



Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Budget and Programme for Government:
Department of Education

19 February 2020

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Chris Lyttle (Chairperson)
Ms Karen Mullan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Maurice Bradley
Mr Robbie Butler
Mr William Humphrey
Ms Catherine Kelly
Mr Daniel McCrossan
Mr Justin McNulty
Mr Robin Newton

Witnesses:

Ms Susan Anderson	Department of Education
Mr Paul Brush	Department of Education
Ms Alison Chambers	Department of Education
Mrs Pauline Donnan	Department of Education
Mr Gary Fair	Department of Education
Mrs Karen McCullough	Department of Education

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I welcome the officials: Gary Fair, director of finance in the Department of Education; and Susan Anderson, assistant director of finance. We have a few more witnesses to follow. We will just give them an opportunity to take their seats. You are welcome, everyone. We also have Pauline Donnan — is that correct? — head of analytical services; Karen McCullough, head of school improvement; Alison Chambers, director of promoting collaboration and tackling disadvantage; and Paul Brush, director of youth and early years.

The Executive Budget process for 2020-21 is, obviously, under way, and it will include a debate in the Assembly on 25 February. We asked for the briefing in order to inform any contribution that our Committee would make to that important process, and we asked to hear about the Department's Programme for Government out-turns. I thank the officials for making themselves available at short notice, advise officials and members that the evidence session will be reported by Hansard and invite officials to make a short presentation of no more than 10 to 15 minutes. Then I will open the floor for questions. Gary, would you like to start?

Mr Gary Fair (Department of Education): We will kick off on the finance side first. I was not sure how you wanted to handle it. I was up here before and ran through some slides on the bids that we had put to the Department of Finance. I will kick off by talking through the process of where we are now and where it will hopefully lead us to.

Next week, on 24 February, it is the Supply resolution and Budget Bill debate. It is not the Budget position; the Budget position is still being negotiated. Executive Ministers are still engaging. Our Minister had a bilateral yesterday with the Finance Minister, so that process is ongoing, and, as I understand it, the Finance Minister will probably meet again with the Chancellor of the Exchequer just to see where that will take us to.

The Supply resolution and Budget Bill on Monday essentially provides legislative authority for changes that have taken place through the year. As you know, we have had additional allocations throughout the year, and there is an assumption that those can be spent, although, legislatively, it is not covered until the spring Supplementary Estimates when that Bill is passed. That gives the Department full legislative cover to spend all additional money throughout the year. It is also the last opportunity in the year to make any amendments that may have to be made if we have had money coming in from other Departments or whatever.

It also provides a Vote on Account for the new financial year. That is a normal part of the process. It normally gives about 40% of what a Budget might look like for next year and enables spend to continue, even though a Budget Bill is not normally passed until June. There are two stages. This is the first Budget Bill, which covers all the spend for this year and provides the ability for Departments to spend up to 40% in the new financial year, so it keeps the wheels of government moving.

The Westminster date for the Chancellor's announcement has been confirmed as 11 March. There was some uncertainty around that, given that there is a new Chancellor of the Exchequer, but it was confirmed yesterday by the Finance Minister that that date still stands. Discussion is ongoing in the Department of Finance on whether the Executive might want to agree some kind of a Budget before that. There is an issue around a legal requirement to have a Budget in place before the end of this financial year, but the Executive are in a conundrum in that, if there was additional money potentially coming through the Chancellor's announcement on 11 March, it would obviously make more sense for that to be reflected in the Budget that is agreed. I am not sure where that will go yet; I do not think that has been confirmed. We are just responding. There is not a clear pathway on timings, but that is just to make you aware that 11 March is the Chancellor's announcement, and, who knows, there may be additional resources coming out of that.

There will also be further discussions among Finance Ministers on agreeing a Budget for next year. None of that is confirmed at this stage. Like Ministers in other Departments, our Minister has made the pitch for the resources that we need for next year, and I went through the detail of that. I am happy to pick up on any particular aspects with you today. We have made our bid, and it is a matter of waiting and seeing.

As I said the last time, Executive Ministers are doing all that they can to secure and maximise the resources for next year. There are big pressures, as you know, on our Department and other Departments, so there are challenges. That is roughly the plan, as much as I know at this stage. I am happy to update you as things develop.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. Gary, is it possible to recap on the key aspects of the bid that has been made?

Mr Fair: Yes, no problem. Give me a second. This is the worst thing about bringing a file with me; I can never find anything when I am looking for it. On the bids that we put forward, I think we shared the document that we shared with the Department of Finance. I will run through what all that covers.

You will be aware of the ongoing industrial action by teachers. Before we got a new Minister, that was a key concern: to try to get that resolved. Now that we have a new Minister, the understanding is clear: there is no point in any agreement being settled with teachers unless there is funding to support it. The problem over the last few years has been that we have not been able to fund inflationary pay increases or even incremental contractual increases or non-teaching staff pay increases. That has been a big issue and is one of the biggest issues that have led to the increase in deficits at school level over the last few years. We are bidding for £148 million for next year.

Special educational needs is an ongoing pressure, as you all will be aware. There are increasing costs every year of roughly £22 million. Next year, we would need the £22 million increase for this year baselined, and there is forecast to be about a £22 million increase next year. I think that the Education Authority briefed you and may have touched on this when they were with you. Further work is being done on special educational needs to get a better understanding of some of the drivers of that spend,

because it is such an escalating issue. It is always a challenge, from my point of view, every year, and we are having to bid for resources in-year. We are being upfront about the position for next year.

The Education Authority reports a number of pressures in its block grant. In the past few years, we have not been able to fund it for all the pressures that it has experienced. Invariably, a lot of those issues have still come through as pressures throughout the year and we have bid for additional resources, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. Again, we are just being upfront about what, the Education Authority says, its pressures are likely to be for next year.

I think that you had a briefing on school maintenance and the significant issues across the education estate. That is an ongoing issue. All we have been able to do is fund the minimum, the real things that might hit a crisis point in terms of health and safety. We always have an agreement with the Education Authority whereby, if anything really significant crops up, it should engage with us early and, between us all, we will try to do something; obviously, nobody wants a situation where a wall collapses in a school or whatever. The reality is that there is a lot of work required across the education estate, and that is tied in as well with the discussion around area planning, the capital programme and the extent of capital works that can be taken forward in any year.

In the last couple of years, we have had additional funding from the confidence and supply arrangement. That never enabled us to do additional things. It covered a range of issues around deprivation and really enabled the sector to continue with the provision of services around deprivation. Without that, essentially, services would have needed to be cut. That is the reality. We were grateful for it in the past couple of years, because it at least enabled us not to have to make some of those difficult decisions.

I will pick out some of the big ones. We are bidding for an additional £22 million for the voluntary exit scheme. That may or may not all be spent, but that is estimate of what could be spent. That would enable the release of a maximum of 200 teachers and a number of non-teaching staff. It is hard to estimate up front what that might be, but we will definitely put forward the case that there is a need to have a voluntary exit scheme because, if you like, it oxygenates the system and enables schools to make some of the difficult decisions when they no longer require a teacher of a particular subject, for instance. Across the sector, the Education Authority and schools endeavour not to go down the redundancy route. It is sometimes necessary, but every effort is made to move staff from one school to another, if need be, or to see if staff are willing to go on voluntary exit. It does not necessarily mean a significant reduction in the overall teaching force over time, because, with curricular demands and demographics, there is often a need for a teacher of a different subject, but it is still an important aspect of funding that enables an oxygenating of the system. There has actually been a significant reduction, leaving aside teaching. A lot of teachers have exited the system over time, and others have come in. There have been quite significant reductions. For example, since the Education Authority was established, it has released over 800 non-teaching staff, so it has really helped to deliver some of the efficiencies required.

I think that you are getting a detailed briefing on the implementation of the SEN framework in the coming weeks, but that is essentially where a new framework will be introduced. It actually fell within the transformation project that I am senior responsible owner for: the review of the common funding scheme. I have always been supportive of the fact that, because this imposes something new on schools, it justifies a bid for additional resources. We listen to school principals along the way, and one of the concerns that they have is that more and more is imposed on them at times without the additional resources, so I support that as a bid, moving forward. That will be a recurrent bid. In some ways, it could be described as "transformational" as well, because it will bring about a new way of doing things. It will support early interventions on some of the special educational needs of children.

There are a number of areas, such as the delivery of a childcare strategy and the delivery of a mental health and emotional well-being and nurture programme, where, really, our Minister and the Executive will have to decide how they want to tackle them. They are important areas, but, again, they will be linked to the funding that is available overall. Some of that is up in the air, I suppose. There are different approaches to the childcare strategy that could be taken that would have different financial consequences. There will be big financial consequences no matter what option you go for. They are reflected here, and it is appropriate that we bid for them, but, to some extent, they are new things, and a view will have to be taken as to what is affordable overall at Executive level.

I do not want to go into too much detail in case I am boring you, but that probably covers some of the main areas. We also have a rates pressure that, to some extent, came out of the blue after we had put forward our initial bid. The figure of £11 million is what we were quoted. We are engaging with Land

and Property Services on that, so we are not sure where the figure might land. I know that there has been a discussion at Executive level on whether something can be done, even in the short term, to avoid that hit on the budget. If it hits our budget, we will be left short; if it is funded out of the Executive's Budget, it will hit that. I do not know where that will go, but, at the end of the day, it is a pressure for us at this stage.

