

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week of 27th February 2015

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Office of First and Deputy First Minister

Together: Building a United Community

Mr Trevor Lunn (APNI – Lagan Valley) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the United Youth programme 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 (DEL) and is being supported by a Design Team which includes representation from DEL, 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.

The First Pilot to help inform the design for the United Youth Programme which was rolled out by Springboard has concluded and has now been evaluated. 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 successful organisations (57 proposals) have been selected to proceed to a further development stage, following which 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. **(23rd February)**

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Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the role of the Northern Ireland Executive within the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There is currently no role for a representative of the Northern Ireland Executive within the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.
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Neighbourhood Renewal or Sure Start Provision

Mr Barry McElduff (Sinn Féin – West Tyrone) - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the range of schemes and services available to assist children and young people, in areas of social deprivation which do not qualify for Neighbourhood Renewal or Sure Start provision.

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There are a number of schemes and services provided by various Executive departments, including OFMDFM to assist children and young people in areas of social deprivation, in addition to that provided by Sure Start and Neighbourhood Renewal. Within these different policies and schemes the pool of people in need will invariably be different. The entitlement criteria may be defined by reference to the individual, groups, or areas or a collaboration of all three.

For example, in relation to schemes and services provided by OFMDFM, the Bright Start Childcare Grant Scheme aims to create childcare provision in the top 25% most disadvantaged Super Output Areas as identified using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Measure. It is available in some areas of social deprivation which do not qualify for Neighbourhood Renewal or Sure Start provision, but there is clearly some overlap.

There is also a range of schemes and services available in areas of social deprivation which use wholly, or in part, non-area based criteria to target children and young people in need. Examples of such schemes initiated by OFMDFM include:

- The Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes for Literacy and Numeracy and Family Support Hubs;
- Summer schools and camps during school holiday periods as set out in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy; and

- The £80 million Social Investment Fund, which aims to improve social conditions and encourage economic growth in areas where there is poverty, unemployment and dereliction, directly or indirectly assisting children and young people.

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Department of Education

Special Educational Needs Early Years Capacity Building Programme

Mr Danny Kinahan (UUP – South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education what assessment has been made of the Special Educational Needs Early Years Capacity Building Programme in the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) Early Years pilot is part of a wider pilot across all ELBs, which finished in pre-school settings at the end of September 2014. This was followed by an evaluation phase, which ended in December 2014.

An interim report from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) found that some progress had been made by the pilot teams; a final report is expected shortly. As an interim measure, pending the final ETI evaluation, arrangements have been put in place until 31 March 2015 across all ELBs to enable some of the earlier momentum to continue.

In advance of the Early Years interim arrangements ending in March, the Department in conjunction with the ELBs, is considering the future shape of SEN early years provision subject to resources being available. **(23rd February)**

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Looked After Children

Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP – Strangford) - To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 40927/11-15, what discussions his departmental officials have had with looked after children throughout the development of the policy.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of young people in care last year. They shared with me their experiences of education, some good, some not so good. They also gave me some ideas on how things could be improved and what was important to them.

The looked after children policy, which my officials are currently developing, will encompass the good work that has already been undertaken and provide the platform to consider the suggestions and ideas given to me during that meeting.

My officials have been listening to the voice of young people through looked after children teams in the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and through engagement with Fostering Network and VOYPIC. They plan to engage directly again with looked after children and young people as the policy is developed.

My officials are also revising the guidance on Personal Education Plans along with the DHSSPS, the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and ELBs. Young people in care have assisted with redesigning their contribution to the Personal Education Plan to make it more user friendly and meaningful for them. **(23rd February)**

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Teaching Posts

Mr John Dallat (SDLP – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the number of teaching posts that will be declared redundant in the next academic year.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): The Department does not employ teachers. Teachers are employed by the relevant Board of Governors for each school setting. They are responsible for determining decisions regarding their staffing complement and are currently considering staffing requirements for the 2015/16 academic year, taking into account such factors as curricular demand, pupil enrolment and the financial projections for the school setting. **(23rd February)**

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Educational Psychologist Referrals

Mr Daithí McKay (Sinn Féin – North Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 41585/11-15, how many pupils in each Education and Library Board waited longer than 9 months from the referral from the school until their first appointment with an educational psychologist in 2014.

Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education): The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of pupils who had their first appointment with an educational psychologist, at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, in the calendar year 2014 and who had been waiting longer than 9 months for that appointment is as follows:-

Education and Library Board	Number of Pupils
BELB	*
NEELB	26
SEELB	14
SELB	10
WELB	0

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

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Transfer System

Mr Chris Lyttle (APNI – East Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Education whether he will consider convening a cross-party working group to devise a more sustainable approach to the transfer system.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): The majority of our post-primary schools (138 for Transfer 2015) already use a sustainable approach to transfer from primary school to post-primary. A minority of post-primary schools (65 for Transfer 2015) continue to use so-called academic selection. These schools have made a conscious decision to do so. They have made a conscious decision to make pupils who apply to their schools sit either two tests under GL or up to three under AQE. They continue to do so despite the fact that all schools now teach to the same curriculum and, under the Entitlement Framework, all schools are now required to offer access to a broad range of subjects.

What is needed is an end to excuses being made for schools which consciously choose to practice a system of academic selection and rejection of 10 and 11 year old children when in fact another system is in place and operational.

Those opposed to academic selection need to actively campaign for its end in all schools to ensure equality of educational opportunity for all children. **(23rd February)**

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Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme

Mr Gregory Campbell (DUP – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister of Education how many children benefited from the Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): The Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme is now in its second year providing support to Key Stage Two primary school pupils and post-primary pupils taking GCSE English and maths. In the 2013/14 academic year pupils received support as follows:

In the primary sector -

- 1561 pupils received support for literacy;
- 1402 pupils received support for numeracy;
- 79 pupils received support for Irish; and

In the post-primary sector -

- 3023 pupils received support for English;
- 3635 pupils received support for Maths;

The number of pupils receiving support this academic year is not yet available but it is estimated that a similar number of pupils are being supported. **(25th February)**

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Educational Psychology Services

Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP – Strangford) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the average cost of referring a child to Educational Psychology Services.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): Due to the breadth of services delivered across each of the five Education and Library Boards’ Educational Psychology Services (EPS), it is not possible to accurately separate the costs associated with referring a child to a Board’s EPS. A meaningful calculation for an average cost cannot, therefore, be provided. **(25th February)**

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Funded Pre-School Places

Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP – Strangford) - To ask the Minister of Education to outline the decision making process and criteria used by each Education and Library Board when awarding a funded pre-school place to a two year old child.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): The aim of the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) is to provide one year of funded pre-school education for children who have reached three years and two months and are in their final pre-school year. The PSEP is non-compulsory and non-sectoral. Places are available in nursery schools and units attached to primary schools and in voluntary and private settings.

Under current legislation, statutory nursery education is available to children who are two years old but who have not reached compulsory school age. Two year olds may be offered a funded pre-school place once the pre-school admissions process reaches stage two and only in the statutory sector: they should, however, not be offered a place which

could accommodate a target age child.

Admissions criteria are a matter for individual schools and are applied when a school offers places to two year olds. Legislation, however, requires that the top criterion for each provider prioritises children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Evidence and experience have shown that many two year olds are not at a stage of development where they can benefit from the pre-school experience provided through the PSEP and when I launched Learning to Learn – a Framework for Early Years Education and Learning in late 2013 – I, therefore, announced my intention to bring forward a Bill, subject to the necessary approvals, to legislate to ensure that only children in their immediate pre-school year can be admitted as pupils for the purposes of the Pre-School Education Programme. **(25th February)**

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Special Educational Needs Inspections

Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 41968/11-15, whether he will take action to increase the number of Special Educational Needs inspections in these instances, on the grounds that seven years between inspections is too long and may not even be enough to ensure the requirements of a special needs pupil are being met adequately in the duration of their time at the school in question, even if they remain in the same school for the minimum five years.

Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education): As part of the ETI's proportionate risk-based approach towards inspection, any school can and may be inspected sooner than seven years should the need arise. Also, schools that are in the follow-up inspection process as a result of having an inspection with an outcome of satisfactory or below will automatically have a follow-up inspection within 18 to 24 months.

In addition to the formal inspection activity, all post-primary schools receive routine inspection visits by their district inspector. **(27th February)**

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Funded Pre-School Places

Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP – Strangford) - To ask the Minister of Education to detail the total cost of (i) all funded pre-school places; and (ii) funded pre-school places for two year olds in 2013/14, broken down by Education and Library Board.

Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education): The aim of the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) is to provide one year of funded pre-school education for children who have reached three years and two months and are in their final pre-school year. The PSEP is non-compulsory and places are available in nursery schools and units attached to primary schools and in voluntary and private settings.

