

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 1 Márta 2006.
Wednesday, 1 March 2006.

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.
Prayer.

Leaders' Questions.

Mr. Kenny: Yesterday saw the publication of the Harding Clark report into medical practices at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, where, for more than 20 years, practices conducted by a doctor were not questioned and a number of procedures were carried out which deprived women of the opportunity to have further children, which has caused them untold distress and anxiety. Most upsettingly, while some people came forward with information during this time, it was not acted on. Effectively, there was a wall of silence and denial about the events at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in respect of the extremely grave concerns expressed about the number of peripartum hysterectomies carried out over a particular period. The report makes for quite shocking reading and arising from it, I wish to ask the Taoiseach a number of questions.

First, can the Taoiseach indicate the status of any Garda inquiry into what the report describes as a deliberate, careful and systematic removal of key historical records, together with master cards and patients' charts? Second, while the removal of these records hampered the inquiry, it also caused considerable stress to the women involved. It is also quite sinister that Judge Harding Clark reported that three forced criminal entries to her premises took place while the inquiry was under way. Can the Taoiseach indicate to the House whether the Government has made any decision, in principle or otherwise, about the establishment of a redress board for the women affected by Dr. Neary's actions?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time has concluded.

Mr. Kenny: Finally, does the Taoiseach now accept that we need comprehensive whistleblowers' legislation, such as that proposed by Deputy Rabbittie and the Labour Party some time ago, which would provide protection for staff members in any organisation who bring attention

to wrongdoing? The Taoiseach and the Government are aware that in many sectors of Irish society, telephone calls to journalists have led to discoveries. This has occurred in the financial services sector and a concerned citizen came to me with information regarding PPARS. However, in the case of Dr. Neary, no one came forward for 20 years. The Government should consider it to be both appropriate and a legislative priority to enact comprehensive whistleblowers' legislation to protect concerned citizens with a legitimate concern which should be investigated. Perhaps the Taoiseach will respond to these three points.

The Taoiseach: I repeat statements I made yesterday by thanking the chairperson, Judge Maureen Harding Clark and the inquiry team for their work in recent years in conducting the inquiry and in the preparation of a very comprehensive report. She acknowledged the co-operation given to the inquiry during its work, particularly that of Patient Focus. I acknowledge the contribution of Patient Focus on its work with my colleagues and with the Tánaiste. The Tánaiste will meet its representatives later today.

I also express my deepest regret and apologise to these women and their families for what happened. On behalf of the Government, we are very sorry and deeply regret what happened. As I stated yesterday, we are all equally appalled.

As for the three questions raised by Deputy Kenny, the Garda conducted an investigation into this matter previously. However, given the report's publication and findings, it will be sent to the Garda which will carefully study it. It is also important that the Garda should speak to Judge Maureen Harding Clark because her investigations narrowed down the possibilities. In particular, she identified some items found on some of the files in question, which I understand would be very helpful to the Garda. Hence, the Garda will undoubtedly so do.

On the issue of redress, the Tánaiste will, as promised, speak to Patient Focus. Obviously, the Government is aware that issues will arise in respect of compensation, culpability, etc. This issue will be addressed today and the Government will return to it. We have made no formal decisions.

Regarding whistleblowers' legislation, as I noted yesterday in respect of this particular case, while a matron raised the issue in the 1980s, her concerns were brushed aside. Subsequently, in 1998, midwives raised their concerns with the solicitor for the health board and the matter was taken up, which led to the current position and the publication of the report yesterday.

As I stated yesterday, after examining the Bill provided by the Labour Party previously, it was decided that the best way to achieve its aims was to insert provisions for a investigative system for

[The Taoiseach.]

whistleblowers into sectoral legislation. This has already been done in respect of three or four Acts and is based on experiences in other countries. When this issue was examined some years ago, only a few countries in the organised world had gone down this road. I understand two countries which did so have subsequently reversed their decision. Hence, it was considered that the best way to cater for whistleblowers was to insert the provisions into individual sectoral legislation. The Government is in favour of this approach and has included the requisite provisions in a number of Bills. Obviously, given this report's findings, the issue will arise again.

The proposed medical practitioners Bill, the proposed Health Information and Quality Authority Bill and the consultants' contract negotiations are all relevant matters which must now take account of, and are affected by, this report's findings.

Mr. Kenny: It is entirely appropriate that he, in his capacity as Taoiseach, should apologise to the women who were so seriously hurt, emotionally and physically, arising from these incidents.

I hope the Garda re-institutes its investigation. It is quite sinister for Judge Harding Clark to state that her premises was forcibly entered on three separate occasions during the course of this investigation.

In respect of the whistleblowers' legislation, it is not a situation where we must stumble from crisis to crisis and look at individual sectors retrospectively. There is merit in what the Labour Party proposed and despite the sector by sector approach, it deserves serious consideration.

Arising from the Neary case, the Government should look at the analysis by Judge Harding Clark of the failures of many of the bodies in the health service to be monitored and regulated properly, particularly where self-regulation of their own members occurs. I have commented previously that there is a strong case for a patient safety authority within the health area which would put patient safety at the centre of medical practice. There are such authorities in other areas of Irish life. Nobody has the legal authority, for instance, to close a public hospital, a private hospital, a public or private medical practice, a public or private dental practice, a private or public pharmacy practice or an alternative therapy clinic like the Carmody clinic. There is no authority that can close any of these. The Government should look again at the issue of a patient safety authority which would give vigorous oversight.

If the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism wishes to laugh at this, if that is his attitude to a serious and constructive proposal, then he should be ashamed of himself.

Ms McManus: Hear, hear.

Mr. Durkan: And his colleague as well.

Mr. Allen: Did the Minister, Deputy McDowell, say it was a joke?

Mr. McDowell: Deputy Allen does not know what we were talking about. He does not know what he is talking about either.

Mr. Kenny: Maybe he is allied to Deputy McDowell.

Mr. O'Donoghue: He is rambling.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Kenny, your time has concluded.

Mr. Kenny: I do not know what the Deputy is talking about.

A Deputy: The gardaí know what they were talking about.

Mr. Kenny: He, above anybody else, has been going on like a demented organ-grinder for the past month.

Mr. O'Donoghue: Better than being the monkey.

Mr. Allen: The meat in the sandwich.

Mr. Kenny: A patient safety authority is something that should be examined seriously by the Government. It would give vigorous and strong control over patients' safety.

The Taoiseach: I think I have answered most of the questions. On the regulatory bodies, all the professions in medicine and the related areas have their own regulatory bodies for the individuals in the professions concerned. The Medical Council, the Pharmaceutical Council and An Bord Altranais regulate the behaviour and standards of their staff.

There is no licensing authority for hospitals, either public or private. That is an issue that arises. I understand it is not simple to do but I accept it should be done. We never had such an authority. The procedure is voluntary and always has been, but it is an issue that arises.

I answered on the issue of putting into sectoral legislation the means whereby people may be able to give information.

The findings and recommendations will be of considerable benefit. As I stated yesterday, we completed the heads of the medical practitioners Bill a long time ago. These findings will be used to complete that Bill and bring forward the preparation of a new medical practitioners Bill.

There also has been considerable work done on the health information and quality authority

Bill by the Department of Health and Children. Of course, as I mentioned, the current consultant contract negotiations have commenced and we can also take account of the findings and the recommendations in that regard. These issues will be followed up.

As I stated earlier, files were removed. I am not too sure there was a connection between the break-in in the judge's office but obviously these are matters that the Garda will look at. The full report, hopefully with consultation with the judge, would help to narrow down some of the issues that the Garda will be able to follow-up from its earlier report.

Mr. Rabbitte: There are many questions that are not answered by the Taoiseach but obviously the single biggest question is, how this could have gone on for 24 years. While we certainly owe a great debt to the author of this report for the manner in which complex material is handled and the substantial and insightful recommendations that are made, the fact remains that were it not for the bravery and courage of a single midwife, Dr. Neary could still be mutilating women today. With all of the medical bodies, all of the self-regulation and the supervision of the Department of Health and Children etc., people outside will find it difficult to understand that this could have happened.

On the more than 24 years of what the author states was a truly shocking rate of unnecessary hysterectomies, the Taoiseach made a passing reference to the matron who protested in 1978 and who was dismissed "by gesture". It took 20 years — until 1998 — for a midwife, in the course of an interview with the legal representative of the health board about something else, to draw attention to this and it would appear from a first reading of the report that the health board acted promptly. However, Dr. Neary was allowed select the nine cases that would be the subject of the peer review and the three obstetricians in Dublin found his conduct was flawless. That seems mind-boggling to the average citizen. Peer review is driven by data. No data was furnished by this man. He seemed to have the final say on matters like that. Nobody from the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists ever asked him why the normal data that ought to have been submitted was not submitted. When this midwife took action, the health board responded and a peer review was established, he was allowed to select the cases and three obstetricians stated it was okay.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Rabbitte's time has concluded.

Mr. Rabbitte: I am not at all clear on what the Taoiseach has stated. Take, for example, the Whistleblowers Protection Bill 1999 that his Government supported when I introduced it in

the House in June 1999. If employees in those circumstances had statutory protection, surely this would have come to light earlier. It is almost beyond belief, leaving out the professional affinity between professional colleagues such as anaesthetists who apparently never brought this to the attention of the institute. Other health personnel would have done so if there had been statutory protection.

The Taoiseach stated he will deal with this on a sectoral basis. At the same time he has never explained why he reinstated my Bill to the Order Paper after the 2002 general election, and it is still on it. If he thinks it is not appropriate and ought to be superseded by sectoral legislation, why does he not take it off the Order Paper? He cannot have it both ways. He is stating, on the one hand, it is unsuitable. Every time something like this arises, the response is that the sector was not covered.

I presume this report will be the subject of a major debate in the House and will then be referred to committee where we will need to deal with some of the complexities in it because it is not a simple matter.

The Taoiseach: I will deal with the latter issue first. The meeting was not about whistleblowing but about another issue and the midwife raised this particular issue in that context. The whistleblower, which is not the correct title, raised it in the context of another issue and said the issue should be examined. It was examined and the solicitor raised the issue. After that the three obstetricians were appointed and the College of Obstetrics conducted at least two examinations of the standards. As the Deputy said, they gave a clean bill of health both to the individual and to the unit. The Deputy has used his own terms for that and I will not disagree. I cannot understand that either. This raises issues for the Medical Council, which it accepts. The Minister for Health and Children has raised the issues with the council and will meet its representatives. It also raises issues for the College of Obstetrics because three of its senior members examined the cases and procedures and believed that Dr. Neary was fine for practice, even though we now have the figures for his hospital and can compare them with similar hospitals. Issues, therefore, arise for the Medical Council and the College of Obstetrics and they must be followed through.

The provision of statute protection for whistleblowers, which is a different issue, on a sectoral basis might be a better and a more focused approach than dealing with the issue any other way. We have put this provision into the child protection and reporting Bills, a competition Bill, a health and safety bill and other legislation. It is not the case that we have failed to do this but it is not the point on this issue.

Mr. Rabbitte: I do not think the Taoiseach has read the report and I ask him, when he gets an opportunity away from his other pressures, that he might do so because that was a muddled reply, which was all over the place.

Even when the former Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Cowen, was written to, it took a year to get an acknowledgement. When a woman wrote about a second consultant in the same hospital to the Medical Council, the letter was lost. The report is littered with this kind of thing and the Taoiseach is entirely missing the point. If there had been whistleblower protection, a member or members of the health service staff would have brought this to light earlier.

I draw the Taoiseach's attention to a single conclusion on page 322 of the report, which states:

In making recommendations, we are aware that our inquiry has been uniquely confined to an examination of documents, practices and structures in Lourdes hospital maternity unit. It is, therefore, not clear whether this maternity unit was unique in its practices or whether similar practices and attitudes are found in any other peripheral hospital in the State.

What does that mean? What steps are being taken to explore the meaning of that particular, ominous paragraph?

I am not clear from the Taoiseach's contribution whether it is the intention of the Government to implement the recommendations of this report. Has the Minister for Health and Children had an opportunity to study it and bring proposals to Government? Her idea of incorporating elements of this into the common contract, if it is ever renegotiated, with consultants is good but other recommendations have been made and I am not clear from what the Taoiseach has said whether it is the attitude of the Government to implement them. It is an extraordinary saga that this could have gone on over 24 years and were it not for a particular midwife who blew the whistle, the doctor might still be doing it. There is no other way of misrepresenting what she did and it does not matter whether she was dealing with another matter.

I do not understand the Taoiseach's reply on the question of Patient Focus and its discussions with the Minister for Health and Children and so on. Will a suitable system of redress be put in place for the women who comprise that group and who were so disgracefully treated at the hands of our health services?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Rabbitte seeks a little confusion on this but I will try to be clear. The Government said it is a damning report and the findings and recommendations will be fully taken into account. The Minister for Health and Children will meet the hospital's board and the Medi-

cal Council. In so far as issues must be addressed by a number of regulatory bodies, they will be followed through and, in so far as some of these issue relate to other hospitals, they will also be followed through. My point, which I think the Deputy understands but which he is trying to confuse, is if somebody raised the issue — in this instance a midwife did — and it was brought to the highest source——

Mr. Rabbitte: The Taoiseach is missing the point.

The Taoiseach: No, the Deputy is missing the point. Three obstetricians from the College of Obstetrics were appointed to examine the issue and they concluded there was no difficulty.

Ms McManus: The health board did not accept that.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Rabbitte can hardly say nothing happened.

Mr. Rabbitte: They examined many cases directed by him.

Mr. Stagg: They were a disgrace.

The Taoiseach: That raises issues for the College of Obstetrics and the Medical Council.

Mr. Stagg: The three examiners should be examined.

Mr. Allen: It is a club.

The Taoiseach: The Minister for Health and Children has raised those points.

With regard to Patient Focus, I stated yesterday we promised we would discuss a number of issues with the group as soon as the report was completed. The group's representatives have made it clear the issue of redress will come up and the Minister for Health and Children will meet them and members of the hospital's board today. Meetings will also be held with the Medical Council and others.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The victims of the former consultant, Michael Neary, and others at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, have been vindicated by the report of Judge Maureen Harding Clark. These women were subject to a procedure that mutilated them so that they could not conceive again. Scores of women have been seriously hurt and are suffering as a result of their experience. It is very important that we should remember that none of them was told what would be done to them or had it properly explained. Many learned some time later from their spouses or partners or in an offhand way. Real and substantial issues need to be further addressed. What

action is the Taoiseach and the Government prepared to take?

The Minister for Health and Children stated yesterday that the report confirms the appropriateness of actions being taken under the new medical practitioners Bill, the reform of the current consultant contract and the changes in management systems within hospitals. How will we, as accountable elected representatives, judge that? The heads of the medical practitioners Bill were agreed by Government as far back as 2004. Yesterday I asked the Taoiseach whether he would encourage or facilitate the release of the heads to all health spokespersons. The Taoiseach deftly ignored the question, but I will put it again. Will he now publish the heads of the Bill in order that all parties may see the pertinence of the Tánaiste's claim? The reform of the consultants' contract is overdue since 2002 and seems to be deadlocked. It has gone nowhere. Where does that contract and its renegotiation stand?

What action will the Garda take on the issue of the medical records that have been stolen? It has already investigated the issue, but will it now proactively pursue the issue to discover who was responsible for the removal of the files, not just in a single situation but in duplicate? Will the Government establish a redress board? There is no reason to dither on this issue. The report is comprehensive and the women involved have appealed for a redress board time and again. Patient Focus has made the same appeal. The appeal is supported by a significant body of elected Members of both the Dáil and the Seanad who have continually put the case in support of the Patient Focus argument for a redress board to be established. The Taoiseach should advise the House of the clear intent of Government in this regard.

The Taoiseach: Judge Harding Clark's report is enormously helpful in every way. It is the case that the women were not advised. As I said earlier, in fairness when these cases were brought to light, the health board followed up on them. It followed up on the information given to it by the midwife and when the three obstetric consultants examined the case. It did not accept that and engaged a consultant from Manchester who gave a different view. Therefore, it did follow up on the issues. However, what the Deputy has said is correct.

The heads of the Bill will be amended and published sometime between Easter and the summer period. The heads must now be amended based on the findings of this report, but they will be published in advance of the legislation. The Garda Síochána investigated the case previously but now has new information. It is a matter for the Garda to investigate it fully and no doubt it will and will carefully the report. I said I thought it would be useful for the Garda to consult with Judge Harding Clark because it seems — I have

probably gone through more of the report than anybody else since its publication — that she has interesting information.

Compensation is an issue the Government will address. However, the Deputy will understand the hospital and the doctor are insured. Whatever arrangements are made, we must ensure that taxpayer does not carry everything. That issue will be discussed today with Patient Focus.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I welcome the fact the Taoiseach said he has had the opportunity to study the report at least as much as any other Member. If that is the case, has he noted that while the report states that much has changed for the better in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, it also mentions some worrying facts? It criticises, for example, risk management among some consultants and says consultants use up too much of their time with private patients. Will the Taoiseach note that and discuss it with the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children?

The report states: "No elective major gynaecology operations are carried out as there are no dedicated gynaecology beds available for elective operations". What has the Taoiseach to say about this? It is clearly indicated in the report that theatres, staff and clinicians with the requisite skills are in place. The equipment is there, but operations of the type referred to by Judge Harding Clark are not carried out because there are no dedicated gynaecology beds for elective surgery in that area. This is absurd in a hospital that provides the critical mass of the service to women throughout the north-east area. What is the Taoiseach going to do about this?

Did the Taoiseach note the comments yesterday from the solicitor for Patient Focus, which has done wonderful work with and on behalf of the women concerned, stating this will happen again because the culture has not been removed? We need to know what the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste are going to do to remove that culture so we may guarantee to women throughout the land that this can never happen again.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy said he has looked at the report. He will have noted the conclusion of Judge Harding Clark that the hospital had made major improvements and she felt it was a remote chance that such issues could recur. However, she highlighted other areas that needed to be put right. The Tánaiste will start addressing those issues in today's discussions with the board. Professor Drumm has already been looking at the issues in the north east. The number of consultants in the hospital has doubled and major improvements have been made. I have answered the question already.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: What about the beds?

