



Assembly Update: January 2016

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Oral Questions

Issues	Question	Answer
Domestic Violence	Pam Cameron asked the Minister of Justice whether his department will commit greater resources to tackling domestic violence.	<p>Minister Ford: I welcome the 16 Days of Action campaign and the public focus that it puts on the important issue of domestic violence and abuse. I have instructed officials to consider and introduce a number of initiatives, including domestic violence protection orders, domestic homicide reviews, special listing arrangements, the potential for a domestic violence disclosure scheme and a possible offence that captures patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate and familial relationships.</p> <p>Such initiatives will require resources, and details will become more apparent during their development. I remain focused on taking forward those and current priorities associated with domestic violence and abuse. However, we need to be realistic that the current funding constraints will impact on what new work can be developed and delivered.</p>

Written Assembly Questions

Issues	Question	Answer
Equal Pay	Trevor Clarke (DUP) asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the progress of equal pay for (i) NI Office staff and (ii) PSNI civilian staff.	This matter was discussed in the Assembly on Monday 12 October where I placed on record my thanks to all staff who worked in the affected areas during very difficult times. However, as the matter is a cross cutting issue requiring legislation to provide a route for payment and substantial funding would have to be found within already challenging budgets; there is no further progress my Department can take and the issue remains firmly with the Executive for consideration.
Childcare	Steven Agnew (Green) asked First and Deputy First Minister whether his Department has estimated how much it would cost to bring NI in line with the provision of the Childcare Bill.	We are aware of the provisions of the Westminster Childcare Bill which plans to increase the amount of free pre-school childcare available to working parents from 15 hours to 30 hours. This bill will not apply to Northern Ireland. Consultation on the Executive's draft Childcare Strategy took place between 28th July and 13th November 2015. Officials are currently collating and analysing responses to the public consultation and we will give careful consideration to the range of views put forward to us. It is only right that we should consider the outcome of this consultation and views on the proposals within the draft Strategy before determining how we aim to proceed on childcare matters. However, in the meantime we are considering the England proposals. One of the high level aims of our childcare strategy is to promote child development. This is because we recognise the importance of early care initiatives for children in their own right and as such our strategy is not simply aimed at working parents.
Domestic & Sexual Violence	Claire Sugden (Ind) asked the Minister of DHSSPS to detail (i) total funding invested in; and (ii) observed outcomes of Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy and (iii) the resources committed to the implementation of the Strategy.	My Department funds a wide range of programmes and services that address sexual violence and abuse both directly and indirectly. It is, therefore, not possible to calculate the overall amount invested in implementing the 'Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse' Strategy. Outcomes achieved during the life of the 'Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse' Strategy include: the opening of The Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre at Antrim Hospital; the expansion of the 24Hr Domestic Violence Helpline to include sexual violence; the WRONG campaign - a major advertising campaign to raise awareness of sexual violence and abuse; an anti-rape campaign run across all higher and further education institutions across Northern Ireland; and

<p>Family Planning Services</p>	<p>Steven Agnew (Greens) asked the Minister of DHSSPS how his department plans to allocate and administer funding for Family Planning Services in each Health and Social Care Trust.</p>	<p>publication of a Regional Directory of Services for professionals and victims of sexual violence in Northern Ireland. The proposed 'Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland' Strategy has yet to be published. There is currently no funding stream dedicated to implementation of priorities within the Strategy.</p> <p>This Department does not allocate and administer funding directly for family planning services. Funding is provided to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and Public Health Agency (PHA). The HSCB and PHA then commission services and allocate funds to Health and Social Care Trusts for a range of services, including family planning services.</p>
<p>Disability Strategy</p>	<p>Claire Sugden (Ind) asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail when results of the public consultation on indicators for monitoring the annual progress of the Disability Strategy will be published.</p>	<p>Officials are currently considering the analysis of the public consultation on possible indicators to measure progress on the implementation of the Disability Strategy. Once consideration is complete, it will be published as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Funding to the community and voluntary sector</p>	<p>Steven Agnew (Greens) asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what changes have been made to the way in which funding is allocated to the community and voluntary sector and the reasons for any such change.</p>	<p>The Outcomes Based Accountability process has been incorporated into the Good Relations funding programmes and the Social Investment Fund. The change enables enhanced monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes focusing on the outcomes to be delivered.</p>
<p>Children's Budgeting</p>	<p>Chris Lyttle (Alliance) asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the work of their Department in relation to children's budgeting.</p>	<p>We were awaiting the publication of the report undertaken by the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner, in association with The Atlantic Philanthropies. This report "<i>Fund-Mapping: The Investment of Public Resources in the Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Northern Ireland</i>" was published in October 2015. The report aimed to identify the extent and effectiveness of direct public funding provided for services impacting on the well-being of children and young people. The research yielded rich high-level information to form a baseline for further analysis of expenditure on children and will inform decision making about future resource allocation in prevention and early intervention. This research was a complex exercise and encountered a range of organisational barriers. The development of the new Strategy for children and young people,</p>

