NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions weeks 9 and 16 September 2016

Development of a 14-19 statement/strategy

AQW 1117/16-21	Dr Stephen Farry *(APNI - North Down)*	**To ask the Minister for the Economy to outline his plans to develop a 14-19 statement or strategy with the Minister of Education in order to better co-ordinate the strengths of school, further education and other youth training to provide a wider range of options for young people.** The new Programme for Government will provide both the Department for the Economy and the Department of Education the opportunity to review the education and training provision currently available for the 14-19cohort. Officials from both Departments met on 17 June to have some preliminary discussions on this and other issues of mutual interest. Any proposals for change to current arrangements will emerge in the context of the detailed development of the Programme for Government in the next few months.

Waiting lists at the Belfast Trust's Child Development Clinic

AQO 227/16-21	Mr Chris Lyttle *(APNI - East Belfast)*	**To ask the Minister of Health for an update on the recruitment of community paediatricians by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in order to reduce waiting lists for pre-school assessments at the Trust's Child Development Clinic.** The Belfast Trust has experienced difficulty in the past in recruiting community paediatricians. The Trust is actively seeking to fill two current vacancies, a Speciality Doctor and Consultant Paediatrician. The current recruitment process underway has yielded applications for the Specialty Doctor in Community Paediatrics post and interviews will take place in September 2016. In addition, a recruitment exercise is underway to

		recruit a Community and General Consultant Paediatrician. The closing date for applications for this post is 13 September 2016. The filling of these posts will contribute to the reduction of waiting list for pre-school assessments at the Trusts Child Development Clinic.

Shared Education programmes 2011-15

AQW 2894/16-21	Mr Chris Lyttle *(APNI - East Belfast)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline the shared education programmes that children took part in between 2011-15.** There were a number of International Fund for Ireland pilot shared education projects, that were implemented up to the closure of their Sharing In Education Programme in December 2013. Details of the pilot programmes are available on the IFI website (www.internationalfundforireland.com). The Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project, which is being implemented through the Education Authority, opened for applications inDecember 2014 with delivery commencing during the last two terms of 2014/15 academic year. Action plans are unique to each school, based on self evaluation against the ETI Framework for School Collaboration and designed to further embed shared education.

Definition of Shared Education

	AQW 2892/16-21	Mr Chris Lyttle *(APNI - East Belfast)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline the definition of Shared Education.** Shared Education is defined within the Shared Education Act (NI) 2016 as: Shared education means the education together of— those of different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not, which is secured by the working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers.

DE's work in greater Shankill area

AQO 205/16-21	Mr William Humphrey *(DUP - North Belfast)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline his Department's work in the greater Shankill area.** In the current financial year, my Department has provided funding as follows: Shankill Sure Start Project has been allocated £607,314 to provide Sure Start services within their catchment area to children aged under 4 and their parents in 2016/17. Schools within the Greater Shankill area receive funding of just under £320,000 as part of the Extended Schools Programme. Belfast Boys' Model and Belfast Model School for Girls receive funding of £385,000 for the Full Service Schools Programme. The service offers substantial additional programmes and activities not only for pupils but also the local community. Four schools within the Greater Shankill area receive funding of £70,000 each for nurture group provision, an in-school, teacher-

		led psychosocial intervention involving small groups of around 6 to 10 children. Funding of £116,160 has been provided to West Kirk Youth and Community Project; £45,000 has been provided to Mount Coylier Youth Centre and £78,000 provided to Woodvale Youth Club for refurbishment of premises. The Education Authority's Youth Office is also currently engaged in youth work in the greater Shankill area across statutory and voluntary provision to deliver a wide range of personal and social development programmes. The Greater Shankill Partnership Board has been allocated £59,130 as part of the West Belfast Community Project. In 2014, the Greater Shankill was declared a Children and Young People's Zone. This is not something that funding has been provided for but I have pledged my support to the Partnership Board. I have undertaken to co-ordinate a cross departmental group of senior officials to support the aims of the Zone and to work cohesively together across Departments to ensure funds and programmes deliver maximum impact for the area.