The Taoiseach: Professor Drumm is responsible for examining these things. The other issues

[The Taoiseach.]

raised will be discussed by the Tánaiste with the board. As I said earlier, the regulatory issues arising from this for the Medical Council, the College of Obstetrics and anybody else must be followed through.

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Legislative Programme.

1. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach his Department's legislative priorities for 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40409/05]

2. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach his Department's legislative priorities for the remainder of the 29th Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1234/06]

3. **Mr. J. Higgins** asked the Taoiseach his Department's legislative programme for the current Dáil session; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [1862/06]

4. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Taoiseach his Department's legislative priorities for 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2978/06]

5. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach his Department's legislative priorities for the remainder of this Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3215/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 5, inclusive, together.

My Department has one item of legislation for the current Dáil session. The National Economic and Social Development Office Bill 2002, has completed all stages in the Dáil and is awaiting Second Stage in the Seanad.

My Department also has one Bill included on the C list of the Government's legislative programme. This is the Statute Law Revision (Pre-Union) Bill which will repeal all redundant pre-1801 legislation and will be published shortly.

Mr. Rabbitte: Whatever else the Taoiseach has, he does not have too heavy a legislative programme.

The Taoiseach: Agreed.

Mr. Rabbitte: This has much merit as it gives the Taoiseach time to move around the country to do the things he has done with such innovation as compared to any of his predecessors. Given the workload in the Department in terms of Bills, is there an argument for more legislation to be put through the Taoiseach's Department? For example, the money advice bureau Bill is on the Order Paper since 2002 but has not moved. The

Law Reform Commission reports directly to the Taoiseach. Is there an argument therefore for more legislation to be led by the Department?

In the context of legislation from the Taoiseach's Department, is it intended that any legislation will be brought forward this year in terms of enabling any amendment to the Constitution?

The Taoiseach: The Department of the Taoiseach traditionally does not have much legislation. However, it is involved across Departments in a great deal of legislation. Despite legislation not being under the name of the Department, we are involved in a significant range of Bills at any time, probably more than any Department, and mainly through Cabinet committees and our position there. That includes what comes through the Law Reform Commission report, even though most of the legislation tends to pertain to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

We have been involved in a great deal of work. The White Paper on better regulation covers not only the Bill I mentioned but also issues concerning the Statute Book and statutory instruments as well as legislation that affects the various areas of competition. At least ten different Acts are in train but none of them is in my Department. However, the better regulation group within my Department will drive most of those.

The first phase of the project was completed with the enactment last year of the Statute Law Revision (Pre-1922) Act. The statute law revision (pre-union) Bill is the second phase where all legislation dating from before 1801, when the Act of Union came into operation, will either be retained or repealed as appropriate. The Bill will state, by means of a white list, all those pre-1801 statutes that are to be retained as they are still in force. At the moment the white list refers to approximately 300 statutes and all others from that time will be repealed, about 2,300 in number.

In fairness to the people involved in this, a very small group within my Department working with one individual in the Attorney General's office, they have done an enormous amount of work on this. They have had to go through all the Acts, close on 2,500 in total. What they have done will be of huge benefit for legal houses, finance houses and others. It is a cleaning up of what has been a very complicated Statute Book. I accept this work started a decade ago but we are now in a very good position where a CD-ROM of current legislation is available which has proved to be very beneficial for those who regularly deal with legislation, that is, most of the legal and finance houses in the country. It has been very useful work although it will still take a good number of years to complete. I was surprised to see that so many pre-1801 Acts remain, even after the examination. It is a very useful exercise and removes many issues that affect the regulatory

and competitive areas as well as other sectors. It is useful work by a small number of people.

Mr. Rabbitte: Can I take it from that response that we cannot expect a referendum, for example, on the EU constitution, this year or this side of the general election?

The Taoiseach: That issue continues to develop in Europe. I think I said six weeks ago that I did not see any possibility of that and I do not really see that changing. Belgium finished its ratification process just two weeks ago. I understand that Estonia, which had originally decided not to proceed with ratification, is now going to do so as well. Others have been urged to do it too. The German Chancellor, Ms Angela Merkel, says we should proceed as is. Our French colleagues say that is not the case. However, a degree of momentum that it should proceed is building again.

I am not convinced as to how we can deal with that until we see what happens with the French situation. I have been watching very carefully, as I am sure has Deputy Rabbitte, to see what the intenders for the French Presidency are saying. It appears they are very different things. I do not agree with what they say because they are back to the cherry-picking business, which will not work. That is forcing France and others to consider whether they should deal with the issue. It remains in the balance and I would not change what I said previously. I do not think it is realistic to proceed until we see what the French and the Dutch are doing. We could very well reach a position by Christmas where up to 20 countries will have ratified the constitution.

Mr. Sargent: I wish to take up a point raised by Deputy Rabbitte regarding the body of legislation in the Taoiseach's Department. With regard to possible legislation that might arise from the Central Statistics Office, which is under his remit, and in light of the problems shown to exist with the electoral register, could the CSO take account of its national remit and reform the electoral register process? At the moment we have 20% more people over 18 on the electoral register than there are in the country. This suggests that the CSO might have a role and that the Taoiseach, who is politically in charge of that organisation, might be able to suggest a way forward.

On the issue of a referendum, the Taoiseach informed me previously that he is in negotiations with counterparts in Northern Ireland regarding legislation to cover people considered unsafe to work with children. I understand that the Taoiseach undertook this himself to ensure that the blockages were removed. Will he indicate whether those blockages have been removed and whether he is pushing forward?

An Ceann Comhairle: That does not arise out of these questions.

Mr. Sargent: The Taoiseach has an interest in this area and has discussed it previously.

The Taoiseach: Whatever happens with the electoral register, and for as long as I have been around as a politician there have been problems with it, work is ongoing at present. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche, is examining proposals, some of which are short-term, concerning the electoral register for the coming winter, which begins around November and is completed around February. There are also issues about how the electoral register is handled in a long-term way. I have long been of the view that one will almost have to separate it and do it in a different way because it will never work the way it is currently done. One must examine how the census is compiled and other processes, but it will never work under the present system. It has always been very inefficient and deficient in every way. It has never been any other way.

While it may not be strictly in order, the other issue raised by Deputy Sargent, I am still pursuing it and we are getting a great deal of co-operation on North-South issues, in fairness to the Secretary of State, Mr. Hain. That is one of the issues we have asked him to try to help us with.

Mr. Kenny: The legislative programme, including the Taoiseach's Department, in September 2005 promised 17 Bills. In January 2006—

An Ceann Comhairle: The questions refer specifically to the Taoiseach's Department.

Mr. Kenny: I know that and I have said, "including the Taoiseach's Department". A total of 13 Bill were added to the new legislative programme. The Seanad—

An Ceann Comhairle: I would prefer if the Deputy would confine himself to the questions before us. There are many questions to the Taoiseach—

Mr. Kenny: I want to give the Ceann Comhairle some information

An Ceann Comhairle: —and we would like to get through some of them.

Mr. Kenny: The Seanad has not dealt with any legislation from the Taoiseach's Department in this session. The Ceann Comhairle may not have known that.

The Taoiseach is the Head of the Government and of the country. There is a great deal of concern, without panic, in respect of the business of emergency planning. Obviously, people are concerned about avian flu, for example. Has the Taoiseach considered co-ordinating and under-

[Mr. Kenny.]

pinning the role of the task force on emergency planning through his Department? It appears to me that there are various responsibilities filtered down through different Departments with no central control or agency to be reported to. That is something the Taoiseach, as Head of the Government and on behalf of the task force on emergency planning, might consider, namely, putting the task force under the responsibility of his Department so that, God forbid, in the event of a national emergency, he would have a clear, responsive unit for the entire business of the country.

The Taoiseach: What happens whenever there is a difficulty or even no difficulty is that the Secretary of Government co-ordinates with the heads of the Garda, the Army and other groups on the detail and they can deal with the broad policy positions. That system does work. The office of emergency planning rests with the Minister for Defence. In the event of any difficulty the contingency arrangements are worked out fairly well. It is the Secretary of Government that co-ordinates it. For example, the last big event was that of 11 September 2001. Within an hour and a half a meeting was convened in Government Buildings between all the agencies. That system is set down and it works. The officials keep in touch on a regular basis.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Will the heads of the next statute law revision Bill be published in advance? Does the Taoiseach propose to advise the House of the details of any pre-1800 legislation that he would then propose to repeal? Among those, is he looking at repealing legislation that refers to the private ownership of rivers and fishing rights? I am not speaking only in relation to the traditional focus *vis-à-vis* landlords from the neighbouring island, I am thinking also of many of our own wealthy indigenous players in this regard. Will the Taoiseach look at that issue and will he publish the legal advice he has received and oft-times relied on in his efforts to excuse his Government's inaction in relation to the whole area of ground rents? When will he tackle that thorny question?

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a matter for another Minister. I suggest the Deputy submit a question to the line Minister.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Certainly it is within the Taoiseach's ambit and I hope it will also be in his compass. We are waiting.

The Taoiseach: On the statute law Bill we have already published some of the pre-information and will publish more but not the heads of the Bill. The entire legislation on the white lists will all be published shortly. I think they are nearly ready. They have had to go through 2,600 Acts

which was a huge task and have now circulated it to all Departments for comments. It is hoped to have it ready—

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Does that include rivers and fishing rights?

The Taoiseach: I will not sort property rights today.

Mr. M. Higgins: Arising directly from the Taoiseach's earlier reply, his Department has a particular role, and I understand that, in dealing with the intersection of different Departments and legislation that arises between them. In regard to the necessary resolution of a contradiction that has arisen — I ask this because the Taoiseach's Department has a particular responsibility in regard to the talks on social partnership — the Competition Authority having struck down the right of trade unions to represent freelance journalists, freelance actors, musicians and so forth because of their being regarded as an undertaking by the Competition Authority and as self-employed by the Revenue Commissioners their union has had to sign an undertaking that it will not represent them in collective bargaining and this could knock on to atypical workers. What is involved is revision of the Competition Authority Act, a revision of the trade union Acts, with which the Taoiseach will be familiar, and possible new legislation bringing us into line with the International Labour Organisation resolution on the right to collective—

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy has made his point. I think we are going outside the questions.

Mr. M. Higgins: It is only the Taoiseach's Department, taking a particular interest in competition law, that can resolve this issue which has existed for nearly two years and which, I imagine, is a huge factor in the opening of the talks on social partnership.

The Taoiseach: While there is no legislation pending I am aware of the point and the arguments raised by the Deputy, which he has raised previously. It is an important point. It is also a difficult issue. The Deputy made the point that it covers many areas and how it can feed into legislation, which I introduced, on part-time and atypical workers. I have raised this issue with my own section previously. It also relates to some of the FÁS issues, including the recent case. I have some papers on the matter and will send a note to the Deputy.

Active Citizenship.

6. **Mr. J. Higgins** asked the Taoiseach when the new task force on active citizenship last met; and when he expects the next meeting to take place. [1867/06]

7. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the task force on active citizenship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3194/06]

8. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the task force on active citizenship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3216/06]

9. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work to date in 2006 of the task force on active citizenship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4186/06]

10. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach when the task force on active citizenship last met; if he will report on the progress of the task force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [6398/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 6 to 10, inclusive, together.

I announced my intention last April to establish a task force on active citizenship. We have received hundreds of expressions of interest in the task force and its work, and a large number of requests to be appointed members. These came from a variety of people from different parts of society — the voluntary sector, business, academics, public servants and many others.

A secretariat was also established in my Department to review current trends in civic participation in Ireland and consider the latest national and international research in this policy area. The secretariat has met with a wide variety of groups including, for example, the TCD centre for non-profit management, the business in the community organisation, practitioners of the US Asset Based Community Development Institute, the community policing unit in the Garda and the National Economic and Social Forum.

It has also attended a large number of relevant seminars and events including the Dublin Docklands Authority conference on active citizenship in the docklands, a seminar on the role of social capital in integrating immigrant communities, a Royal Irish Academy conference on volunteering and philanthropy, the national adult literacy week active citizenship through literacy conference and the directors of services in local government annual conference.

This work carried out by the secretariat will greatly inform and assist the task force in its consideration of active citizenship across different areas of Irish life. It has also been of great assistance in deciding on the membership of the task force.

I am now pleased to announce that Mary Davis, chief executive officer, Special Olympics Ireland, has agreed to chair the task force on active citizenship. I am waiting until I have responses from all the other proposed members before I announce the full membership of the

task force, but I hope to be in a position to do so later this week.

Mary Davis began her own association with Special Olympics Ireland as a volunteer and her success in capturing the enthusiasm of a nation will, I have no doubt, inspire critical debate on the importance of promoting a renewed sense of pride in community, in our sense of place and in working together to improve the lives of all our citizens. From her wealth of practical experience, her personal drive and commitment, Ms Davis is ideally placed to guide the task force as it examines the policies and measures that would help to inspire and foster the ethos of civic responsibility and engagement in modern Ireland.

Mr. J. Higgins: Does the Taoiseach recall saying in a parliamentary reply last November in regard to active engagement in society by citizens there are pressures on this type of civic engagement in modern Ireland because of work, family responsibilities, changing settlement patterns and evolving societal values? Did he read this morning the report of a study by Professor O'Boyle, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, showing the quality of life for those at management level in many companies is less than for those suffering from serious physical illness in hospital because of the pressures? Will he acknowledge that one does not have to be a manager to have this kind of pressure? Does the Taoiseach acknowledge that the capacity of citizens to engage in active citizenship is subject to growing pressure particularly because of economic pressures on the younger element in society? As the Taoiseach carries this morning the sign of humility and penance on his forehead will he admit that nine years of his Government has contributed to a disastrous deterioration——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should return to the question.

Mr. J. Higgins: ——in the capacity of ordinary people to contribute to society outside of work as active citizens because of these pressures? Does he agree that hundreds of thousands of young working people, in particular, are forced to work inordinate hours to make up the cost of the inordinate mortgages foisted upon them by the limitless greed of land speculators and profiteering in the housing sector, which the Taoiseach has allowed?

Does the Taoiseach acknowledge that because of his failure over nine years to resolve the transport and traffic crisis, working people are spending the equivalent of one extra working day per week on the roads, which time could be used to contribute to society?

An Ceann Comhairle: These questions do not arise from the five questions before the House.

Mr. J. Higgins: I am surprised the Ceann Comhairle does not recognise their relevance. One should acknowledge the great contribution of ordinary people, who are under enormous pressure, to youth clubs, youth services etc. Rather than having a task force on active citizenship, a change in Government policy that would lessen the pressure on people's lives would create the space for an enormous increase in active citizenship.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is well outside the five questions for the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: I am glad the Deputy, in his second last sentence, acknowledged that people get involved in active citizenship. As usual, I disagree fundamentally with him but he is correct that there are now hundreds of thousands of people working in our society because of Government policies. These people are not in the Bronx, Australia or London but in their own country. They are working and commuting every day and they participate in society as much as they can. Tens of thousands of people are happy in their lives.

I did not have a chance to read the statement made today by the eminent professor of the Royal College of Surgeons, who was quoted by the Deputy — it is unusual he quoted him today — but I read the results of recent research which indicates that people's attitudes to active citizenship have not changed very much in 15 or 16 years, nor has the amount of time they have available to them.

Mr. J. Higgins: The pressures have changed enormously.

The Taoiseach: We will always have pressures. People had pressures 100 years ago and they will have them in 100 years' time. I never worry too much about pressure because if you do, you will be pressurised.

Mr. J. Higgins: It is calculated that the price of a house has increased fourfold and that is pressurising.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to continue without interruption.

The Taoiseach: I would not want the Deputy to worry about pressure because you only get worse when you concern yourself with these things.

Mr. J. Higgins: The Taoiseach is bluffing as usual.

The Taoiseach: One should try to find solutions, think positively, think of the glass as being half full, and move forward.

Mr. O'Dowd: Form a coalition.

Mr. J. Higgins: If the Government put a stop to the speculators, the price of a house would not be four times what it was when it came to power.

The Taoiseach: One gets irritable and cranky, cannot think of anything positive and dies prematurely when one gets oneself into that position, so the Deputy should not be agitating himself like that.

Mr. J. Higgins: The Taoiseach must have been eating the ashes as well as putting them on his forehead because he is delirious.

The Taoiseach: He should think of all the positive things that happen in society and how he can make them better.

Mr. O'Donoghue: Throw off the old sackcloth.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: How does one deal with a cranky Taoiseach? When the task force was announced last year, the Taoiseach indicated it would report within six months. It is sometimes difficult to hear him very clearly over here and, even when we do, it is sometimes just as difficult to understand him. Will he tell us, if he has not done so already, whether the task force has reported? Will he indicate the full membership of the task force and let us know who we are talking about?

It was stated that the task force would report on how to encourage people to volunteer for various activities, from parish activities to the work of credit unions and sports and scouting organisations. Has the task force, over its period of deliberation, met representatives from each of these sectors and engaged with them in determining how the Government could encourage more participation in these areas? I ask this against the backdrop of the recent and very devastating news from Scouting Ireland that it has had to abandon its proposals to have a jamboree park at Castle Saunderson on the Cavan-Fermanagh border, which would have brought all the scouting associations throughout the island together regularly. How can the Government intervene to help in these areas? What encouragement is there for people to become active volunteers in their respective communities and areas of interest?

The Taoiseach: We are trying to foster the spirit of activism such that people will volunteer some of their time, be it to the scouts, junior schoolboy football, the Irish Girl Guides or any other activity. The ESRI report issued before Christmas showed that 400,000 people in Ireland are actively engaged in this regard. It happens that as a country becomes more prosperous — this happens in every country — people tend not to give of their time. We must be honest about this. It is argued that individuals do not volunteer because they are busy, but we all know that those who are more likely to give of their time are those

who are doing a bit for the GAA or soccer club, the scouts or credit unions. Other people are home at 5 o'clock in the evening and do not get involved — that is the truth.