Those are some of the main areas. I do not know whether members have any questions.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): If we take questions on these matters, Gary, are you content to come back to some Programme for Government issues as well?

Mr Fair: Yes. My colleagues will probably pick up on the Programme for Government issues.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. You raised the issue of rates: do you have an estimated total of what the increase to the school rates bill may be?

Mr Fair: It is that £11 million figure at this stage, although we have asked for the detail on a school-by-school basis. I should emphasise that that does not hit individual schools' budgets; the cost is picked up by the Education Authority, so it hits our budget overall. That is why it is highlighted as a pressure.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): So schools will not see a shock to their budgets.

Mr Fair: No. The Education Authority picks up the tab for controlled and maintained schools, and voluntary grammars are exempt, on the whole, so it is not a direct hit.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): But, obviously, it could be a significant shock to the Department's budget.

Mr Fair: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK, and you have no indication of how exactly that will be met at this stage.

Mr Fair: No. That is more of a discussion at Executive level.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. As we know, we are obviously in a serious situation. The situation has been referred to as a "financial crisis": do you believe that there is a financial crisis for education?

Mr Fair: I think that it is widely recognised that there is very significant financial strain right across the sector. I try to be optimistic at this time of the year and hope for the best about what might be agreed in a Budget. At the end of the day, no matter what is agreed, it will probably still require some challenging decisions to be made. Until the last few years, when we have been given very challenging budgets, we have tried to keep the focus on front-line delivery — on children and young people, schools, early years and youth. I imagine that that will continue to be our key focus, but it is challenging. We will have to manage whatever comes through, but we are hopeful that some of the significant pressures that we have highlighted will be met. There are, obviously, areas that I have highlighted, such as the childcare strategy and other issues, that will require an Executive view on what is taken forward, to what extent they are taken forward and when they are taken forward. It is a matter of waiting and seeing what the budget looks like.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. Before I bring members in, just at a high level on resource and capital, I just want to check that my understanding is correct on total bids and, therefore, I presume, some indication of the scale of the pressures that you face. On resource, the Department is seeking £353 million for 2020-21.

Mr Fair: No. I do not know whether it was in the paper that we shared with you. Taking account of some additional items that were reflected in the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement, we have actually bid for £427 million next year. That takes account of everything. There are, obviously, discussions going on about some of the detail in the NDNA agreement and whether that can be taken forward in the short term or, perhaps, in the longer term.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. That increases to £570 million in 2021-22 and what appears to be £716 million in 2022-23, compared with the 2019-2020 baseline.

Mr Fair: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): An additional £716 million. Do you believe that that will be allocated?

Mr Fair: As I understand it, it is likely that the Chancellor will announce only a one-year Budget, so our focus at this stage is on next year and trying to maximise the extent of the bids that could be met. Decisions will then have to be taken on prioritisation.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. On capital, compared with the figures for 2019-2020, 2020-21 will be £80 million extra and then, for 2022-23, £120 million extra —

Mr Fair: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): — as well as a reprofiling of the Fresh Start capital. Can the Department spend that additional amount of capital?

Mr Fair: The bids were submitted, so the understanding is that the Department could spend it. Capital can be difficult to manage because it depends on how quickly some of the major schemes can move, and, invariably, there are timing issues. If issues are identified early enough in the year, money can often be reallocated to minor works.

As you mentioned, one of the big issues is the flexibility around the Fresh Start Agreement money. We are still seeking that, and the Department of Finance is still seeking an answer from Treasury on that. That, obviously, has an impact on quite a number of projects, and we would want the flexibility on that, rather than losing it. If we lost that money, it would have a significant impact on all other capital.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. In total, in three years' time, you are not far off requesting a billion pounds of additional money for the Department.

Mr Fair: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK, that is the finance side of it. How realistic is that? If you do not receive that, what type of radical overhaul of education is needed?

Mr Fair: As we have done in previous years, the focus would have to be on developing a budget strategy. That is not easy. Really, the only areas that the Minister would probably have to consider in conjunction with Executive colleagues are the new areas that have been identified and that I have referred to. Starting to cut other areas would invariably hit those at the front line — children and young people. That has always been the challenge for the Department. Because so much of our expenditure on the resource side is linked to staffing costs, there is not a lot of flexibility there, and, invariably, you either have to make people redundant or stop quite critical services that have a significant impact on the educational welfare of children and young people.

When we did not have a Minister, we highlighted some of those areas as areas that required a political decision, because it felt too heavy for an accounting officer to have to make decisions to make cuts to services that are so critical to children and young people. If we do not get a significant proportion of what we seek here, we will be in that position again; that is the reality.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): When will the Finance Minister meet the Chancellor?

Mr Fair: I do not know. I was not given a date, but he did indicate that he will be engaging again. I think he wants to complete all of his bilaterals with Executive Ministers first.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. It suggests that the independent review of education ought to be wide-ranging and urgent. Are there any indications of when that will be initiated?

Mr Fair: Not at this stage. The Minister will take a view on that in due course.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK.

Mr Fair: We have been briefing him on the work that has already been taken forward under the education transformation programme, some of which falls to me. Obviously, that may well impact on any views that are taken on a wider review.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): That transformation programme is tinkering at the edges of £1 billion of additional resource.

Mr Fair: Yes. There was never an awful lot of money to take it forward, but there has been a fair bit of work.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Thanks very much, Gary. I will bring in the Members.

Mr McCrossan: Thank you, Gary, for your presentation and an insight into some of the challenges.

I noted that, throughout your presentation, you said continually that there was a requirement for challenging decisions to be made in the time ahead. I am sure that you are very aware, as are the members of the Committee and my colleagues, that challenging decisions have been made in schools for the last number of years as a result of the continued cuts and the severe financial pressures burdened on principals to manage their resources. That stress has continued over the last number of years, and I am worried that it will worsen as a result of what lies ahead. Whilst I am speaking on that, I pay a huge tribute to the many principals out there who have managed in the circumstances over the last number of years and to the teachers, who are unfortunately involved in this action. They do not want to be, but feel they have no choice simply because they are not getting what they are rightfully entitled to.

With regard to the £148 million for teachers and non-teachers' pay, if teachers had received the equivalent of the public sector pay awards since 2015-16, would they have more or less money now? Was it an advantage to the Department of Education not to pay teachers until now? Was there any advantage in the delay? Basically, would there be more money or less money?

Mr Fair: They obviously would have got more money if they had received rises in line with public sector pay policy, but the negotiations have been ongoing for that time. At least, at this point, there seems to be agreement in principle, subject to funding. Again, whatever might be agreed with teachers is probably linked to whatever Budget settlement we get. There are elements that make up the £148 million: £68 million will, hopefully, settle the pay dispute for 2016-17 and 2017-18, and included in the £148 million will be a 1% increase for this year and next year. Whether those may have to be decoupled, I do not know.

In answer to your question: yes, teachers would have been better off if they had got the 1%, but then negotiations have been ongoing that will deliver better than that, on the basis of what the agreement in principle is at the moment for those two years.

Mr McCrossan: Given the disruption that this has undoubtedly caused over the last few years and that we are now in the middle of the discussion about issuing teachers with their rightful entitlement, what has been the benefit of the entire mess to the Department of Education, withholding what is rightfully the entitlement of teachers?

Mr Fair: I have not been involved in the negotiation process. I think —.

Mr McCrossan: From the Department of Education's point of view?

Mr Fair: There have issues probably on both sides, and there has probably been that need for the level of engagement and negotiation with the unions to get to the point where they are now. As I understand it, it was not just pay issues; there were other issues. It has been a meaningful engagement with all of the unions, and it is helpful that agreement in principle has been reached at least, at this stage.

Mr McCrossan: Do you think that the whole process has been handled effectively over the last few years?

Mr Fair: I have not been involved in it, so I would not want to comment on it.

Mr McCrossan: Yes, but what about from your own analysis of the delays and disruption that it has caused the schools, when, ultimately, now, we are sitting where we should have been years ago?

Mr Fair: My role is —

Mr McCrossan: A finance role.

Mr Fair: — to get the information from a finance perspective and make sure that I bid for the required resources, so I would not want to comment on the process.

Mr McCrossan: OK. There was £5 million for teacher redundancies. Why is that figure so low? It says that the Department of Education spent £5 million on teacher redundancy in 2016.

Mr Fair: I am sorry: are you looking at the totals? What are you referring to?

Mr McCrossan:

"In 2016, DE spent £5 million on teacher redundancy".

I wonder why that figure was so low then.

Mr Fair: Well, the split of the £22 million, for instance, for next year, in terms of potential voluntary exits is about £7 million for teaching and about £15 million for non-teaching. The £5 million would have been what was delivered in that year against a budget, probably, of about £7 million.

Mr McCrossan: Does the non-teaching category involve classroom assistants?

Mr Fair: Yes.

Mr McCrossan: OK.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): How many classroom assistants?

Mr Fair: I do not think that we have a figure with us. Do we have a figure for the potential number?

