

## **NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week ending 13 March, 2015**

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## Office of First and Deputy First Minister

### Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation

**Steven Agnew (GPNI - North Down)** - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the groups that will be (a) included; and (b) excluded from goods, facilities and services legislation; and whether the legislation will be subject to Equality Impact Assessment for all Section 75 categories.

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We made a Written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 19 February 2015 announcing our decision to take forward proposals to prohibit unfair age discrimination against people aged 16 and over by those providing goods, facilities and services. We want to make sure that the proposed new legislation prohibits only harmful or unjustifiable age discrimination. As a consequence, the proposed new law will allow for differences in treatment for different age groups protecting a number of age based practices. Our consultation document will set out those age-based practices for which we believe exceptions from the prohibition on age discrimination may be warranted. The proposed legislation will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment across all Section 75 categories. **(13<sup>th</sup> March)**

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### Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation

**Mr Colum Eastwood (SDLP - Foyle)** - To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether age discrimination legislation relating to goods, facilities and services will be developed within the current mandate.

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We made a written Ministerial Statement to the Assembly on 19 February 2015 announcing our decision to take forward proposals to prohibit unfair age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services. The next step is to bring forward a consultation document setting out our proposals. Once the consultation is complete and a policy agreed, we will then consider all the options available to us for bringing this legislation before the Assembly. **(13<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Department of Culture Arts and Leisure

### Leisure and Social Activities

**Ms Claire Sugden (Ind – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the provision for low cost or free leisure and social activities which meet the needs of disabled children from low income families.

**Ms C Ní Chuilín (Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** There are a wide range of leisure and social activities supported by my Department that are available to disabled children from low income families.

The Libraries NI network provides accessible buildings with lifts, disabled toilets etc and provides a range of activities which are open to all children, regardless of disability including Rhythm and Rhyme for pre-school children/ families, Storytime, Craft sessions and special events such as author readings.

Library membership is free and provides all children with access to a wide range of age appropriate books and other material. Libraries provide material from Clear Vision and Access to Books, specifically aimed at children with a visual impairment and material from Barrington Stoke which is specifically aimed at children with dyslexia. Audio book and eBooks are also widely used by children with disabilities.

National Museums provides free entry for people with disabilities and their carers to the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum and the Ulster American Folk Park. During April 2014-January 2015, over 4,500 people with disabilities and carers visited the two museums. Admission to the Ulster Museum is free for all.

Arts Council supports the core costs for several Arts & Disability organisations which provide activities for young people with disabilities. These include;

- Drake Music - provides access to music for people with disabilities using state of the art instruments. The organisation aims to provide free music programmes for children and young adults with disabilities as part of its 15/16 programme.
- Open Arts – provides arts activities for disabled people, including young people, in music, visual arts, drama and creative writing. The organisation is working on a 'Youth Development' programme and has a partnership with disability organisations such as Angel Eyes and Autism NI.
- Replay Theatre Company - provides children an opportunity to experience live theatre and the arts. Replay's 'Up' production focuses on young audiences with

Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD).

- Streetwise Community Circus – aims to make circus skills accessible to all communities and individuals. Streetwise has a focus on working with young people with disabilities and has established an annual ‘Circus Summer School’.
- Kids in Control - this theatre company ‘values children and young people of all backgrounds and abilities, without discrimination’. The organisation runs inclusive theatre projects and has an established apprenticeship programme for young adults with disabilities.

Under the Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986, the provision of leisure services, including facilities for people with disabilities, rests in the first instance, with District Councils. However, Sport NI supports a range of interventions for people with a disability to participate in sport. These include:

- Provision of a range of pan-disability activities and opportunities through Sport NI’s Disability Mainstreaming Policy delivered by Disability Sport NI;
- An annual programme of activities delivered by Special Olympics Ireland for athletes with learning/intellectual disabilities benefitting approximately 1,700 individuals;
- Delivery of the Active Communities programme in partnership with 11 District Council consortia (benefitting approximately 12,000 people with a disability);
- In 2014/15, Sport NI invested with a variety of groups to provide free/low-cost opportunities for people with a disability to participate in sport through its small grants programme. These included groups such as Ulster Deaf Sports Council, NI Blindsport Network, Autism Initiative NI and the Coleraine & District Riding for the Disabled Association, amongst others.