The task force is asking what can be done to foster the spirit of activism. Its terms of reference are to review the evidence regarding trends and citizens' participation across the main areas of civic, community, cultural, occupational and recreational life — the ESRI report helps to feed into that; examine trends in the context of international experience and analysis — many good reports have been written on that subject in most countries; review the experience of organisations involved in political, caring, community, professional, occupational, cultural, sporting and religious dimensions of life regarding influences, positive and negative, on levels of citizen participation and engagement — that involves looking at the good and bad aspects, both of which we know exist; and recommend measures that could be taken as part of public policy to facilitate and encourage a greater degree of engagement by citizens in all aspects of life and the growth and development of voluntary organisations as part of a strong civic culture — I have no doubt that the Government, local authorities, the Health Service Executive and others will learn lessons from that. It is intended that the task force will complete its work within nine months.

The view was taken that we should do the preparatory work first rather than ask the task force to commence its work and spend ages waiting for people. We established the secretariat last autumn. It gathered the relevant information over the entire autumn and winter and determined how the process could work. It attended all the conferences I have mentioned.

We genuinely tried to accommodate everybody. Hundreds of people wanted to be involved although there was not a cent in it for any of them. One will appreciate the people involved, and they wanted to play their part. I had to choose representative areas and individuals because it could not be done otherwise. Luckily Mary Davis, who probably has the most credibility in this area because she has proved herself—

Mr. Kenny: She is a Mayo person.

The Taoiseach: Yes, and she is highly successful. We tried to recruit from the big organisations people who have been involved in this area. We have spoken to all the chosen individuals and are awaiting their responses, which we should receive within a matter of days. I hope they will get on with the work over the period of their remit.

Mr. Rabbitte: Have the individuals behind this initiative given any thought to the concept of citizenship in the education system? During the events of last Saturday, a great many young people spewed out sectarian hatred and bigotry

on the streets of Dublin, who did not seem to have much of a concept of citizenship of this State or of somebody resident on this island. Perhaps we ought to include the concept of citizenship in the education system. It has often been remarked to me that the scouts, for example, in other countries get some credit in their equivalent of the leaving certificate examination for their performance in the scouts. We do not give any such recognition in our education system to young people who are involved in such positive activity. As the Taoiseach said, there is a hell of a chasm between the young fellows who gathered in Celtic and Hibernian jerseys etc., last Saturday and any notion of good citizenship.

The Taoiseach: I would not rule out any of the things suggested by Deputy Rabbitte. When I was in school in the 1960s, before they changed the curriculum, I attended civics lessons for 40 minutes each week. It was a good idea to teach young people about such matters.

Mr. Rabbitte: The Taoiseach learned his civics at an early age by going up poles and putting stuff in doors.

The Taoiseach: That happened a little later.

Mr. Rabbitte: The Taoiseach was an exception.

The Taoiseach: In fairness, I should give credit to Home Farm football club for helping me to learn about these matters. I would be lifted out of it if I was two minutes late for voluntary training. It is important to encourage scouting, football and other sports.

Mr. Kenny: I can see the Taoiseach is at home on this ground.

The Taoiseach: I think one learns lessons about citizenship by participating in such activities. If one is on the road firing rocks and causing trouble—

Mr. Kenny: What about climbing trees?

The Taoiseach: It is interesting that everyone is getting excited about the activities of one weekend, given that many hoodlums are involved in such activities every weekend. I do not intend to roll it out in the education sector. Many things are being done to encourage volunteerism. Students are participating in such activities as part of the second level transition year programme. Steps are also being taken at third level, for example at Dublin Institute of Technology. Grants are allocated to voluntary bureaux and funding is made available to various groups under the Cohesion Fund by the city and county development boards. Many good things are happening. I accept that Deputy Rabbitte has a particular interest in a children's programme in his constituency. We are trying to encourage some

[The Taoiseach.]

activity in that regard and I hope we will have some success. It is necessary to take action in heavily populated areas where people feel they are not involved and are not participating. I refer, for example, to the pilot projects in Deputy Rabbitte's constituency and in two or three other areas, including Darndale. Many people in such communities are badly alienated. They are not getting involved in the good sporting and scouting clubs which are available to them. Rather than standing back, we should try to get such people involved in activities of that nature, but it will not happen automatically. We have to work hard in the area of active citizenship. I am not sure whether we should take action in schools, but we should take action in communities where high levels of difficulties are found. If we try to embrace such communities, we will be able to change the way they are. Deputy Rabbitte and I are familiar with the communities to which I refer. It is not easy to bring about change in such areas. Steps have to be taken over the course of a year or two. Much of the good work that is being done involves giving grants to sporting and other organisations so they can employ full-time workers in communities to interact with local people.

Cabinet Committees.

11. **Mr. J. Higgins** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet sub-committee on drugs and social inclusion last met. [1874/06]

12. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach when the membership of the Cabinet sub-committee on drugs and social inclusion last met. [3217/06]

13. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach the Cabinet sub-committees on which he sits or on which his Department is represented. [3218/06]

14. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet sub-committee on drugs and social inclusion last met; and when the next meeting is due to be held. [4187/06]

15. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet sub-committee on drugs and social inclusion last met. [6399/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 11 to 15, inclusive, together.

The Cabinet sub-committee on social inclusion last met on 1 February 2006. The sub-committee's next meeting is scheduled to take place on 5 April next. I generally attend meetings of the Cabinet sub-committees on housing; infrastructure and public private partnerships; health; European affairs; science and technology; and children, which meets following the meetings of the

Cabinet sub-committee on social inclusion. There are no plans for future meetings of the Cabinet sub-committees on Aer Lingus and decentralisation.

Mr. J. Higgins: I know the Ceann Comhairle is waiting to stop me from asking a question before I——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is familiar with Standing Orders at this stage.

Mr. J. Higgins: I could see he was holding his breath and waiting to pounce. I suggest the House should revert to its practice during the current Government's first term in office, when the Minister of State with responsibility for social inclusion and drugs problems gave lengthy answers to questions on this matter and Deputies were allowed to ask at greater length about the role of the Cabinet sub-committee and Government policy on this issue. That would be a good initiative. What is the precise role of the Cabinet sub-committee on drugs and social inclusion in 2006? What recent initiatives have been taken by the sub-committee? In what way has the sub-committee made a difference to Government policy? In particular, what difference has the sub-committee made to the problems being suffered in many communities?

An Ceann Comhairle: The matters discussed by the sub-committee impinge on Cabinet confidentiality. They cannot be discussed on foot of the questions before the House. If the Deputy reads the questions, he will find that they refer to when the last meeting of the sub-committee was held and when the next meeting will be held.

Mr. J. Higgins: I know but, in fairness, if I am confined to just listening to the Taoiseach give us a date——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy can submit questions to the line Ministers on all these issues. His questions will be answered then.

Mr. J. Higgins: Yes, but the Taoiseach has responsibility and attends these meetings.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach has no responsibility for the matter.

Mr. J. Higgins: Why is he answering questions on it then?

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy reads the questions before the House, he will see what they refer to.

Mr. J. Higgins: Technically, all the Ceann Comhairle will allow is for the Taoiseach to name a date and all other Deputies to remain in their seats and stay shtum.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy looks at his question, he will see he asked the Taoiseach “when the Cabinet sub-committee on drugs and social inclusion last met”. That is the Deputy’s question.

Mr. Stagg: The Taoiseach would be delighted to answer if the Ceann Comhairle let him.

Mr. J. Higgins: One cannot ask a supplementary question, in effect.

An Ceann Comhairle: I admit there is very little opportunity for supplementary questions on foot of the questions before the House.

Mr. J. Higgins: That is ridiculous.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy has a question on this issue, it should be directed to the line Minister.

Mr. J. Higgins: It would be more honest not to have allowed these questions at all. I asked the Taoiseach a few questions before I was stopped.

The Taoiseach: I will respond to the points made by the Deputy at the start of his contribution. As I have said previously, there is nothing to stop Deputies from tabling questions as we used to do. The only difference is that in the last Dáil, I did not take up the full 90 minutes available to me for oral questions during the week — the relevant Minister would come in before that time had elapsed — but the practice in this Dáil has been that I have used the full 90 minutes, which means that no time is left for questions to other Ministers. I cannot do anything about that. Questions have to be tabled to the line Ministers for response during their own period. It is beyond my control.

Mr. Rabbitte: What can the Taoiseach do? He would answer the questions if he could.

The Taoiseach: I take up all the time available to me.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Does the Cabinet sub-committee on drugs and social inclusion receive regular reports on the drugs issue from the Garda Síochána? Following the publication last September of Merchants Quay Ireland’s annual report, my colleagues and I called for the development of a fully resourced national action plan to prevent and address cocaine use and its consequences. Has the Cabinet sub-committee addressed this very pressing issue?

The Taoiseach: All the issues relating to drugs and the relevant groups are dealt with by the sub-committee, which meets all the relevant interests regularly.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Does it consider reports from the Garda?

An Ceann Comhairle: Would Deputy Rabbitte like to ask a supplementary question?

Mr. Rabbitte: The Taoiseach has answered so comprehensively that I cannot think of another question.

Mr. Durkan: It is impossible to improve on perfect.

Mr. Sargent: Perhaps the Taoiseach can remind Deputies who is on the Cabinet sub-committee and the dates of the meetings of which we are talking. We should have such details when we are asking questions of the line Ministers and doing the real business. I ask the Ceann Comhairle to consider the spectacle before him. We are asking about the date of a meeting, which is information that could quite easily be elicited by a telephone call if it were not for the possibility of being able to ask a supplementary question. It is as if the only question that could be asked of Steve Staunton were to relate to the colour of the jerseys to be worn by a football team.

The Taoiseach: That changes too.

Mr. Sargent: To ask the Taoiseach about the date of a meeting without being able to ask supplementary questions does not ring true or have any semblance of reality. A wider Standing Order is needed so when we ask questions, we can follow them by asking about some of the related issues.

An Ceann Comhairle: Perhaps the Deputy should submit a question for written answer.

Mr. Sargent: I think the Standing Order is what we are really talking about here.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a matter for the House.

Mr. Sargent: When a question is allowed, we expect to be able to ask supplementary questions. Apparently, there is no possibility of a supplementary question in this case.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is no provision for supplementary questions dealing with matters which are subject to Cabinet confidentiality.

Mr. Sargent: We are not just in here to listen to the Taoiseach.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a long-standing rule of the House. There are precedents.

Mr. Sargent: The Ceann Comhairle can see how ridiculous this looks.

The Taoiseach: It is pointless tabling a question such as this and we have just agreed that is the case. I cannot add to it. It is just a case of having a question on the Order Paper. The relevant Ministers are the Minister for Education and Science, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Minister for Finance, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, and the Ministers of State with responsibility for children, housing and urban renewal, the national drugs strategy, community affairs, equality issues, including disability issues, and labour affairs, including training. We have a full attendance at most of the meetings and that is a broad range of Ministries. Deputies may table questions on any individual areas of responsibility.

Death of Former Member: Expressions of Sympathy.

Mr. Kenny: I am honoured to pay a warm and well deserved tribute to the late Larry McMahon. I welcome his family, who are with us in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery, his children Ronan, Lorcan, Claire, Niamh, Conor and Ciarán, as well as his sister, Sister Pascal. They could be making this tribute today because they know better than anyone else how passionately Larry McMahon believed in politics and in his community. They can measure the commitment he showed on so many occasions when he had to leave home to attend to his public duties, spending nights over the years solving or attempting to solve problems in his community, or when he sought support and votes in rain, hail or shine. The public business was his business and he did it extraordinarily well.

Larry McMahon represented the people of Tallaght for more than three decades. They know that he always did that work with passion and diligence as well as with a considerable degree of grace and good humour. His absolute belief in public service and in the party that he served made it a pleasure to work with him. His passing was marked by a genuine regret and personal sadness by all of us who knew him. Many Members in this and the previous Dáil may not have known him, but we always pay tribute in this House to those who served the nation in their own way.

Larry McMahon was a great Christian in word and by example. He certainly was not afraid to voice his Christian beliefs and to stand up at parliamentary party meetings in the 1980s when serious social issues were being discussed and debated throughout the country. All who knew him will appreciate that he lived his religion, being a kind, generous and thoughtful man.

His wife Ursula — go ndéanadh Dia trócaire uirthi — died last year and life changed utterly for Larry. He missed her desperately and those who knew him well said that once she passed on,

he made up his mind to follow her as soon as he could. Anyone who saw them together knew that they were the epitome of two people who really loved each other. In the midst of the excitement of a big match in Croke Park last year, he said to me that while it was a wonderful occasion, he was not a happy man. It was perfectly obvious why that was the case.

We have lost a loyal colleague and an exemplary public servant, but Larry's family here have lost a terrific father, a loving brother and a true friend. I offer them the sincere sympathy of the Fine Gael Party, which their father and brother served so well. On behalf of the House, we offer that sympathy to the family. He had a great sense of occasion and for such a proper Christian, paying tributes to him on Ash Wednesday of all days would be something for him.

In such a material world, Lent is a time when we get to think about the big questions. Who are we and why are we here? On this Ash Wednesday, it is safe to say that Larry McMahon, with a head start on all of us, probably knows the answer to both questions. The House and politics are less for his passing. In paying tribute to him, Larry McMahon's family will appreciate far better words than mine, which were written by T.S. Eliot to commemorate Ash Wednesday:

Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood

Teach us to care and not to care

Teach us to sit still

Even among these rocks,

Our peace in His will

And even among these rocks

Sister, mother

And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,

Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

God bless you Larry. We appreciate your public service. I hope you are in heaven.

The Taoiseach: On behalf of the Fianna Fáil Party and on my own behalf, I extend my sympathies to Deputy Kenny and the Fine Gael Party, to the McMahon family with us today and to those who are not. I knew Larry McMahon well from his days in the House but I got to know him and his brother in the 1960s when my sister and brother-in-law were farming in Piperstown in Bohernabreena up in the famous country of St. Anne's. He and his brother had a butcher shop and my sister went there regularly. When I met Larry years later in the House, I always had a great friendship with him. We shared a love of the GAA. I am subject to correction, but Larry told me he was born in Kildare, but he was a great supporter and my last occasion to meet him was when we were both shouting for the Dubs

against Tyrone last year to no great avail. He was always a lovely person to meet.

He made an extraordinary contribution to politics, having entered Dublin County Council in 1965 and remained there for 30 long years and through his great service to his community during his time in both Houses of the Oireachtas. As I knew him from way back, every time I met him in the Oireachtas I always spoke to him. He was very friendly and generous. I will always remember him as courteous and kind and someone who was committed to the rapidly developing community of Tallaght. My conversation with Larry tended to be about Tallaght and how it had changed from the early 1960s, when I would meet him on the big hill in Bohernabreena or near Saint Anne's Church, to what it has become over the past 20 years as a result of constant development. Larry was part of all of that.

He had a great interest in the community and the public good and put a huge effort into that as well as working for his community and party. His reputation in politics was always that of a true gentleman, combining great strategic capability and a friendly charm. He was a man of great religious faith and that was very important to him. He was respected right across the political boards. He had many friends on this side of the House as well.

I join Deputy Kenny and Members of the House in extending our sympathies to his daughters, Claire and Niamh, as well as to Lorcan, Ronan, Ciarán and Conor. We also remember Ursula today. I hope it brings consolation to the children that their parents are now reunited and that the House pays tribute to a fine public representative and a very decent person.

Mr. Rabbitte: On my behalf and on behalf of the Labour Party, I join Deputy Kenny and the Taoiseach in paying tribute to our late colleague, former Deputy Larry McMahon, and in offering sincere condolences to his family. I agree with everything Deputy Kenny and the Taoiseach have said about Larry McMahon's qualities, his commitment to public life and the fervency with which he held his views and argued his position.

I worked in the same constituency with him for a long time and I remember him as a Deputy, Senator and councillor. At that time the constituency of Dublin South-West was very different from what it is now. Larry McMahon was there from the beginning and the formation of a new community put extraordinary demands on the public representatives who were elected in and served that area. Larry McMahon never shirked his share of the workload and the people of the area owe him a great deal. I was pleased to be able to attend the funeral where their appreciation was evident.

As the Taoiseach said, Bohernabreena is a particularly beautiful part of my constituency. Bohernabreena and the area up the Dublin

Mountains is a magnificent part of this county. At the time Larry McMahon started in politics there was nothing below that area because the population of Tallaght was that of a small village compared to the more than 90,000 people who live there now.

As Deputy Kenny said, Larry McMahon held strong Christian beliefs and he never departed from them in his public position on many of the social issues that were dealt with during the 1980s in particular. I might not have agreed with him on everything but I admired his trenchant conviction of the rightness of his views. He never departed from that.

I was somewhat amused by the priest who presided at the funeral. He said that at one stage he had appealed to the parishioners from the pulpit in Firhouse to vote for Larry McMahon. He said he was fearful that he would get a belt of the crozier from Drumcondra but that did not happen. It caused something of a frisson in some sections of the congregation although I was not too disturbed by it. I was a lot more disturbed when the priest went on to say that after Larry McMahon retired from politics he reverted to his old voting pattern. I doubt that it was for the Labour Party.

On my behalf and on behalf of the Labour Party, I offer our sympathies to his sister, who is in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery, and to Ronan and the rest of the clan. He was a tremendous family man, which was acknowledged in the area. I am sorry for his passing.

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children

(Ms Harney): I join the Leader of Fine Gael, the Taoiseach and Deputy Rabbitte in paying my tribute to Larry McMahon. I knew him very well. Although he was a Member of the Dáil in 1977 when I became a Member of the Seanad, it was through his involvement with Dublin County Council that I got to know him best. In Dublin County Council he had a strong passion, as I had, during those years for ensuring people from small villages such as Bohernabreena, Saggart, Rathcoole and Newcastle, as they were then, could live in their own area. He had a great phrase which he regularly used when addressing the manager: "Manager, the villages are not just for the birds". He said it with such vigour that it impressed.