Ms Susan Anderson (Department of Education): We do not have the breakdown for classroom assistants, but we can certainly come back to you.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): That would be helpful. If £7 million is for teaching and you expect that to be 200 teachers and the balance for non-teaching is £15 million — notwithstanding the fact that there may be other types of staff in that — there could be a concern that that would be a significant number of classroom assistants. Why would that be the case, if it is?

Mr Fair: The £15 million could release up to 360 non-teaching staff. That could be a range of staff; it would not all be classroom assistants. We do not have the breakdown of what that might be. Again, they are only estimates; this is what is estimated could happen next year. However, as we all know, because there have been a lot of exits in the past, the reality is that the numbers coming forward depend on who is interested in leaving voluntarily. The numbers could well be below that.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): It would be helpful to get a breakdown of the non-teaching staff figure, given the significance of some of the roles in that group of people.

Do you want to come back in, Daniel?

Mr McCrossan: I had a question about the voluntary exit scheme.

Mr Fair: I emphasise that it will be an estimate of what is, potentially, possible. I do not know whether it would be helpful for us to provide you, for instance, with the figures for the number of classroom assistants who went last year, just to give you an illustration. We can certainly give you an estimate.

Mr McCrossan: That would be helpful, thank you.

More than half of the amount allocated for the voluntary exit scheme — £12 million — is being surrendered in 2019-2020. Why is that figure so high?

Mr Fair: As I say, because there have been so many exits over the last few years, it is difficult to estimate the interest that there will be in a voluntary exit scheme, and it varies each year. That is the only explanation that I can give. We are dependent on people wanting to leave the system; people are not being forced. There is no compulsory redundancy.

Mr McCrossan: Is there anything that you would do differently, given that £12 million is being surrendered back to the Department of Finance?

Mr Fair: The Department's workforce side liaises closely with the Education Authority early in the year and even in advance of the year to try to get fairly robust figures from the authority, primarily. We try to get robust figures at the start of the year, but, again, it is dependent on the uptake. A number of people will put their names forward and, perhaps, not follow it through and leave, but they may express an interest at the start, so it is difficult to assess.

Mr McCrossan: OK. Chairperson, would you give me another few moments?

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Briefly, yes.

Mr McCrossan: The childcare strategy has been allocated £15 million. I am looking at item 3:

"Bring all pre-school down to 12·5 hrs — wrap around 17·5 hrs childcare".

It is my thinking that that will reduce the education element of the current provision: is that right?

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I think that is only one option to be considered.

Mr McCrossan: Yes. It is an option, but is that something that is noted in considering that option? That would have a detrimental impact on the current provision.

Mr Fair: All those issues would be considered. We wanted to bid for a resource as part of our bidding strategy. It is difficult to know. It would depend on what decisions were made and what option is chosen. There will be more work and more discussion around that, and, again, it is a question of whether we could spend even £15 million next year. A lot of that is a bit up in the air, but it is right, nonetheless, that we bid to address such issues.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I will bring other members in, and, Daniel, I will bring you back in if needs be. Before I do, why, in our system, can we offer voluntary severance to so many teaching and non-teaching staff?

Mr Fair: It is linked to some of the challenges at school level that you referred to. Obviously, you will know that I have written to schools over the past few years and do so as a matter of process to inform them of their budgets at the start of each year. I emphasise the importance of good financial management, as I need to do in my role, notwithstanding the fact that I recognise the pressures that school leaders are under. When boards of governors seek to make difficult decisions on living within budget, it often requires the release of staff. The voluntary exit scheme is there to facilitate some of that decision-making at school level and to enable boards of governors to make the decisions that they need to make on subject leads or whatever they need in a school. For non-teaching staff, it allows that oxygen in the system, I suppose, where some people are not required for the purposes that they were recruited for.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): It is an area of interest that we would probably like to come back to and ask more questions. This is maybe a slightly vulgar analysis, but we either have too many teaching

and non-teaching staff or we are reducing schools below capacity on that staffing element. I will stop there, as I need to bring other members in.

Mr Butler: I will continue on that note. I find this intriguing. Does such a scheme constitute good value for money, given the reasons that you have suggested and some of the explanations? We spoke to some of the bodies that represent teachers, and we have been told that there is not a high churn. It is a profession that has good retention, so we have, perhaps, an ageing population among our teachers. Is it perhaps a strategic oversight, or is it just one of those unmanageable difficulties because we do not have a long-term vision for education?

Secondly, Chris and Daniel pointed out the disparity in figures between teaching staff and non-teaching staff. Are the retention issues with non-teaching staff in the mix of the breakdown when explaining why there seems to be a bigger churn with them?

Finally, £12 million for voluntary exit went back last year, and the anticipated budget for this year is £22 million. Can any underspend be reprofiled, as opposed to going back to the Department of Finance?

Mr Fair: No, it is ring-fenced.

By way of context, there are about 20,000 teachers and about 44,000 non-teaching staff, so that explains, to some extent, the difference in numbers. It is the nature of the education sector that a lot depends on the requirements of the curriculum and the individual pupils in any given year. That impacts on the subject leads and so on that you will require in any year. It allows some of that flexibility at school level to take place. "Non-teaching staff" covers quite a range; for example, there are people who are involved in providing school meals and people who are employed linked to transport. There is a raft of areas. It allows that kind of flexibility in the system to deal with some of the pressures so that schools, in particular, do not feel bound to a staffing structure that may not work for them as they move forward.

Mr Butler: The point is that the curriculum, as I understand it, is not as flexible as you make it sound. There are difficulties with changing the curriculum, and there are things that we talk about here. I struggle to understand the concept of a changing curriculum on an annual basis creating the environment where redundancy is an option or, perhaps, there is a need to move teachers on.

Mr Fair: I do not want to stray too much into my colleague's territory. It might be better if he came back with some information. It would be Mark Bailey's side. Obviously, I have a bidding strategy here, and it makes sense from our point of view to bid as a Department for this. It is valid to ask whether this is value for money, and that question probably needs to be asked every year to ensure that the system gets value for money.

Mr Butler: I have a second question on another note: is that OK?

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Yes, if you keep it brief. I am keen to get as many members in as I can.

Mr Butler: OK. On the mental health framework and the £10 million, is that per annum?

Mr Fair: Yes.

Mr Butler: OK, it is per annum for three years. Are there any anticipated financial pressures on the delivery of the framework this year? Has there been any risk assessment of the prospect of the finance failing to stack up with the delivery of the framework by December this year, which is when, we have been told, it will be signed off? Will you provide a breakdown of the £10 million over those three years?

Mr Fair: I do not know whether we have any of that information with us. We can come back on that.

Mr Butler: OK.

Ms Anderson: Colleagues were here last week to discuss the well-being framework and, I think, agreed to write to the Committee on specific areas. We will ask them to include that detail.

Mr Fair: Again, that area probably will require a bit of an Executive discussion, because it is not just about Education. We will come back with more detail.

Mr M Bradley: Thank you for the presentation. My issue is childcare and the review of the childcare strategy. Has the Department identified how it is going to take the childcare strategy forward? Has it any indication of the costs and the target number of hours available? If not, when will that information be available?

Mr Fair: I think I am right in assuming that you are getting a more detailed briefing from colleagues on that, probably next week.

Mr Paul Brush (Department of Education): Next Wednesday there will be a session on early years and childcare.

Mr Fair: I do not mean to be rude, but it might be better if you wait to get that detailed briefing. We have bid for resources based on what might be feasible from next year. From a budgeting strategy point of view, it made sense to flag up that that is an issue.

Mr M Bradley: Is the £2.5 million bid for nurture to cover the current signature project, which covers 31 schools, or is it a broader figure for a wider number of schools?

Mr Fair: That would be to fund a wider number. It probably has not been fully thought through exactly what that would be, but it is to provide something wider.

Mr M Bradley: Is that budget bid enough to widen it out?

Mr Fair: We try to construct bids so that they are as realistic as possible. There is no point in going in too high with certain bids if we feel that, when something new is kicking off, we may not be able to spend that level. So, it is a reasonable assumption for the coming year.

Mr M Bradley: OK, thank you.

Mr Newton: I welcome Gary and his colleagues to the meeting. I am extremely pleased to see such an ambitious bid; it is to be commended. We often talk about the cost of education rather than investment in education, so let us see where it all goes. Returning to the £22 million, Gary, you talked about it allowing oxygen into the system. That really just means cheaper teachers does it not?

Mr Fair: Well, not necessarily.

Mr Newton: Even partially?

Mr Fair: Well —.

Mr Newton: I understand what you are trying to do. When teachers move on, younger teachers come in, and they have different cost, therefore there is a budget saving.

Mr Fair: That is not the main driver. The investing in the teaching workforce scheme was probably more focussed on that, as it gave teachers who were near the end of their teaching careers the opportunity to consider leaving to enable younger, newly trained teachers to come in. The voluntary exit scheme is wider than that. As I have described, it enables the difficult decisions to be made at school level.

Mr Newton: Does the £22 million include teachers in the SEN schools? Are they involved in that reduction?

Mr Fair: Yes, it will cover all teaching staff.