Foras na Gaeilge runs a range of funding schemes which are openly advertised and available to all. When funding Campaí Samhraidh (Summer Camps) and Imeachtaí Óige (Youth Events) fees charged are monitored to ensure that these are not a barrier to participation.

The Ulster Scots Agency provides summer schemes in special schools which provide insight into Ulster Scots language, music and dance. These have taken place in Strabane, Fermanagh and Derry. Ulster Scots Music and dance schemes are also open to everyone including disabled children.

Waterways Ireland provides opportunities for children with disabilities and those from low income families to access and use outdoor recreational facilities. All mooring facilities and amenity areas are designed in accordance with both universal design standards and its Access for Disabled Persons Policy and Procedures. **(10<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Department of Education

### Shared Education Policy

**Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education whether the introduction of a shared education policy and a legal definition is his starting point for a single education system.

**Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education):** The introduction of a shared education policy and legal definition is in line with the Executive's commitment to advance shared education. It will ensure a more integrated approach to educating children and young people from different communities together and build on the rich diversity which is a strength of our education system. **(10<sup>th</sup> March)**

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### Youth Services

**Mr Danny Kinahan (UUP – South Antrim)** - To ask the Minister of Education, in light of his statement of 19 January 2015 on the restoration of £2 million to Education and Library Board youth services for the 2015/16 budget, what impact is anticipated on the voluntary youth sector.

**Mr J O'Dowd (Minister of Education):** Decisions on the allocation of the Education Authority's youth service budget, including provision of funding to voluntary youth sector groups and organisations, is an operational matter for the Education Authority.

Future funding of youth services by the Education Authority and the Youth Council will be in line with the Regional Youth Development Plan and Priorities for Youth, and, within the resources available. **(10<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Early Years Educational Intervention

**Mr Peter Weir (DUP – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Education what schemes or funding streams are available through his Department to assist with early years educational intervention.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** The following schemes or funding streams are currently available through the Department of Education to assist with early year’s educational intervention:

- Pre-School Education Programme
- Sure Start Programme
- Early Years Fund
- Toybox
- Extended Services for non statutory pre-school providers
- Support Services for Irish-medium Pre-School Education providers
- SEN Early Years Interim Capacity Building

(12<sup>th</sup> March)

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## Early Years Fund

**Ms Claire Sugden (Ind – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Education to outline the immediate impact on the most vulnerable in society of the announcement that the Early Years Fund is to be reduced by over two thirds in the financial year 2015/16.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** I have ensured that budget is available in 2015/16 to enable all recipient groups to receive continued funding to the end of the current academic year i.e. 31 August 2015. There will therefore be no immediate impact on the recipients of the DE Early Years Fund which is administered by Early Years – the Organisation for young people (EYO) on behalf of the Department.

The Fund was originally established in 2004 to help sustain certain early childhood services in areas of greatest need which were facing funding difficulties when Peace II funding ended. It has effectively remained as a “closed” Fund since then to applicants that were in areas of greatest need at that time.

I will continue to review my budget to establish if a fund can continue beyond 31 August 2015. However any such fund will have to be open to all and reflect the policy priorities of DE. **(13<sup>th</sup> March)**

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### Early Years Funding Projects

**Mr Sammy Wilson (DUP – East Antrim)** - To ask the Minister of Education to list all of the Early Years funding projects, and their location, that will have their funding cut from 31 March 2015.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** None of the recipient groups of the DE Early Years Fund will have funding cut from 31 March 2015.