School uniform grants and free school meals

AQO 204/16-21	Mr Conor Murphy *(SF - Newry and Armagh)*	**To ask the Minister of Education how his Department plans to ensure full take-up of school uniform grants and free school meals.** Free school meals (FSM) and school uniform grants provide vitally important support for non working and low income families with some of the financial barriers which they face in seeking to ensure their children have access to and can benefit from a good education.

		I am keen to ensure that parents/guardians of every child who is eligible for a FSM and uniform grant establishes that entitlement. My Department works in partnership with the Education Authority (EA) and individual schools to take various steps to promote both applications for and uptake of FSM and the uniform grant. To encourage parents to check their eligibility and to increase awareness, the EA issues press releases, sends out renewal applications and letters to parents, and distributes display posters to schools, Social Security Offices, Citizens Advice and libraries. Within schools there are a range of activities undertaken to encourage uptake of FSM including menus are sent home with pupils and promoted through school websites, theme days and taster sessions are arranged for parents and pupils and the uptake of FSM meals against entitlement is monitored to identify particular issues. Consideration is also given to ways of improving the school meals experience by reducing queuing time, improving the variety and quality of food and improving the dining environment and experience, as these factors can impact on a decision to avail of a FSM. The Department also issues a press release before the start of the school year to encourage parents who think they might be eligible for a FSM to apply. My officials will continue to work closely with the EA and schools to continue to promote uptake of FSM and uniform grants.

Support for pupils on autistic disorder spectrum

AQO 201/16-21	Mr Cathal Boylan *(SF - Newry and Armagh)*	**To ask the Minister of Education how both his Department and the Education Authority are addressing the increasing numbers of pupils diagnosed as being on the autistic disorder spectrum.** I acknowledge the increase in the prevalence of autism in school age children and I am committed to ensuring that every child, including those with autism spectrum disorder receives a high quality education that enables them to fulfil their potential. The responsibility for diagnosis of autism in children rests with the Department of Health; however access to support for pupils with autism is not dependent on a formal health diagnosis. Funding to the Education Authority ensures that there is a range of educational provision to support children with SEN, including autism. This includes mainstream provision, learning support centres attached to mainstream schools and special school provision. The Authority is working to enhance autism specific learning support centre provision throughout the region. The Education Authority's Autism Advisory and Intervention Service provides support to pupils and schools through training and advice to teachers, individual interventions with pupils and also provides support to parents. In addition my department provides funding to The Middletown Centre for Autism, which has enabled it to expand its programme of direct support and intervention to children with complex autism who are referred by the Education Authority and provide professional and parental training, and research services. Since the launch of the NI Executive Autism Strategy and Action Plan, my Department has been working closely with the Education Authority and the Middletown Centre for Autism and other departments on implementation of actions. These include delivering training programmes for teachers, educational

		professionals, youth workers and parents and providing effective support for pupils with autism. Formal arrangements are also in place for collaborative working between the autism services in education and health. My department will ensure that the Education Authority continues to deliver effective provision for the growing number of children with autism

Addressing educational underachievement

AQO 198/16-21	Ms Linda Dillon *(SF - Mid Ulster)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline the plans he has to address educational underachievement, particularly among young people from socially-deprived backgrounds**. While recent statistics demonstrate a continued upward trend in the performance of our school leavers, there is still a need to address low performance and the significant gaps that remain between our most and least deprived pupils; between boys and girls; and between Protestant boys and their Catholic peers. We also need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes so that more of our young people leave school with these key skills. One of my key priorities is to drive more ambitious improvement in every school and in every sector so that more of our young people achieve and progress. I will focus on those policies that are drivingimprovement and which aim to support schools and teachers in their work to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning which some pupils face. I intend to work closely with schools, early years and childcare providers, the youth service and education stakeholders to ensure that together we can meet the needs and nurture the aspirations of our children and young people.