<p>Smoking in cars with children on board</p>	<p>Maeve McLaughlin (SF) asked the Health Minister whether he intends to bring forward proposals to ban smoking in cars carrying children before May 2016.</p>	<p>post 2016, will be informed by this evidence which will also act as a platform for proposals contained in the Children's Services Cooperation Bill which passed its Final Stage on 3 November 2015. The issue of budgetary analysis has been raised by the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child and it is recognised that clear information on public expenditure on children can help to illustrate the importance which Government attaches to children's rights, prospects and wellbeing. Experiences in other countries show that bringing clarity to the public expenditure on children's services bears results and we are fully committed to this. Following publication of the report, we will now consider how best to take this matter forward in light of budgetary constraints and the major restructuring of departments.</p> <p>You will be aware that I announced on 8 December,during the Second Stage of the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, that I intend to bring forward an amendment at Consideration Stage to ban smoking in cars carrying children.</p>
<p>Funding for schools</p>	<p>Claire Hanna asked the Education Minister to provide guidance on the funding available for shared education and how this compares with the funding available to naturally integrated schools that do not have formal integrated status.</p>	<p>The Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project was launched in 2014, will run until 2018 with investment of £25 million over the four year period. The project focuses on supporting schools that have previously participated in Shared Education. It is anticipated that Peace IV funding for Shared Education will be made available over coming months. All schools, including those which you refer to as naturally integrated schools, may apply for funding providing they satisfy the eligible project criteria.</p>
<p>Sexual health education</p>	<p>Claire Sugden (Ind) asked the Education Minister for his assessment of why schools are not utilising the specific school designed sexual health education provided by the Public Health Agency.</p>	<p>Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a policy which is devolved to schools. All schools are required to have in place an RSE policy which sets out how the school will address RSE within the curriculum. My Department commissioned the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment to review and update current guidance and this guidance was issued to schools in August 2015. The Public Health Agency was represented on the Steering Committee that helped CCEA develop the revised guidance. The new guidance includes a resource directory and reference section to support schools when they are developing their RSE policies. It is entirely a matter for individual schools to determine which resources and programmes they use to deliver the curriculum.</p>

Women who are not in education, employment or training.

Fra McCann (SF) asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the action his Department is taking to encourage women currently not in education, employment or training.

My Department has a wide range of plans and programmes to encourage the return of women to education or employment. The 'Success through STEM' strategy includes recommendations to address the issue of gender bias. The 'Access to Success' strategy provides for a number of programmes, for example REACH, which are aimed at increasing participation in Higher Education from a range of underrepresented groups, including women. To reduce barriers for those wishing to access further education, my Department also provides encouragement through the provision of financial assistance towards childcare costs. This financial assistance is available to full and part-time students enrolled in an FE college with dependent children in registered or approved childcare setting. Support is also provided through the FE Awards, college hardship funds and the Care to Learn NI Scheme. These FE Awards and college hardship funds are means tested and dependent on household income. My Department has also developed and leads on the Executive's 'Pathways to Success' strategy addressing the needs of all young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in education, employment or training. The main elements of this are now funded through the NI European Social Fund Programme 2014-2020, within which most of the 67 funded projects are open to women and men alike. In addition, six projects under the Unemployed / Economically Inactive strand of the Programme have women as their sole target group. These projects are designed to encourage and train women in such a way as to assist their transition back into the workplace. In partnership with the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I have also launched an Executive Strategy, 'Enabling Success' tackling the growing problem of economic inactivity. Key target groups for this strategy include lone parents and carers, most of whom are women.