The budget for the Fund, which is administered by Early Years the Organisation for Young Children (EYO) has been reduced by £2m in 2015/16. The residual 2015/16 Fund will enable all (153) recipient groups to receive continued funding to the end of the current academic year i.e. 31 August 2015.

I will continue to review my budget to establish if a fund can continue beyond 31 August 2015. However any such fund will have to be open to all and reflect the policy priorities of DE.

**The current recipients of the DE Early Years Fund are:**

Group Name	Location
174 Trust Pre-School	Belfast
Acorn Women's Group	Augher
Aghadowey Pre-School Playgroup	Coleraine
An Droichead	Belfast
Appletree Childcare	Coleraine
Ardstraw Community Playgroup	Newtownstewart
Armoy Cross Community Playgroup	Ballymoney
Ashgrove Pre - School Playgroup	Portadown
Ashton Childcare	Belfast

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Atlas Creche	Lisburn
Atticall Playgroup	Kilkeel
Ballinascreen Early Years Pre-Sch Education Centre	Draperstown
Balloughry Integrated Community Playgroup	Derry
Ballykinlar Cross Community Pre School Ltd	Downpatrick
Ballymacarrett Youth and Community Project	Belfast
Banagher Community Playgroup	Derry
Barnardos BME	Belfast
Barnardos Forward Steps	Belfast
Barnardos Travellers Pre-School	Belfast
BCDA	Belfast
Beacon Playgroup	Cookstown
Bees Nees Early Years Centre	Newtownards
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	Belfast
Benburb Community Playgroup	Dungannon
Blackie Creche	Belfast
Bloomfield Playgroup	Belfast
Bunnahone Bunnies Playgroup	Derrygonnelly
Buttonmoon Playgroup	Tandragee
Carebears Community Playgroup	Newtownstewart
Carryduff Pre School Playgroup	Belfast
Castlerock Community Playgroup	Castlerock
Caw Community Playgroup	Derry
Chirpy Chicks Playgroup	Greyabbey
Chrysalis Women's Centre	Craigavon
Clady Tiny Tots	Clady
Clough & District Community Playgroup	Ballymena
Cloughmills Early Years	Cloughmills

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Crows Nest Community Playgroup	Coleraine
Dara Playgroup	Armagh
Derry Well Woman Creche	Derry
Derrytrasna Playgroup	Craigavon
Dervock Playgroup	Ballymoney
Drumellan Community Association	Craigavon
Drumsum Parent and Toddler	Limavady
Dundrum Cross Community Playgroup	Dundrum
Dunloy Community Playgroup	Ballymoney
Dunnaman Childrens Centre	Kilkeel
Earlybird Playgroup	Armagh
Falls Women's Centre	Belfast
First Steps Community Playgroup (PM Session)	Castleberg
First Steps Day Care Project	Castleberg
First Steps Playgroup	Belfast
Forthspring Afterschools	Belfast
Foyle Downs Syndrome Trust	Derry
Gingerbread Lone Parent Services	Derry
Glenarm Community Pre School	Glenarm
Greengables Playgroup	Carrickfergus
Grove Community Playgroup	Lisburn
Hansel and Gretal Pre School	Glynn
Happy Days Playgroup	Newry
Harbour Bears Pre-School Playgroup	Larne
Harpurs Hill Community Early Years	Coleraine
Hillside Pre School Playgroup	Newtownabbey
Hobby Horse Playgroup	Belfast
Holy Cross Pre School	Belfast