Review into provision of special educational needs

AQO 196/16-21	Dr Stephen Farry *(APNI - North Down)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline the terms of reference for his review into the provision of special educational needs.** Firstly, I should make clear that it is the Education Authority (EA) which is undertaking the review of nursery provision in special schools, as the body with statutory responsibility for making provision for children with special educational needs (SEN). I can advise the member that the EA Board has agreed an Implementation Plan, outlining the processes that will be followed to carry out the review. Indeed, I understand that the Plan has now been shared with the Education Committee. Importantly, the Implementation Plan confirms that consultation and engagement with key stakeholders will be integral to the delivery of the review. I understand that Terms of Reference for the strategic review were agreed at the EA's Children and Young People's Service Committee on 8 September, and that these will be forwarded to the Department once they have been ratified by the EA Board. I have asked my officials to closely monitor the progress of this review to ensure that the EA delivers on its commitments. The EA Board will also want to assure itself that the review will be delivered within the agreed timescales; namely, commencing implementation of new arrangements from September 2017. I can assure Members that no long term decision on this matter will be made prior to completion of the review.

Middletown Centre for Autism

AQO 195/16-21	Mr Colum Eastwood *(SDLP - Foyle)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline the rationale for his Department's statement that a cross-border residential centre for children with Autism is not a key focus.** The Middletown Centre for Autism provides an excellent service and plays a vital role in meeting the needs of children with autism. My Department's current focus for the Centre is the delivery of the outreach learning support and assessment service, the training and advisory service and the research and information service. The current service model has been evaluated by NI and ROI inspectors as 'impacting significantly on the education and life experiences of referred pupils, their teachers and parents.' The outreach learning support and assessment service, developed following the pause in funding in 2009, is fundamentally the same support as was originally intended, but delivered within the child's home and school setting, instead of on site at the Middletown Centre. In addition this service is having a wider impact for other children with autism attending the school by enhancing the whole school practice for autism. The Centre has advised that whilst a residential facility would be of value to a small number of children , the Centre's current outreach intervention work is having a much more immediate and prolonged impact not just on children and young people with autism that are referred, but also on their families, school staff and other pupils. Two joint inspection reports have confirmed that the services delivered by the Centre are of an exceptional standard; noting that the intensive support has led to improved outcomes for the pupils both at school and at home.

		Parents whose children have availed of the intensive outreach service commented on the life changing benefits it has provided; and importantly I had the opportunity to speak directly with parents and children on my recent visit to the Centre. I was moved to hear of the progress that the young people had made as a result of the support received.

Educational Maintenance Allowance

AQW 2819/16-21	Mr Barry McElduff *(SF - West Tyrone)*	**To ask the Minister of Education (i) to detail the overall number and percentage of pupils currently in receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance; (ii) to outline why there are differing amounts received; and (iii) to outline the parental income thresholds for determining eligibility or otherwise.** In the 2015/16 school year there were 11,699 pupils in receipt of the means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). This represents approximately 37% of the total number of pupils in post-compulsory education. Since 2013, all eligible students receive the same weekly allowance of £30 which is paid every two weeks, providing they meet the school's attendance requirements. There are also two performance based bonuses of £100 normally paid out in January and June. Students are eligible to apply for an EMA if: their household income is £20,500 or less for households with one dependent child; their household income is £22,500 or less for households with more than one dependent child.

Pupils not completing study

AQW 2809/16-21	Mr Colin McGrath *(SDLP - South Down)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to detail the numbers of pupils that left schools at the end of Year 13 having not finished their course of study, broken down by category for leaving and area in each of the last three years.** My Department collects information on the qualifications and destinations of all school leavers in Northern Ireland. However, information on educational pathways orspecific courses of study for individual students is not collected. It is therefore not possible to determine how many pupils left school education before completing their course of study.