He came to see me on one occasion in the 1980s and he was very sad, which was unusual for Larry. One of his children was seriously ill and he said to me that it would take a miracle for her to recover. However, she did recover and he was very proud of that. The last encounter I had with him was around this time last year at the annual mass for the sick in Whitehall. I met Larry and Ursula there. I had not been aware of it but he told me that Ursula was unwell. She was with him and seemed strong and determined but they told me the illness was terminal. He was devastated and was crying. She died shortly afterwards and when I attended her funeral I saw a broken and

[Ms Harney.]

devastated man. They were very much a team who lived for their children.

Larry McMahan was extremely popular in Bohernabreena. At one level he was an old style politician. He was deeply conservative and did not share many of my perspectives on some issues. He used to caution me about some of the positions I took. I know the priest to whom Deputy Rabbitté referred. I doubt that he voted for the Labour Party and he certainly did not vote for the Progressive Democrats. I believe he would have been close to the Taoiseach's persuasion. However, in Bohernabreena people of every persuasion respected and loved Larry McMahan. He was a great neighbour and a great man for the community.

He leaves a wonderful family of four sons and two daughters. For any child to lose a parent is always difficult but to lose both parents at such a young age and in such a short timeframe is a devastating blow for them. As I was away, I was sorry to be unable to attend his funeral. I would have loved to have been there because I had a very good friendship with Larry McMahan over many years.

On my behalf and on behalf of the Progressive Democrats, I extend my sympathy to Claire, Niamh, Lorcan, Ronan, Ciarán and Conor, to his sister and his wider family and to the Fine Gael Party, which has lost a committed party supporter and member.

Mr. Sargent: Ar mo shon féin agus ar son an Chomhaontais Ghlais, ba mhaith liom mo chomhbhrón a chur in iúl do mhuintir Larry McMahan. On my behalf and on behalf of the Green Party, I extend my sympathies to the family of Larry McMahan, who are with us today, and to the Fine Gael Party, which has lost someone who was one of its long-standing, legendary characters as well as being a public representative.

Larry McMahan would have been mentioned frequently in conversation among family and friends I have in Templeogue, Firhouse and Saggart. In many ways he was part of the folklore of politics for me when I was a child. To that extent, I knew him more as a brand than as a person but his name and influence were widespread in the area he represented and loved so much. He is well remembered and well respected by many in the community and outside the area he represented. I am aware from what has been said here and from people in the area how much he was respected and is missed. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On behalf of the Sinn Féin Deputies, I join other speakers in expressing our sympathy to the family of the late former Deputy Larry McMahan. To his sister, his sons and daughters, his grandchildren and his extended family, we convey our sincere condol-

ences. I also offer sympathy to Deputy Kenny and the Fine Gael Party on the loss of somebody who was a stalwart representative in a number of fora over many years.

Following the death of former Deputy McMahan, whom I did not have the pleasure or privilege to meet, I spoke to my colleague, Deputy Crowe, who represents the same area. He described the late former Deputy McMahan as a decent and honourable person. By all accounts that view is universally held. The Taoiseach mentioned that the late Larry McMahan was born in County Kildare and had a great passion for Dublin football. As a Monaghan native, born and bred in the home of the McMahons, I often wondered over the days since his death if he had any association with the land of the McMahons. The town of Monaghan was built by the clan.

I again extend our sympathies. All I can do is put my hand on my heart and live in hope that when he was making other choices, he might have considered Sinn Féin. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Mr. C. Lenihan): As Deputy for Dublin South-West, I would like to be associated with the kind words said about the late Larry McMahan. He was a wonderful man, who was not partisan in his approach. He and the late Sean Walsh worked tirelessly for the Tallaght area at a time when the area was growing and going through its growing pains as a community and constituency. He worked in a non-partisan way with the late Sean Walsh. They both more or less operated a tag team approach to all sorts of issues, local and otherwise, which worked very well for the people of Tallaght as that community grew in strength.

I express my sympathy to his family. He was a man of great religious faith and strength of purpose. I remember being on a parliamentary visit to Jerusalem with him. It was clear that it was a marvellous journey for a man of his faith, and marvellous for him to see the centre of his Christian worship and the many biblical sites which we visited that Easter time. It was lovely to see it. Despite his religious faith, he was a deeply amusing and humorous man. He was not afraid to have a go or have a crack at people on any basis, so he was great company and a real gentleman.

Mr. O'Connor: It is kind of the Ceann Comhairle to allow me to say a few words. It is good in any debate to hear Tallaght mentioned so often but we are thinking and talking about Larry McMahan, my friend and neighbour from Tallaght. It is sad on this special religious day that we also remember that he and his colleague Ruairí Brugha were both elected for the Tallaght area in 1973. It is a long time ago and we remember them both.

The first time I met Larry was during the by-election which he won in 1970, a time when Fine Gael had three Deputies representing the Tallaght area, as was also the case in 1973. Much has been said about Larry and his political legacy so I will not repeat that. However, the local newspaper, the *Tallaght Echo*, summed up all our feelings a couple of weeks ago when it stated: "Tallaght says goodbye to Larry McMahon."

We all remember what he achieved as a Deputy, a Senator, a member of the Council of Europe and a member of Dublin County Council. All of us valued his friendship and valued the great work he did. He loved Tallaght and lived in Bohernabreena from 1932. He often reminded us that he was educated in Firhouse. I got to know him and his family over many years. They were always polite and civil to me. I miss Larry already. His wife Ursula died on my son Robert's birthday on 12 June last. She and Larry will be remembered.

Larry made many impressions on me but one in particular remains. He was the man who told me that politics was about being in the right place at the right time and being ready. He was ready in 1970.

I never served in the Oireachtas or on the council with Larry but I served with him on a number of school boards. One of the VEC boards of which he was a member was the board of Tallaght Community School, a famous institution. He served an amazing 32 years on that board. The board chairman, Myles Berkeley, reminded me recently that when we were discussing difficult issues in the school and difficult pupils that needed assistance, Larry would always wait until the end of the discussion and try to save the situation for the pupil. That showed his caring outlook.

I join colleagues in expressing my deepest sympathy to Lorcan, Ronan, Claire, Ciarán, Conor and Niamh, who I always felt should be a politician — perhaps there is time yet. I also sympathise with Larry's sister, Sister Pascal, his 11 grandchildren and the wider McMahon family, and also with the Bohernabreena community, who will miss Larry for a long time. I offer my sympathy to Deputy Kenny and the Fine Gael party, particularly my friends in the Fine Gael organisation in the Tallaght region. It is a sad occasion. It is good that we would pause on this special day to think about Larry McMahon. I offer my deepest sympathy.

Mr. Crowe: I want to be included in the sympathy extended to the family of the late Larry McMahon and his colleagues in Fine Gael. I knew Larry. I found him to be a very honest and upright person. My last meeting with him concerned the question of local people in Bohernabreena trying to get housing for their sons and daughters due to the difficulties in obtaining planning permission.

He was very involved through the years and we met at various meetings. He had a vision for the growth of Tallaght. He was one of those who talked in terms of the positive effects of The Square for the people of Tallaght. His work on the school boards of management was remarked to me on several occasions, as was his remarkable level of attendance. Many people who are selected to serve on boards of management, particularly politicians, do not bother to turn up but Larry turned up regularly. I know of one woman who used to telephone the family home and his wife, Ursula, always made sure that Larry attended the meetings. The board of management and the school appreciated this.

I listened to a eulogy from Larry's son at his funeral. He certainly brought his father alive to all who were present in the church that day. We saw another side of Larry as a father. His son told of a visit to East Germany when the Berlin Wall was still up. Larry in his usual manner decided to take photographs, causing uproar at the checkpoint. If I remember correctly, one of the military police stopped Larry and told him he could not take photographs and asked him his name. Larry replied: "An bhfuil cead agam dul go dtí an leithreas?" I thought that story gave another insight into the man. Larry was full of character and wit, a side which might not have been evident to those who met him at meetings. He believed strongly in public service and spent his whole life in the service of those he represented. He will be sadly missed by the people of Tallaght.

Members rose.

Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 31.

Mr. Morgan: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to discuss the following matter of urgent public concern, namely, the necessity, given the publication of the Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital report, for the Minister for Health and Children to move immediately to order an inquiry into the atrocious practice of symphysiotomy; why such a barbaric procedure was allowed to be carried out in this State until the early 1980s; and if she will undertake to meet the victims of this inhumane procedure, which is urgently required.

Ms C. Murphy: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of local and national importance, namely, the need to reassess the demographics in the west Dublin-north Kildare area for health care provision. Figures illustrating the increasing number of patients awaiting treatment on hospital trolleys demonstrate that the main hospitals serving this catchment, namely, James Connolly Memorial Hospital, Blanchardstown, Tallaght Hospital and Naas General Hospital, are experiencing increased strain on resources. This problem must

[Ms C. Murphy.]

be tackled urgently, as promised by the Minister for Health and Children last year, given that the numbers on trolleys have steadily increased over the past year as opposed to declining.

Mr. Sargent: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the arrangements agreed with Government to allow the President of the United States attend a rally of American troops in Ireland last night and the contrast between the cost of security for this event and the low-key security for the Unionist march planned for last Saturday in Dublin.

An Ceann Comhairle: Having considered the matters raised, they are not in order under Standing Order 31.

Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 22, Competition (Amendment) Bill 2005 [*Seanad*] — Order for Report, Report and Final Stages; and No. 23 — statements on further and higher education, to be taken following the announcement of Matters on the Adjournment under Standing Order 21 and the order shall not resume thereafter. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the proceedings on No. 23 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 7 p.m. tonight and the following arrangements shall apply: the statements of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for the Fine Gael Party, the Labour Party and the Technical Group, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case; the statements of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case; Members may share time; a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a statement in reply which shall not exceed five minutes. Private Members' business shall be No. 55 — motion re school discipline issues, resumed, to conclude at 8.30 p.m.

An Ceann Comhairle: There is one proposal to put to the House. Is the proposal for dealing with No. 23 agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Kenny: I thank the Government for agreeing to the simple motion in respect of sending out a clear message about the carry-on on the streets of Dublin last Saturday. I do not believe the Ceann Comhairle can rule me out of order when I mention the legislative programme, which refers to wider business and not just the Department of the Taoiseach. Only one Bill has been initiated in the Seanad this session and all other legislation to come before the Seanad has been amending legislation sent back from here. Of the 17 Bills on the Government's legislative programme, so far only four have been published.

Where is the promised legislation to introduce an independent inspectorate for nursing homes, which has been on the stocks for some time? Where is the promised legislation to clarify entitlements and rights to health services? Where is the promised legislation to establish a register of persons deemed unsafe to work with children? These are three fundamental areas. It increasingly appears in the past two years in particular that there is a blockage in the legislative procedure, either in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government or elsewhere. While it is important for us to be able to take statements here, a paucity of legislation is coming through. I ask the Taoiseach to comment on this issue and refer to the three Bills of fundamental importance, which have been promised for some time.

The Taoiseach: The nursing homes legislation is due this session. The hospital Bill will be ready in the summer and will be taken in the autumn session. We do not have a date for the legislation relating to the register of persons who are considered unsafe to work with children. The Departments of Education and Science and Health and Children have been in discussions about the establishment of pre-employment consultancy services. That legislation has been caught up in the North-South Ministerial Council. I have raised the matter with the council and with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to try to move it on. However, we do not have a definite date for its progress.

Mr. Rabbitte: Will arrangements for discussion of the Neary report be announced this week? Did the Taoiseach see the report in *The Sunday Tribune* last weekend claiming that the register of electors is inaccurate by up to 860,000 people? Since I previously raised the matter, has the Taoiseach given any consideration to when proposals should be made by the Minister and whether these will include legislation? Even if the inaccuracy is half that level, in a small population it is an extraordinary degree of inaccuracy, which needs to be tended to, especially the way things are going between Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats.

The Taoiseach: The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche is examining the issue of the register.

Mr. Allen: Now I am worried.

The Taoiseach: There are two issues here: what can be done in the short term and what can be done in the longer term. I understand that to do anything major would need primary legislation and also necessitate a fundamental examination of the old system of registers being compiled by local authorities.

Mr. Stagg: The Minister said he would not give resources to local authorities.

The Taoiseach: The register has always been a problem, as we know. There are issues that need to be addressed in the short term and they are being examined.

I understand the arrangements for debating the Neary report will be discussed at a Whips' meeting tonight. I agree that we have a debate.

Mr. Boyle: Yesterday Deputy O'Donnell described as a joke the failure to regulate the charities sector. It is now a nine-year standing joke that has been passed through four Departments, each of which has failed to produce legislation. Can the Taoiseach be definitive in stating when the charities Bill will come before the House? In light of yesterday's opinion given by the European Commission that fees charged for freedom of information requests here are excessive, when will the Minister for Finance introduce regulations to extend the remit of the Freedom of Information Act? Will amendments be made to the Freedom of Information Act in the light of yesterday's comments?

The Taoiseach: I do not think there is any amending legislation. I am not aware of the regulations and whether the Minister is extending the scope. As he has extended it a number of times, possibly it is true.

Mr. Boyle: It was promised in October.

The Taoiseach: I am not saying he is not bringing it forward. I understand the heads of the charities regulation Bill are complete or nearly complete and the work is continuing. This is a very substantial Bill. Earlier the heads were circulated to Departments and they will be submitted to Cabinet on completion of those discussions. Work is proceeding on the drafting of the Bill. It has been given priority in the Department to try to have the Bill this year. We hope to have it on the floor of the House during 2006.

Mr. Costello: I am sure the Taoiseach saw the headlines in *The Irish Times* stating that the Garda had a well thought out strategy for what happened in Dublin on Saturday. How does this tally with his prior knowledge of trouble and all the missiles that had accumulated in the back streets adjacent to O'Connell Street? Given the remarks the Taoiseach made yesterday regarding the possible introduction of by-laws and the response of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to questions from me that neither he nor the Government had any formal prior knowledge of the march of up to—

An Ceann Comhairle: The matter does not arise on the Order of Business.

Mr. Costello: It does in terms of by-laws.

An Ceann Comhairle: It does not arise on the question of legislation.

Mr. Costello: By-laws are secondary legislation. Given that the Taoiseach mentioned it yesterday, does he intend to ensure that with a march of that nature, 1,000 persons—

An Ceann Comhairle: It does not arise. I ask the Taoiseach whether any legislation is promised.

The Taoiseach: It is not. The city council turned down the by-laws.

Mr. Costello: It is a policy decision.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Ó Caoláin.

Mr. Costello: The Taoiseach has not answered the question.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy has gone beyond discussion of the Order of Business.

Mr. Costello: Should the Government not have made a policy decision?

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a question for the line Minister.

Mr. Costello: The first the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform knew was what he read in the newspaper.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is limited to asking about promised legislation and the Taoiseach has already answered that question. I call Deputy Ó Caoláin.

Mr. Costello: The Taoiseach was never informed about it nor was the Cabinet. No policy decision was ever taken on the issue.

The Taoiseach: That was because the city council rejected the by-laws.

Mr. Costello: The city council did not reject the by-laws.

The Taoiseach: It did.

Mr. Costello: No, it did not.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have a discussion on Dublin City Council here.

Mr. Costello: They were brought forward by a small committee of business people, not the city council.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to resume his seat.

Mr. Costello: It is important—

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is incorrect. They were brought forward by the legal section of Dublin City Council and the council rejected them.

Mr. Costello: They were brought forward by a sub-committee.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to find another way to raise the matter.

Mr. Costello: The sub-committee had no representation from the city council.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is out of order.

Mr. Costello: I am not out of order.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Chair has ruled.

Mr. Costello: The Taoiseach has put an inaccurate statement on the record. The city council did not consent to the by-laws.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have a debate on that here. The Deputy will see the difficulties that arise for the House and himself when he raises matters not appropriate to the Order of Business.

Mr. Costello: A small sub-committee of businesspeople and city officials with no council representation did it.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to resume his seat. The Chair has ruled him out of order.

Mr. Costello: It is important the Taoiseach does not put an inaccurate statement on the record.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: There is great concern among the work force at Aer Lingus and in the wider community that a Government decision is imminent regarding its privatisation. Will that issue be debated in the House before a decision is taken, and is it planned that a motion should come before the House?

An Ceann Comhairle: That does not arise.

The Taoiseach: That does not arise.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: What is the Taoiseach's answer?

The Taoiseach: That does not arise at the moment.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: What about Aer Lingus? Will it continue to arise as we have known it?

Mr. Morgan: The way he is going on, it is about to sink.

The Taoiseach: We have saved it several times in the last ten years.

Mr. Crawford: When will the nurses and midwives Bill come before the House? In light of the Neary report and the fact that personnel from Drogheda Hospital made decisions on how Monaghan General Hospital and Cavan General Hospital should be run when they could not even see their own problems—

An Ceann Comhairle: That does not arise on the Order of Business. I call the Taoiseach on the first question, concerning promised legislation.

Mr. Crawford: —when will the health Bill come before the House so we can discuss the matter?

An Ceann Comhairle: That has already been dealt with this morning.

The Taoiseach: The heads of the nurses and midwives Bill are expected soon. Legislation must be drafted, and there are approximately 40 heads.

Ms McManus: Following the Neary scandal, I would like to ask regarding two Bills. When does the Taoiseach intend to introduce legislation to put the Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, on a statutory footing? In view of the fact this scandal occurred in part of the health service that is regulated, will he take on board the fact that another part, the pharmacy sector, is not regulated? It is very likely we will see a scandal as a result of the Government's delay and failure to introduce pharmacy legislation to protect patients.

An Ceann Comhairle: On the pharmacy legislation, I call the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: The pharmacy legislation is due later this year, when the health Bill, which will provide for the establishment of HIQA and the Irish Social Services Inspectorate on a statutory basis and introduce a registration system, is also due.