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Holy Trinity Centre	Belfast
Ionad Uibh Eachach	Belfast
Kiddies Castle Early Years	Castledawson
Kids Korner	Larne
Kids R Us Cross Community	Fivemiletown
Kidzone Playgroup (Newry)	Newry
Kilkeel Community Association	Kilkeel
Killean Playgroup	Newry
Killen Parent and Toddler	Castleberg
Killyleagh Early Years P & T	Killyleagh
Killyman Community Playgroup	Dungannon
Kingdom Playgroup	Kilkeel
Krafty Kids (Ogras)	Coalisland
Ladybird Playgroup	Omagh
Laurencetown Playgroup	Laurencetown
Leitrim Community Playgroup	Castlewellan
Lifestart Limavady	Limavady
Ligoniel Family Centre	Belfast
Little Acorns Playgroup Derrynoose	Derrynoose
Little Amps Playgroup	Maghera
Little Castles Playgroup	Lisnaskea
Little Diamonds Community Playgroup	Claudy
Little Doves Childcare Centre	Newtownards
Little Folk Playgroup	Rostrevor
Little Oaks Pre-School Playgroup	Craigavon
Little People Playgroup	Newry
Little Rainbows PG	Maghera
Little Rascals Community Playgroup	Limavady

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Little Villagers Playgroup	Loughilly
Loughgiel Community PG	Loughgiel
Lower Oldpark Community Association	Belfast
Macosquin Community Playgroup	Coleraine
Magherafelt Womens Group (Kidz Lodge)	Magherafelt
Magic Roundabout Playgroup	Omagh
Magilligan Community Playgroup	Limavady
Monkstown Community School Playgroup	Monkstown
Mother Goose Community Playgroup	Ballycastle
Naiscoil an Chreagain	Silverbridge
Naiscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh	Belfast
Naiscoil Ard Eoin	Belfast
Naiscoil Charn Tochair	Maghera
Naiscoil Dhun Padraig	Downpatrick
Naiscoil Mhachaire Ratha	Maghera
Newhill First Steps Childcare Centre	Belfast
NICMA	Newtownards
O'Fiaich Playgroup	Armagh
Old Warren Community Association	Lisburn
Omagh Early Years Centre	Omagh
Orana Nursery	Newry
Orchard Community Playgroup	Limavady
Parish of Nativity Playgroup, Poleglass	Belfast
Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup	Dungannon
Portaferry Playgroup	Newtownards
Portrush Community Pre-School Playgroup	Portrush
Poyntzpass Community Playgroup	Poyntzpass
Rainbow Child and Family Centre (WHSSB)	Derry

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Location</b>
Rainbow Community Playgroup	Omagh
Rainbow Playgroup	Carrickfergus
Rasharkin Community Playgroup	Ballymena
Roden Street Development Group	Belfast
Scoil na Fuisseoige	Dunmurray
Shalom House Creche	Belfast
Shankill Women's Centre	Belfast
Slievegallion Community Playgroup	Magherafelt
Smart Attack Childcare Services	Omagh
St Teresa's Youth Centre	Belfast
Stepping Stones Playgroup	Maghera
Stepping Stones Pre School Nursery	Newtownabbey
Stewartstown Tiny Tots	Stewartstown
Straidarran Community Playgroup	Claudy
Strangford Parent and Toddler	Strangford
Sugar and Spice Playgroup	Drumquin
Sunflower Early Years Group	Fintona
Taghnevan Pre School Playgroup	Lurgan
Taylorstown Cross Community Complex	Toomebridge
The Cedar Foundation	Derry
The Firs Playgroup	Armagh
The Orchard Playgroup	Loughgall
Tiny Steps Creche	Cookstown
Tiny Toons Playgroup	Ballyhoran
Tiny Tots Community Playgroup	Strathfoyle
Tiny Tots Corner Playgroup	Killylea
Tober Tinys Playgroup	Tobermore
Upper Andersonstown Comm. Forums Daycare Facility	Belfast

Group Name	Location
West Bann Development (Dev Worker)	Coleraine
Whiterock Creche Centre	Belfast
Windsor Women's Centre	Belfast
Zero-8-Teen	Brownlow

**(13<sup>th</sup> March)**

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### Early Years Fund

**Ms Claire Sugden (Ind – East Londonderry)** - To ask the Minister of Education how a reduction of the Early Years Fund would impact upon the most disadvantaged communities in Northern Ireland.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** During 2014/15 there were 153 recipients of the DE Early Years Fund. The Fund was established to help sustain certain early childhood services in areas of greatest need which were facing funding difficulties when Peace II funding ended; and to support of a number of Capacity and Development posts aimed at enhancing quality and good governance within the early childhood sector.

