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Funding for marginalised groups

Ms Claire Sugden: To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the budgetary constraints to his Department, how he will protect organisations who are funded by the European Social Fund, whose client groups include those with mental health needs, learning and physical disabilities, lone parents and disadvantaged young people.

Dr Stephen Farry answered The Strategic Aim of the NI ESF Programme 2014-2020 is to combat poverty and enhance social inclusion by reducing economic inactivity and to increase the skills base of those currently in work and future potential participants in the workforce.

The Programme will fund activity to enhance and extend employment opportunities, in particular, for those groups at a disadvantage in the labour market, such as lone parents,

and other groups who are unemployed, including long term unemployed, or economically inactive. Almost 20% of funding has been allocated for the priority supporting unemployed and inactive people.

A quarter of the programme is ring fenced for projects supporting people with a disability, reflecting the importance DEL attaches to supporting this sector. Almost 20% has been ring fenced to support young people not in employment, education or training.

The total value of the new ESF Programme will be €513.4m – over 20% more than the initial allocation to the previous programme. This amount is made up of €205.4m (40%) from the European Union, which requires 60% match funding of €308m.

ESF funding will be awarded on a competitive basis. Applications will be objectively assessed by expert panels and any application that meets the required threshold will be considered for funding. As part of the call for applications, comprehensive guidance notes are available for all potential applicants.

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Seat belts use on buses

Miss Michelle McIlveen: To ask the Minister for Regional Development what initiatives are in place to encourage the use of seat belts by pupils travelling on Translink services.

Mr Danny Kennedy: Translink actively encourages the use of seat belts by all passengers travelling on its buses where seatbelts are fitted. All seat-belted buses have notices/internal visual displays promoting the wearing of seat belts whilst the vehicles are in motion.

Additionally, Translink have produced a 'Travelsafe' DVD and this has been circulated to all schools. It addresses many safety related issues and contains a specific section dedicated to the safety benefits of seat-belt wearing.

In conjunction with schools, Translink has an on-going programme of visits by the 'Safety Bus' team, who deal with all aspects of safe travel by bus.

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Autism specific support

Mrs Sandra Overend: To ask the Minister of Education which mainstream schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area offer autism specific support class placement for (i) Key Stage 1; (ii) Key Stage 2 only; (iii) both Key Stage 1 and 2.

Mr John O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that autism specific support class placement is offered in the following ten mainstream schools for Key Stage 1 pupils:-

Christian Brothers PS, Armagh
Cookstown PS
Dungannon PS
Edenderry PS, Portadown
St Mary's PS, Banbridge
St Joseph's Convent PS, Newry
St Joseph's PS, Bessbrook
Kilkeel PS
Primate Dixon PS, Coalisland
Armstrong PS, Armagh

At Key Stage 2 these schools offer Learning Support Centre provision as part of an inclusive programme aimed at reintegrating them back into mainstream classes.

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Notice in Lieu for special and/or complex needs

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley: To ask the Minister of Education how many (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary pupils are currently in receipt of a Notice in Lieu with respect to special and/or complex educational needs, broken down by Education and Library Board.

Mr John O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of pupils, who were issued with Notes in Lieu in respect of special or complex educational needs, during the period 1 December 2013 to 30 November 2014, is as follows:

	Primary	Post-primary
BELB	*	0
NEELB	23	*
SEELB	*	*
SELB	*	*
WELB	*	*
TOTAL	31	10

Denotes fewer than five pupils suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils.

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Youth club provision for deaf young people

Mr Danny Kinahan: To ask the Minister of Education what measures are in place to ensure the accessibility of mainstream youth clubs for deaf young people who use sign language; and how many sign language users currently access mainstream youth clubs and how many of the youth work staff within these settings have British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language qualifications.

Mr John O'Dowd: Youth clubs are open and inclusive to all young people. Whilst, there are no specific measures in place for deaf young people who use sign language, individual Education and Library Boards work with the NI Deaf Youth Association where a need is identified.

The number of sign language users across registered youth groups is not held and ELBs do not routinely collate information on the number of youth work staff holding British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language qualifications.

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Budget cuts in education

Mr Steven Agnew: To ask the Minister of Education how schools can reasonably be expected to affect continuous improvement in the face of recent and anticipated budget cuts; and for his assessment of whether parents are being adequately prepared for the effect that cuts may have.

Mr John O'Dowd: There is no doubt that the proposed reductions to the Education budget as part of the Executive's 2015-16 Draft Budget will pose major challenges right across the Education Sector. It is important that in meeting these challenges the key issues of raising standards and delivering frontline services are maintained wherever possible. As part of my Department's draft budget proposals I have carefully considered my priorities and will use the finite resources available to the greatest effect.