Literacy levels

AQW 2808/16-21	Mr Colin McGrath *(SDLP - South Down)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to detail literacy levels, broken down by school or area.** At a system level, information relating to literacy is collated at the end of each of the key stages of education. In 2014/15, by the end of Key Stage 2, an estimated 76.8% of pupils achieved the expected level of progression for Communication (English) in Northern Ireland. Figures are based on a sample proportion of schools and it is therefore not possible to provide a further breakdown by school or geographical area. Information on the qualifications of all school leavers in Northern Ireland is collected annually and includes pupils that studied GCSE English at the end of Key Stage 4. In 2014/15, 94.0% of school leavers in Northern Ireland achieved grades A*-G in GCSE English. The below table provides the number and percentage of school leavers in each district council who achieved grades A*- G in GCSE English in 2014/15.

Number and percentage of school leavers achieving GCSE English at grades A* - G by district council of pupil residence, 2014/15(1)

District Council(2)	Achieving GCSE English A*- G		Total School Leavers
	Number	%	Number
Antrim and Newtownabbey	1520	95.7	1588
Ards and North Down	1618	93.7	1726
Armagh City, Banbridgeand Craigavon	2266	94.7	2393
Belfast	3362	95.3	3526
Causeway Coast and Glens	1555	92.4	1683
Derry City and Strabane	2051	95.2	2155
Fermanagh and Omagh	1331	91.5	1455
Lisburn and Castlereagh	1520	94.3	1612
Mid and East Antrim	1627	96.2	1691
Mid Ulster	1808	93.4	1935
Newry, Mourne and Down	2256	91.7	2460
Invalid/Missing/Unknown Postcodes	114	83.2	137

Total Northern Ireland	21028	94.0	22361

Source: School Leavers Survey
Notes:
Data exclude special and independent schools.
District council of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil.

CCMS area plan for West Belfast

AQW 2797/16-21	Ms Jennifer McCann *(SF - West Belfast)*	**To ask the Minister of Education for an update on the CCMS area plan for West Belfast.** The Education Authority (EA) has overall operational responsibility for Area Planning and works closely with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), as planning authority for the Catholic maintained sector and other sectoral support bodies, to develop a single Area Plan covering all sectors. The EA's existing Area Plan and supporting action plan, which has currency until March 2017, does not include any plans to reshape maintained primary provision in West Belfast but does note that CCMS is currently engaging with the relevant school trustees of maintained secondary schools in this area about the shape of future provision in order to develop options for consultation. The draft EA Area Plan for 2017-2020 is intended to be published for public consultation this autumn, with the results of consultation informing the future priorities for action to ensure that education provision is shaped to meet the future needs of an area. It is expected that any proposal emerging from current CCMS engagement in West Belfast on post-primary provision will be further developed in the 2017-2020 planning period.

‘Hidden cost’ of Education

AQW 2747/16-21	Mr Barry McElduff *(SF - West Tyrone)*	**To ask the Minister of Education whether his Department has carried out any research into the hidden cost of education, including the financial burden on parents relating to voluntary contributions, being school trips, paying for invited speakers and bringing in materials and ingredients for coursework.** My Department has not carried out any research into the hidden cost of education. Schools in Northern Ireland are entitled to request or invite voluntary contributions from parents for the benefit of the school or any school activities.

Academic underachievement in West Tyrone

AQW 2662/16-21	Mr Barry McElduff *(SF - West Tyrone)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) the level of academic underachievement in West Tyrone; (ii) how this compares to other constituencies; and (iii) what specific measures are being taken to improve levels of academic achievement in West Tyrone.** The policies and programmes I have in place are realising improvements for our young people at Key Stages, GCSE and A-level. In 2014/15, in West Tyrone,66.4% of all pupils and 40.3% of pupils entitled to free school meals achieved 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C (or equivalent) including GCSE English and maths. These results are close to the Northern Ireland averages of 66% and 41.3% and show a welcome increase in performance from 2013/14 when figures were 64.7% and 38.6% respectively. However, significant challenges remain in West Tyrone and elsewhere. Responsibility must lie in the first place with

		schools. Teachers and school leaders are best placed to identify those pupils at risk of underachievement and, through high quality teaching and learning, identify the most appropriate actions to meet individual pupil needs and raise attainment. I will continue to focus on those policies that are driving improvement and that support collaboration between schools and teachers to raise standards and share good practice across the school system.