Mr Newton: It is all teaching staff, but some classroom assistants are also involved in our special needs schools.

Mr Fair: Yes. Obviously, business needs have to come into any decisions when it comes to voluntary exits. In the past few years, we have put the Education Authority under pressure — as is our role to ensure that there is good value across the sector — to make significant efficiency savings. It has been challenging from the Education Authority's point of view, because the numbers had to reduce in order for savings to be made. Part of the problem that the chief executive faces now is in looking at the areas where there might be gaps from a business need point of view. There are big challenges around this because — this is back to your original point — there is an efficiency driver element to it, but the more important driver is making sure that the right people are in the right places to deliver the best for the children.

Mr Newton: It must be a big challenge to replace redundant special needs teachers and, indeed, classroom assistants, whilst the sector feels that it is not being supported adequately at this time.

Mr Fair: The Education Authority also makes use of the transfer redundancy scheme that enables some movement of individuals across schools. Where there is an interest by some staff in taking voluntary exit, there can be movement across schools so that the needs are still met, hopefully, depending on the skills that are required. It is tricky to handle, and that is probably one of the reasons why, quite often in the last few years, the spend has been a bit below what was anticipated. However, I still think that it is a good thing from a value-for-money perspective to bid for the resource. We cannot hold on to the money if we do not spend it. As long as it is released early enough in the year, I presume that the Exchequer can use it.

Mr Newton: I want to hone in on the £10 million for educational underachievement. How do you anticipate that £10 million being spent, if you are successful in getting it?

Mr Fair: Again, that was put forward as part of our bidding strategy. I am not briefed on a lot of the underpinning detail. Again, that is probably an Executive discussion that needs to take place once budgets are agreed. It is an important area for the Executive to consider. Whatever is taken forward will depend on the budget settlement as well, other than what can be taken forward within existing resources. I am not even sure that we have much detail on that, which we would get from policy colleagues. The aspiration is to further develop some of the work that has already been done and give it new impetus. There is a good aspiration behind it, but, again, it will depend on what resources become available.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): My understanding is that it will be used, in some degree, to refresh the extended schools programme that is now to be called Partners in Education. Alison, do you want to comment on that?

Ms Alison Chambers (Department of Education): Yes. The extended schools programme is 14 years old now, so this is an opportune moment to look at that programme afresh and at the lessons learnt from some of our other programmes. We would really like to improve the offer. At the moment, the paper is with the Minister for consideration. We have been invited back to give the Committee a more detailed briefing on that in due course.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Robin, I hope that you do not mind indulging me for a second.

Mr Newton: OK. That's fine, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Some of the challenges with the funding for extended schools are in monitoring, observing and accounting for precisely what that goes towards once it is received by the schools.

Ms Chambers: No. We have a very comprehensive programme of accounting for extended schools. I was going to come to that when we discuss the Programme for Government (PFG). There is a report published annually by the Education Authority (EA). We have a sophisticated Northern Ireland extended schools information system to which the schools upload their action plans, and that then gives us information on what has been achieved.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): That might be something to come back to in even more detail down the line. Do you want back in, Robin?

Mr Newton: No. I am happy, Chair, given your final remarks that we will come back to it at a later stage.

Ms C Kelly: Thank you, Gary, for your presentation. I want to bring it back again to childcare. It is in crisis across the North, and most of us are aware of that. If we are to get more of an update at next week's briefing, I will just make a comment. The fact is that, when we talk about childcare, we should not talk about it as childminding or filling a space while a parent is working. It should be about the education of the child. There should be a particular focus on that when we are looking at whatever scheme ends up being in the childcare strategy. I live in west Tyrone, and the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area has the smallest provision. We need to tackle that very soon. If anyone is in any doubt, they should read Employers for Childcare's 2019 survey; it makes shocking reading.

Can you advise how the £44 million for special educational needs would be broken down? Will this address the lengthy delays in statementing?

Mr Fair: We can answer the first question. The forecast spend that we have from the Education Authority indicates that about £9 million would go on special schools, £16 million on SEN in mainstream schools, £12 million on pupil support, and £7 million on SEN transport costs. That is the best estimate at this stage. I do not know whether I can answer your second question. Again, I know that special educational needs is one particular area that the Education Authority is looking at as part of its thinking on the draft recovery plan. I presume that that is the aspiration.

Ms Mullan: Gary, thank you for the second presentation within a short couple weeks; I appreciate you coming back. Back to rates, can private fee-paying schools register for charitable status and then be afforded rates relief or exemption?

Mr Fair: As I understand it, there are a number of factors for those types of schools. It depends on how the school was originally established, and I suppose any school could make a case for becoming a charity. I do not know whether Susan can give any more details generally.

Ms Mullan: Do you have any examples?

Ms Anderson: It depends on the individual school set-up and the trustees, and whether or not they can be classified as a charity for [*Inaudible*] and other status.

Mr Fair: Some of those schools may have other properties, which are not directly linked to the provision of education to children, on which they may have to pay rates, but they are normally exempt in the normal provision of educational services.

Ms Mullan: Right. Since 2014, the number of schools in deficit has more than doubled and the surplus position has fallen by nearly £17 million. Would the cited £60 million figure begin to reverse that trend?

Mr Fair: Yes; that is the intention. We really submitted that bid just to try to stabilise the system. It is £60 million cumulatively for three years. There is no way around that. There has just not been enough money going in through the aggregated schools budget over the last number of years.

Ms Mullan: On Monday, the Finance Minister announced an extra £10 million for the Education Department. Do we know where that will be allocated yet?

Mr Fair: Do we have a breakdown?

Ms Anderson: Yes. Just under £1 million will go towards SEN, which meets the full SEN pressures for this year. Just over £1 million will go towards EU exit costs in the Education Authority. The balance will address the existing pressures in the Education Authority.

Ms Mullan: Great. If we are going to come back to extended schools under the PFG, I will keep my other questions until then.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much for the presentation, Gary. The challenges that you have set out are huge. This year's bid of £427 million rises to £570 million next year and then £716 million the following year. Given the challenges facing the Department — and given economies of scale and

savings, budgetary planning, costs versus opportunities costs — what would the picture be if we had one education system in Northern Ireland?

Mr Fair: The reality is that it would probably be cheaper to run — there is no question about that — but we are where we are. As officials, we have to develop a budget strategy for the Minister's consideration based on where we are. I do not know where the independent review thinking might go on this, but even if you were to consider significant transformation of the sector, it would take time. I am sure you have been briefed by colleagues on area planning, but the focus of area planning is not necessarily on getting a cheaper way of doing things; it is about getting a better way for the youngsters, a better way of educating children. It is not a straightforward sector in many ways, but any significant transformation would take quite a bit of time.

Mr Humphrey: How long?

Mr Fair: It would be in the medium to longer term. I have been leading on the work on the review of the common funding scheme, for instance; some of you are probably aware of the thinking that we have been putting into that. In some ways, it almost feels like tinkering at the edges, but we are still listening to principals and boards of governors on the issues that matter to them. A lot of what you are talking about is linked to area planning as well, and it is about the challenges around area planning. Obviously, there is a significant drive to get things moving quicker, in the Department and in the Education Authority, but local challenges are faced every time difficult decisions have to be made.

Mr Humphrey: I want to return to the issue that Mr Bradley raised about nurture units. Up to this point, there have been 31 primary schools in the signature project, or pilot. Was your answer suggesting that the £2.5 million that had been allocated would now go across all primary schools?

Mr Fair: I wonder if a colleague would be better informed on that.

Mr Brush: I think that nurture units are also on the schedule for next Wednesday. They are not part of my session, but —

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Next Wednesday is going to be revelational. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Humphrey: I will make this point, before we get to next Wednesday: the £2.5 million over the 31 projects, currently, is nowhere near enough to make an impact. If the Department thinks that it can be spread over all primary schools in Northern Ireland. In fact, the Department will not be serious if it makes that decision. I do not think any member around the table would agree to that. How on earth could you possibly suggest that the £2.5 million that is spread over 31 schools — and, from what I see, will not be increased — could be spread to have an impact over hundreds of schools? That is nonsense.

You did not touch on figures for school maintenance and new builds. Does it come down to the professional judgement of those who go into schools and assess the need for maintenance and new build? How does that work in the Department? How do you get to the top of the league to get such work done?

Mr Fair: My colleague Philip Irwin would be better informed on that. I do not want to tread on his toes. All capital works and maintenance are prioritised, but there are different criteria. I am not well enough informed on that to give you a meaningful answer. I do not know whether Philip is coming here or if you want me to get him to come back to you on that.

Mr Humphrey: It would be helpful if he came back to me on it. Does the Department work sufficiently well with the EA and other Departments on the hard-to-reach communities and educational attainment, for instance, to ensure that money is targeted in the way that it could and should be?

Mr Fair: I am not directly involved, but I have dealings with the Education Authority and colleagues from the Department, and I believe that there is that level of joined-upness across the system, and it is obviously critical. The answer to your question is yes.

Mr Humphrey: Finally, if you believe that that level of joined-upness is there, do those other Departments, such as the Department for Communities, for example, bring any money to the table to help?