The Fund is effectively “closed” as applications are generally only accepted from previous recipients to the Fund.

Following a reduction of £2m the residual Fund will have a value of £941k in 2015/16. This will enable all recipient groups to receive continued funding to the end of the current academic year i.e. 31 August 2015.

I will continue to review my budget to establish if a fund can continue beyond 31 August 2015. However any such fund will have to be open to all and reflect the policy priorities of DE. **(13<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## **Safeguarding and Behaviour Support Budget**

**Miss Michelle McIlveen (DUP – Strangford)** - To ask the Minister of Education how he intends to achieve savings of £1.4m in the Safeguarding and Behaviour Support budget.

**Mr J O’Dowd (Minister of Education):** I will be making £12m of earmarked funding available to the Education Authority (EA) for Safeguarding and Behaviour Support in the 2015/16 financial year. This is a very sizeable budget over and above the Authority's core budget.

It is not planned that any services in this area will be removed, however, the Department has identified areas where new work will be deferred and others where we believe there is scope for administrative savings to be made.

Ultimately it will be a decision for the EA where the savings are made or whether additional resources for safeguarding and behaviour support can be found elsewhere in its budget. As with all other aspects of the education budget, we must consider how we effectively meet these needs with less money. **(13<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Department of Employment and Learning

### Apprenticeship Places

**Mr Phil Flanagan (Sinn Féin – Fermanagh and South Tyrone)** - To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration has been given to introducing a ring fenced number of apprenticeship places for people with special educational needs.

**Mr S Farry (Minister for Employment and Learning):** My Department's Apprenticeships NI programme is an employer-led training provision, with employers creating apprenticeship positions in line with their future business needs. It is therefore employers who determine the number of apprenticeships available.

Where required, a 'disability supplement' of up to £1,560 is available to enable training suppliers to provide individual apprentices with support in relation to the off-the-job training element of an apprenticeship, for example, to provide additional training or specialist equipment.

Specialist Disability Support Suppliers are contracted to work with training suppliers to ensure that apprentices with disabilities are given every opportunity to overcome their difficulties and develop using appropriate support mechanisms.

In relation to employing an apprentice, the Department can also provide specialist disability support to employers and apprentices through the Workable (NI) and Access to Work (NI) programmes.

Extensive information on relevant services is available through the Skills to Succeed website <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/skills-to-succeed> (9th March)

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## Department for Environment

### Newry and Mourne District Council

**Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP – Fermanagh and South Tyrone)** - To ask the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of Newry and Mourne District Council's decision to name a children's play park in memory of a convicted terrorist.

**Mr M Durkan (Minister of the Environment):** The naming of a facility by a district council is a matter for that council, as an independent legal entity. However, in the exercise of its functions, a district council must have regard to the provisions of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in relation to equality of opportunity and the promotion of good relations.

In taking decisions councillors should also bear in mind their responsibilities when acting as a district council to represent the interests of all the residents of the local government district.

The provisions that I brought before the House on 24 February 2015 in the draft Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 were designed to copper-fasten the provisions, for the protection of the interests of minority communities in council decision-making, contained in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The absence of the approval of the draft Regulations, as a result of the tabling of a Petition of Concern, means that the protections that this House approved when it passed the 2014 Act will not be delivered, and a means for addressing issues similar to that which the member highlights, through the combination of call-in as provided for in the 2014 Act and qualified majority voting, is no longer available.