Year 8 intake exceptional circumstances

AQW 2632/16-21	Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley *(DUP - Fermanagh and South Tyrone)*	**To ask the Minister of Education whether there is a procedure in place for post-primary schools to apply for an additional placement to accommodate a child, other than Year 8 new intake, in exceptional circumstances; and if so, whether there a specific criteria of what constitutes exceptional circumstances or are all instances treated on a case-by-case basis.** There is no such procedure for post-primary schools, however parents of the child in question, can apply to the Exceptional Circumstances Body and each case would be considered on its own merits.

Promotion of a single transfer test

AQW 2598/16-21	Mr Gordon Dunne *(DUP - North Down)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to detail the plans his Department has to promote a single transfer test amongst current test providers.** I have tasked my officials to engage with relevant stakeholders to make swift progress to improve the current arrangements. I do not wish to pre-empt the conclusion of that engagement but it is in the best interests of children to find a way forward in good time.

Welfare Reform Services

AQW 2583/16-21	Mr Cathal Boylan *(SF - Newry and Armagh)*	**To ask the Minister for Communities for his assessment on the (i) delivery; and (ii) relocation of welfare reform services. *[Priority Written]*** I am committed to having a strong regional based network of offices and the Department confirms its commitment to continue to progress a programme of modernisation and continuous improvement aimed at enhancing accessibility to services and the quality of local offices. The Working Age Services local office network currently consists of 39 local offices, delivering a high level of customer service. Universal Credit will be delivered from 3 Service Centres based in Newry, Londonderry and Belfast and work is ongoing to finalise the Department's Universal Credit Service Delivery Model and rollout plans. Discretionary Support and Short Term Benefit Advances will provide support in a financial crisis. This will be a telephony-based service delivered from Antrim and Dungannon Jobs & Benefits offices. Financial Support in other times of need that is Budgeting Loans, Sure Start Maternity Grants, Funeral Payments and cold weather payments will continue as part of the new Finance Support service. These services will be consolidated into a single central processing centre in Lisburn Jobs & Benefits office. The processing of claims for Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support and the provision of telephony services to Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support claimants is currently delivered from 11 Benefit Processing Centres located in Jobs and Benefits

		Offices at Andersonstown, Armagh, Ballymena, Coleraine, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Foyle, Holywood Road, Lurgan, Magherafelt and Newry. In preparation for the delivery of the changes to the benefits system a review is currently underway to determine the restructuring of the Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance Benefit Processing Centres. The outcomes of the review are likely to be known in the near future. We expect the end state models to consist of a reduced number of Benefit Processing Centres in a functionalised business structure preparing the way for Universal Credit. The Department needs to strike a balance between meeting the needs of claimants and those of staff and in order to safeguard service delivery to claimants it is sometimes necessary to relocate staff to ensure that services can continue to be delivered in an efficient and effective manner.

Indicators to assess outcomes for children

AQW 2575/16-21	Mr Steven Agnew *(GPNI - North Down)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline (i) what indicators other than academic achievements are being considered for the Programme for Government to assess outcomes for children; and (ii) how does such an indicator apply to a child with significant learning difficulties.** The measures identified within the draft Programme for Government (PfG) with respect to educational attainment refer to the performance of the Executive in delivering an effective education system for all children, including those with special educational needs.

		However these measures do not encompass all of the qualities of a good education system. Many of the functions of education are reflected in the other PfG indicators: for instance the economic/employment measures and the health and social inclusion measures. These do not necessarily refer to the attainment of qualifications.

