

## **NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week of 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

- **Together: Building a United Community**
- **Education and Library Board Youth Services**
- **Youth Council**
- **Support During Transition Period**
- **Statement of Special Educational Needs**
- **Transport Arrangements**
- **Child Victims of Domestic Abuse**
- **Statutory Assessment**
- **Together: Building a United Community**
- **Sex Education in Schools**
- **United Youth Programme**
- **Voluntary Exit Scheme**
- **Extra Contractual Referrals**

- **Collection of Data in Health and Social Care Trust Areas**
- **Child-Minding Provision for Children with Autism**
- **Health Service Staff Training**
- **Maintenance of Registers**
- **Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking**
- **Enhanced Disclosure Checks**
- **Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies**

## Office of First and Deputy First Minister

### Together: Building a United Community

**Mr Fra McCann (Sinn Féin – West Belfast)** - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the United Youth element of Together: Building a United Community.

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** One of the seven core headline actions committed to within Together: Building a United Community is the development of the United Youth Programme.

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

The co-design process begun by OFMDFM is being continued by the Department for Employment and Learning and is being supported by a Design Team which includes representation from the Department for Employment and Learning, OFMDFM, the Department for Social Development, the Department of Education, Community Relations Council, Youthnet, Youth Council, International Fund for Ireland, Public Health Agency and Education and Library Boards.

OFMDFM successfully ran the first pilot through Springboard called “Headstart”. A call for concept proposals to deliver pilot projects was issued in early September. Following a development phase in the Autumn, over 150 pilot applications were submitted in December. An assessment of these proposals was completed with assistance from the programme’s Design Team.

As a result, 50 organisations (57 proposals) have been selected to go through to the next co-design development stage. Following this development phase, a number of pilot schemes will be operational during the 2015/16 financial year.

It is expected that the selected pilot projects will be aimed at the 16 – 24 age group who are not in education, employment or training and offered to approximately 300 young people. By summer 2016 the programme will extend the eligible age range to the 14-24 age group. **Oral Question** [Back to Top](#)

## Department of Education

### Education and Library Board Youth Services

**Ms Anna Lo MBE (APNI – South Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Education whether the £2 million allocated to Education and Library Board youth services includes funding for outreach and detached youth work delivered via the area projects.

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** On 19 January I announced that I was allocating £2million to Education and Library Board youth services to restore the reduction made at draft budget stage. I am currently finalising my 2015-16 spending plans and a detailed decision on allocations for youth services will be determined in due course.  
**(10<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

### Youth Council

**Mr Nelson McCausland (DUP – North Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Education whether he has reconsidered his proposal to impose a twenty per cent cut on the budget of the Youth Council, in view of his decision to restore the reduction that he made in the budget of Education and Library Board Youth Services at draft budget stage.

**[Priority Written]**

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** I am currently finalising my 2015-16 spending plans and detailed decisions on allocations will be determined in due course.  
**(10<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## **Support During Transition Period**

**Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 41363/11-15, whether a mechanism exists to ensure that Education and Library Boards and schools provide appropriate support during the transition period for young people with Special Education Needs who do not have a statement.

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** Under Article 4(2) of the Education (NI) Order 1996, Education and Library Boards and Boards of Governors of grant-aided schools are required to have regard to the provisions of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Paragraph 6.51 of the Code recognises that, in some instances, a pupil approaching the age of 16 may have SEN which do not call for a statement, but which are nevertheless likely to require some support during the transition process. The Code makes clear that Boards and schools should seek to provide such support. This may include the provision of school/FE college link courses or work placements. Schools may also wish to prepare their own transition plans for non-statemented students with SEN.

In addition, the Department for Employment and Learning's Careers Service is available in post-primary schools for all young people with SEN, regardless of whether or not they have a statement.

I am satisfied that the Code, which is underpinned by legislation, together with the intervention of the Careers Service, provide the mechanism for appropriate support during the transition period for those young people with Special Education Needs who do not have a statement. **(11<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## Statement of Special Educational Needs

**Mr John McCallister (IND – South Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education what policy exists for the recognition in Northern Ireland of a Statement of Special Educational Needs that has been made elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** Although there are a number of similarities between the assessment process in the north of Ireland and England, Wales and Scotland, there are also substantial differences in the administration of education and in the funding of Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN). It is not possible, therefore, to have reciprocal arrangements between the separate jurisdictions which would allow Statements to be accepted when a family moves from one jurisdiction to another.

Prior to a pupil receiving a Statement of SEN, a statutory assessment must be completed within this jurisdiction by the relevant Education and Library Board (ELB). As part of that process the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP) advises that the educational psychologist (EP) from whom the ELB seeks psychological advice must be employed by the Board. The EP must, however, consult and record any advice received from any other psychologist who may have relevant knowledge of or information about the child.