I recognise the challenges schools will face and the importance of maximising the impact of finite and increasingly constrained resources. A key element of the process in determining how best to use resources will be through effective school development planning; and the focus must remain on raising standards and improving outcomes., My

Department and the managing authorities will also be working to support schools in this challenging fiscal environment.

The announcement of the Executive's 2015-16 Draft Budget on 3 November 2014 triggered the commencement of the public consultation period, the closing date for which is 29 December 2014. The public consultation period on my Department's proposals runs concurrently with the public consultation on the Executive's Draft Budget having been published on 25 November 2014. During this time the Department are engaging with the Assembly Education Committee and key stakeholders across the education sector, with a view to building a consensus on mapping the way forward for education next year.

I am keen to ensure that parents have a channel through which they can provide not only their views on the impact of the budget proposals but also their suggestions as to alternative approaches on the delivery of education for the 2015-16 financial year. Boards of Governors will want to ensure their pupils' parents are kept informed and will, like me, continue to encourage parents, and others across the north of Ireland, to participate both in the overall consultation on the Executive's Draft Budget and on my Department's Draft Budget consultation.

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Assessing children with special educational needs

Miss Michelle McIlveen: To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of establishing regional criteria for assessing children with special educational needs.

Mr John O'Dowd: The establishment of the regional criteria for assessing children with special educational needs (SEN) brought, for the first time, a consistent approach to the identification of SEN with all boards adopting the agreed common descriptors for children and young people within particular categories of SEN. This has enabled more accurate comparisons of prevalence rates for areas of SEN which has proved useful for provision planning and for the monitoring and evaluation of pupil outcomes. It has also been less confusing for parents who previously had to contend with different descriptors depending on which board their child resided in.

Furthermore the Good Practice Guidelines, which accompanied the Regional Criteria, provided clear advice and suggested interventions for schools to use in order to improve outcomes for pupils within different categories of SEN. This has promoted early intervention and has also provided schools with a common framework and a clearer understanding of the level of need that may require an assessment from the educational psychologist.

In view of the above I am content that the criteria are an effective tool for assessing children with SEN and they will continue to be kept under review and amended as necessary.

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Cuts to Sure Start

Mr Steven Agnew: To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made on the impact the proposed cuts to the Sure Start budget will have on the costs of care for looked-after children.

Mr Jim Wells: I have been advised by the Department of Education that the Sure Start programme currently receives £25m funding per year and that the draft budget for the Department of Education for 2015/16 includes a proposed reduction of £2m from the Sure Start programme. I have also been advised that the programme will continue to be managed within available funding for 2015/16 in line with Department of Education priorities.

The Sure Start programme is principally an early intervention service, which works with parents and children to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional development of pre-school children, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to ensure they can flourish at home and when they get to school.

There are a range of early intervention initiatives currently being pursued across government. Key among them is the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP), which is led by my department and is designed to support families and intervene earlier to, among other things, reduce the risk of children coming into care in the first place. EITP has a proposed budget of £25m spread over a 4 year period, with OFMDFM (Delivering Social Change) contributing £10m, Atlantic Philanthropies (£10m) and DE along with DHSSPS, DEL, DOJ, DSD jointly contributing a further £5m over a three year period between April 2014 and March 2017.

In addition, my Department's Families Matter Strategy supported the development of Family Support Hubs and the Family Support NI (FSNI) website, www.familysupportni.gov.uk. Family Support Hubs accept referrals and signpost families and children to appropriate services. They are coalitions of agencies that provide services locally with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention. FSNI is an information and signposting resource for families, communities and professionals looking for family support services and registered childcare.

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Health and Injunctions

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley: To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant AQW 39043/11-15, whether the injunctions are open to the Department to apply for in these instances, and if so, whether (i) any such injunctions have been sought and/or granted in the past; and (ii) this is being considered for further use, particularly in light of the findings of the Marshall Report.

Mr Jim Wells: The option of applying for an injunction is available to Health and Social Care Trusts in the circumstances described. However, this is subject to sufficient evidence being available. I can confirm that injunctions of this nature have been pursued in the past and, where appropriate, will be sought in the future. Also, it has been demonstrated in the past that injunctions have deterrent value when seeking to safeguard children.

The Health and Social Services (HSC) Board has confirmed that court orders have been sought and served on individuals to refrain from association with certain young people and, not to be within the vicinity of certain addresses. HSC Trusts, conjointly with PSNI, have been proactive in this regard and will continue to factor this into their thinking in light of the recommendations contained within the Marshall Report.

Regular meetings take place between HSC Trusts and PSNI Public Protection Teams where discussions take place to review risk assessments and associated action plans in respect of individual children.

My department is actively considering the Marshall recommendations. This is being undertaken jointly with the HSC Board and Trusts and in partnership with the Departments of Justice and Education.