Dr. Twomey: On the Neary case, concerns were raised about the doctor over a 20-year period. When can we expect the health legislation to which the Taoiseach referred to come before the House? The Medical Defence Union will receive the protection of the courts in not paying out to Dr. Neary's victims. When can we expect legislation on a redress board to come before the House?

An Ceann Comhairle: Is legislation promised?

Dr. Twomey: A cosy consensus between the three Dublin obstetricians and Dr. Neary leaves a bitter taste for doctors and patients. Regarding amendment to the Medical Practitioners Act 1978, there is cosy consensus between the Tánaiste and the Medical Council. Could the Taoiseach involve the health spokespersons in the House in drafting the heads of that Bill?

An Ceann Comhairle: That does not arise, since this concerns legislation coming before the House. The Deputy should submit a question.

The Taoiseach: I have dealt with the health Bill issue, and I also spoke about the Medical Practitioners Act 1978. That legislation will be amended based on yesterday's findings, and the heads of the Bill will be circulated in due course. The Deputy will be able to comment on the heads.

Ms O'Sullivan: Has the Government had time to consider the implications of yesterday's judgment on the back to education allowance? Might amending legislation be required? How does the Taoiseach propose to reimburse those who were entitled to the back to education allowance during the holiday period?

The Taoiseach: As I stated, that judgment is being considered in the Department. Based on its own legal opinion, it will decide how to proceed.

Dr. Cowley: Some 100 Irish women are very seriously affected and desperately ill as a result of hepatitis C but have not tested positive. However, they have every other manifestation of the illness and a positive diagnosis from their consultant.

An Ceann Comhairle: We must confine ourselves to legislation.

Dr. Cowley: There must be legislation, since those women are desperately ill and need help. The Tánaiste has said they cannot receive free health care, but they are dying.

An Ceann Comhairle: That does not arise on the Order of Business.

Dr. Cowley: I hope some legislation will be introduced to help them.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, but we have gone far over the allotted time. I call Deputy Broughan as a final contributor.

Dr. Cowley: I hope that the Taoiseach will intervene.

Mr. Broughan: Regarding the historic vote of the National Salmon Commission, is it intended to introduce regulations or legislation to implement it?

The Taoiseach will remember this time two weeks ago we discussed at length the implications of the Stardust fire. Does the Taoiseach intend to meet the families of the victims in the next week or two? I believe they intend to march on his Saturday clinic.

An Ceann Comhairle: The second question does not arise. I call the Taoiseach to answer the first question on regulation.

Mr. Broughan: Will he meet them before that?

The Taoiseach: With the permission of the Ceann Comhairle, I would like to answer.

I gave an undertaking to Deputy Rabbitte two weeks ago that I would meet the families. I cleared my diary to do that last week. I also got the Minister to attend. However, shortly beforehand, I was told the families did not want to meet me but that their legal representative would contact me. I contacted that person, who said he wished to send in a submission first. I agreed that if the families attended this week, I would meet them. Then they said they did not want to meet me this week but would do so next week. I agreed, but then their legal representative said he would not have his report in until then, meaning that it would have to be after St. Patrick's Day. In the meantime, the families decided to march on me. However, I have done everything possible.

Competition (Amendment) Bill 2005 [Seanad]: Order for Report Stage.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): I move: "That Report Stage be taken now."

Question put and agreed to.

Competition (Amendment) Bill 2005 [Seanad]: Report and Final Stages.

Acting Chairman (Dr. Cowley): Amendment No. 1 in the name of Deputy Howlin arises from committee proceedings.

Mr. Howlin: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 4, between lines 33 and 34, to insert the following:

"(6) A person who contravenes section 15B shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to the penalties provided by this Act for breach of sections 4 and 5."

We had a long and rather tetchy discussion on this with the Minister on Committee Stage. I suggested that, if he were feeling so tetchy, he might send the Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Killeen, who is much more malleable on such matters. I am therefore delighted that he is

[Mr. Howlin.]

present today. I know that we will have a much more constructive debate on the issues.

Mr. Hogan: Hear, hear. We might even get amendments passed.

Mr. Howlin: I do not intend to rehearse everything I said in the committee. It was a very long Committee Stage, which I am sure the Minister of State has had a chance to read in detail. Suffice it to say the amendment is the straightforward insertion of a new subsection (6) in section 1 to state that a person who contravenes the new section 15B shall be guilty of an offence and liable for penalties provided by the Act for breach of sections 4 and 5 of the parent Act.

Having read over the response of the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Martin, to me in the committee, it seems there is a lack of clarity regarding why this set of offences — I will not fill up my time reading the new section 15B — should have been treated in this way when there are other matters, including the introduction of “hello money” and retail price-fixing by a wholesaler, which in most circumstances are regarded as very serious. Why should they not be regarded as serious enough to warrant criminalisation escapes me.

The Minister said that although predatory pricing is a criminal offence under section 5, as we know, that the new section 15B relates to similar practices. He has conceded the point that they are similar to those criminalised in section 5. They include the issue of “hello money” and other matters I have mentioned. However, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment went on to tell the Select Committee on Enterprise and Small Business: “Due to the fact that both the conduct and questions are not prohibited in all cases, it would be inappropriate to criminalise those particular activities”. I am simply unclear about what that means. Further in his reply the Minister stated: “civil prohibition has the advantage of allowing aggrieved parties or the Competition Authority to proceed quickly in court to challenge any suspect conduct or practice”. That is well and good.

I will not labour the issue any further as we had a long debate on a similar amendment on Committee Stage. I hope that the Minister of State has had a chance to reflect on the issues and will not consider himself bound to reject the amendment. It will be interesting to see whether he will set the tone of how the debate proceeds by showing that, having reflected on the points made on Committee Stage, he is willing to accept amendment No. 1 and other Opposition amendments that are appropriate.

Mr. Morgan: I rise to support amendment No. 1 in the name of Deputy Howlin, but my opposition to the Bill remains as firm as it was at the outset. I have no intention of rehashing the com-

mittee debate, but the Minister appeared to sit on the fence on this issue. After resisting pressure from lobbyists representing big business, when the RTE programme by Eddie Hobbs came along the Government fell into the lap of big business. This Bill will have a disastrous effect on small retailers across the land. It is most unfortunate that the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment has caved in to pressure from the likes of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation. The Bill will in no way enhance the services that the people of this State receive, so my opposition to the Bill remains.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen):

The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Martin, asked me to convey his regret that he cannot attend today’s debate due to his involvement in a promotional tour. His regret at his inability to attend comes second only to mine in this matter.

Mr. Howlin: Is his promotional tour to promote himself?

Mr. Killeen: Not at all. He is undertaking an important promotional tour on behalf of the country from which we hope positive results will emerge.

Although Deputy Howlin described the Committee Stage debate as somewhat tetchy, I found it quite entertaining to read.

Mr. Howlin: It was entertaining only in the debate on my amendment.

Mr. Killeen: However, I do not intend that the remainder of the proceedings will be quite as entertaining.

Amendment No. 1 in the name of Deputy Howlin is designed to criminalise behaviour that will be prohibited under the Bill but, as the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Martin, explained on Committee Stage, the prohibitions contained in the Bill are not *per se* offences. In other words, the conduct in question is not prohibited in all cases. That answers the question that Deputy Howlin raised.

Anti-competitive agreements and decisions or concerted practices by associations or undertakings are already prohibited under section 4 of the Competition Act 2002. Such hardcore cartel-type conduct is regarded as among the most serious of anti-competitive offences. However, the amendment seeks to deal with unilateral conduct on the part of a single undertaking. Such conduct is prohibited under the Bill but is less serious as it cannot amount to a cartel-type activity. Therefore, a civil prohibition has a number of advantages in that it allows the aggrieved parties or the Competition Authority to proceed quickly to court to deal with the issue. In addition, Deputies will be familiar with the

rule of reason approach to criminal offences, which comes into play in this instance.

For those reasons, it would be inappropriate to accept amendment No. 1.

Mr. Howlin: I anticipated that the Minister of State might rehash the same arguments. Has he had any dialogue with the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Deputy Noel Dempsey, who seems to argue that offences should be criminal offences and administrative penalties are inappropriate. Obviously, Ministers differ despite the consequences.

Mr. Hogan: So much for consistency.

Mr. Howlin: I will not take up more time making arguments I have already made, given that the Minister of State's approach is simply to follow his riding instructions on the matter. However, I will make this final point. The Minister of State said that not all instances of the activities prohibited by subsections (1) to (4) of the new section 15B will necessarily be outlawed. However, subsection (5) provides: "conduct described in subsections (1) to (4) shall not be prohibited unless it has as its objective or effect the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition in trade in any grocery goods in the State or in any part of the State." The import of amendment No. 1 would be that, once that criterion is met because the person contravening section 15B has been deemed to have had the objective of preventing or restricting competition, the person should be considered to have committed an offence. The bar is already provided in subsection (5) of proposed new section 15B, but the Bill currently provides no appropriate sanction once that bar is reached if the activity is not — to use the interesting and amusing phrase employed by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment on Committee Stage — "hardcore" prevention, restriction or distortion of competition. Amendment No. 1 proposes that such activities should incur the same sanction as other anti-competitive practices such as predatory pricing, which are criminalised under section 5 of the parent Act.

Mr. Killeen: Three differences need to be taken into account. First, the operation of a cartel is quite separate from the unilateral situation described in amendment No. 1, which might include within its scope some pro-competitive activities that would also need to be provided for. Second, civil prohibition has the advantages I set out in that a contravention can be dealt with much more quickly and easily. Third, the rule of reason approach to criminal offences is an overriding concern in this instance. In view of all three concerns, I strongly believe that amendment No. 1 should be rejected.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Acting Chairman: Amendment No. 2 in the name of Deputy Hogan arises from committee proceedings. Amendments Nos. 3 and 4 are alternatives. Amendments Nos. 2 to 4 will be discussed together.

Mr. Hogan: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 4, to delete lines 34 to 49 and in page 5, to delete lines 1 to 32 and substitute the following:

"15B.—(1) Subject to the provisions of this section, all arrangements, decisions, and practices, by grocery undertakings, which have as their object or effect, the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition in trade in grocery goods, in the State or any part of the State, shall be prohibited, including in particular, without prejudice to the generality of this subsection, those which—

(a) directly or indirectly attempt to compel or coerce another grocery goods undertaking, whether by threat, promise or any means, to resell or advertise for resale any grocery goods at -

(i) a price fixed directly or indirectly by the first mentioned grocery goods undertaking, or

(ii) a price above a minimum price fixed directly or indirectly by the first mentioned grocery goods undertaking,

(b) apply dissimilar conditions to equivalent transactions with any other grocery goods undertaking,

(c) directly or indirectly compel or coerce, whether by threat, promise or any means, any grocery undertaking to make a payment or grant any allowance for the advertising or the display of grocery goods, or

(d) directly or indirectly compel or coerce, whether by threat, promise or other means, another grocery undertaking to make any payment or grant any allowance to a retailer in respect of the provision of space for the display, marketing or sale of grocery goods within a retail outlet.

(2) Following the commencement of this Act and without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), the Minister may make such regulations as may be appropriate to prescribe any additional arrangements, decisions or practices that are contrary to section 15B(1) or to provide for any related aspect required for the effective enforcement of this section 15B(1).

(3) Nothing in this subsection shall affect any right of the Authority to bring proceedings for an offence under section 6 of

[Mr. Hogan.]

this, or of any other person to issue proceedings under section 14 of this Act.”.

Amendment No. 2 deals with predatory pricing, which is I suppose the principal issue in the Bill that has been the subject of dispute between the Government and the Opposition parties.

During the course of proceedings on Second Stage and Committee Stage, the Minister put all his eggs in one basket by stating that section 5 of the Competition Act 2002 should continue to be the mechanism by which predatory pricing is banned. However, no substantive legal arguments have been proven in court in this jurisdiction to show that predatory pricing is banned, so the Minister is reliant entirely on European law. Furthermore, abuse of a dominant position has been defined only in one case, which involved the *Drogheda Independent* newspaper. In that case, dominance was defined in such a way that the company was not deemed to be dominant even though it had 65% of the local market. If we accept that retailers of groceries and other products are to be adjudicated not to be dominant if they control 65% of the market, an awful lot of products will come under threat from big players.

The fundamental difference between the Government and the Opposition is that the Government is on the side of big business but we are on the side of maintaining competition in a market that is not concentrated in the hands of a few players. Whereas predatory pricing would remain a grey area under the Bill as it stands, we want to ban the practice explicitly under the Bill so that there would be no doubt about whether the law in this jurisdiction allows a dominant player to put smaller, more localised competition out of business. Amendments Nos. 2 and 3 are worthy of reflection.

The whole basis for abolishing the Restrictive Practices (Groceries) Order 1987 is to ensure the rebates and discounts available to retailers can be passed on to consumers. The Government has said that the free market will look after that.

Unfortunately, in the real world, major retailers will, in metaphorical terms, screw the small indigenous suppliers. Regardless of whether they supply sausages, bread, meat or whatever, they will come under enormous pressure, as they do at present. Such rebates are pocketed by the retailers, to the value of €2 billion in profits for a company like Tesco. They are not passed on to the consumers and, consequently, Members wish to see a mechanism which will enable that to happen.

Moreover, the multiples target small shops in a localised area, on a particular basis and restrict any special offers they might have to that locality. For example, a multiple could have a restrictive offer whereby a litre of milk would cost 10 cent while consumer purchases would be restricted to one or two units. Nothing in this law will prevent that from taking place. If this legislation passes

without amendment, it will affect 137 shops in the Minister of State's constituency which are trying to compete with predation in their local community.

Everyone should be clear in this respect. If the legislation is passed in its current form, there will be nothing to stop large multiples with significant funds putting others out of business in a local community. Any special offers which a multiple might make would only be available, if it so wishes, within a small geographical area. There will be no obligation or compulsion to make such an offer available nationwide. The only basis on which a multiple will restrict an offer is to put its competition out of business. Hence, the non-restriction of offers should be made explicit.

Members have heard the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Martin, assert that he wants to ensure that some aspects of the groceries order are enshrined in competition law. This means that he wishes to ban resale price maintenance and so-called “hello money”. He wants to ensure that unfair credit terms are not imposed and that there is no obligation to compel people to pay for advertising allowances.

Unfortunately however, all these objectives are dealt with in section 15B(5), which effectively states that one must prove dominance before any of these activities are banned. Hence, small retailers will be expected to take cases against the large multiples if the latter are driving the former out of business. However, under the Competition Acts it would cost a fortune for such a retailer to make a case to the Competition Authority with the attendant barristers, solicitors, economists and required analysis. It could be another way to put them out of business. How can one expect a small retailer or supplier to take on the might of big business to prove what should be enshrined in law, namely, a complete ban on predatory pricing?

The proposed amendments will go some way toward ensuring a level playing pitch, genuine competition and choice for consumers so that big business will not put small players out of business in the local community through predation. I ask the Minister of State to reflect on the required balance in respect of the sale of products in this small country. Choice and diversity are required, as is a level playing pitch. Moreover, one must define dominance, which has not been defined satisfactorily in this jurisdiction. We should not rely on section 5 of the Competition Act 2002 as it would be very expensive to test. Will the Minister of State accept these amendments as a basis on which we can proceed and ultimately ensure proper competition in the marketplace across a wide range of consumer products?

Mr. Howlin: As Deputy Hogan rightly stated, as far as most Members are concerned, this is the most important focus of the Bill. While this is not a lengthy Bill as far as the number of sections

are concerned, it will have a major impact on the manner in which the operation of the grocery trade will be re-regulated or deregulated. There are genuine concerns among the existing players that this will have the impact of killing off the smaller players. All the reassurances Members have received from the Minister in recent months have not succeeded in abating those fears. While the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Martin, has asserted he knows such matters in his heart, we need clarity in this respect.

I greatly fear that the core issue of predatory pricing will not be addressed. In all his responses on Second Stage and on Committee Stage, the Minister has relied on the fact that section 5 of the parent Act, that is, the Competition Act 2002, deals with the issue of predatory pricing. The problem is that he relies on European Court judgments in this regard. In my Committee Stage speech, I pointed out a difficulty in respect of that reliance. The Minister also acknowledged that no domestic judgments exist to give clarity in this regard. It always strikes me as odd when parliamentarians of any shade or hue prefer to rely on judicial decisions rather than on clarity of legislation to protect a vital interest.

Amendment No. 3 is in my name and seeks to insert a relatively simple new clause: "A retailer (whether or not it enjoys a dominant position) shall not engage in predatory pricing or any other unfair conduct in relation to price which is likely to eliminate or significantly reduce competition." From the Minister's perspective, the amendment's greatest weakness is its clarity. It sets out the objective that all Members are agreed upon. However, inserting such a clear objective into legislation must frighten the horses or something. Perhaps it was unusually candid of me on Committee Stage to note that the amendment's weakness is that it does not define the issue of predatory pricing. However, the Minister has done so in his utterances. He has stated that we all share an understanding as to what constitutes predatory pricing. However, that is not the case. As Deputy Hogan has rightly noted, the core issue is that reliance on section 5 of the Competition Act 2002 implies a reliance on the establishment of a dominant position.

On Committee Stage, the Minister took issue with the amendment I tabled and stated that it was contradictory in that it sought to deal with the issue of predatory pricing while simultaneously dealing with it in cases where an individual predator did not have a dominant position. He appeared to believe that this was a contradiction in terms. However, it is only a contradiction in terms if there is clarity as to what dominant position means and as I pointed out, no such clarity exists. I hope the Minister of State will take careful note of this point.

The issue of what constitutes a dominant position is anything but clear. All we can go on is European law, and in *United Brands v. the Com-*

mission in 1978, the European Court of Justice defined dominant position as:

[A] position of economic strength enjoyed by an undertaking which enables it to prevent effective competition being maintained in the relevant market by giving it the power to behave to an appreciable extent independently of its competitors, customers and ultimately of its consumers.

