NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week ending 14th February, 2020

Update on the development of a mental health action plan

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| [22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl02$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Dr Steve Aiken OBE *(UUP - South Antrim)* | **To ask the Minister of Health for an update on the development of a mental health action plan.**  I am fully behind the commitment in the New Decade, New Approach document which commits to the production of a Mental Health Action Plan within 2 months.  Since the middle of 2018 officials in the Department of Health have together with a wide range of stakeholders been co-producing a Mental Health Action Plan. The aim has been to develop actions that has a real impact on positive delivery of mental health services.  The draft Action Plan currently consists of 51 actions falling in three broad categories.  The first category aims to provide fixes to immediate problems and immediate service developments – where there has been an identified immediate need. This includes, for example, consideration of alternative methods of working for the mental health workforce to respond to the immediate, and significant, workforce pressures.  The longer term strategic objectives aim to fulfil future strategic needs and include, for example, a multidisciplinary workforce review to consider mental health workforce needs and structures into the future.  The third category relates to preparatory work to inform future strategies. This includes, for example, development of an action plan for the use of technology and creating better governance structures.  Whilst some actions are of a preparatory nature, the plan also includes the creation of a Mental Health Strategy by the end of the year and the delivery of a number of reviews and service developments. These are subject to sufficient funding being provided to allow them to be taken forward.  My officials are currently working on finalising the action plan which I intend to publish in March. |

Update on plans to reduce cost of arms-length bodies

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| [AQO 78/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl14$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mrs Pam Cameron *(DUP - South Antrim)* | **To ask the Minister of Finance what plans he has to reduce the cost of arm's-length bodies across the public sector.**  In line with the commitment within *New Decade, New Approach*, there will be a review of Arm’s Length Bodies with a view to their rationalisation. The Agreement outlines that the review will consider the efficiency and effectiveness of all Arm’s Length Bodies with the aim of concluding the review and agreeing timescales for implementation within six months of the Executive being restored. I intend to bring a proposed terms of reference for the review to my Executive colleagues in the coming weeks. |

Update on additional funding to support mental health in schools

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| [AQO 68/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl05$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Sinead McLaughlin *(SDLP - Foyle)* | **To ask the Minister of Education whether he intends to allocate additional funding to support mental health in schools.**  My Department is working collaboratively with the Department of Health, the Public Health Agency, the Health and Social Care Board and the Education Authority, to develop an Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework that will aim to enhance support for children and young people. The emphasis will be on promotion, prevention and early intervention, including how services can be augmented to support schools, and their pupils.  Budgets beyond this current financial year are not yet known, therefore no decisions have been taken in relation to future years as ye |

Update on shared and integrated education funding

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| [AQO 66/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl07$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Miss Rachel Woods *(GPNI - North Down)* | **To ask the Minister of Education how much of the total funding allocated to shared and integrated education since 2016 has been spent by his Department.**  The Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) set out a commitment by the UK Government (UKG) to release up to £500m over ten years (£50m per year) of new capital funding to support shared and integrated education and housing, subject to individual projects being agreed between the Executive and the UKG.  Between the Fresh Start announcement on 23 March 2016 and the end of December 2019 my Department has spent £28.5m of Fresh Start funding. |

Update on review of Home to School Transport

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| [AQO 64/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl08$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Thomas Buchanan *(DUP - West Tyrone)* | **To ask the Minister of Education whether he plans to undertake a review of Home to School Transport to meet the needs of families in rural areas.**  The Department is currently undertaking a review of the home to school transport policy as part of the wider Education Transformation Programme. The aim of this review is to ensure the policy is fit for purpose and sustainable over the long term. The review will look at home to school transport in rural and urban areas.  A detailed programme of initial stakeholder engagement was completed in early 2019 that offered opportunities for all those with an interest in the area to put forward their views. A number of these events took place in rural areas and sought to gather the views of those living in these areas.  Each day, the Education Authority transports approximately 84,000 pupils to and from school and it is a service that is highly valued by parents and pupils. Over 70% of these pupils live in a rural area.  While there will always be some exceptions, in the main, the vast majority of pupils in rural areas are receiving a service that gets them to and from their school in a safe, comfortable and timely manner.  I understand that any changes to this policy as a result of the review will have an impact on many families living across Northern Ireland. It is essential, therefore, that this review is robust and evidence-based. We also need to ensure we understand the impact any changes may have on families as well as on wider society in areas such as air pollution and traffic congestion.  The review will be exploring all aspects of the current policy to see if change is necessary in the years ahead. |