Women and training

Paula Bradley (DUP) asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department is encouraging more women to enrol in further education.

Women accounted for 56.9% of students enrolled at Northern Ireland's higher education institutions in 2013/14 and 50.4% of enrolments at Northern Ireland's further education colleges in 2014/15. Women are also more likely than men to enrol on postgraduate courses. However, a higher proportion of male than female students study narrow and broad STEM subjects and around two thirds of total higher education STEM enrolments are male. There is a similar pattern in further education. While my Department is not engaged in any specific activity aimed at increasing the number of women in higher and further education generally, I recognise the pressing need to increase the numbers of women studying STEM subjects. These issues are addressed by my Department's strategies 'Success through STEM'. In June 2013, the STEM Business Subgroup produced a draft report called 'Addressing Gender Balance – Reaping the Gender Dividend in STEM'.

		<p>This report demonstrates the business case for gender diversity and contains several tools to help business engage with the issue. These include a STEM CEO Charter, 22 good practice guidelines and seven good practice case studies gathered from STEM businesses in Northern Ireland. Two STEM Employers Equality Networks, in Belfast and Londonderry were established, to help employers benchmark their practice against the Good Practice Guidelines and identify areas that they would like further support to develop. My Department has also funded and supported a range of interventions to raise the attractiveness of STEM study and careers. For example, I have committed significant funding to promote the ICT sector as a career choice to all our young people. ICT has traditionally been perceived as male-dominated, and an important aspect of the 'Bring ITOn' programme, which I support, is addressing the gender imbalance. Other gender-specific initiative include "Computer Clubs for Girls" and the IT Girls Initiative.</p>
<p>Early Years Funding</p>	<p>Peter Weir (DUP) asked the Minister of Education whether the Pathway Fund will be open to both groups that (a) have and (b) have not been funded through Early Years funding.</p>	<p>The Pathway fund will be introduced to replace the Early Years Fund, with awards made from April 2016.</p> <p>The Fund will be open to any voluntary or community provider of Early Education (0-4), including the current 153 recipient groups of the Early Years Fund.</p>
<p>Equal Pay</p>	<p>Claire Hanna (SDLP) asked the Finance Minister what action her Department has taken on the issue of equal pay for PSNI, Department of Justice and Northern Ireland personnel.</p>	<p>I want to re-iterate Minister Foster's comments during October's Assembly debate when she placed on record her thanks to all staff who worked in the affected areas during difficult times. As outlined then, this issue, which is not one of equal pay, is cross-cutting and would require legislation to provide a legal route for payment. It would also require substantial funding to be taken from already challenging departmental budgets, which are likely to decrease further over the next few years. There is therefore no further action my Department can take unilaterally and the issue remains with the Executive for consideration.</p>

Childcare

Ross Hussey (UUP) asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the reduction in funding for the Women's Centres Childcare Fund and the impact this will have on his Department's ability to support this charity.

In the context of OFMdfM's Childcare Strategy my predecessor Minister Storey indicated that this would be the last year of funding for the Women's Centres Childcare Fund. OFMdfM officials have now advised that the likely alternative funding measure being brought forward under the Childcare Strategy is unlikely to be in place before April 2017. Accordingly I am currently considering the way forward in terms of the Women's Centres Childcare Fund at this time.

Motions

Issue	Motion	
European Social Fund	Robin Swann (UUP) Chairperson of DEL Committee brought forward a motion.	<p><i>"That this Assembly acknowledges the important role of the European social fund in delivering essential support and services to the most vulnerable people in Northern Ireland; recognises the challenges faced by the community and voluntary sectors in the administration of the current and previous programmes; and calls on the Department for Employment and Learning to learn from its mistakes and to ensure that it works in partnership with the community and voluntary sector to deliver, efficiently and effectively, the European social fund programme."</i></p> <p>The motion passed without a vote being taken.</p> <p>Read the debate in full here.</p>

Issue		
Department Restructuring	Full debate on the Accelerated Passage: Departments Bill (NIA 70/11-16)	The motion was tabled, in accordance with Standing Order 42(4), to seek Assembly approval to the Departments Bill proceeding under the accelerated passage procedure. Full debate here: http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2015/12/08&docID=251987