The Standing Orders Regulations, had they been approved, would provide the mechanism to require a decision called in by councillors on disproportionate adverse impact grounds to be taken by a qualified majority. This would mean that such decisions would require the support of 80 per cent of the members who are present and voting on the decision for it to be approved, and become council policy. **(11<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Department of Health

### Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation

**Mr Fearghal McKinney (SDLP – South Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact the proposed Goods, Facilities and Services legislation will have on the provision of health and social care services.

**Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I understand that the main aim of the proposed Goods, Facilities and Services legislation is to outlaw unjustifiable age discrimination by those providing goods, facilities and services and exercising public functions. However, it is not possible to offer an assessment of the impact of the proposed legislation on the provision of health and social care services until a final version of the Bill has been prepared and available for scrutiny. **(9th March)**

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## Drug Rehabilitation Treatment

**Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of children referred for drug rehabilitation treatment in each of the last three years; and (ii) the percentage of children referred who have not relapsed into drug use.

**Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Information on the number of children referred for drug rehabilitation treatment is not available. However, the number of young people aged under eighteen who presented for treatment for drug misuse to Addiction Treatment Service providers is collected through the Drugs Misuse Database (DMD). The latest publication is available at: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/dmd-2013-14.pdf>.

The number of young people aged under eighteen who presented for treatment for drug misuse in each of the last three years is given in the table below.

Year	Under 18s who presented for treatment for drug misuse
2011/12	217
2012/13	198
2013/14	174

Source: Drugs Misuse Database

Information on the percentage of children referred who have not relapsed into drug use is not available. (9<sup>th</sup> March) [Back to Top](#)

## Drug and Alcohol Addiction Treatment

**Ms Rosaleen McCorley (Sinn Féin – West Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many young people have been treated in Beechcroft for drug and alcohol addiction, since the facility opened.

**Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** No young people have been treated solely for drug or alcohol addiction in Beechcroft since the facility opened. Young people being treated in Beechcroft are likely to have a range of social and emotional problems, including substance misuse, for which they need specialist support. (10th March) [Back to Top](#)

## **Drug and Alcohol Addictions Contractual Reviews**

**Ms Rosaleen McCorley (Sinn Féin – West Belfast)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Extra Contractual Reviews have been requested and granted for young people with drug and alcohol addictions in the last five years.

**Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) operates a process which allows local Health & Social Care 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. The HSCB does not hold ECR records for the full timescale specified and does not routinely collect the information requested.

### **However, in 2013/14:**

- The HSCB did not support any inpatient treatment outside Northern Ireland for patients (adults or children) with a primary diagnosis of addiction.
- The HSCB received 24 ECR requests for mental health and addiction services, approving 21 of them. These referrals were for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Eating Disorder, Obsessive–compulsive Disorder (OCD), Mental Health Assessment, Acquired Brain Injury, Personality Disorder, Eating Disorder and Alcohol Dependency (some of the referrals were for a combination of these issues).

In analysing these referrals, we can confirm 11 of the 24 requests related to children i.e. referrals within the CAMHS and Family and Child Care programmes of care. The HSCB has stated that given the low number of Extra Contractual Referrals (ECRs) made for mental health or addiction services, to ensure anonymity it is not possible to provide further breakdown on these figures. **(11<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## **Drug Rehabilitation Best Practice**

**Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the evidence in relation to best practice in drug rehabilitation for young people; and for his assessment of whether the current provision of services in Northern Ireland can be defined as best practice.

**Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Young people will require a range of services – from information, education and awareness raising through to treatment and support. Evidence shows that very few young people actually develop physical dependency.