This judgment obviously attached a considerable weight to the notion of what constituted a dominant position.

What percentage of the market constitutes a dominant position? As I tried to demonstrate on Committee Stage, there is no clarity on that issue.

The threshold of dominance is an important consideration because the market share possessed by an undertaking may be a crucial factor in determining whether the European law as transposed into Irish law has been breached. However, the problem is that there is no definitive rule as to what percentage of market share will come into the scope of Article 82, transposed into Irish law by the Competition Act. In the *United Brands v. the Commission* case, a share of 40% to 45% of the banana market in a relevant member state was deemed by the court to be sufficient. Hence, a market share of 40% to 45% was determined to be dominant. However, in the *Hoffman-La Roche* case the European Court of Justice ruled that a firm was not in a dominant position holding 43% of the market, for vitamin B3 in that instance. In the *Virgin Atlantic Airways Limited v. British Airways plc*, the European Court of Justice found that an undertaking with a market share less than 40% was, in fact, a dominant position as understood by Article 83.

As I indicated on Committee Stage, the Minister is giving us firm assurances that the issue of predatory pricing is dealt with in the European law under Article 83, transposed into Irish law by section 5 of the Competition Act 2002. The problem is the reliance therein on the issue of what is dominance. There is no clarity in that regard, nor could the Minister indicate what dominance is. That is why I tabled amendment No. 3 to detach the issue of dominance where there is, as I have suggested, "predatory pricing or any . . . unfair conduct in relation to price [this is the crucial bit] which is likely to eliminate or significantly reduce competition".

To detach that obvious anti-competitive practice from any notional threshold of the market is an important consideration. If the Minister of State will regard that as contradictor, as the senior Minister did on Committee Stage, he lacks the understanding to grasp my intention and that of most who have come to address this issue, that is, to create certainty in the law on this critical issue of the avoidance of predatory pricing, the elimination of competition and the creation of dominance in the market over time by wiping out

[Mr. Howlin.]

the competition, either in parts of the country or in the whole of the country.

From my perspective, this is the most critical issue. We debated the issue at length and I will not go through all the jurisprudence that the Minister bantered with us on Committee Stage. I seek this final opportunity for us on this side of the House to address real concerns which have not been addressed in all the utterances of the Minister on this issue to date, that predatory pricing will not follow from this enactment and that it will not create dominant players to the exclusion of smaller or weaker players in the groceries market henceforth.

Mr. McHugh: We are at the nub of the problem with this issue of predatory pricing. If it is not dealt with properly, it will allow the big bully-boy operators to force smaller operators out of business. It is as simple as that and it could not be put in simpler language. That is what will happen.

It is interesting that the Minister has removed himself from the situation today. He scampered out of the country because he probably could not face more criticism from, first, the Opposition and, second, his backbenchers.

Mr. Howlin: Sharing the blame.

Mr. McHugh: The Minister of State would have to agree that Fianna Fáil traditionally claimed to be on the side of the small man and woman, but this Bill gives the lie to that proposition. It is certainly official now that Fianna Fáil, including the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Ó Cuív, irrespective of what he might state later, is on the side of the big man and woman and to hell with the ordinary small operator, the small grocery man, the small supermarket or the small convenience store. That is the bottom line on this legislation. The issue of the dominant position must be addressed. If it is not, it will create problems and they will never be resolved.

Predatory pricing must be outlawed regardless of whether a player is deemed dominant. There should be no qualification in that regard. It is important that all predatory pricing be outlawed, whether that trader is dominant or not. That is a repetition of what I said. The reason I repeat it is that I want to impress it upon the Minister of State. I hope he will have sufficient leeway, in the absence of his senior Minister, to give way to some degree on this.

Another issue, which must be addressed in this Bill or which otherwise will be abused, is that there should be no restriction on offers. That is a clause which must be included in the Bill. Otherwise a dominant operator will use this to advertise a litre of milk for sale at 10 cent, for example, where there will be only one litre of milk for sale at that price and every other litre will be sold at a substantially increased price. That is unfair

competition. If somebody offers an item for sale at a greatly reduced price, then there should be an obligation on that operator to sell as many of those units as a person wishes to buy. That would soon cut out that kind of nonsense. If it is not included in this Bill and the Government does not ensure it is a practice in which one cannot be engaged, it will be used again to ensure that smaller operators will be put out of business and dominant players will remain. They will then do what they like because they will have eliminated the competition, and prices will rise. That is what will happen.

Mr. Morgan: I support these amendments. We all know that the large operators, the multi-nationals and the giants in the grocery trade, are especially devious and will do anything to squeeze out the smaller opposition. Unless we get the definition clear, smaller operators simply will not be able to muster the legal arguments. They will not even be able to afford them because they will be under so much pressure and they will be squeezed so much, so to speak, that their undertakings will not even be profitable at that stage. Unless we get it right now and give smaller operators some clarity on definitions, they do not stand a chance.

We have seen many times in the past how large operators are merciless in their marketing ploys and gimmicks. The consequence of that will be a much worse service for the people who deserve better. Smaller struggling retailers who provide jobs in local communities deserve better. I therefore hope that the Minister of State will consider these amendments carefully and take them on board.

Mr. N. O'Keeffe: I speak in favour of the amendments. Having taken my party pledge, I will honour it if there is a division.

Mr. Howlin: Speak in favour and vote against.

Mr. Morgan: People take the pledge as pioneers but they do not always keep it.

Mr. McHugh: Deputy O'Keeffe cannot be all over the place. He is with one or the other.

Mr. N. O'Keeffe: Deputy McHugh from Tuam is in a bigger hole on his side of the House than I am. He would not be on that side only for the queue in his constituency and that is why he is there. I want to be straight and honest.

Mr. Howlin: That is competition, which is allowed.

Mr. N. O'Keeffe: There are queues in our party in many counties. We do not have enough vacancies.

Mr. Hogan: That is what happens under the Competition (Amendment) Bill 2005.

Mr. N. O’Keeffe: Predatory pricing is not a problem for us. It might be for the smaller party and the Minister, Deputy McDowell, speaking in Waterford on Friday referred to predatory pricing.

Mr. Hogan: Exactly.

Mr. N. O’Keeffe: I am not a predator. I never was, nor was anybody belonging to me.

Mr. Hogan: They are running the show.

Mr. N. O’Keeffe: In fairness to the Minister, Deputy Martin, of whom mention has been made and who is away on business planned a few weeks ago, he probably inherited this legislation. It always has been the tradition in this country that one accepts what one gets when one goes into office and then one changes everything as one goes along.

Mr. Howlin: He did not.

Mr. N. O’Keeffe: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Killeen, to the House. I sympathise with him on taking this legislation as he comes from the small county of Clare——

Mr. Hogan: Exactly.

Mr. N. O’Keeffe:——where there are approximately 300 small grocers. I received a telephone call today asking was I to speak on this issue. I am reasonably familiar with Corofin and it is the Minister of State’s backyard. There was a councillor who had a fine business down that way at one time and I had to canvass him on a Seanad issue or something. Such people will be affected by this legislation.

Predatory pricing is a real issue and everybody in this House has agreed that something must be done about it. This is the House where we make laws and we cannot tolerate monopoly situations.

I have picked up a few figures. While I do not like naming companies, the turnover of Tesco in Europe is €37 billion. It is in this country to make money. In rural parlance, money makes the mare go. We can examine the performance of its shares on the stock market. It is big into predatory pricing. It will target a small shopkeeper causing him pain, anger and suffering and get him out of the way. It will then have a monopoly, but who will pay the price? The poor will become poorer and the rich richer. That will be the result of the policy because poor people will have nowhere to go. Shops are falling by the wayside daily in villages in north Cork and County Clare because of unfair competition.

I did not have time to read the competition report but it has more flaws than any report ever printed because it was a hurried job.

Mr. Howlin: The Deputy is right.

Mr. N. O’Keeffe: The report refers to Germany which has a groceries order. It has the lowest food prices in Europe serving a market of 90 million people.

The food industry will come under serious attack and small operators will be wiped out. The person who makes buns, jam, honey and other products will be affected by predatory pricing and monopolies. Predatory pricing is the central issue in this legislation. I fully understand the Minister of State’s position, having had the same role on a number of occasions. He must do what he is told, otherwise things go wrong.

Mr. McHugh: What about freedom of expression?

Mr. N. O’Keeffe: Freedom of expression is one thing that is left in the country. Everything else is gone.

The two for one mechanism will not work. People in rural Ireland will have to travel 30 or 40 miles for groceries and services. I appeal to the Minister of State to amend the legislation. My party has been the backbone of rural Ireland and it has always enjoyed supporting the small, entrepreneurial person. We have never been associated with big business, which will damage our society, grocery industry and small people.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul and other socially minded organisations, which I respect because they look after needy people in our society, are opposed to this legislation and they made presentations in this regard to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Enterprise and Small Business. If it were not for the committee chairman, Deputy Cassidy, we might not even be here. He put a mechanism in place to interview all the various agencies concerned with the order. Very few came up with proposals that would enforce what we want. This legislation has been imposed on us by an external organisation or by faceless people in another area. If the Minister had followed the joint committee, we would not be here now. This is an all-party committee comprising members of different political persuasions who have different views on society and ideologies but they support what I am saying. I fear we will have nowhere to get our newspaper, pound of butter or tea and sugar, which is part and parcel of the fabric of life. Predatory pricing must be ruled out. We will concede everything else if the Minister of State rules that out.

Mr. Killeen: Those who tabled the amendments made a particular case, which is contradictory. However, following the contributions of other Members, it is clear a concern is shared by all Members about the impact of predatory pricing, particularly where a firm might be in a dominant position. The political point was made about who is protecting big business and who is the saviour of small business and so on. Approximately, 2,500 small businesses have gone to the wall over

[Mr. Killeen.]

the past few years under the current regime, which some of the people who claim to protect small business also claim ought to be preserved. I have a difficulty with that logic.

Mr. Howlin: That is like saying one should cancel the ambulance service because people die in ambulances.

Mr. Killeen: That is an entirely inappropriate example as it pulls the emotive strings. It is grossly dishonest in the context of this legislation.

Mr. Hogan: That is not the word we would use. Is the Minister of State referring to the Minister?

Mr. Killeen: I refer to the example, not the Deputies or the Minister.

Even those whose intent is to be the saviours of the small player must concede that the consumer is the smallest player in this equation. Ultimately, the judgment that must be made in the legislation and the amendments is how best that is done in the short term and the long term. Members are concerned more about what will be achieved in the longer term by the predatory activities of a dominant player that ousts the competition and increases prices subsequently. That concern is best addressed by the legislation, as drafted.

Mr. Howlin: The Minister of State does not believe that.

Mr. Killeen: I do. I had the opportunity to be entertained by reading the Committee Stage debate. I had a discussion with the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment yesterday and I was briefed by officials. Like every Member who represents a rural constituency, I have heard conflicting views from various people and I had the opportunity to go into detail with a number of them on the points they made and examine the issue of dominance and the history of the groceries order. The more I examined the issue and considered cases raised, the more unsatisfactory I thought was the order. It should have been addressed long ago. Taking into account the necessity to have a long-term as well as a short-term solution to a series of difficulties, the manner in which the Minister has addressed them in the Bill stands the best chance. The amendments would considerably undermine the strength of the legislation.

Deputy Howlin discussed at length the issue of the threshold of dominance but it is difficult to pin down. It would be impossible to outline in legislation that, for example, a 25% share represented dominance.

Mr. Howlin: If dominance is a criterion and it cannot be defined, no protection is in place. That is the issue.

Mr. Killeen: I do not make that point.

Mr. Howlin: Of course not.

Mr. Killeen: Inserting a specific percentage to represent dominance would be entirely unsatisfactory.

Mr. Howlin: One cannot determine what is dominance and, therefore, the bulwark the Minister of State suggests is in place is not there. It is an illusion.

Mr. Killeen: The legislation contains a series of tests, which would be entirely destroyed by two of the amendments. It is impossible to deal with the two critical issues of dominance and predatory pricing without doing so in the context of the entire Bill. These issues also recur in later amendments but one cannot pick a sentence or two and make a fundamental change, which undermines not only the effect of this legislation, but, more importantly, the provisions of the 2002 Act, which, ultimately, are of great importance in the area of competition. The threshold can be determined by the various tests provided in the legislation and not by percentages. It is only of critical importance in the context of predatory pricing. A number of Members have failed to put the two together to make the equation that would create the difficulties they envisage and they have failed to give sufficient consideration and weight to the provisions of the legislation which address the issue considerably better than if these amendments were accepted.

Mr. Howlin: The Minister of State is beginning to sound like the Taoiseach. That statement has all the clarity of the Taoiseach.

Mr. Killeen: I am trying to deal with a number of entirely contradictory statements.

Mr. Howlin: The Minister of State is trying to pour smoke to cover an impossible wicket he has been given.

Mr. Killeen: I have been trying to deal with three separate issues.

Mr. McHugh: The Minister of State has our sympathy.

Mr. Killeen: It is difficult to defend against the cheap political shot with regard to who defends the small or big player. The amendments would also undermine the intent and efficacy of the legislation. Added to this, much woolly thinking represented on the issue so far in the debate has had the effect of undermining the case made for two of the amendments. It is hardly the fault of the Minister if there is no Irish case law to rely on in this area.

Mr. Hogan: There is one case.

Mr. Killeen: There are European Court of Justice rulings which, as everyone in the House is aware, apply here as they do in any other member state. Much of the language of the Bill reflects directly what is in European directives and, for that reason, benefits from the effects of European Court of Justice cases. If the Bill were written differently, it would not have that benefit. If it were written in the manner proposed by Deputy Hogan's long amendment, which seems to present the language of the section in more passive terms, that would have the effect of undermining the—

Mr. Hogan: The Minister of State does not believe that. He has been told to say that.

Mr. Killeen: I have not been told to say anything. I was given notes and background briefing—

Mr. Howlin: Can the Minister of State not just say he is against it too?

Mr. McHugh: The Minister should try to do something for Deputy Ned O'Keeffe.

Acting Chairman: Allow the Minister of State to respond.

Mr. N. O'Keeffe: When I spoke on the amendment I was thinking of Corofin village as the model.

Mr. Killeen: If I were to think of Corofin village, I would probably have to make a declaration of interest. I had better stay away from that element.

It is obvious the groceries order protected neither suppliers nor businesses given that so many of them closed, something people seem reluctant to acknowledge. I have come to the view that the issue of predatory pricing is one about which people pretend to be concerned. It seems the way the arguments are being pursued—

Mr. Hogan: The Minister of State should not say that about Deputy Ned O'Keeffe.

Mr. Killeen: I am speaking generally, but I will be specific if I must. Ultimately, the job we are charged with doing is to present the most effective legislation. I have extended to Deputies my

belief that everybody in the House is opposed to predatory pricing by those in a dominant position. I do not accept that these amendments serve in any way to improve the situation in that regard. In some cases they achieve the opposite. If amendment No. 2 were adopted, some of the catch-all provisions in part of it would have the effect of undermining the impact of the European Court of Justice case. It would also undermine existing legislation which is beginning to have a positive effect. We must be careful not to damage further the small player, generally the consumer.

On amendments Nos. 3 and 4, the case made by Deputy Howlin on predatory pricing by a non-dominant firm is a case difficult to sustain.

Mr. Howlin: Why is dominance the issue?

Mr. Killeen: Even if one were to take that as an if, which I do not, the benefit of predatory pricing for the dominant player can only be delivered on if the player is in a position and has financial muscle over a prolonged period to exclude others and force them to close. Not only would the firm need to do that, it would subsequently need to keep other players from entering the market.

Mr. Howlin: Does the Minister of State not regard Tesco or Dunnes Stores as dominant?

Mr. Killeen: It depends on whether they are involved in both areas. With respect, it is not my call to decide whether they are. The Competition Authority has a role in this and there is provision in the Bill to allow others who wish to do so to take a role in this area.

The small people are the consumers and there are many of them. There is much evidence they need protection. The way this Bill sets about providing protection is considerably more effective than any effect contemplated by these amendments. In these circumstances, I am not disposed to accepting amendments Nos. 2, 3 or 4.

Mr. N. O'Keeffe: The Minister of State has spoken about predatory pricing and dominance. Predatory pricing comes before dominance. It is after predatory pricing that dominant players enter the market and take over.

Question put: "That the words proposed to be deleted stand."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 69; Níl, 55.

Tá

Ahern, Michael.
Ahern, Noel.
Andrews, Barry.
Ardagh, Seán.
Brady, Johnny.
Brady, Martin.
Brennan, Seamus.
Browne, John.

Callanan, Joe.
Carty, John.
Cassidy, Donie.
Collins, Michael.
Cowen, Brian.
Cregan, John.
Cullen, Martin.
Curran, John.

Tá—*continued*

Davern, Noel.
 de Valera, Síle.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Dempsey, Tony.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Ellis, John.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Dermot.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
 Glennon, Jim.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Jacob, Joe.
 Keaveney, Cecilia.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Killeen, Tony.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Tom.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 McDowell, Michael.
 McEllistram, Thomas.
 McGuinness, John.

Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Donal.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M.J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Feargháil, Seán.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Donnell, Liz.
 O'Donoghue, John.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Keeffe, Batt.
 O'Keeffe, Ned.
 O'Malley, Fiona.
 O'Malley, Tim.
 Parlon, Tom.
 Power, Peter.
 Power, Seán.
 Roche, Dick.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Smith, Michael.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Dan.
 Wallace, Mary.
 Walsh, Joe.
 Wilkinson, Ollie.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
 Boyle, Dan.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Connolly, Paudge.
 Costello, Joe.
 Crawford, Seymour.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Gormley, John.
 Harkin, Marian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Healy, Seamus.
 Higgins, Joe.
 Higgins, Michael D.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 McCormack, Pádraic.
 McGinley, Dinny.