Update on introduction of coding and digital skills

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| [AQO 65/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl16$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Dr Caoimhe Archibald *(SF - East Londonderry)* | **To ask the Minister of Education whether he plans to introduce coding and digital skills to the primary curriculum to ensure children and young people are prepared for the jobs of the future.**  The statutory curriculum is designed to give schools as much flexibility as possible in what they choose to teach and to use approaches that best suit their pupils. The curriculum is designed to be adaptable and dynamic.  This is particularly valuable in rapidly changing and advancing areas such as digital skills and coding, as it enables schools to keep pace with developments in digital technology both locally and internationally.  There are many opportunities, at primary level, for schools to help young people understand the application of digital technology in life and learning, and to integrate the ever expanding area of coding into their teaching.  My Department continues to support the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in developing a range of resources and providing support to teachers, which will help primary-age children understand the application of digital technology in life and learning. This includes workshops for teachers on Coding with Scratch activities, including computational thinking and designing and creating a digital product.  CCEA has also developed a Digital Skills Curriculum and Qualifications Framework, which maps how digital skills for learners should be woven into the curriculum from Foundation Stage, through the primary key stages, to post-primary and beyond.  My Department also currently funds Business in the Community’s Time to Code Programme for Key Stage 2 pupils, as well as supporting the “IT’s Your Choice Programme” developed by Sentinus, which delivers coding activities and will engage almost 11,000 primary and post-primary pupils during 2019/20. |

Update on e-Safety Strategy

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| [AQW 1721/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl06$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Justin McNulty *(SDLP - Newry and Armagh)* | **To ask the Minister of Health when he will finalise his Department’s e-Safety strategy, which was consulted on in 2019. *[Priority Written]***  The draft strategy, now known as an On-line Safety strategy, and accompanying action plan are being finalised and, subject to necessary approvals, including Executive agreement, will be published soon.  In January 2015, the former Executive commissioned the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) to develop the strategy and action plan. As sponsor department of the SBNI, development has been led by my Department. |

Update on disclosure of staff and pupils personal data by EA

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| [AQW 1636/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl18$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Justin McNulty *(SDLP - Newry and Armagh)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline what guidance the Education Authority has issued, or what policies are in place, to ensure personal information relating to staff and pupils are not listed in the minutes of Boards of Governors meetings, which are published by the Education Authority.**  The Department of Education wrote to all schools and the Education Authority in April 2018 to make them aware of the requirements of the incoming General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the impact this would have on schools and how they manage personal data. As data controllers, school Boards of Governors are accountable for ensuring that data protection practice within the school meets the requirements of the legislation, including any requirements on the management of personal data.  The EA has a dedicated on-line “Think Data” resource hub which provides school staff and governors with data protection related guidance and support as well as on-line data protection training.  The Education Authority’s Scheme for the Management of Controlled Schools sets out the requirements in relation to the minutes of meetings of boards of governors, specifically paragraphs 58 – 61. |

Update on NICCY’s Still Waiting report

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| [AQW 1588/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl07$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Paula Bradshaw *(APNI - South Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Health what steps he is taking in response to the Still Waiting report by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, with particular regard to the development of pathways for young people to access mental health support and services.**  On 10th October 2019 my Department published a draft Inter-Departmental Action Plan in response to the agreed recommendations of the ‘Still Waiting’ report. The Action Plan contains a series of actions to improve Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) such as full implementation of the CAMHS Integrated Care Pathway ‘*Working Together: A Pathway for Children and Young People through CAMHS’*, which has been published since March 2018. A Progress Update Report on the draft Action Plan, outlining the key areas of progress since October, is available on my Department’s website. |

Update on children in care when they reach 18

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| [AQW 1503/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl02$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Carál Ní Chuilín *(SF - North Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Health what happens to looked after children or children in care when they reach 18 years and leave a care setting to live on their own.**  The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 places a statutory duty on Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts to prepare looked after children for leaving care and to provide services to them when they have left care in order to improve their life prospects as they make the transition to independent living.  HSC Trusts must assess and meet young people’s individual needs up to the age of 21, and up to age 24 if they are still in education or training.  The services and support currently available to care leavers include allocating a Personal Adviser, conducting a needs assessment, producing a pathway plan, which should be regularly reviewed, keeping in contact or re-establishing contact with the young person and providing maintenance and suitable accommodation. These supports enable care leavers to eventually live on their own.  In 2017, as part of a public consultation on the draft Adoption and Children Bill, the Department sought views on whether to extend some support to care leavers up to age 25. Responses have been analysed and work to finalise the Bill is almost complete. |