The research shows limited evidence for the effectiveness of residential treatment services for young people – with community-based services being deemed as effective as or more effective than residential treatment for the majority of young people. Guidance from the former National Treatment Agency in the UK states that those young people who do use drugs or alcohol problematically are likely to be vulnerable and experiencing a range of problems, including mental health issues, trauma, and relationship issues. It is therefore important that such young people can access holistic services – including child and adolescent mental health services – which should be supported by in-reach specialist input and support to address the substance misuse element of their issues. This is the approach currently undertaken in Northern Ireland. For the very small number of young people who may need residential treatment just for alcohol and drug misuse, an Extra Contractual Referral to a service outside Northern Ireland may be appropriate – there were no such referrals in 2013/14 (the last year figures are currently available for). **(11<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Drug Rehabilitation Facilities

**Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI – North Down)** - To ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what drug rehabilitation facilities are available for children in Northern Ireland; (ii) where facilities are located; (iii) the number of spaces currently available in these facilities; (iv) the criteria which must be met before a child is referred into these facilities; and (v) how a child can be referred to these facilities.

**Mr J Wells (Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Drug and alcohol misuse services for young people cover a wide range of areas from education, information and awareness raising, through to early intervention and harm reduction, community-based counselling and mentoring services right up to treatment and support. Where appropriate, these services work in partnership with other Health and Social Care teams to respond to the complex needs of clients, including Children and Family Services, Mental Health teams, Probation and Criminal Justice teams. The full range of alcohol and drug services available across Northern Ireland, and their locations and contact details, can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/drug-and-alcohol-directories-services>. It should be noted that work is underway to commission a range of updated services in light of new guidelines and evidence, and it is anticipated these will be in place from July 2015.

Given the nature of these services, it is not possible to say how many spaces are available as they cover a variety of different approaches and treatment models. The criteria for accessing these services or being referred differs between the service types – but the initial approach should be through the young person’s GP, who can refer them to the appropriate care pathway. In addition, some of the services accept self-referrals (such as the young people’s counselling services in each Trust area).

In a majority of cases, children and young people with the most complex substance misuse problems also have co-occurring issues such as mental health, trauma, criminal justice involvement, relationship problems, etc. This means that it is therefore important that such young people can access holistic services which should be supported by in-reach from alcohol and drug misuse specialist input. The Child & Adolescent Inpatient Unit at Beechcroft, which has 33 beds and is based at the Forster Green Hospital, is the dedicated regional mental health inpatient facility for children and young people under the age of 18 in Northern Ireland. If a young person is admitted to Beechcroft, and as well as mental health problems they also have substance misuse problems, they are supported on an in-reach basis by the Drugs and Alcohol Misuse Mental Health Service (DAMMHS) team. (11<sup>th</sup> March) [Back to Top](#)

## Department of Justice

### Age of Criminal Responsibility

**Mr Basil McCrea (NI21 – Lagan Valley)** - To ask the Minister of Justice whether any progress has been made on increasing the age of criminal responsibility.

**Mr D Ford (Minister of Justice):** To date, there has been no progress on raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility in line with the recommendation in the Youth Justice Review. The absence of cross-party support for an increase has meant that my Department cannot implement any such change.

Whilst this remains the case, criminal justice agencies will continue to work in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations to divert children from crime and the criminal justice system and support them to make positive life choices. **(11<sup>th</sup> March)**

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## Department of Social Development

### Welfare Reform

**Mr Patsy McGlone (SDLP – Mid Ulster)** - To ask the Minister for Social Development what steps his Department is taking to implement the next stage of Welfare Reform.

**Mr M Storey (Minister for Social Development):** I was due to take the Welfare Reform Bill through its final stage yesterday but as the member is aware Sinn Fein, with support from your party, has placed a petition of concern against the Bill, which astounds me.

My Department is ready to progress a programme of work to put in place the operational arrangements for each of the changes which are being brought about by the Welfare Reform Bill. These changes would represent some of the most significant changes introduced in the last 60 years. The programme of work to implement these changes will require a period of dual running of the existing and new social security systems and it is expected the overall project will take up to 4 years to fully implement.

I will also be bringing forward a number of schemes which the Executive parties agreed at their 22 January meeting, and once these have been agreed, there will be a period of public consultation followed by sub ordinate legislation. The Social Security Agency is currently planning to have all of the schemes in operation by the end of 2015.

**(10<sup>th</sup> March)**

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