The COP also requires ELBs to consider any advice which parents may submit independently and, as far as possible, follow up suggestions from other agencies or individuals who might be able to provide relevant advice. **(11<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## Transport Arrangements

**Mrs Dolores Kelly (SDLP – Upper Bann)** - To ask the Minister of Education what information was provided to parents, specifically transport arrangements, to enable them to make an informed decision regarding their choice of post-primary school for September 2015 enrolment by the Southern Education and Library Board and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** In advance of selecting a post-primary school for their child for September 2015, all parents were issued by the Education and Library Boards with a copy of “Transfer 2015 – A Guide for Parents – Admission to Post-Primary Schools”.

The guidance includes information on applying for transport assistance. Information regarding transport is provided by the Education and Library Boards on behalf of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

Additionally, the Department of Education provided an advice leaflet to parents of pupils in Year 6 (Primary 6) in the 2013/14 school year ahead of their transfer in September 2015. The leaflet is entitled, “The Transfer Process to Post-Primary School: Advice for Parents of Children in Primary Six”. The leaflet contains advice with respect to school transport, inter alia. **(11<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

### **Child Victims of Domestic Abuse**

**Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) what training exists to encourage teachers to identify child victims of domestic abuse; and (ii) the correct link-up process with other relevant bodies if a child is identified, or suspected.

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** In schools, domestic abuse comes within the overall child protection agenda.

All schools have a named Designated Teacher (DT) for Child Protection and a named Deputy Designated Teacher. The DT acts as a focal point for child protection within the school through providing advice and support to staff and by liaising with agencies outside the school as appropriate.

All grant-aided schools are required by law to have a child protection policy and to implement it. When preparing its policy a school must take account of advice from the Department, relevant Education and Library Board (ELB) and, in the case of Catholic maintained schools, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

All advice issued from the Department is consistent with the ‘Co-Operating to Safeguard Children’ document and the Area Child Protection Committee Regional Policies and Procedures.

Training on child protection matters is organised by the ELBs and is available to members of Boards of Governors, school principals, DTs and their deputies.

There are clear procedures under the UNOCINI (Understanding the Needs of Children in the North of Ireland) assessment framework to facilitate referral from schools to social services and onward to other agencies such as PSNI, as appropriate. **(11<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

### Statutory Assessment

**Mr Daithí McKay (Sinn Féin – North Antrim)** - To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40592/11-15, how many pupils in each Education and Library Board did not have a decision to carry out a statutory assessment within a ten week period as of 31 December 2014.

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of pupils for whom a statutory assessment was requested and the decision to turn down the request issued during the ten week period from 23 October – 31 December 2014 was as follows:

Education and Library Board	Number of Pupils
BELB	*
NEELB	8
SEELB	25
SELB	8
WELB	29

\*denotes fewer than five pupils suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils.  
**(12<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## **Together: Building a United Community**

**Mr Nelson McCausland (DUP – North Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Education what evidence schools are expected to provide of community support for a project seeking support through the Together: Building a United Community – Shared Education Campuses programme.

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** Each application to the Shared Education Campuses Programme is unique and therefore the evidence of community support will vary from project to project.

My Department has not been prescriptive about what is required. Evidence can be provided in the form of surveys, letters from local community organisations, elected representatives, churches and other schools in the locality. **(12<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## **Sex Education in Schools**

**Mr Phil Flanagan (Sinn Féin – Fermanagh and South Tyrone)** - To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) any strategy or policy on improving the provision of sex education in schools; (ii) whether sex education is contained within the statutory curriculum; and (iii) his assessment of the importance of appropriate sex education.

**Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education):** Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a policy which is devolved to schools. All schools are required to have in place a RSE policy which sets out how the school will address RSE within the curriculum. A school’s policy should be subject to consultation with parents and it should be endorsed by the Board of Governors of the school. While it is a devolved policy, the Department does provide guidance to support schools, which emphasises the need for pupils to have the opportunity to provide feedback about the contents of the RSE programme delivered by the school, so that it can be responsive to their needs. CCEA has been working to review current guidance and it is expected that new guidance will be issued to all schools before the end of the current academic year.

RSE is an integral part of the curriculum in both primary and post-primary schools and it must be delivered in a sensitive manner which is appropriate to the age and understanding of pupils and the ethos of the school. The minimum to be taught is detailed in legislation as Areas of Learning (AOLs) for each Key Stage. The main Areas of Learning within the

revised curriculum for the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) at primary level and the Personal Development strand of the Learning for Life and Work Area of Learning at post-primary level. A survey of RSE provision in Primary Schools is to be conducted by the Education and Training Inspectorate towards the end of 2015.

Effective RSE provision is essential if our children are to value themselves as individuals and make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives. **(12<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## Department for Employment and Learning

### United Youth Programme

**Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on funding availability for the United Youth Programme; and when organisations will receive notification of the outcome of their pilot concept proposals.

