due to cease during the life of the Signature Project (June 2015).

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Pupil Support – Further Education Choices

Mr Adrian McQuillan (DUP – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education what support is in place for pupils from year ten onwards when making choices in relation to further education.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): Young people must have access, at the right time, to high quality careers education, information, advice and guidance so that they can make informed choices leading to the most appropriate progression route for them as individuals.

Careers-related learning is a substantial component within the Learning for Life and Work part of the statutory curriculum. Through this young people are given the opportunity to learn about careers opportunities and to develop the skills to become effective decision makers.

Schools work in partnership with DEL’s careers advisers who offer impartial advice and guidance to young people at key transition points on making appropriate and informed choices on pathways that lead to higher or further education, training or employment.
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Counselling Services

Mr Chris Lyttle (All – East Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Education for an update on the provision of counselling services to children of primary school age.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): I have previously indicated that I would like to be in a position to offer provision of counselling support to pupils of primary age. There are a number of issues around how such a service would operate when dealing with very young children that require to be teased out but I am committed to doing this and to bringing forward proposals for the introduction of such a service at the earliest opportunity.
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Special Education Needs

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education, in relation to schools for children with special educational needs, to detail the current stipulated ratio of (i) teachers; and (ii) classroom assistants, to pupils.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Department of Education does not stipulate teacher or classroom assistant ratios for special schools. **(5th November)**

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Integrated Schools

Mr Danny Kinahan (UUP – South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education how many (i) controlled; and (ii) catholic maintained post-primary schools have transformed their management status to integrated since the option became available.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): Since the introduction of the statutory measures contained in the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, which facilitate the transformation process, a total of 5 controlled post-primary schools have transformed to integrated status. To date, no catholic maintained schools have transformed to integrated status. **(6th November)**

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Funding to Gingerbread NI

Mr Colum Eastwood (SDLP – Foyle) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) the amount of funding initially allocated to Gingerbread NI in 2014/15; and (ii) whether this amount has been reduced due to budget pressures.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): Early Years – the Organisation for young children has awarded Gingerbread NI £14,410 from the DE Early Years Fund in 2014/15, which represents a slight increase on the allocation made to them in 2013/14. **(6th November)**

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Department of Employment and Learning

Education, Employment or Training

Ms Claire Sugden (Ind – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to assess and address the risk factors resulting in young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training.

Dr Farry (Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department is responsible for the implementation of the Executive’s “Pathways to Success” which seeks to address the needs of all young people who are presently Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This work is monitored and supported by a delivery infrastructure under the direction of the NEET Advisory Group, which is representative of key decision makers from Government Departments, the voluntary and community sector, education, health, social care and business sectors and local government.

A range of programmes has been developed to meet the needs of those young who are in the NEET category, all of which include the development of a personal action plan based on a detailed assessment of each young person’s specific needs. The following programmes currently provide targeted support to young people in the NEET category. I have also referenced a number of new initiatives which will provide additional support to those young people furthest away from the labour market. These include:

Collaboration and Innovation Fund

This programme commences with an initial assessment by qualified staff to identify the barriers which are preventing the young people moving towards employment. This enables staff to develop a meaningful action plan designed to address the specific barriers and help the young people to improve their employability skills.

Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS)

This is a community-based employment initiative designed to help the “hardest to reach” in targeted geographical areas. LEMIS Mentors travel to meet clients with a common employability barrier in their local area, to conduct an assessment of the clients’ specific needs and to arrange mentoring and other support measures to address the critical barriers.

The Community Family Support Programme (CFSP)

CFSP focuses on the needs of the most disadvantaged families, to enable young people to re-engage with Employment, Education, or Training. This programme has received additional financial support from OFMDFM and has been designated as a 'Signature Project under the Delivering Social Change initiative.

Careers Service

My Department's Careers Service currently provides dedicated advice and support to all 16-17 year olds in the NEET category. These clients are allocated a specific careers adviser who provides support and advocacy to assist them to secure an appropriate education, employment or training opportunity. Careers advisers also work with those young people who have unfortunately dropped out of education and training, to help them back into a positive labour market opportunity.