Indicators of need among pupils

AQW 2574/16-21	Mr Steven Agnew *(GPNI - North Down)*	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline what is being done to move beyond free school meals as an indicator of need; and to take into consideration other issues such as disability and number of pupils for whom English is not their first language.** My Department uses a wide range of indicators to target social need. Free school meals is one of these and is commonly used as proxy measure of deprivation. However, it must be noted that although FSME is the best indicator we have at present, it is still a proxy measure. When appropriate, alternative measures of deprivation are used by my Department. For example, the Multiple Deprivation Measure and Neighbourhood Renewal Areas are used in relation to a number of its programmes such as Extended Schools and SureStart where need is identified based on the home address of pupils. Other identified needs (such as Newcomer Pupils, Looked-After children or the specific needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs) are separately targeted and supported, and are not identified as measures of social deprivation. Free school meals has a number of characteristics that makes it the most reliable indicator for identifying social deprivation i.e. it relates to the individual pupil, collecting information that is personal to the pupil's family circumstances, and is therefore more

		robust than an area-based measure which assumes that everyone in the same area is alike; it is updated on an annual basis and is therefore current; it is available as part of the census return and is therefore easily gathered at school and pupil level; it is capable of independent validation; and it is highly correlated with the Multiple Deprivation Measure and with the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). It provides an indication of the relative concentration of potentially 'disadvantaged' pupils in a given school in a way that no other indicator currently does. Officials will continue to consider different measures of need depending on the different contexts.

Provision of Education in Juvenile Centres

AQW 2547/16-21	Ms Catherine Seeley *(SF - Upper Bann)*	**To ask the Minister of Education how his Department plans to address the under provision of education in juvenile centres.** Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, located in Bangor, is the only Juvenile Justice Centre in Northern Ireland. It has the capacity to hold up to 48 young people aged between 10 and 18 years, held either on remand or after they have been sentenced by a court to custody. The majority of young people detained at any individual point in time will be those on short-term remand placements. The centre operates a diverse range of educational and vocational provision. Young people are comprehensively assessed on their entry into the Centre to identify their medical, mental health, social and emotional care needs and to determine their educational baseline. Each receives a personal

		education plan setting out targets for their education and personal development and their ongoing learningis integrated with other interventions to help address offending behaviour and meet any other identified needs. Woodlands education service has historically been provided by qualified teachers directly employed by the Youth Justice Agency. The service is now under theauspices of the Education Authority (EA) and by the end of the autumn; all existing teaching staff will have transferred to become EA employees. The EA will operate the education and vocation training service asone of its Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS) centres, following the same high standards applied to all other EOTAS provision and subject to the same periodic inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

Delivery Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme

AQW 2542/16-21	Mr Barry McElduff (SF - West Tyrone)	**To ask the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme; and (ii) whether he will, in partnership with the Executive, consider extending this scheme in future years.** The Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme has been shown to be successful, in particular, in enabling schools to develop effective ways of identifying and targeting underachievement and putting in place appropriate intervention strategies to raise attainment. A legacy programme has been put in place to disseminate to schools the learning from the Signature Programme. It is for school leaders, within their own resources, to mainstream the approaches to tackling underachievement that have been shown to be effective in many of the schools supported by DSC. I will be exploring how best to take forward the legacy of the signature programme into the future.

School Starting Age

AQW 2512/16-21	Mr Chris Lyttle *(APNI - East Belfast)*	**To ask the Minister of Education whether he will introduce legislation to allow flexibility with regards to the school starting age.** As I am currently considering the legislative proposals I wish to progress during the 2016-2021 Programme for Government period, it is not possible to provide you with an update on this matter at present. However, I am aware of the work that was undertaken during the previous mandate and the range of issues involved. I will take these into consideration when determining the way forward.

AQW 2506/16-21	Mr Cathal Boylan (SF - Newry and Armagh)	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline the funding available to childcare organisations.** The Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme, launched in March 2014, aims to create new or sustain existing childcare settings. Grant Scheme support is available for minor capital expenditure (premises and equipment), for revenue (running costs), or both. It is delivered by the Health and Social Care Board via the Childcare Partnerships on behalf of the Department of Education (DE). To date it has provided some £6 million to support 3,000 sustainable childcare places across 114 childcare settings. There are other early years initiatives that offer support for childcare, for example, sessional care provision made available for children whose parents are attending Sure Start services. A wide range of organisations provide childcare which is funded from sources other than DE. I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken

		account of the many consultation responses received, the agreed Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and early years initiatives.