**Dr Farry (Minister for Employment and Learning):** Funding has been secured via the Change Fund to deliver a number of pilots for the United Youth Programme during the 2015/16 financial year. All of the organisations who submitted concept proposals were advised of the outcome of their applications by 26 January 2015.

Of the 130 organisations who submitted a concept proposal, 50 are being taken forward to the development phase. **(12<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## Department for Finance and Personnel

### Voluntary Exit Scheme

**Mr John McCallister (IND – South Down)** - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the Voluntary Exit Scheme will be initiated by the Executive.

**Mr S Hamilton (Minister for Finance and Personnel):** Plans to develop a Voluntary Exit Scheme for the NICS are well advanced. The Executive agreed the preferred option at its meeting on 5 February and it is intended that the NICS Scheme will be launched on 2 March 2015. **(12<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## Department of Health

### Extra Contractual Referrals

**Ms Maeve McLaughlin (Sinn Féin – Foyle)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how extra contractual referrals are administered for young people at risk of substance misuse. **[Priority Written]**

**Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) operates a process which allows local Trusts, in exceptional circumstances, to refer patients outside NI by means of an Extra Contractual Referral (ECR). ECRs must be based on clinical recommendations for specific treatment needs that cannot be met in NI. Such a referral must outline all of the resources that have been considered locally, and why these are felt to be inappropriate.

ECRs normally arise, and are eligible for approval, in the following circumstances:

- the patient's clinical condition requires specialised care that could only be sustained for a large catchment population and cannot be provided for a small geographic area such as Northern Ireland;
- the patient's clinician wishes to seek a second opinion from a provider outside Northern Ireland because of complexities of the patient's condition or circumstances;
- the treatment is available locally but the patient has an exceptional reason which renders their case different from the vast majority of other patients with the same condition which therefore justifies a referral outside Northern Ireland;
- the service being requested is not reflected in commissioning arrangements such as a Service Level Agreement with a provider outside Northern Ireland; or
- the service being requested is not commissioned for the population of Northern Ireland, but the patient's clinical circumstances are such that exceptionality can be demonstrated and a case justified for an ECR to access care from a provider outside Northern Ireland.

All applications are first cleared within the given Trust, and are then sent to the ECR Panel in the HSCB. The ECR Panel meets on a weekly basis to consider all ECRs received within the preceding 7 days. Decisions are made and communicated to the Trust within one week of the panel meeting. **(9<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## Collection of Data in Health and Social Care Trust Areas

**Ms Maeve McLaughlin (Sinn Féin – Foyle)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the process of the collection of data in Health and Social Care Trust areas of addiction issues relating to people under eighteen.

**Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Data relating to addiction issues of people of all ages are collected from Addiction Treatment Service providers centrally within the Department through the annual Drugs Misuse Database (DMD) and the biennial Census of Drug and Alcohol Misuse.

The latest publications are available at:

- <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dmd-2013-14.pdf>
- <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/drug-alcohol-census-2014.pdf>

(10<sup>th</sup> February)

[Back to Top](#)

## Child-Minding Provision for Children with Autism

**Mr Fearghal McKinney (SDLP – South Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the specific actions his Department has taken to ensure families have adequate access to child-minding provision for children with autism.

**Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** A number of actions taken forward by my Department in recent years have supported improved access to childcare for children with a disability, including those with an autistic spectrum disorder. Through Bright Start, my Department was able to secure £500k funding to support a range of initiatives to improve access to childcare for children with a disability. This included the provision of small grants and disability awareness training which allowed childcare providers, including childminders, to secure specialist equipment and training. There was a particularly high uptake from child care providers and childminders who were looking to support ASD children.

The Family Support NI website ([www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)) was developed with funding from my Department's Families Matter Strategy, while information around Autism services on the site has been enhanced in line with the Autism Strategy.

An enhanced childcare search and App for all major smart phones and tablet devices have been developed using funding through Bright Start and my Department's Families Matter Strategy. This enables parents to search for registered and approved childcare across Northern Ireland, specifying a range of criteria which they require including a providers experience of supporting children with a disability. **(10<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

### **Health Service Staff Training**

**Mr Peter Weir (DUP – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the programme of training for Health Service staff on recognising the signs of human trafficking.

**Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Substantial guidance has been developed to support staff working in Health and Social Care to recognise the signs of Human Trafficking. This includes:

- “Working arrangements for the welfare and safeguarding of child victims/suspected victims of human trafficking”, published by DHSSPS and the Police Service of Northern Ireland in February 2011;
- “Working arrangements for the welfare and protection of adult victims of human trafficking”, published by DHSSPS and the Department of Justice in October 2012; and
- “Pathway for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of separated children” launched by DHSSPS in November 2013.