Mr Fair: I do not have the detail, but, yes, it does happen that there are agreements between Departments for joint funding of certain projects, although it depends on the availability of funding. Often, another Department will be bidding in the same way in which we are bidding, in order to deliver something that requires joined-up working.

Mr McNulty: Thank you, Gary and your colleagues, for coming this morning. There is no mention of the investing in the teaching workforce scheme. I am referencing Simon Doyle's article in today's 'Irish News'. Why is that? Does the Department not think that it was successful? The scheme was about bringing newly qualified teachers into permanent roles and "oxygenating the system". You used that term, and Robin referred to it. Can the scheme not be looked at again?

Mr Fair: That is a matter for the Minister to consider. I cannot comment on that. I know that he was supportive of it in the past, so it may well be reconsidered, but, again, a lot depends on funding.

Mr McNulty: There is £0.7 million for Ulster-Scots and Irish-language legislation. That is a token figure, given the cost of failure from the collapse of the institutions for three years. Do you feel that that paltry figure is adequate?

Mr Fair: Again, as part of a budgeting strategy, we had to assess what was reasonable to bid for, for next year in particular, and that cost will essentially cover the establishment of another arm's-length body to coordinate the work. It is part of the NDNA agreement, so it was deemed to be a prudent bid at this stage, given that there perhaps needs to be more clarity around what will be taken forward.

Mr McNulty: Officials previously advised that the mental health and emotional well-being framework would not be ready until after Christmas, so why bid for £10 million in-year? We are all aware of the emotional and mental health challenges that young people face. Are there any plans for additional counselling and support in post-primary schools, given the waiting lists for services?

Mr Fair: I cannot comment. I do not think that we have. We can come back to you on that.

Mr McNulty: To meet pressures, there is a £6.5 million resource bid per annum over each of the next three years for school maintenance. Recently, the Committee was advised of a £400 million backlog. How do those figures marry?

Mr Fair: The £6.5 million bid is for additional resource. That is in addition to what the Education Authority is given to cover that. The budget in the past few years has been about £18 million. The Education Authority has assessed that it needs more than £18 million to deal with critical health and safety issues, so the £6.5 million reflects a higher bid overall.

Yes, it would be better if more money could be allocated to take forward a lot of the more substantial school maintenance work, but, across the sector, we and the Education Authority have been having to manage the kinds of budgets that we have been given, so we have had to include a realistic budget there. We have been quite firm that the Education Authority has to live within that budget, but we recognise, moving forward, that it needs at least £6.5 million more. That is what that the bid reflects. I agree to some extent that it is only chipping at the edges of the problem, but there has to be a realism in budget planning. That is part of the challenge that we have faced in recent years.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Even with that additional allocation, the Department of Education and the Education Authority's extent of capacity for school maintenance at present is to avoid there being critical health and safety issues, and no more?

Mr Fair: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK.

Mr Fair: That has been the reality. Additional resource would help the Education Authority substantially, but we are trying to be realistic here.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): The financial crisis therefore extends to an estate crisis.

Mr Fair: It is not quite that straightforward, because it is tied in with whatever capital works will take place. It is really part of a wider view, which is linked to your question about how decisions are made on prioritisation.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Justin, are you content?

Mr McNulty: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Daniel, have you a very brief follow-up question?

Mr McCrossan: I was scrolling through a few things here. I see that there is note that states:

"There has been a real terms reduction of £229m (12%) in DE's Resource Budget between 2010-11 and 2018-19."

What is the funding loss in to school budgets in real terms over the same period? Have pupil numbers risen over that period?

Mr Fair: Yes, pupil numbers have risen over the same period by about 17,000. There was a real inflationary increase that was not funded, of about 13% or 14%. From memory, additional allocations to schools were at 3% or 4%, so there was a significant shortfall. We also have to bear in mind that some of the increases allocated over those years were to cover increased costs, such as National Insurance and other costs that have been imposed on schools. Thankfully, this year, for example, there was the increased pension contribution cost. We were able to secure the funding for that. It might have looked as though we were giving a reasonable amount more to schools this year, but that was largely to cover the pension cost, apart from £7 million that we agreed, as part of the Budget strategy, would be given to schools to ensure that no school should be any worse off than in the previous year when it came to the amount of funding per pupil.

Mr McCrossan: Some comments have been made by colleagues around the table about deficits, and I am aware of a number of schools, even in my constituency, that are in significant deficit. I do not expect you to rhyme off the figures, but, to the best of your knowledge, what is the highest deficit in any particular school? In other words, how many schools have exceeded a deficit of £1 million?

Mr Fair: I do not know off the top of my head, other than that the number has probably increased in recent years, but we can come back to you with that information.

Mr McCrossan: It is an important point.

Mr Fair: I will make one general point, from an awareness point of view. The Education Authority ultimately has to pick up the tab if a school is in deficit in a year. That is part of the challenge that the Education Authority faces, and one of the reasons that we have been working closely with it is to ensure that there is robust financial management across the sector. That is not to be disparaging about school leaders in any way. It helps me when I am bidding for resources if I can give an assurance that everything is being done across the sector and that schools have gone as far as they can go, but the message has never been that we are trying to push schools over the edge. It is just about getting that assurance from schools that they are doing what they can do.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Finally, on the Budget, will the Education Authority and the Department of Education close 2019-2020 having overspent? If so, by how much for both?

Mr Fair: At this stage, I cannot give a definite figure. We are grateful for the additional money that we have got in-year, but the Education Authority will still be forecasting an overspend of potentially £28 million or thereabouts. That may not be the actual overspend for the Department, because other factors come into play come the end of the year, but there is still a risk.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Do you have an approximate idea of what the overspend will be for the Department?

Mr Fair: The Department will not have overspent, but often what is reflected as an Education Authority overspend will reduce when all factors are taken into account, perhaps where the Department has small easements or whatever.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): The main overspend is therefore in the Education Authority. What is the consequence of that?

Mr Fair: The Audit Office has not qualified the Education Authority's accounts over the past number of years. Even it will recognise the strains in the system and that the Department, the Education Authority and schools are doing everything to manage the position as well as they can. That has been helpful in one respect. Perhaps this year more than other years, because of the pressures on the Northern Ireland block, the consequences may be more significant. I do not know. I suppose that it depends on where every Department lands come the end of the year.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Will it require an Excess Vote from the Assembly?

Mr Fair: No. It has not.

Mr McCrossan: Chair, may I make a brief point?

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Make it very brief, Daniel.

Mr McCrossan: The papers mention that the age-weighted pupil unit (AWPU) will be kept at the same level. Surely, with inflation, that means a real-time cut. It is not the same.

Mr Fair: I agree. The action that we took at the start of this year was to allocate £7 million to schools. That was to avoid a change in the split between the primary and post-primary AWPU. If there had been a reduction in one or the other, that would have had a significant impact on some schools, and we were trying to avoid that impact at an individual school level. It does not take account of inflation; I acknowledge that. It is really to keep the balance across the two sectors.

Mr McCrossan: It is frozen, but, in real terms, it is a cut to schools.

Mr Fair: If the additional money had not gone in, it would have ended up being a cut for some schools, yes. That is why we have included £9 million as part of our bidding strategy to cover that.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Will all the capital money for 2019-2020 be spent by the Department?

Mr Fair: That is always a difficult balancing act. I am not quite sure.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): There are lots of hopes and aims in here, Gary.

William, do you want back in on the budget matter before we receive the briefing on the Programme for Government?

Mr Humphrey: If you are struggling to spend your capital budget, let me tell you that I know schools that could use it.

Mr Fair: With some big schemes, a lot of it is about timing, as you will understand.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are you getting the hard hat on, William?

Mr Humphrey: Those schools are beyond their time.

One thing that might help the EA's budget and accounts is if area planning were accelerated. What can the Department do, or what has it been doing, to apply pressure on the EA to push that along?

Mr Fair: I cannot give a lot of detail on that, other than to say that I know that my colleague Janis Scallon is leading on that work. There is considerable pressure to see things moving. Taking account

of all the factors that come into play with area planning, the Minister is very keen to see things moving as quickly as they can. He wants to see more progress and take forward a lot of the issues.

Mr Humphrey: That will be crucial for the budget and accounting.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): We will get a detailed briefing on area planning, William.

Finally, as far as I can see, the independent review of education provision has requested £1 million over two years. Does that suggest that the Department envisages the independent review taking two years?

Mr Fair: It is just an assessment of what cost we felt might be associated with an independent review of that nature. In some ways, it is a case of sticking our finger in the air and making our best estimate. It assumes a three-person panel and the associated daily costs, as well as an official structure to act as a secretariat. The wording of the NDNA agreement indicates that a very substantial review might take place, but it is hard to tell exactly what form it will take. We estimated the resource cost based on what we think might be appropriate.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): That is something that we will need to come back to. Quite a few elected representatives and political parties might be shocked at the suggestion that the review may take two years, given the urgency of the need for reform and to do things differently to help with the figures that you have in front of you, Gary.

Mr Fair: I am not sure whether there is clarity at this stage about exactly what the review will look like. It will be easier to estimate the resource cost once we have it.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Do you want to make any comments about the Programme for Government before we go into questions?