Update on support for children in care post 18

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| [AQW 1502/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl03$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Carál Ní Chuilín *(SF - North Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Health for an update on (i) support for children and young people who are in care and/or being looked after; (ii) what happens to them when they reach eighteen and leave a care setting to live on their own**.  When a child or young person is ‘looked after’ by a Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust, the HSC Trust becomes their ‘Corporate Parent’ and is responsible for safeguarding the child and promoting his or her welfare.  HSC Trusts, supported by other public authorities and third sector partners, provide an extensive range of supports to looked after children and young people, which seek to deliver improved outcomes in key areas of their lives, including their physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing and educational attainment. Support is provided to ensure each young person has: an appropriate and safe place to live; access to education, training or employment; their healthcare needs assessed and met; an effective care plan in place, which is regularly reviewed; and advocacy support.  Work is underway to finalise a new strategy specific to looked after children and care-experienced young people. The strategy, *A Life Deserved: “Caring” for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland*, was taken forward jointly by the Departments of Health and Education and will be supported in implementation by other departments.  In relation to Part (ii) of the question, I refer you to the response issued in respect of AQW 1262/17-22 and AQW 1503/17-22. |

Update on plans to make healthy eating part of the school curriculum

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| [AQW 1442/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl03$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr John Dallat *(SDLP - East Londonderry)* | **To ask the Minister of Education what plans he has to make healthy eating a key element in the school curriculum.**  My Department recognises the importance of young people being educated to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (primary level) and the Learning for Life and Work (post-primary level) areas of learning are statutory elements within the Northern Ireland curriculum. These areas of learning provide an opportunity for pupils, from Foundation Stage (ages 4 to 6) to Key Stage 3 (ages 11 to 14), to learn effectively how to keep themselves healthy and safe, aligned to the importance of healthy eating.  To support schools in the delivery of the curriculum, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment develops and produces curricular guidance and teaching support materials for use in schools. This includes resources to address the broader issues of obesity, over-consumption of junk food and general health. |

Update on viability of extending Education Support fund to adopted children

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| [AQW 1421/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl06$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Paula Bradshaw *(APNI - South Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education for his assessment of the viability of extending the Education Support Fund to include adopted children.**  The Department of Education and Department of Health are currently in the final stages of developing a joint Looked after Children Strategy entitled, *‘A Life Deserved: ‘Caring’ for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland’.*  One of the proposed commitments to action under the Learning and Achieve outcome, is to review the effectiveness of looked after children-targeted funding, currently provided through the Common Funding Formula and, if effective, consider extending it to other groups. |

Update on target for number of children in integrated schools

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| [AQW 1419/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl07$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Paula Bradshaw *(APNI - South Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline what target his Department has for the number of children in integrated schools by the year 2030.**  My Department does not set targets for the number of children in any schools. Parental preference is the determining factor in relation to demand for school places in all sectors, and my Department will continue to work to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education in line with its statutory duty. |

Update on childcare strategy

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| [AQW 1413/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl10$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Mark Durkan *(SDLP - Foyle)* | **To ask the Minister for Communities for an update on the childcare strategy; and whether her Department intends to introduce a universal free childcare provision for working parents.**  I plan to bring an updated Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues for consideration and approval in due course. The Strategy will take account of the responses to the consultation undertaken in 2015, the policy priorities set by the Executive and the extended early education and care services available in other jurisdictions.  The actions required to deliver the dual aims of promoting parental employment and improving child development consulted in 2015, including the scope of and eligibility for extended, affordable, responsive and high quality early education and care provision for families with children aged 3 to 4, requires Executive approval.  I am not in a position to outline the scope of any proposed childcare offer in advance of the Executive’s consideration of the budget and resources available to deliver all the actions. |

Update on numbers of SEN assessments pending

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| [AQW 1289/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl16$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Paul Givan *(DUP - Lagan Valley)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to outline the estimated process for the allocation of a Special Educational Needs assessment at present and how many assessments are pending decision.**  ‘Special Educational Needs assessment’ is taken to refer to the statutory assessment process undertaken by the Education Authority (EA) to decide whether or not a child requires a statement of special educational needs (SEN).  A child will be brought to the EA’s attention as possibly requiring a statutory assessment by a referral from a mainstream school or another agency or by a formal request from a parent. The EA will then consider whether to issue a notice to parents that it proposes to make an assessment.  The maximum length of time for completion of the statutory assessment process is 26 weeks. However, there are valid exceptions outlined in the legislation which can be applied and which may result in the process being completed beyond the 26 week timeframe.  There are 2,108 children currently undergoing a statutory assessment in the EA. |

Update on number of children waiting to be statemented by constituency

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| [AQW 1266/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl21$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Carál Ní Chuilín *(SF - North Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of the numbers of children waiting to be statemented, by constituency. *[Priority Written]***  This has been interpreted as the number of referrals to the Education Authority for a statutory assessment (a statutory assessment may result in a statement or a note in lieu of a statement). |