Belfast, South Eastern and Southern Trusts have delivered training for staff on how to recognise the signs of human trafficking. This topic is also addressed in all training provided by HSC Trusts on Safeguarding Children and is to be incorporated into future training on Adult Safeguarding.

In addition, awareness training and/or specialist training is provided for social workers, as appropriate to their duties, and within the curriculum of the Degree in Social Work sponsored by the Department. **(10<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## **Maintenance of Registers**

**Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how Health and Social Care Trusts maintain updated registers of children who have a disability.

**Mr J Wells (The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts do not maintain registers of children who have a disability. However, they have a range of information systems which record children with a disability who are known to particular services. Their key information system is the Child Health Information System which has the capacity to record a number of relevant areas of information in respect of children with a disability.

In addition, the Children's Services Improvement Board (CSIB) has established a work stream to review the current information systems used within HSC Trusts with a view to ensuring regional consistency and the validation of information. CSIB membership includes all HSC Trusts, the Health and Social Care Board and DHSSPS. **(12<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## Department of Justice

### Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking

**Mr David McNarry (UKIP – Strangford)** - To ask the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the number of vulnerable children who are put at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking through the inability of the National Crime Agency (NCA) to operate in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Ford (Minister of Justice):** There was a significant step forward in securing a full role for the National Crime Agency here on 3 February when the Assembly gave consent to Westminster introducing the necessary legislation. After an impasse since 7 October 2013 we should shortly be able to see a full operational NCA here supporting our law enforcement effort.

The inability to bring civil recovery cases in the devolved sphere has been costly. Since June 2013 there has been a 58% decrease in the number of Northern Ireland investigations (19 to 8). Obviously there have been no new devolved cases since October 2013. The value of the cases involved has dropped by approximately £4m net which gives an indication of the loss to the public purse. There has also been a 71% decrease in the number of property freezing orders in Northern Ireland cases.

There is no precise figure on the resource cost to the PSNI to accommodate work which should have been handled by NCA. They have, however, on occasion had to withdraw officers from other work. Difficult decisions regarding prioritisation have had to be made.

A 2014 report by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed their strong concern that, in the absence of National Crime Agency operation in the devolved sphere in Northern Ireland, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), which is integrated into the NCA, is not fully operational here. It suggested that this was an example of devolution leading to discrimination in the enjoyment of rights by children. The PSNI are able to access information and advice from CEOP. What has been missing, however, is access to operational support and an input into NCA planning strategically and operationally.

I hope that shortly the hiatus will be resolved and the people of Northern Ireland can then benefit from the expertise and resources of the National Crime Agency. **(9<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## Enhanced Disclosure Checks

**Mr Alban Maginness (SDLP – North Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Justice (i) how many Enhanced Disclosure checks are currently being processed by Access NI; (ii) what is the current average waiting time for an Enhanced Disclosure Certificate to be issued; and (iii) what action is being taken to address any delays.

**Mr Ford (Minister of Justice):** (i) AccessNI processed 127,758 enhanced disclosure checks in 2014. It receives on average 2,450 applications per week.

(ii) AccessNI is currently processing enhanced applications within 5 days of receipt. Approximately 72% of the checks can then be issued. The other 28% are sent to PSNI (or other police services as appropriate). Currently, a further 24% of all enhanced checks, are issued within five weeks of receipt once returned by police forces. The remaining small percentage of checks fall into a category of cases which cannot be issued until PSNI advise AccessNI if they have any information to be disclosed. The average waiting time for an enhanced check between 1 January and 31 December 2014 was 17.5 days.

(iii) There is regular contact between AccessNI and PSNI staff to review progress and backlogs. The PSNI have a backlog of the more complex cases requiring greater scrutiny. The Christmas holiday period has also impacted on their turnaround of the more straightforward cases. PSNI have a recovery plan in place, with steps being taken to reduce the number of outstanding cases over the next few months. AccessNI will continue to work with PSNI and to monitor the situation. **(10<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)

## **Child Protection and Safeguarding Policies**

**Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone)** - To ask the Minister of Justice, in relation to people convicted of sex offences against children or persons remanded on suspicion of child sex offences, and in line with child protection and safeguarding policies and given that no bail conditions can be imposed on prisoners, (i) what procedures are in place to prevent contact with children during prison visits; (ii) how visits in these circumstances can be accommodated; (iii) whether these visits are barred from occurring when children are present to visit other prisoners; and (iv) whether visits in these circumstances are routinely supervised by Social Services personnel, as per in the community.

**Mr Ford (Minister of Justice):** Managing visits to, and communication with, those prisoners who present a risk to children is done in accordance with NIPS' Child Protection Policy and Procedures contained in Safeguarding Children Framework and Guidance, which is available on the NIPS website. **(12<sup>th</sup> February)**

[Back to Top](#)