Ms Chambers: I would like to make a few short comments, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the previous PFG's out-turn. I believe that you received a briefing previously and some graphs. No? You are looking at me quizzically.

I invite my colleague Pauline to take you through the indicator data and explain it. We will focus on outcome 12, which is:

"We give our children and young people the best start in life."

Paul can then take questions on the early years programmes and actions that contribute to closing the gaps in the indicators. I can talk to the extended schools and full service programmes. My colleague Karen can cover the curriculum.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Members, we have information about the high-level outcomes and indicators in our pack.

Mrs Pauline Donnan (Department of Education): By way of brief introduction, there are 12 outcomes in the Programme for Government and 42 indicators. Four of the indicators relate specifically to the Department of Education. Mainly, they measure how the outcome of giving our children and young people the best start in life is being met. They also contribute to outcomes 3 and 5, which are about creating a more equal society and creating an innovative and creative society. We do hit quite a lot of the population outcomes.

Alison mentioned indicators 11 and 12. We have a very robust source of data to measure those, which is the school-leavers' survey. It is really a census of all pupils leaving school at the end of either year 12 or year 14. We measure their GCSE and A-level attainment. The specific indicator — indicator 11 — that was chosen by the Executive is really just a measure of the percentage of pupils who are leaving school with the standard of at least five GCSE A* to C grades, including equivalents, including GCSE English and maths. It is a bit of a mouthful, but that is the standard. Indicator 12 looks more at the difference in educational attainment and underachievement. It looks at the same measure, but it instead compares pupils leaving school who were entitled to free school meals with those who were not. Do you want me to take you through the figures for those?

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Yes. It would be helpful to get a brief idea of performance against those indicators.

Mrs Donnan: OK. I am pleased to say that things have been getting better. For indicator 11, which is really the standard for all pupils leaving school, the baseline has been steadily increasing. The baseline year for all the PFG indicators is 2014-15. For 2017-18, which are the latest figures that we have, 70.6% of all pupils were leaving school with that educational standard. That represents an increase of almost five percentage points from the baseline year.

For indicator 12, where we are measuring the gap between free-school-meal-entitlement (FSME) school-leavers and non-FSME school-leavers, the gap has been increasing. In 2017-18, the gap between those two sets of pupils was 29.5 percentage points, but that is compared with a baseline figure of 32.4 percentage points. There are quite stringent rules about how we decide whether the indicator is improving. Those are all proved by a technical assessment panel. The rules are that there needs to be a reduction in the gap. Moreover, for pupils who are entitled to free school meals, their attainment has to be improving, and there cannot be a reduction in the number of pupils who are not in receipt of free school meals. In other words, we do not want to see standards slipping for non-FSME pupils, and that closing the gap. We want everything to improve for all pupils, regardless of their status.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): How has the performance of non-FSME school-leavers been benchmarked? Has it improved?

Mrs Donnan: Yes, it has. Over the period, it has been steadily improving.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Is there an online mechanism or a report that an MLA or a member of the public can check to see the data in more detail?

Mrs Donnan: Yes. The Executive Office has what it calls a "PFG outcomes viewer". As soon as a Department has up-to-date information on any of the indicators, it provides it. On the same day that we release the information as official statistics, we have to provide it to the Executive Office as well. It approves the commentary around it, and then it goes straight up on to the outcomes viewer. I am happy to share a link to that.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Does one need a map to find that?

Mrs Donnan: I hope that it is straightforward.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): No problem. It would be helpful to have the link.

Mrs Donnan: Are there any more questions about those two indicators?

Mr Butler: Do you have a figure for the percentage of pupils in receipt of free school meals who sit GCSE examinations against those who sit them and attain? I want to make sure that we are comparing apples with apples, rather than just going for the high-level output. Moreover, what is the percentage of pupils who sit GCSEs exams compared with the percentage of pupils who are not in receipt of free school meals and do not sit GCSEs?

Mrs Donnan: I do not have a figure to hand. There are some exemptions for pupils from sitting the exams. For example, a child may be pregnant, or there may be other extenuating circumstances. The rules for exemptions are quite stringent.

Mrs Karen McCullough (Department of Education): The information that we are using — the school-leavers' survey — covers all children. As far as I am aware, the only children who are excluded from that cohort are young people leaving special schools. From information that I got, that is maybe 300 or 400 pupils a year. They are not in there, but the rest is everybody who left school.

Mr Butler: I get that, but there could still be a disparity in the evidence when you break down what is being fed in. I go back to my day, because I was in the first year to do GCSEs. Do not ask me what I got, because it is not important any more. You can become an MLA even with results like mine. [Laughter.] It is really important to know what is going into the machine, because the output is OK. We

can see an improvement there. However, I still have a fear that, for whatever reasons, schools may be deciding with parents and pupils that it is better for the children not to do the exams, as that is better for protecting their results. At the end of the day, our schools are being measured on their performance. Unfortunately, we see the league tables published every year. We are all aiming to understand the figures.

Mrs McCullough: There is a different data source, which is the summary of annual examination results. That is a school-level measure and is the one that may include exemptions and reasons that you can be excluded from the statistics. However, you cannot be excluded from the school-leavers' survey. You are wondering how many children sit the exams.

Mr Butler: Yes. The number who actually sit the exams. It will certainly not be 100%, for various reasons, but I am interested to know the figures for those on free school meals and for those who are not and whether those figures are the same or whether they differ. If there is a difference, we need to make sure that it is captured in the overall outputs, because it will have knock-on effects for employability and future higher education.

Mrs Donnan: Based on the data source that Karen has just mentioned, around 7% of pupils are exempt. There is a range of different reasons for that: they have a serious illness; they have transferred to another school or have emigrated; they are in a special unit approved by the Department; they have a statement of special educational needs; they have been placed on the education other than at school (EOTAS) scheme; or they have a serious welfare issue.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): How many pupils is 7%? Do you know roughly?

Mrs Donnan: Honestly, I do not know. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): That was not an intentional attempt to catch you out. It was a genuine question. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Butler: Ask the finance guy. He will know.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): It may be around 1,500. That genuinely was not a maths question.

Mrs Donnan: I will need to come back to you on that.

Mr Butler: May I ask either for direction to those stats or for you to come back to us with the figures? I would genuinely love to get that one answered.

Mrs Donnan: Yes.

Mr Butler: Thank you.

Mr McNulty: Thank you for your presentation, Alison. Maybe I am missing something here. I believe in a holistic approach to educating pupils. There is no mention in the outcomes, actions and indicators on mental health and well-being of how we are succeeding in developing the whole person, as opposed to developing a pupil academically.

Mrs Donnan: In the Programme for Government, there are, as I mentioned, 42 high-level indicators to measure where the population is at and how things are getting better, or otherwise. There needs to be a realisation that not everything can be covered within that. In the information that we provide, we also give breakdowns, as far as we can. In other words, we provide the qualification results by gender, ethnic group, religion — a range of section 75 groups — plus urban/rural and other breakdowns to try to dig deeper.

I am not sure, off the top of my head, whether well-being fits into one of the other outcomes. Perhaps it is a Department of Health-related indicator. It is certainly something that could come out in the actions in the outcomes delivery plan, which is really looking at targeted interventions at a much lower level that impact on participants on the ground, or, in this case, pupils on the ground.

Mr McNulty: Surely you recognise that developing the emotional and mental well-being of children is crucial and that there should be indicators to measure outcomes for that in the Programme for Government. I am aghast that there is no recognition of the epidemic in our society, where young people have more to cope with than we ever had to in our childhood; that there is no recognition of the emotional and mental well-being of children; and that there is no recognition of the need to develop their resilience to cope with the growing challenges that they face in a modern society. I find that bewildering.

Ms Chambers: It is possibly something that we need to look at in the development of the new Programme for Government, which we are actively looking at, but the funded interventions that we have that contribute to closing the gap do recognise the importance of mental health and well-being in children. There is investment through the extended schools and full service programmes, for example, and through targeting social need that will address specifically mental health and well-being in children. It is for one of my colleagues in the Department to look at that in the development of a new Programme for Government.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): To supplement that, Justin, my understanding is that one of the commitments in a previous Programme for Government was the creation of what was called a system-level dashboard, which was to look at different types of outcomes for children and young people. Can you speak to that?

Mrs McCullough: Yes. I can pick up on that and give a bit of background. That dashboard is a management information tool that collates a wide range of indicators. Those indicators are then used to inform and evaluate policy. It is information that will help us improve quality and efficiency, leading to better outcomes for learners.

You may recall that we participated in the OECD's review of assessment and evaluation. It reported that countries that have good system-level evaluation have developed dashboards that are bespoke to their system, and the advice from OECD was that we should do the same. If a dashboard is going to work, you need to set it in the context and values of your own system. That is what we therefore set out to create when we were taking forward that piece of work. Following OECD's suggestion of a methodology, we started off with a blank piece of paper and worked with key stakeholders to try to identify what we might include in the dashboard. We completed two phases of qualitative research, and it was only at that point that we developed some potential indicators that might go in there, and we did targeted consultation on that as well.