Under current legislation, statutory nursery education is available to children who are two years old but who have not reached compulsory school age. Only children in their pre-school year can be admitted to voluntary and private pre-school settings.

The table below shows the total number of children and the total number of two year olds in pre-school places broken down by Education and Library Board:

Board	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	TOTAL
Total no. of Children*	3565	3939	5244	4874	5542	23164
No of 2 year olds*	96	137	236	119	107	695

*Information source - School Census 2013/14

For the reasons set out below, it is not possible to specify actual costs for pre-school children: identifiable funding available for pre-school education in 2013/14 was, however, approximately £56m

Budgets for grant-aided schools include nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools and it is not possible to disaggregate funding for nursery class pupils in primary schools from the overall budget delegated to the primary school.

In addition, funding for schools is based on year-group enrolment totals and, for grant-aided pre-school settings; it is not possible to disaggregate funding elements for age-specific pupils.

Schools receive a fully delegated budget and it is for each school's Board of Governors to determine spending priorities, in meeting the needs of all pupils within the school.

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Teacher Training

Mr Danny Kinahan (UUP – South Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Education where in Northern Ireland teachers can be trained specifically for Special Educational Needs skills; and if they have to travel to Birmingham for training, what financial support is given to help them attend the course.

Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education): In order to support pupils' special educational needs across school sectors, there is a wide range of training courses available to teachers across the north of Ireland. Training is offered by providers from the statutory, private and voluntary/community sectors. It is for each school principal to work in partnership with the relevant Education and Library Board to identify the most appropriate method for meeting the training needs identified for teachers in their school.

Each Education and Library Board will consider funding, on an individual basis, for a teacher who wishes to attend SEN training in Birmingham, or elsewhere outside of the north of Ireland.

Furthermore, student teachers in our local universities and colleges are educated in and expected to demonstrate understanding of the SEN Code of Practice. Their training covers the recognition of pupils' special needs and focuses on strategies to meet those needs. **(27th February)**

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Department of Finance and Personnel

Voluntary Exit Scheme

Mr John McCallister (IND – South Down) - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the governance arrangements associated with the Voluntary Exit Scheme; and whether decisions on departures will be peer reviewed, signed off at Permanent Secretary level and where necessary subject to internal audit.

Mr S Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel): The NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme has been developed and managed under robust project management arrangements, with a Senior Responsible Owner, Project Board and Project Manager in place to oversee the scheme. The business case for and terms of scheme have been subject to robust examination and have secured the necessary approvals at Permanent Secretary and Ministerial level.

Selection panels, made up of staff from departments, will be used to quality assure the selection process. Permanent Secretaries' Group will have an oversight role. This Voluntary Exit Scheme, in line with any area of my Department is subject to examination by Internal Audit at any time. **(24th February)**

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Voluntary Exit Scheme Impact Assessment

Mr John McCallister (IND – South Down) - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department intends to carry out an economic impact assessment of the Civil Service Voluntary Exit Scheme.

Mr S Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel): This question has been referred to me by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment as it refers to the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme. An economic impact assessment of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Voluntary Exit Scheme has not been made, since the scheme has been designed with the objective of facilitating significant pay bill reductions required to live within their 2015/16 Budget allocations. This is a voluntary scheme and so any impact can only be analysed once the scheme has closed and numbers and profile of applicants is known. **(24th February)**

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Staff Exit Scheme Business Case

Mr Jim Allister (TUV – North Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will place a copy of the business case for the 20,000 staff exit scheme across the public service in the Assembly library.

Mr S Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel): There is no single business case for the Public Sector Voluntary Exit Scheme. Each public sector organisation will prepare individual business cases to support bids to the Public Sector Restructuring Fund. The NICS business case for the Voluntary Exit Scheme covers the NICS only.

There are no plans to place copies of all business cases for such schemes in the Assembly Library. **(26th February)**

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Monitoring of the Proposed Voluntary Exit Scheme

Mr John McCallister (IND – South Down) - To ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service will work with Permanent Secretaries to provide strategic oversight and active monitoring of the proposed Voluntary Exit Scheme.

Mr S Hamilton (Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Head of the NI Civil Service chairs the Public Sector Restructuring Steering Group comprising senior officials from each department nominated by their Ministers to provide oversight of the process for allocation of the funding for voluntary exit schemes across the public sector over a four year period.

The Voluntary Exit Scheme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service has been subject to consideration at Permanent Secretaries Group at all stages under the chairmanship of the Head of the Civil Service. **(26th February)**

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Department of Health

Children's Palliative Care Strategy

Mr Fearghal McKinney (SDLP – South Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progression of a Children's Palliative Care Strategy, following the public consultation that ended on 28 March 2014.