McGrath, Finian.
 McHugh, Paddy.
 McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Gay.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Murphy, Catherine.
 Murphy, Gerard.
 Neville, Dan.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Pattison, Seamus.
 Perry, John.
 Quinn, Ruairí.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Ryan, Seán.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Twomey, Liam.
 Upton, Mary.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Kitt and Kelleher; Níl, Deputies Kehoe and Stagg.

Question declared carried.

Debate adjourned.

Amendment declared lost.

Sitting suspended at 1.40 p.m. and resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Ceisteanna — Questions (Resumed).

Priority Questions.

Tourism Industry.

31. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the PricewaterhouseCoopers review of the regional tourism authorities; if the proposed changes will be implemented during the 2006 tourist season; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8511/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): As I previously advised the House in response to similar questions on 26 January 2006, individual actions and measures relating to tourism promotion or development at regional level are day-to-day functions of the State tourism agencies. To this end, Fáilte Ireland commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers just over a year ago to conduct a major study of regional tourism structures. The report was published last year and is available on the Fáilte Ireland website. This work was supplemented by a short engagement facilitated by a small independent group, chaired by Mr. John Travers, with the relevant parties to satisfy interests in the Dublin region that the mechanisms of consultation were complete.

The PWC report highlights the need for a much wider brief for regional tourism, with more emphasis on its strategic rather than administrative role and contributing more directly to national policy. It recommends a greatly increased emphasis on targeted marketing, product development and enterprise support. It suggests establishing an integrated linkage between regional tourism strategy and national policy and exploiting avenues to leverage increased resources.

At the end of July last, I authorised Fáilte Ireland to proceed with the proposed revision of regional tourism structures on the basis of the PWC and Travers reports. To assist this process, Fáilte Ireland set up an implementation group under the chairmanship of Mr. Finbarr Flood. The group has completed an extensive process of engagement with relevant parties, including the existing regional tourism authorities and industry representative groups, to smooth the process of implementation, and I understand that it will report shortly to Fáilte Ireland.

In tandem with this, Fáilte Ireland has begun the process of gearing up its internal structures. A new senior management position of director of regional development has been created and applications to fill the post have been invited in the

national press. A due diligence process will commence shortly with each of the regional tourism authorities. Fáilte Ireland expects that the impact of these changes will be experienced in the regions by the middle of the year.

This year Fáilte Ireland will invest more than €60 million in supporting regional tourism, from local festivals to building capability and strengthening the tourism product. The authority will channel in the region of €10 million of this sum directly into the regional tourism companies to strengthen and enhance their operational and marketing capabilities this year. This investment is designed to ensure both high quality visitor servicing at key tourist information offices and also a strong overseas promotional effort.

Both Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland will continue to roll out a number of very innovative schemes in 2006 which should heighten the regional impact of Ireland's marketing activities both nationally and overseas.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

The super-regions initiative launched last month is one of these.

The agencies will also maintain an opportunities fund of €1million to allow them to respond to regional opportunities which may arise during the course of the year and are not anticipated in current programmes. Fáilte Ireland has also announced a new €1 million local area marketing fund to support the industry in generating additional business in 2006 and 2007. In addition, it has an innovation fund of about €1 million, the immediate priority of which is to encourage innovation and investment across a range of new products with a strong emphasis on products designed to attract and hold visitors outside the mature urban tourism areas.

Recognising the importance of home holidays at regional level, Fáilte Ireland will invest €4 million to sustain the recent remarkable growth in the home market. It also plans to advertise domestic holidays and short breaks 44 weeks a year to reach and stimulate the impulse market. Fáilte Ireland's website, www.ireland.ie, generated 500,000 direct sales leads to the tourism industry during 2005. On the basis that activities and attractions — things to do and see — are central to increasing spend per visitor, Fáilte Ireland will continue to assist in product development, including developing and promoting looped walks, angling, festivals, cycling routes, equestrian, golfing and water-based activities.

Tourism Ireland, for its part, will invest an estimated €5 million in 2006 specifically to support promotion of the regions of Ireland overseas and will engage in additional co-operative marketing with all regions. Key activities include presenting and promoting a series of all-island tourist theme trails or "rainbow routes" to help tourists get the most out of their visit. Themes will include music, gourmet, literature, history, Christian heritage,

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

and houses and gardens. It will be cross-regional, thus further promoting and supporting regional access development as well as reinvigorating the car touring sector.

Mr. Deenihan: I thank the Minister for his reply and emphasise again the need to put the recommendations of the PWC and Travers reports in place as soon as possible. The Minister will agree there is no major divide between east and west in the area of tourism. The number of people taking pure holiday tourism is at a standstill, the growth rate of which was just 2% last year. These are the people who would typically visit regions such as the Minister's area in Kerry and other rural areas.

Does the Minister agree there is a worrying decline in activity holidays in Ireland? For example, in 1999, 254,000 people came to Ireland to play golf. In 2004, it was just 138,000. In 1999, 326,000 came to Ireland on walking holidays. In 2004, it was just 259,000. The numbers cycling decreased from 16,000 to 6,000 and the numbers angling, which is important for areas such as Kerry and Mayo, decreased from 173,000 to 93,000. Does the Minister agree there is a major problem with the spread of tourism? While the numbers may be increasing, the type of tourist has changed from a typical weekender to business tourism and visiting family and relations. The scenario has changed.

Will the Minister put in place immediately the recommendations of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report and ensure proper resourcing in order that these regions can be marketed? As a Minister from a rural area, will he emphasise the necessity of spreading the tourism spend in 2006?

Mr. O'Donoghue: There was a welcome increase of 6.5 million in the number of visitors to the country last year, which was the highest number ever to visit the State in one year. It is true, however, that all regions and sectors did not benefit equally and this is causing a difficulty for us. For example, the Dublin region increased by 11% whereas some regions increased only by small margins.

In those circumstances, I recently announced a new initiative, the creation of three new super-regions — Ireland west, Ireland south and Ireland east — the idea being that each would receive €1 million from Fáilte Ireland and would also be resourced from within the industry to market the regions as an individual unit in all our main markets. The object of the exercise is to bring more visitors into the regions and I am confident this will be successful.

We also announced a new local area marketing fund of €1 million. Again I anticipate the funding will be supplemented by the industry in due course. As I said in my reply, more than €60 million, the highest amount in the history of the State, is being invested through Fáilte Ireland in

marketing the regions. I am confident we will succeed in spreading the benefits of tourism to the regions to a greater extent this year than last year.

I agree with Deputy Deenihan that there is a fall-off in some activity holidays. In particular, there is a fall off in angling compared with 1999 figures. This is related to the paucity of salmon in the rivers. The fall off in hillwalking and general walking holidays is due to the question of the land of Ireland being open to all. In some instances this is not the case.

I am pleased that there has been an increase in golf tourism. Last year approximately 200,000 people came to Ireland to play golf, which was a record number. I anticipate the numbers will be even greater this year following the Ryder Cup in September of which we are set to take advantage. More than 400 golf courses in Ireland are affiliated and one third of the world's championship links courses are located in Ireland. The Ryder Cup offers an ideal opportunity to bring more into the regions because the majority of the golf courses are located in the regions.

Departmental Investigations.

32. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the terms of reference of the inquiry being undertaken by Mr. Tim Dalton into matters involving Bord na gCon; the progress made to date; when he expects to receive the report; if he intends to make changes to the structure or organisation of the board of Bord na gCon; if he is satisfied that sufficient procedures are in place to prevent doping or irregular practices in the greyhound industry to protect the integrity of the sport and ensure the continued confidence of patrons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8319/06]

Mr. O'Donoghue: On 31 January 2006, I requested Mr. Tim Dalton, former Secretary General of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, to carry out an independent assessment of issues relating to corporate governance in Bord na gCon as well as its management of positive tests for banned substances. The terms of reference of the independent investigation are as follows: to review the allegations of shortcomings in corporate governance practice at Bord na gCon made by the chief executive of the board in his letter of 18 January to the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism and the response dated 30 January 2006 of the chairman of Bord na gCon to these allegations; taking into account the possibility of legal proceedings taking place, to examine the circumstances surrounding the decision of the board of Bord na gCon on 26 January 2006 to terminate the contract of employment of the chief executive of Bord na gCon with immediate effect; to report, when and if possible in light of the said legal proceedings, the findings to the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism and, in any event, to advise on any actions considered neces-

sary to ensure adherence to best corporate governance practice; and to consider the way in which Bord na gCon procedures dealing with doping infringements are currently carried out, to comment on the adequacy of existing procedures and to advise whether there should be any changes or modifications put into effect.

While no precise timetable has been laid down for the completion of Mr. Dalton's investigation, I would expect to receive his report in a matter of weeks rather than months. I agree with the Deputy that the interests of the greyhound sector will be best served by having the issues which are the subject of the investigation resolved as speedily as possible. I intend to respond quickly to any recommendations made to me by Mr. Dalton. It will be appreciated however, that pending receipt of his report, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the structure or organisation of the board of Bord na gCon, the procedures in place to prevent doping in the greyhound industry or any other issues relating to the greyhound industry.

Mr. Wall: I thank the Minister for his reply. Will he receive only a final report from Mr. Dalton? Is there no interim report on the structure that has been put in place?

I understand there is no predetermined time for the appointment of the chairman of Bord na gCon. Why does this not apply in all other State agencies? Does the Minister accept that the problems that have arisen have damaged the greyhound industry? Are the anti-doping mechanisms in Ireland of the same standard as those in the United Kingdom? Has any effort been made to create a common denominator between the two jurisdictions given the exchange of greyhounds between the two countries?

Today's Order Paper lists many documents laid before the Dáil in respect of Bord na gCon's subsidiaries. Some refer to 2001 but are only being laid before the House five years later. I question why we should wait so long for the director's reports, which pertain only to the years up to 2004. What is the thinking behind this?

Has the board met since the controversy arose and what decisions has it made since then? Has the chairman honoured his statements to the effect that he would make public and transparent any test results available regarding drugs or their misuse in the greyhound industry? Has there been any contact with the Minister's office in this regard?

Mr. O'Donoghue: I understand Bord na gCon would have had a meeting or meetings since this controversy arose. There will not be an interim report but a final report, which I trust will be comprehensive.

On the question on the term of the chairman, Bord na gCon was set up on 28 May 1958 under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and

develop the greyhound industry. Its functions are set out in the legislation, which provides that the Minister appoint the chairman, who is to remain in office at the pleasure of the Minister. It is implicit that the Minister would have to have a reason to remove the chairman, if deemed necessary.

The report is being compiled by Mr. Dalton and I am awaiting it. I have explained that I will act upon his recommendations and I feel sure the House will have an opportunity to discuss the report, if it so wishes, following consultation with the Whips. I would not like to pre-empt or pre-judge the report and I look forward to receiving it.

National Stadium.

33. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if plans to build a national stadium in Dublin are contingent on planning permission to proceed with the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road stadium; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8593/06]

Mr. O'Donoghue: As the House is aware, in January 2004 the Government agreed, after considering a number of options, to provide funding of €191 million to the joint IRFU-FAI project for the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road stadium. Lansdowne Road Stadium Development Company, the company charged with the delivery of the project, has brought the design of the project to the planning stage and submitted a planning application for the project on 12 January 2006. At this stage, it is not possible to estimate the time required to complete the planning process or the decision of the planning authorities. It is clear that a successful outcome to the planning process is required to enable the proposed development to proceed.

As Deputies will be aware, the Lansdowne Road site has long been associated with sport because the first rugby international played there was in 1878. The new design for the stadium has been created in consultation with the different stakeholder groups that will be involved in and impacted on by the stadium. The concerns of residents have been taken into account in the design of the facility. The stadium is on four levels on three sides but sweeps down to one level at the north end to minimise the impact on those residents living in closest proximity to the stadium. The design also makes wide use of translucent and reflective materials, designed to minimise negative impact on the local area.

The increase in overall capacity of the stadium is small in that the current capacity is 49,000, comprising 24,000 seats and 25,000 standing spaces, whereas the new stadium will have a capacity of 50,000, all seated, which will bring significant benefits in terms of safety and comfort. The design proposed will deliver a building of iconic status and will ensure that the IRFU and the FAI

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

can use the site to its maximum potential. It will also provide improvements in urban design and landscaping in the area, including the improved Dodder walk and safer access to the DART facilities serving the stadium.

The planning process must now take its course. The project has so far proceeded on schedule and I am confident that the end of 2009 will see the completion of the redeveloped Lansdowne stadium, which will cater for the international rugby and soccer fixtures of the IRFU and the FAI. In the event that the planning process does not authorise the redevelopment of the Lansdowne Road stadium into a modern all-seated stadium accommodating 50,000, a scenario which is not countenanced, there are no plans to provide stadium facilities of the type required by soccer and rugby authorities at an alternative location.

Mr. Ferris: I thank the Minister for his reply. Given that many members of the GAA, particularly in clubs around the country, had reservations initially regarding the opening of Croke Park to the IRFU and the FAI, and given that it appears we are locked into a long planning process that may lead to court action, as has been indicated, and the consequent possibility that the stadium as envisaged may not be developed, does the Minister not consider it appropriate to have a plan B? Does he believe the Cabinet members should debate this, particularly because the issue was originally quite divisive among them and considering that the idea, primarily of Fianna Fáil, to proceed with a national stadium was scuppered by the Progressive Democrats? Will the Minister consider putting a plan B in place so this matter does not become divisive? It would be ridiculous if we had to restart the process of developing a national stadium in 2009, or perhaps later, owing to probable action in the courts on foot of sufficient local opposition. If the national stadium in question does not materialise, there should be an alternative option on the table.

Mr. O'Donoghue: The Government decided unanimously to construct the new stadium at Lansdowne Road — that much is clear — and it has committed €191 million in this regard. The GAA congress agreed to allow international home rugby and soccer games to be played at its stadium in Croke Park while the Lansdowne Road stadium is being redeveloped, but not beyond its development.

On the question of there being a plan B, the reality is that we have allocated the funding, a company has been set up to redevelop Lansdowne Road and the planning application has been lodged. We met all our deadlines to date or were very close to meeting them and I have no reason to believe there will be any difference on this occasion. It is obvious that the entire project depends on our obtaining planning permission.

Nobody can say whether it will be granted but it is relevant to state there is a stadium at Lansdowne Road, as everyone knows. When the proposed new stadium has been constructed, it will be a modern state-of-the-art stadium of which Ireland can be proud. Deputy Ferris asked whether there is a plan B — there is no plan B at the present time. If the redevelopment of the Lansdowne Road stadium does not proceed, consideration will have to be given to an alternative. It may well be that the alternative will be a return to Abbotstown or somewhere else. It would be entirely negative and self-defeating of me to draw up a plan B at this point. I do not think I should do that because it would be the height of pessimism. I remain positive about the planning application.

Mr. Ferris: The Minister's response has indicated that there is a distinct possibility — perhaps it is more than a possibility — that the agreement originally reached with the co-operation of the GAA means that Croke Park will be open to the IRFU and the FAI for the foreseeable future, perhaps much later than 2009. I asked the Minister about alternative arrangements because it is necessary for a plan B to be put in place at Government level, if not publicly, if we are to meet the requirements of the agreement that was worked out with the GAA, both politically and within the sporting bodies.

Mr. O'Donoghue: No agreement was worked out with the GAA in respect of the opening of Croke Park. When I delivered the final tranche of €40 million to the GAA authorities, it was given with no conditions attached. I made it clear at the time and I do so again now that any decision on the opening of Croke Park for soccer, rugby or any other game is entirely a matter for the GAA. It will continue to be entirely a matter for the GAA, which responded with a great deal of magnanimity and generosity. It is heartening that the GAA's central council honoured the integrity of the decision made by the congress of the GAA. I understand that it was decided to allow other sports to be played in Croke Park only for the duration of the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road. A new decision of the GAA congress would be needed to change that, which would be a matter for another day. In the meantime, it is full steam ahead with Lansdowne Road, as far I am concerned.

Sports Facilities.

34. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has commenced a national audit of sports facilities here as promised in 2002; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8513/06]

Mr. O'Donoghue: Work has commenced on the proposed national audit of sports facilities which is being undertaken by the Department of

Arts, Sport and Tourism as part of the development of a long-term strategic plan for the provision of such facilities. A commitment to undertaking such an audit was included in 2002 in An Agreed Programme for Government, which covers the period up to 2007. The subgroup established to oversee the detailed work of the audit comprises representatives of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, the Irish Sports Council, Campus Stadium Ireland and the Central Statistics Office. Expert assistance is being provided by local authorities. The subgroup has decided that the audit will be undertaken in a number of phases to speed up the availability of information. The first phase of the audit will be carried out largely within the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. It is likely that some external information technology expertise will be required to help to develop a database and map the data to be retained.

Completion of such a comprehensive exercise is a significant challenge for the Department, especially as its staff members face many other work pressures and commitments. In recognition of that fact, the inter-agency steering group decided to prioritise certain areas of work. The task being undertaken in the first phase of the project is the establishment of a record of national and regional sports facilities. That is being done immediately because we need to develop a comprehensive database on key strategic facilities as quickly as possible, not only if we are to put in place an effective long-term strategy but also if we are to maximise opportunities relating to the London Olympic Games in 2012. It is clear that many leading sporting teams are likely to decide over the next two to three years where they will locate their final pre-Olympic training camps. We will need to be in a position to promote what we have to offer by then. The first phase of the audit is likely to focus on key national facilities such as Croke Park, Lansdowne Road, the national aquatic centre, the national coaching and training centre in Limerick, Morton Stadium, the national rowing centre, the national basketball arena, the national hockey stadium, the national badminton centre and the national tennis centre. Other categories of facilities which will be included in the audit are the GAA county grounds, rugby and soccer league grounds, university sports campus facilities, sports centres run by local authorities, synthetic athletics tracks and swimming pools.