This initial dashboard that we have brings together a wide range of proposed indicators, organised under four headings, which are around context, quality, progress and achievement. That is achievement in its widest sense. The indicators extend well beyond attainment to include indicators related to skills; early childhood development; pupil well-being, which came up a lot in the discussion; and how we committed the level of support that we are giving pupils with educational and additional needs. There are also indicators proposed in there that are signals of stress in our system, such as applications for principal posts, governor vacancies and staff absence. Staff well-being was also raised. All of those might be seen as early warning signs of issues that might impact on quality of provision and pupil outcomes in the longer term.

Where have we got to with that piece of work? Most of the indicators being suggested for inclusion can be populated with measures that are already available. We are a data-rich organisation, so I think that those count for about 70% of the suggested indicators. For the remaining indicators, we need to develop a work programme to identify and fill specific measures so that, for things that are coming up today, we can decide what we should include and ensure that we measure them in the right way. Some of the work is already under way. There was a discussion with colleagues from pupil support, and they said that they were starting to look at the well-being measures. We have measures for the Getting Ready to Learn programme in early years and the work that has been progressed that way. However, you may have noticed that that action was included in the draft Programme for Government and was in the outcomes delivery plan for 2018-19, but it is not specifically referenced in the outcomes delivery plan that was published in 2019. That is because developing a dashboard like that is an enabling activity. It does not directly impact on the population; it helps us all to make better decisions, inform policy and to implement programmes and pieces of work on the ground.

The advice received when we were preparing that outcomes delivery plan was that enabling activities should not be included in it; things that can directly impact on the population should be there. However, I do not want you to think that nothing is happening on taking that forward. The dashboard is

not yet finalised, given the context that we have been working in as we have been developing it. The strands of work to progress it, such as filling information gaps and improving the flow of information around the education system, are being considered as part of a wider data strategy. It is not that it has stopped and been shelved.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Is the dashboard for the education system as a whole?

Mrs McCullough: It is a system-level dashboard. If it were in place, it is the kind of indicator that would describe our system but also enable us to monitor what was going on in our system.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): What is it called?

Mrs McCullough: We just call it a dashboard at the moment.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Answers on a postcard?

Mrs McCullough: Yes. It could do with a good name.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I think that there are benefits from it. Hopefully, its delivery will be sped up rapidly.

Mrs McCullough: I mentioned the context in which we have been working over the last three years. We also have to be very cognisant of the ongoing negotiations on the pay and workload offer. That includes a strand of work on school and system evaluation that we need to be cognisant of.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): The point of the outcomes-based accountability approach, the PFG and the dashboard is to measure and report on whether we are achieving what we said we would work towards achieving, so it is vital. It would be interesting to get a more detailed briefing on the dashboard in due course.

Mrs McCullough: We would be happy to do that. It is an online application, so it may not be suitable for a briefing.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): It would be useful to get a visually assisted briefing on it.

Daniel, do you want to come in on this in particular?

Mr McCrossan: No.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. We will make a bit more progress on the presentation, and I will bring you back in. The Deputy Chairperson wanted to come in on extended schools.

Mrs Donnan: The other two indicators are under data development. Indicator 13 is the percentage of schools evaluated and found to be good or better. This is based on school inspections and the inspection grade that the school is evaluated at. It is known as OEC1 or OEC2. According to the inspection framework, which changed in January 2017, OEC1 means:

"The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all learners."

OEC2 means:

"The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all learners."

That is how the indicator is designed to be measured. Unfortunately, due to action short of strike by teachers, it has not been possible to collect a sufficient volume of inspection outcomes. Inspectors have not been able to carry out inspections to determine those different grades. That is why inspection outcomes were not published in the latest chief inspector's report, which was for 2016-18. As a result, it is not currently possible for us to update the measure for indicator 13, but I know that the Department is working separately to address issues related to action short of strike. As soon as that

information improves, we will start to measure that indicator again. I am afraid that that is the situation with that indicator.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Indicator 13 is the percentage of schools found to be good or better. What is the most up-to-date data on that indicator? Sorry, did you say that it was from 2016?

Mrs Donnan: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): What percentage of schools were found to be good or better in 2016?

Mrs Donnan: In the high 90s. Schools really were performing at a very high standard. It was agreed with the technical assessment panel that any inspection from 2005-06 would be counted within that so that we would have a very good sense of what the rating was for all schools.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): That is another reason why we cannot overstate the importance of delivering fair teacher pay and conditions. It spans widely, does it not?

Mrs Donnan: Finally, I move on to indicator 15. Paul, feel free to jump in at any stage on this. Indicator 15 is the percentage of children who are at the appropriate stage of development in their immediate preschool year. This is also under data development and is subject to approval by the technical assessment panel. The proposed data source is the 3+ health review, which some of you may be aware of. That review was introduced under the early intervention transformation programme. As I understand it, the review is being mainstreamed across schools. It is a developmental review of children in their preschool year and is carried out by health visitors in the funded preschool sector, which covers about 92% of all children of that age.

The review uses the ages and stages questionnaire for social and emotional development. There are three questionnaires: one for children aged 36 months; one for children aged 48 months; and one for children aged 60 months. The parent, working with the health visitor within the preschool setting, completes the questionnaire, and there is then a guided conversation between the parent and the health visitor to talk about some of the responses. The idea behind it is that it helps to identify any developmental needs of children at that very early age so that they can receive the appropriate support for intervention. When we have fully robust data, the indicator will measure the percentage who are at no or low risk of requiring an intervention. All of this data is collected through health visitors and is uploaded. The Public Health Agency is working on this, and the data is uploaded to the Northern Ireland child health system. At present, Department of Health colleagues are working with the Public Health Agency to ensure that this date is of a sufficient standard and coverage for us to use it to monitor the indicator.

Ms Mullan: You mentioned the roll-out of the 3+ review. To date, how many children has that covered?

Mrs Donnan: Sixty per cent of children who are in the preschool setting have been covered, but the review does not include special educational needs pupils because their needs are assessed under a different programme.

Ms Mullan: Grand. Maybe we can come back to that. I would be interested to see the level of parental engagement and what support is available to parents, but we can do that another time.

Gary pointed out, rightly, that the confidence and supply money prevented cuts to Sure Start and the extended schools programme during that period. It is detailed under fair investment and the partners in education programme, formerly extended schools. Will there be extra funding and investment in Sure Start through that pot of money?

Mrs Donnan: I cannot answer that.

Mr Fair: At this stage, our strategy is bidding simply to maintain existing services. That will, perhaps, be a consideration further down the line.

Ms Mullan: We will probably have to take it up with the Minister. There was to be a review of Sure Start — I am not sure where that is at — but it needs to be invested in and broadened. We will come back to that. Under the new model of partners in education, will the funding still go through schools?

Ms Chambers: That is the intention. We are putting a paper to the Minister for consideration and have been invited back to give a detailed briefing on what that might look like.

Ms Mullan: Alison, has the Department engaged with neighbourhood renewal partnerships on this model?

Ms Chambers: We work closely with neighbourhood renewal partnerships in any case to make sure that we are complementing each other and not duplicating provision in areas.

Ms Mullan: Those in my local area tell me that they have not been involved.

Ms Chambers: There will be an extensive consultation on the new programme once the Minister has had a look at it.

Ms Mullan: Right. So, that has not happened yet.

Ms Chambers: That has not happened yet.

Ms Mullan: This will also be part of the consultation: it is how the outcomes will be aligned with other Departments to deliver on the child poverty, anti-poverty and children and young people strategies.

Ms Chambers: We are mindful of that.

Ms Mullan: It is about the investment needed and where other Departments come in so that it is done jointly. You are looking at cross-cutting work, and we talked last week about the mental health framework and mentioned strategies on early intervention and addressing the links between socioeconomic background and underachievement. Those are all cross-cutting. If we do not get the money that we bid for, rather than going directly to cutting those projects, are we looking at joint financial packages across all Departments to enable us to deliver these programmes?

Ms Chambers: We have been engaging with other Departments, particularly on the development of the overarching strategy. I need to give the Minister time to consider that paper. We see collaborative working as the best way forward in tackling the issues.

Ms Mullan: We need that money to come from other Departments. We know that the Department of Education is under enough pressure from school budgets, maintenance, capital and all of that. We need that in order to be able to provide the investment needed.

Mr McCrossan: My question has, largely, been answered. It was about how you measure the effectiveness of the extended schools programme, given the pay dispute and the difficulties with inspecting schools over the last few years. On that point, your briefing paper says:

"The two linked Full Service programmes operating in North and West Belfast are having notable results".

Is it just those two, or is there anywhere else? Is there a list of various places that have also had notable results?

Ms Chambers: We have very good outcomes for both of those full service programmes. We are also piloting a different approach with 21 principals in north Belfast: allocating funding to them and giving them autonomy to spend that thematically for parental engagement and literacy and numeracy impacts for the children. Training is being provided to classroom assistants, for example, to help them to engage more effectively with parents. We are into the second year of that pilot programme. We are taking the learning from full service programmes into the development of the new extended schools offer.

Mr McCrossan: Is that specifically in north and west Belfast? Is it nowhere else?

Ms Chambers: There are other sources of funding for programmes in other areas in Northern Ireland through our tackling paramilitarism programmes. We have wrap-around services in east, south, west and north Belfast, and in Derry/Londonderry.