The United Youth Programme (UYP)

My Department is leading on the development of the Executive's United Youth Programme which has two specific outcomes:

- The personal development of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), to improve their confidence, skills and experience; and
- The promotion of good relations between these young people and others across the community, including people (and particularly young people) from other religious backgrounds.

In the early pilot phase I am particularly interested in finding new and creative ways of engaging those most disadvantaged or at risk of exclusion.

Apprenticeships

In June 2014, my Department published *Securing our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships* which will be central in transforming our skills landscape and securing our economic success. The new model for apprenticeships will be in place for 2016 and includes a range of commitments to increase participation by a wide range of individuals. In particular, a pilot project will be taken forward to develop a new youth training offer to widen access to apprenticeships to individuals with disabilities or other barriers that are impacting on their ability to engage in education and training.

Economic Inactivity

My Department is currently working in partnership with DETI, DSD, Invest NI and DHSSPS to develop a new strategy to tackle economic inactivity. A key aspect of this Strategy will be the delivery of initiatives designed to reduce the numbers of young people who are economically inactive. **(3rd November)**

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Work and Families Bill

Mr Robin Swann (UUP – North Antrim) - To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to the Work and Families Bill, why he did not include a section on children and young people with special education needs or disabilities, as included in the Children and Families Act 2014.

Dr Farry (Minister for Employment and Learning: The Work and Families Bill currently before the Assembly is an employment Bill with a tight focus on employment rights issues, and in particular the entitlements of working families following the birth or adoption of a child.

Whilst I am satisfied that it is appropriate for the Bill to have that specific focus, my Department has been alert to the need to consider the potential applicability here of provisions within Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 concerning the needs of young people with special educational needs or disabilities in England.

Although this is very much a cross-cutting issue, my Department's assessment regarding those provisions falling within its own remit is that there is no direct read-across to structures in Northern Ireland and that a birth to 25 education, health and care plan of the kind supported by the Act does not sufficiently recognise and respond to the changing needs of young people as they move into adulthood.

Officials in my Department will continue to monitor developments in Great Britain and elsewhere, and to liaise with those other Northern Ireland Departments having a relevant policy responsibility, to ensure that the potential applicability to our own systems of the latest thinking in this important area can be appropriately considered. **(7th November)**

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Department of Health

Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (Sinn Féin – Foyle) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following his statement on the future of paediatric congenital cardiac services, to outline the process whereby family representatives will be included in the governance and delivery groups.

Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Subject to my final decision on the way forward, my Department will consult with the proposed groups, including family representatives, on their nominated representatives on both the Governance Committee and Family Advisory Group, as proposed in Recommendations 1 and 2 respectively of the International Working Group's report. We will ask for their views on how they would wish to see those groups established and how they would want the families they represent to be involved in them. **(4th November)**

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Children's Cardiac Surgery

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (SDLP – South Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the imminent closure of the children's cardiac surgery unit at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, whether he can provide an assurance that children who are currently on the local waiting list who have to travel to specialised hospitals in England for surgery are not placed at the bottom of the waiting list, and that their existing waiting time and health conditions will be taken into account.

Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The timing and location of all children's cardiac surgery are matters of clinical judgement to be taken by the appropriate healthcare professionals. Currently a small number of lower complexities, non-urgent paediatric cardiac operations are carried out each month in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (equating to approximately 35 cases per year). All other elective surgery is carried out in heart centres in England or Dublin and is planned in advance through case conferences between both sets of clinicians, which will take account of a range of factors to determine the appropriate timing for treatment.

When surgery ends in Belfast in December 2014, the small cohort of children to be added to the number requiring surgery in England, while capacity is being increased in Our

Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, will be managed in the same way. I can therefore provide assurance that they will not simply be placed at the bottom of a waiting list. The heart centres in Birmingham and Evelina Children's Hospitals have sufficient capacity to treat these children when deemed appropriate in agreement with their clinicians. The Clark Clinic will continue to provide all non-surgical care for children with congenital cardiac conditions. **(6th November)**

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