Children's Services Co-operation Act

AQW 2477/16-21	Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI - North Down)	**To ask the Minister of Education what arrangements have been made to promote co-operation as required by Section 2(2) of the Children's Services Co-operation Act.** Since the Children's Services Co-operation Act received Royal Assent my officials have been promoting the duties under the Act with those bodies named in the legislation – highlighting the need for better co-operation. In terms of the Executive making arrangements to promote co-operation, this is being considered in line with the development of the new Children and Young People's Strategy. I expect the Strategy to explain that the well-being of children and young people can only be improved if we agree the better outcomes we wish to achieve; ensure better delivery of services and actions; and facilitate better co-operation across key bodies. The arrangements to be made by the Executive will be informed by the development of the Strategy and the formal consultation process, when stakeholders can give their views on how co-operation could be promoted. I understand that during the informal co-design process the issue of better co-operation has been a key issue for stakeholders. I expect the Strategy to outline how co-operation could be promoted through the agreement of key principles of co-operative working; the potential establishment of effective structures; and through the proactive identification of opportunities to co-operate.

Children's Services Co-operation Act

AQW 2458/16-21	Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI - North Down)	**To ask the Minister of Education whether he intends to publish explanatory notes and/or guidance in relation to the Children's Services Co-operation Act 2015.** The Member will be aware that the Children's Services Co-operation Act links directly to the development of the new Children and Young People's Strategy. This Strategy will be expected to outline how the Executive will work together to deliver improved well-being for children and young people. A significant amount of work, including engagement with stakeholders through co-design, has taken place on the Strategy and it will be issued for formal consultation in due course. A common theme in the co-design process has been the need for better co-operation across Executive departments, agencies and stakeholders to deliver better services for children and young people. I therefore intend to use the Strategy as a vehicle to promote better co-operation and outline how this could be facilitated, in order to support the realisation of better outcomes for children and young people. I expect there could be a need for either formal guidance on co-operation or explanatory notes on theAct, however this will be informed by the consultation process on the forthcoming Strategy. In the meantime,my officials have been highlighting the duty to co-operate, as set out in the Act, amongst Departments and other Children's Authorities.

School transport services in Upper Bann

AQW 2429/16-21	Mr Doug Beattie MC (UUP - Upper Bann)	**To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) the criteria for the provision of an escort as part of the School Transport Service; and (ii) how many children with Special Education Needs currently avail of this service in Upper Bann.** Home to School transport assistance is provided for pupils with a special transport need only on the recommendation of a Designated Medical Officer as part of the statutory assessment process. This will include any special requirements including the provision of an escort. The Education Authority has informed me that in relation to the information requested in part (ii) of your question, it is not held in a readily accessible format and an exercise to produce it would result in disproportionate cost. Allocation of escort supervision is not provided on a per pupil basis unless the pupil's statement of special educational need explicitly states that this is required.

Numeracy and Literacy Signature Project

AQW 2403/16-21	Mrs Sandra Overend (UUP - Mid Ulster)	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline his plans to mainstream the Numeracy and Literacy Signature Project.** Following the successful implementation of the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme, a legacy programme was put in place to disseminate to school leaders ways in which they can, within their own resources, mainstream theapproaches to tackling underachievement that have been shown to be effective in many of the schools supported by DSC. Further dissemination of the good practice identified will take place during this academic year. I will be giving consideration as to how to best take forward the legacy of the signature programme in the future.

Control over budgets and resources in schools

AQW 2401/16-21	Mrs Sandra Overend (UUP - Mid Ulster)	**To ask the Minister of Education to outline his plans to give more control over budgets and resources to schools.** The percentage of the 2016-17 Education budget currently allocated to the Aggregated Schools Budget is 60%. On top of this, around 12% of the overall 2016-17 budget is allocated to schools from the centre budgets held by the Education Authority with a further 13% attributable to schools for services provided to them. Therefore around 85% of my Departmental budget goes towards schools funding. It is my intention, to give greater freedom and autonomy to schools over how they spend their budget. Over the coming months, I will be looking at ways and means of achieving this.