Mr McCrossan: Has the Department of Education's Miss School = Miss Out campaign ended or is it ongoing?

Ms Chambers: The campaign is still very active. We promote the importance of parental engagement through those campaigns. Later this year, we will work with the advertising company on a refresh of Give Your Child a Helping Hand campaign. It has targeted 1.8 million people through 211 TV adverts, radio adverts, radio broadcasts, billboards, bus shelters etc. We are continuing that work.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): What is the name of the north Belfast pilot programme?

Ms Chambers: The north Belfast principal pilot programme.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): What is its budget?

Ms Chambers: It is £250,000 a year.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. What is the budget for the North Belfast and West Belfast Full Service programme?

Ms Chambers: It is £385,000 for each.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): For each constituency?

Ms Chambers: Yes. The Boys' Model and the Girls' Model get £385 million, and the Full Service community network, serving the greater Falls and upper Springfield areas, gets £385,000 as well.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. I am tempted to ask what the allocation for East Belfast is, but I know what it is, and everybody else might start asking about their constituency, so I will leave that for another occasion.

Mr Butler: I want to roll back to indicator 15. It was really good to hear that information about the 3+ review and the health-visitor-led model. Given the growing propensity for mental ill health and the barriers to education, it is really important that that work is adequately resourced. I am interested to know what the funding model for that looks like and what burden falls on the Department of Education, given that it is a multidisciplinary team (MDT) effort. Did you say that the PHA is involved and is the lead on that?

Mrs Donnan: The Public Health Agency, yes.

Mr Butler: I imagine that the MDT will extend to that, so health visitors will be predominately made up of social workers or maybe nurses. Does a financial burden fall on you from that? I see it as a really important invest-to-save strategy, given the problem that we face at the moment with well-being, resilience and mental health issues. If we want to get into preventative mode, it has to happen preschool. That is a really important piece of work. We see the breakdown of traditional family structures and so on and the impact of poverty, for instance, which will be picked up in this. Is there a funding model for that? Can you explain it to me?

Mr Brush: I am happy to take that one. There is not an explicit financial burden on DE in that context because, essentially, this is an instrument that originated for the purposes of health, and we are almost piggybacking on it to try to see whether we can use it for the purposes of monitoring that particular outcome. Clearly, the financial pressures that the Department of Health has experienced have had a bearing on the roll-out of the questionnaire, to the extent that, last year, about 60% of all children had that piece of work done with them in the preschool setting. There is a plan to roll it out to 100%, which is clearly where we want to get to. That is likely to take a couple of years. The pressures in the health visitor context have been a factor in that. There is not an explicit cost to the Department. The bigger issue is our needing to get to a point where we are comfortable that it is providing a robust, stable and reliable measure of the educational developmental component of that indicator and that it has the approval of the necessary PFG technical team. It is not explicit that we pay a certain amount each year for that to be done.

Mr Butler: No problem. Thank you.

Mr McNulty: Following on from what Karen said earlier about Sure Start, I want to acknowledge the presence in the Public Gallery of Conor McArdle and his colleague. Conor is a project manager for Sure Start in south Armagh, and they do incredible work. I know that Conor has ambitions to extend the services into different parts of south Armagh, and he is working ferociously and diligently with the Department to try to achieve that. I just want to recognise the important work that Sure Start does in so many communities.

Where does the sports programme for Key Stage 2, which replaced the discontinued Curriculum Sports programme, fall in the outcomes and actions?

Mrs McCullough: In which directorate?

Mr McNulty: In the Programme for Government's actions and outcomes, where does that fall?

Mr Fair: I would need to come back to you on that, unless colleagues know. I do not know offhand.

Mr McNulty: The Curriculum Sports programme has been discontinued, sadly, in recent years, but it has been replaced by a Key Stage 2 programme that is about developing children physically. I am a big believer in the holistic development of the child, and physical development is huge. Sport offers opportunities to young people who may not be academically gifted and develops the whole person. In the actions and outcomes, where does that fall?

Ms Chambers: We will have to come back to you on that, regrettably. That sits with one of my colleagues, but we will come back to you with something in writing.

Mr McNulty: Thank you.

Mr Newton: I have a fairly simple question about the extent to which the programmes for under-4s in the targeted interventions — Sure Start, the Pathway Fund and Toybox — are joined up. How do they integrate? All seem to be addressing a similar issue, and I am a wee bit confused.

Mr Brush: All are part of a suite of interventions, as you say, in that 0-4 period. They are aimed at progressing towards the objective of having all children at the appropriate stage of development when they go into primary school. All three that you mentioned — Sure Start, Toybox and Pathway — are targeted. They are not universal; they are targeted at addressing the issues faced by children from various backgrounds. Sure Start is targeted geographically on the basis of the 25% most disadvantaged wards, although there are issues with that targeting and the data still being used for that. I will elaborate on that next Wednesday.

Mr Newton: It will be some day, now. [Laughter.]

Mr Brush: Yes. I have trailed it too much.

The pathway fund comes in as a referral point for those who need even more specific support. Sure Start, for example, refers children to pathway, where it is available, to give even more intensive one-to-one engagement where needed. The Toybox fund is specifically focused on children from Traveller backgrounds.

Mr Newton: OK. Is Toybox pretty exclusive?

Mr Brush: Very narrow.

Mr Newton: Is there any interchange between the other two, Sure Start and pathway, so that children can change from one to the other?

Mr Brush: Yes, and they might, indeed, avail themselves of both. With £26 million, Sure Start is by far the largest. Pathway is a relatively small fund of, from memory, around £3 million a year, I will check those figures for you. On the ground, there is a very good relationship between the two funds, each referring and making clients aware of the other.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I will ask a brief follow-up question to that, given the theme of early intervention. Government funded the Bookstart programme up to 2015, which is a universal first year reading intervention that is intended to develop a love of books. Parental engagement in reading is vital in the child development and learning process. Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK not to have such an intervention. We are to hear from Booktrust later, so I will not pre-empt that too much. My understanding is that Booktrust seeks in the region of only £50,000 a year in order to be able to deliver that universal reading intervention. Has such an allocation been considered in these bids? Could it be considered?

Mr Fair: We need to check that.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. Consider the question on the record. We will hear about it in more detail later, members. However, consider the millions spent on other interventions, and significant research shows that only a small additional amount can target literacy, reading and the parental engagement that comes from that. I would certainly like to hear more about that. I am eager to hear your consideration in response to it.

Mr Brush: Part of the Getting Ready to Learn programme is an element that focuses on encouraging reading. The Big Bedtime Read, as it is labelled, has worked in a range of preschool settings. It invites parents in to those settings to read with their children and provides books to take home. A component of the offer has some emphasis on that, but that is not to say that it replaces what might have been available through the alternatives.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): The key aspect of Bookstart is that it is a pack that will be delivered to every newborn child in Northern Ireland. There is a significance to that. As I say, and I stand to be corrected, but I think that we are the only region of the UK that does not do that, so I am keen to explore that further.

Mr M Bradley: I look forward to your presentation on Sure Start. It has had a big impact in my area. I will not ask you any questions on that until next week. You mentioned tackling paramilitarism in north Belfast and mentioned having some schemes in the north-west. What schemes do you have in the north-west? Where are they? How much is your budget?

Ms Chambers: Apologies. I came to talk about the actions that contribute to the Programme for Government, which those are not part of.

Mr M Bradley: That is all right. Not a problem. Is there a collaboration between your Department and the Department of Health on mental health and well-being?

Mr Fair: I do not have the details, but there definitely is ongoing collaboration.

Ms C Kelly: The fact that Sure Start has been mentioned here many times proves its importance and the amazing work that goes on there. My question is probably one that you want to come back to next week, Paul, but I thought that I would get it in here now to give you time to come back to me. The pressures on our health service are pulling health professionals, such as speech and language therapists and midwives, away from Sure Start. How is the Department coping with that? How is that affecting children's outcomes?

Mr Brush: I will be keen to address that next week. I have visited a number of Sure Start programmes, and those are the sorts of messages that I hear. In a sense, Sure Start is an example of collaboration between DE and the Department of Health, even the resourcing of it and the implications of the squeeze on our budget, the Health budget and all of that. We are looking at those factors. I am aware of that issue, and I am happy to cover it next week.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. I will save you, Paul, in light of how widely we are stretching things. The briefing for next week is on early years in childcare. That is the intended theme of the briefing.

Thanks very much for your briefing and your answers today. It is extremely helpful to get into the Programme for Government indicators and measurements. For me, it is the most important aspect of the Government: whether it is achieving what it said it would achieve. I appreciate that it has been an extremely challenging time for officials to progress these matters in the absence of a Government and a Minister. I am keen to return to some of the more detailed presentations with visual aids of the

various dashboards and measurement tools that you have available to assist you with those matters. Do you know when the new Programme for Government might be agreed or completed?

Mrs Donnan: The communication from the Executive Office yesterday was that it was looking for a new draft outcomes delivery plan by the end of April.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): At this stage, will that will be for one year — 2020-21?

Ms Chambers: It is for one year. That is right.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. All the best with that important work. I am sure that we will engage with you — especially you, Paul — next week, it seems. All right, folks. Thanks very much.