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): My Department has finalised its draft Strategy for Children's Palliative and End-of-Life Care. The draft strategy will shortly be referred to the Health and Social Care Board to prepare an Implementation Plan to be published with the final strategy subject to my approval. I expect this work to be concluded for publication by May 2015. **(23rd February)**

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Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Ross Hussey (UUP – West Tyrone) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what steps have been taken by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to liaise with parents of children who were given the wrong vaccination at Omagh Academy; (ii) the background to the mistake; (iii) what steps have been taken to ensure this does not happen again; and (iv) whether the results of the investigation by the Public Health Agency be published. **[Priority Written]**

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I have been made aware that a letter was issued by the Western Health and Social Care Trust on 26 January 2015 to every parent/carer of a child vaccinated on 12 January 2015 in Omagh Academy providing points of contact, to facilitate parents/guardians contacting the Trust. The School Health Lead in the Trust has been in constant direct contact with both the school and parents answering any queries.

The Public Health Agency have informed me that the investigation is being dealt with as a Trust Serious Adverse Incident and the guidance for the investigation of Serious Adverse Incidents is therefore being followed. The investigation is being led by the Trust with appropriate input from the Public Health Agency. The findings will be shared with the parents of the pupils, the school and the education and library board.

Any findings and learning points from the investigation will be shared by the Public Health Agency/Health and Social Care Board with all HSC Trusts to ensure that a similar incident does not occur in any other Trust. **(23rd February)**

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Screening of Newborn Babies

Mr Jim Allister (TUV – North Antrim) - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what differences exist in the screening of newborn babies in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom for genetic disorders.

Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme currently in place in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom offers screening for phenylketonuria (PKU), congenital hypothyroidism (CH), cystic fibrosis (CF), MCADD (medium chain acyl CoA dehydrogenase deficiency), and sickle cell disorders (SCD).

In 2014 the UK National Screening Committee (NSC) recommended that every newborn baby in the UK should be screened for four additional conditions. This would involve expanding the existing Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme to include screening for: Homocystinuria (HCU), Maple Syrup Urine Disease (MSUD), Glutaric Aciduria Type 1 (GA1) and Isovaleric Aciduria (IVA). Screening for these four other inherited metabolic diseases is being rolled out in England. Wales is also extending its bloodspot programme to include these four additional conditions. I too would hope to be in a position to do this in Northern Ireland and on new service development funding becoming available; expansion of the Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme will be prioritised and considered. A decision has not yet been taken in Scotland.

It is recognised the early identification of these rare disorders (approximately 3 in Northern Ireland every two years) can prevent death and significantly improve the quality of life for those living with these conditions. **(24th February)**

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Department of Justice

Young Offenders

Mr Fearghal McKinney (SDLP – South Belfast) - To ask the Minister of Justice how many young offenders in each of the last three years were from a foster care background.

Mr D Ford (Minister of Justice): When Young Offenders are committed to Hydebank Wood they are inducted through a committal process. However, this does not include researching if they have a foster care background. **(25th February)**

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Department for Social Development

Social Fund and Community Care Grants System

Ms Claire Sugden (IND – East Londonderry) - To ask the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the support provided by the Social Fund and Community Care Grants system to working parents on a low income, who have a child with a disability.

Mr M Storey (Minister for Social Development): The Social Fund scheme comprises a regulated element which provides entitlement to maternity, funeral, cold weather and winter fuel payments and a discretionary element made up of, Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans. Subject to working parents on a low income satisfying the relevant qualifying conditions, they may be entitled to Cold Weather Payments, Community Care Grants, Budgeting Loans and Crisis Loans to meet the specific needs of a disabled child.

My Department's Annual Report on the Social Fund was published on 17 December 2014 and provides details of the £82 million paid out from the discretionary element of the Social Fund during 2013/14. The report highlights that over:

- 129,000 Budgeting Loans were awarded totalling £53.69 million
- 103,000 Crisis Loans awards totalling £14.45 million were made
- 20,000 Community Care Grants awards totalling £13.69 million were made

Information is not recorded separately on applications specifically related to disabled children; however, these figures are a clear indication that for thousands of people across Northern Ireland who are on low incomes, the Social Fund provides valuable assistance in helping them cope with unforeseen emergencies and managing unanticipated expenditure. **(23rd February)**

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