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Counselling Services for under 16s who have been a victim of sexual assault

Ms Michaela Boyle: To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he is addressing the lack of counselling services for people under the age of 16 who have been the victim of sexual assault, particularly in light of recent findings and given that there are no services in place other than the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service which deals with mental health issues as opposed to counselling facilities for victims of abuse.

Mr Jim Wells: My Department currently provides the regional Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) with £450,000 per year to provide specialist services in the aftermath of a sexual assault, rape or an incident involving childhood sexual abuse. The SARC offers a comprehensive range of services, which include emotional support for victims of sexual abuse and a 24-hour advice and information line.

Children and young people who have been sexually abused can avail of counselling provision through existing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Psychological Therapies Services and the Family Trauma Centre.

In addition, counselling support is also available to children and young people who have been victims of abuse, through a range of community and voluntary sector organisations including Barnardo's, NSPCC and Nexus NI.

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Internet Safety Strategy

Mr Chris Lyttle: To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress of the Internet Safety Strategy for Children.

Mr Jim Wells: I am currently seeking the approval of Executive Ministers to commission and fund the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to develop an e-safety strategy on their behalf. In accordance with the protocol governing the confidentiality of Executive business, I am unable to offer any further response to the question asked.

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Central register for children and adults with Down Syndrome.

Mr Oliver McMullan: To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will introduce a central register for children and adults with Down Syndrome.

Mr Jim Wells: There are no plans to introduce a central register for children and adults with Down's Syndrome or for any other learning disability.

Relocation of children

Mr Pat Ramsey: To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many looked-after children have been relocated by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to other regions of the UK or Ireland in the last five years; and to detail the (i) reasons for; and (ii) cost of the relocations.

Mr Jim Wells: The number, the reason for, and the cost of children/young people relocated to other regions in the UK or Ireland from the Western Health and Social Care Trust during the last five years is as follows:

Year At 31 March	Number of children/young people	Reason for relocation	Cost
2010	1	Therapeutic	No costs available
2011	1	Therapeutic	£51,189
2012	4	Therapeutic	£186,916
2013	8	4 Therapeutic 4 Kinship care	£1,043,534
2014	6	2 Therapeutic 4 Kinship care	

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Diagnosis of autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Asperger's Syndrome

Mr Jim Allister: To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have received a diagnosis of autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Asperger's Syndrome in each Health and Social Care Trust in the last five years; and whether funding allocations to meet this assessment process, post-diagnosis support and intervention have been proportionate to the trend identified from these figures.

Mr Jim Wells: The Health and Social Care Board is unable to provide diagnostic data for the last five years as data collating from each Trust area only commenced in October 2012. The following table outlines the number of children diagnosed with autism over the last 2 years.

The number of children diagnosed with autism in each Health and Social Care Trust from October 2012 – October 2014

TRUST	Children Diagnosed with Autism	
	Oct 12 - Sept 13	Oct 13 - Sept 14

Belfast HSC	170	212
Northern HSC	356	449
South Eastern HSC	154	228
Southern HSC	59	70
Western HSC	109	125
Total	848	1084

Prevalence data on school-age children is contained in the report

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/asd-children-ni-2014.pdf> and

shows a 67% increase in children aged 4-15 with ASD (including Aspergers) over the period 2008/09 to 2013/14. The number of referrals to the children's Autism service has increased significantly over the last 5 years across all Trusts.

Regional referral figures represent an estimated 100% increase in demand since 2008/2009. There has been no new recurrent investment in children's autism specific services since 2012, however there is an on-going review within current services in each Trust to ensure efficient use of the current resources.

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Access NI criteria

Mr Steven Agnew: To ask the Minister of Justice what in providing enhanced disclosure to employers; and how this process is monitored.

Mr David Ford: Eligibility for enhanced disclosures is prescribed in paragraph 9 of the Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Disclosure) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008, as

amended.

AccessNI conducts audits with organisations listed as Registered Bodies to ensure compliance with a published Code of Practice. These Audits include a review of the positions applied for on enhanced disclosure applications to ensure due consideration has been given against the prescribed eligibility criterion in the Police Act regulations.

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Internet trolling and cyber harassment

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley: To ask the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to the introduction of legislation making internet trolling and cyber harassment or bullying a criminal offence.

Mr David Ford Harassment and bullying are already criminal offences in Northern Ireland, whether perpetrated directly or in the form of cyber bullying. The maximum penalty for harassment is 2 years' imprisonment, which may be increased to 7 years where there is the threat of violence, or 10 years where a person threatens to kill another.

I am aware of the Justice Secretary's proposals in the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill in relation to malicious communications or "internet trolling". As part of those changes the time limit for prosecutions for sending grossly offensive messages by public communications networks will be extended in certain circumstances to 3 years of the offence being committed.

That proposed change will apply to Northern Ireland and whilst I have no further plans to change our laws at this time, along with my officials I will be keeping developments in England and Wales under review.