Update on support to prevent young people getting a criminal record

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| [AQW 1264/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl03$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Ms Carál Ní Chuilín *(SF - North Belfast)* | **To ask the Minister of Justice to outline the programmes and support her Department are engaged in with the local community, to prevent young people getting a criminal record.**  I recognise the long-term impact that having a criminal record can have, which is why early intervention is a key priority for my Department. We are working with children, families, communities and statutory and voluntary sector partners to address vulnerability and risk-taking behaviour through targeted support and intervention, to prevent children and young people being drawn into the criminal justice system.  Getting the right support at the right time is essential if we are to help those on the margins of the justice system and educate them on the consequences of risk taking and offending behaviour. In recognition of this, the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) has made some significant strategic and operational changes, with a dedicated Early Intervention (EI) team now appointed to support and develop the use of EI across all their regional teams, with designated EI workers in each region. This has been made possible through redirection and prioritisation of budgets – savings made from a reduction in numbers of court-ordered supervision cases have been invested in ‘front end’ services.  Prioritisation of this work has enabled staff to identify problems and intervene with children and families at a much earlier stage, before issues escalate. They deliver bespoke programmes of intervention and support families to access universal or specialist services in the community.  In a further development, a partnership with PSNI now enables YJA staff to support children referred by police when they have received a Community Resolution Notice (CRN) for low level offending. The onus is on educating and empowering children to make better-informed decisions and reduce likelihood of offending behaviour, rather than criminalising them through the formal system.  YJA’s Schools Programme also continues to expand in line with this focus on EI. Whilst initially developed in 2015 in response to public disorder in North Belfast, YJA staff now engage with thousands of pupils each year through educational workshops on issues which have the potential to bring children into the justice system e.g. antisocial behaviour, sexting, internet safety, drugs and alcohol etc.  Aside from the YJA work, you will also be aware that co-ordination of the cross Executive Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime is hosted by my Department. Funding has been provided to projects which aim to build relationships with young people who are identified as being at higher risk of involvement in criminality and to deliver programmes that develop resilience and increase awareness of risk factors. The Executive Action Plan also supports projects which provide educational resources and activities to help young people develop new skills, build knowledge and examine their own attitudes to law and order.  The Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS), administered by my Department, also provides funding for a range of projects aimed at preventing crime or reducing the fear of crime. While not specifically targeted at young people, many of the projects funded by ARCS provide a number of activities and interventions, often in community settings, including drug support projects, restorative justice initiatives and awareness and diversionary projects. In the current financial year, ARCS has allocated nearly £1million in funding to 49 projects across Northern Ireland.  The overall success of these partnership approaches to Early Intervention can clearly be seen. There have been significant reductions in both the numbers of children entering the justice system for the first time, and the numbers being dealt with through the formal court system. The latest statistics are attached at Annex A for your information.  As well as keeping children and young people out of the criminal justice system and thereby preventing them getting a criminal record, this work also helps to deliver on Outcome 7 of the draft Programme for Government (PfG) – *We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other*. This work is vital if we are to promote lawfulness and build a long-term civic society respectful of the law and others.  A new Community Safety Framework is also being developed to provide an operational roadmap on how to deliver these safer community aspirations set out in the PfG. This Framework will build on the previous Community Safety Strategy by supporting communities to be safe and resilient through crime prevention, whilst also addressing the issues of underlying harm and vulnerability that can lead to offending behaviour.  As a Department, I believe we have a very good story to tell on the work we are currently engaged in to prevent children and young people entering the justice system, and getting a criminal record, with all the negative consequences that often follow. |

Update on why child post-mortems are carried out in England

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| [AQW 1137/17-22](javascript:__doPostBack('ctl00$MainContentPlaceHolder$SearchResultsGridView$ctl17$RefNoLinkButton','')) | Mr Alex Easton *(DUP - North Down)* | **To ask the Minister of Health why child post-mortem examinations are carried out in England.**  Following the resignation of the sole Paediatric Pathologist in Northern Ireland (NI), it was necessary to secure an interim arrangement with Alder Hey Children’s NHS Foundation Trust, Liverpool to ensure that a perinatal and paediatric pathology service for hospital consented post-mortem examinations can continue to be offered.  Significant efforts have been and continue to be, made by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) to retain a service within NI, including repeated recruitment drives both nationally and internationally. Paediatric pathology is a very small specialist area and the challenges in retaining and recruiting consultants are not unique to NI.  Further background information on the interim service, including frequently asked questions can be found on the Health and Social Care Board’s website:  http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/our-ork/commissioning/perinatal-and-paediatric-pathology/ |