The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism is drawing on the experience of the Northern Ireland Sports Council, which embarked on a similar exercise in recent years. It emerged clearly from the Northern Ireland experience that it is important to be able to access databases which are already in existence. Time and cost savings can be secured by accessing information held by local authorities, Departments and sports groups in advance of the start of the audit. The work being undertaken by the Department is a data-

gathering exercise involving information in respect of facilities which have previously been funded under programmes administered by the Department.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

When the database has been finalised, the present state and condition of the facilities will be established by means of a detailed questionnaire that will be issued to their owners and managers. Ascertaining and mapping what is in place will be important in developing a strategic approach to future facility provision. It will help to establish the level of need that exists in the sports sector and to determine future priorities. Work on the development of a strategy for sports facilities has commenced. It is likely that the final report will cover a range of key issues such as the role of the sports capital programme, improved co-ordination and integration of funding among the various Departments and bodies, community access to school facilities, targets for the future provision of strategic facilities and other facility types and the impact of future funding. Discussions about the role of the sports capital programme and future priorities for facility provision have taken place with some of the key stakeholders. Meetings with additional stakeholders have not yet taken place. A position paper on the direction of the strategy is being prepared by the Department. I intend that a new strategy for provision of sports facilities will be in place for the 2007 sports capital programme.

Mr. Deenihan: I am sure the Minister will agree that the audit of sporting facilities is important for the future direction of sporting policy here. It may determine how moneys are spent in the future. The audit will reveal that vast areas do not have adequate sporting facilities. The provision of such facilities is not balanced throughout the regions. Over the past ten years, the investment of national lottery funds in sporting facilities has been based on whether a given area was in a constituency represented by a Minister. That was not the right basis on which to make such decisions. The Minister mentioned some of the facilities which will be covered in the audit. Can he confirm that facilities which are very important for the promotion of athleticism among young people, such as playgrounds, will be included in the audit? Will recreational facilities such as parks, walkways, canals, golf courses and equestrian centres be included in it? Will the audit cover both public and private facilities? It is important that all forms of facilities should be included because there are many private facilities here. Does the audit relate to public facilities only?

Mr. O'Donoghue: The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism is involved in a data-gathering exercise which will integrate information on

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

facilities funded under programmes administered by it. When the database has been finalised, the present state and condition of the facilities will be established by means of a detailed questionnaire that will be issued to their owners and managers. Deputy Deenihan suggested that there are no facilities in many regions. Since 1998, more than €390 million has been spent on the provision of sporting facilities in every city, town, village and parish. Some 4,923 facilities have received grant aid to date. Deputy Deenihan has to accept that the level of provision is significant.

Mr. Deenihan: I am not denying that, but some areas are getting more than others.

Mr. O'Donoghue: The sports capital programme gives special attention to rural areas of disadvantage covered by the CLÁR programme and urban areas of disadvantage covered by the RAPID programme. Increased levels of grant aid are allocated to such areas by my colleague, the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Ó Cuív. We are seeking to plug the gaps. The comprehensive audit of sports facilities will identify the needs and lacunae which exist. It is obvious that the Department will use the audit to determine how such gaps can be filled. I am sure the Government in office when the audit has been completed will take account of the gaps that will be identified in the audit.

Mr. Deenihan: Will the audit be all-embracing? Did the Minister indicate that it will relate only to projects funded through the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism?

Mr. O'Donoghue: Yes.

Mr. Deenihan: Surely that would not really constitute a thorough audit of this country's sporting facilities. It is critically important that all such facilities, including the facilities
3 o'clock I have mentioned like walkways and canals, should be covered by a broad audit. Will there be an audit of the sporting facilities in our primary and post-primary schools? I recently completed a survey of all the primary schools here which found that just 23% of them have sports halls. There is a major issue here. Without a sports hall in the school, young children cannot obtain the benefits of exercise and teachers cannot carry out proper programmes in the school. The audit should be all embracing. Every facility in the country should be audited and both primary and post-primary schools should be included.

Will the local sports partnerships be involved in the audit? The local sports partnership in County Kerry carried out such an audit on the schools in the county. The audit showed that 75% of the schools in Kerry do not have a PE hall on their

grounds, in spite of all the money that has been spent in the county.

Mr. O'Donoghue: Deputy Deenihan may have misunderstood what I am trying to say. The work currently undertaken by my Department is a data gathering exercise which will integrate information on facilities that have been previously funded under programmes administered by the Department. However, the audit will also seek to identify sports facilities provided by voluntary sports organisations, local authorities and private individuals, as well as sports facilities available in schools and colleges which have benefitted from grant assistance provided by the Department of Education and Science. Recording this data and making it available in a user friendly and accessible format will be a significant undertaking. An effective way to obtain information on key national and regional facilities is to conduct the audit in two phases. The type of facilities likely to be included in phase one represent key national facilities such as GAA county grounds, rugby and soccer league grounds, university sports campus facilities, local authority run sports centres, synthetic athletic tracks and swimming pools. Phase two will include sports facilities at a local level, including those in post-primary schools.

The audit will be a comprehensive body of work which will enable policy makers to map the location of the various sports facilities throughout the country, whether they are provided through voluntary sports organisations, are privately funded or have benefitted from the assistance of public finance. A better fix on the location of existing sports facilities will obviously lead to more effective targeting in the funding of new facilities, as well as a more efficient use of financial resources.

Mr. Deenihan: What is the timeframe for this audit?

Mr. O'Donoghue: The experience in Northern Ireland was that it took more than three years to complete the audit. The audit will take some time and there is no point in pretending otherwise. The first step was to assess what has been achieved under the Department's sports capital programme. That has been carried out.

Film Industry Development.

35. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the provisions made in the recently published Finance Bill 2006 regarding relief available for investment in film; his plans to extend the qualifying investment period for this relief beyond 2008; if the changes proposed require the approval of the European Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8179/06]

Mr. O'Donoghue: I warmly welcome the announcement by the Minister for Finance that

the amount that can be raised under the section 481 scheme is to be increased from €15 million to €35 million, and that a new limit of 80% of the total production cost will replace the existing limits of 55% and 66%. This will do much to restore Ireland's competitiveness in the international marketplace, particularly for medium to large-scale projects. I support the scheme, as it is critical to the future of Irish film-making. The extension of the scheme beyond 2008 is a matter in the first instance for the Minister for Finance. The changes proposed require the agreement of the European Commission.

Mr. Wall: I compliment the Minister on this issue. He always led from the front in ensuring this initiative would not be removed. These changes for 2006 will restore confidence in the film market. This is for a two year span until 2008, when it will then be removed. Would it not be better to review it rather than remove it? It takes years to plan a major film and this initiative is all about attracting some of the major American companies to make those films here. This initiative is far more beneficial and more interesting from the perspective of those companies, but if it is only available for two years, we may not get as much benefit from it as we think. It would be much better to state that the initiative will be reviewed on 31 December 2008, rather than that it will expire on that date.

I am aware the matter is for the Minister for Finance in the first instance, but does the Minister not feel it should be reviewed rather than expire at that stage? We are seeking to give confidence to the major film makers to come here. If the incentive is reviewed in 2008, we will attract most of those American companies which recently seem to be going to other countries.

Mr. O'Donoghue: Deputy Wall is correct to state that films are planned a long way in advance and that a certainty in the marketplace is necessary. People can be satisfied that this relief will continue. The former Minister for Finance, Mr. McCreevy, increased the cap to €15 million and extended the relief to the end of 2008. The current Minister for Finance has increased the cap to €35 million, which is unprecedented. He has more than doubled the relief available under section 481. I am deeply grateful to him for it, as is the film industry. The Minister recognised that to remain competitive, it was necessary to increase the cap significantly. He has increased it by a higher amount than any of his predecessors and that is indicative of his own commitment to the film industry. He also increased the percentage of the total production to 80%, which is very welcome. These factors all indicate the Minister's good faith towards the film industry. He would not have bothered increasing the cap at all if he had another motive and was thinking of terminating the relief.

The Deputy can take it from me that the Government has no intention of terminating the relief. If the Government is still in office in 2008, I believe that relief will be continued. I am pleased that we are again competitive in attracting inward film production. The benefits to the economy of such production should never be underestimated. Many people are influenced by films to come to Ireland. I sincerely hope the new arrangements ensure that Ireland receives a good share of large productions from the US and elsewhere. I recently visited Bollywood in India, where great interest was shown by those in the Indian film market in coming to Ireland. This will bear fruit in the not too distant future.

Other Questions.

Sports Funding.

36. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has made a final decision on increased funding for the community games; his views on the clear need for more funding for the games in view of the drop-off in the numbers of volunteers able to devote time to the games; if he has had discussions with representatives from the community games regarding the new strategic plan currently being formulated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8190/06]

Mr. O'Donoghue: The Irish Sports Council was set up as a statutory body in July 1999 with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards. The provision in funding for the Irish Sports Council in the 2006 Estimates is €40.9 million, in comparison to just over €13 million in 2000. The council provides funding to recognised national governing bodies of sport, including the national Community Games organisation. National governing bodies are dealt with as autonomous organisations and grants are allocated under agreed funding conditions and with specific priorities in mind. The grant allocation process is run on an annual basis by the Irish Sports Council, with national governing bodies submitting an application form covering their programmes for the coming year. My Department has no role in the level of annual funding provided to individual national governing bodies of sport.

In 2006, the national Community Games received a grant from the Irish Sports Council of €250,000, which represents the largest amount of grant aid given to the national Community Games by the council since its inception. This is in recognition of the work that has been done to streamline and modernise the organisation including the reduction of members on its executive. The council has been in regular contact over the last two years regarding the changes being

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

implemented as part of the previous strategic plan and will continue to be involved with the community games this year in developing the new strategy. The national Community Games have recently announced a new sponsorship arrangement with the Health Service Executive and this is to be welcomed as a very appropriate partnership. This increased funding will alleviate financial concerns for the future of the games and will give added recognition to the work of their many dedicated volunteers.

Mr. Wall: The Minister said he does not have an input into the funding for the games. At a recent function at which the famous founder of the Community Games, Joe Connolly, was honoured, the Taoiseach said an announcement of increased funding for the games had been expected but the issue was still being assessed by the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, Deputy O'Donoghue. I do not know whether the Minister or the Taoiseach is wrong on this issue but perhaps the Minister will clarify it.

Mr. Deenihan: The Minister is responsible when there is good news.

Mr. Wall: Obviously, the Taoiseach is waiting for a statement from the Minister about it. In the same press report in *The Irish Times* on 11 February 2006, grave concern was expressed by Donal Buggy, the chief executive of the Community Games, about problems with volunteerism and about parents being under extreme pressure, to the point that they are not encouraging children's participation in the Community Games.

The Community Games is a huge undertaking because of the variety of sports, which encompasses practically every sport one can imagine a child being involved in. There is a need for further funding from the Sports Council for the Community Games. It takes 20,000 volunteers per year to run the games, probably more than is required by any other sporting organisation in the country. This is important because the Community Games can determine what attitude a child will have towards recreational sport in the future. Is the Taoiseach correct that further funding will be made available or will it still be determined by the Sports Council?

The committee on arts, sport and tourism has discussed the issue of volunteerism. What can be done by the Minister's Department, the Sports Council and other organisations to revive volunteerism in Ireland? Nowadays, volunteerism is a major problem in every organisation. What can we do to reverse that trend? We spoke earlier about reversing a decision relating to the film industry. Given the number of sports involved in the Community Games, can an increased amount of funding be provided? This investment is important in fostering children's views on rec-

reational sport. The funding situation might also increase the number of volunteers attached to the games.

Mr. O'Donoghue: I am a great fan of the Community Games. Unlikely as it might seem, as Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform I was also involved in giving grant aid to the Community Games. Indeed, the current Minister today added to the funds which I, in that office, had allocated so between us we have allocated €800,000 to the Community Games at Mosney. The Taoiseach is correct that the amount allocated to the Community Games this year is the highest ever allocated by the Sports Council, at €250,000.

Mr. Wall: I will be looking at the newspapers in the next few weeks.

Mr. O'Donoghue: Volunteerism is an important issue. Few organisations of the country boast of a greater level of volunteerism than the Community Games. The men and women who volunteer to assist in sport are the true heroes and heroines of sport in Ireland. In that context, the Community Games movement has a registered adult volunteer complement of approximately 20,000 people and approximately 250,000 registered under 18 year old members. It has approximately 711 affiliated areas and, in 2005, the number of counties participating was 31. The sole exception was County Antrim.

With regard to volunteerism, the ESRI report prior to Christmas indicated that there are 400,000 volunteers in the country. That is a wonderful sign of how things are going in Ireland. In an age of materialism, the individual often transcends the community but in the case of these 400,000 people, the community clearly transcends the individual. The men and women who put up the nets, line the fields and put out the flags are the true heroes and heroines of Irish sport.

It is time we recognised the role of volunteers in sport. In that context, I am formulating plans to bring before Government with a view to examining whether we can create an appropriate awards scheme which would recognise not just the individuals concerned but also the individuals as representing the volunteers who give their time and effort to the children of the nation. These plans are well advanced and I hope to bring them to Government in the not too distant future so we can appropriately recognise the true heroes and heroines of Irish sport.

Mr. Deenihan: The Minister will be aware of the Oireachtas committee report on volunteerism which quantified the value of volunteers to the country. If they were to be replaced, it would cost the Exchequer approximately €250 million. That must make the case for additional funding. There is a great deal of burn-out among volunteers. People are getting frustrated because it is costing

them a great deal of money and, to a greater extent, time. The perception is that the Community Games, which has been one of the most positive movements in sport in this country with the GAA, is being sidelined. Will the Minister make a commitment today that it will be top of his priorities?

The report on obesity was produced approximately six months ago. It stated that 300,000 young people in this country are either obese or overweight. The Community Games would be an important vehicle for ensuring that this rate of obesity, which will lead to major health problems, including type 2 diabetes which is now manifesting itself in young children, will not continue into the future. There are compelling reasons for investing in the Community Games. The money provided at present is inadequate, despite what the Taoiseach said. Will the Minister give a more firm commitment in this regard than he has given thus far?

Mr. O'Donoghue: The amount of money allocated to the Sports Council for 2006 is the highest ever, at €40.9 million. Clearly, this gives greater scope to the Sports Council to fund various non-governmental organisations and bodies in the State. The Community Games is one example. The organisation has received the highest amount ever. It is also welcome that the organisation has been greatly facilitated by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the current Minister. In that context, a new contract for the use of Mosney was signed between Mosney Irish Holidays Limited and the Minister on 18 November 2004 to provide for the use of the facility at Mosney up to 5 June 2010. I greatly welcome that because this was one of the major concerns the organisation had when I was Minister in that Department. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and its various Ministers, including myself, have been as helpful as possible to the Community Games.

In the same way the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism has been hugely helpful to the organisation. Since 1999, the Irish Sports Council has funded the Community Games to the tune of €1,745,345. That is no mean achievement in the context of the funding that was available to the Sports Council over those years. The Sports Council decides how it will allocate its funding. I will bring to its attention what has been said by the Opposition Members today and see whether the council will, in its wisdom, decide to increase the funding even though the €250,000 for 2006 is the highest amount ever given. Some 500,000 youngsters are involved in the Community Games in any given year, which is a considerable number by any stretch of the imagination. I accept Deputy Deenihan's point that the games help to combat obesity and so on. The national Community Games are of immense importance. I acknowledge the role of Mr. Buggy, his officers, executive, volunteers and staff. Without the

games, there is no question that Irish life and the children of the nation would be the poorer as a consequence.

I want the Community Games to continue to thrive and I want more young people involved in them. It is sometimes forgotten that some of our greatest sporting heroes began their sporting lives in the Community Games. Sportspeople like Sonia O'Sullivan, Eamon Coughlan, Michael Carruth and Niall Quinn, to name but a few, started out with the Community Games. It is appropriate that we would continue to fund the games adequately.

Tourism Promotion.

37. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding his recent announcement that three new super-regions are to be created from existing rural tourism authorities to promote rural tourism; the efforts he is making to encourage more tourism to the regions; the amount of money to be allocated to fund new tourism initiatives in each of the new super-regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8180/06]

41. **Mr. Boyle** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his plans for the creation and funding of three new super-regions for tourism in this country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8242/06]

61. **Mr. M. Higgins** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the new €1 million innovation fund to support new developments and stimulate investment across the three new super-regions that have been created out of the existing rural tourism authorities; the precise schemes this money will be used to fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8185/06]

Mr. O'Donoghue: I propose to take Questions Nos. 37, 41 and 61 together.

Having good levels of tourism growth throughout the regions has become an increasing challenge for tourism policy. As a result, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland have incorporated a strong regional focus in their current strategies. In this year's Estimates, I obtained substantial additional funding to help the agencies address this challenge. Last week, I attended the launch by Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland of a number of marketing initiatives — the super-regions initiative, the opportunities fund and the local area marketing fund — which are designed to help improve tourism growth throughout the regions.

The operation of these programmes is a day-to-day matter for the tourism agencies and the regional tourism authorities. Details on the local area fund are available on www.failteireland.ie and fuller information on the other programmes

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

will emerge as the final details are agreed between the agencies, the regional tourism authorities and regional industry.

In case there is any confusion, let me be absolutely clear about last week's announcement in regard to the super-regions initiative. A super-region is a marketing concept, not an administrative structure. Therefore, the super-regions initiative is not about creating new structures at a regional level. It is purely a marketing initiative created by the tourism agencies and designed to present Ireland's regions more coherently to overseas consumers. I addressed the current state of play with regard to the restructuring of the regional tourism authorities in my earlier reply. The super-regions initiative will not impact on these structures.

At present, the country is divided into seven regional tourism structures for administrative purposes. These administrative divisions may not be optimum for marketing purposes overseas. Concepts like "Ireland west", "Ireland south" and "Ireland east" may have a greater chance of resonating with the foreign consumer than, for example, "Ireland south-east" or "midlands and east coast tourism". Basically, it is about making the marketing of regions simpler and, it is to be hoped, more effective.

From a policy perspective, I have long held the view that there is considerable scope for the existing tourism regions to work more closely together and to pool some of their marketing resources. The pooling of resources allows for campaigns with greater impact and also improves the chances of leveraging more funds from the industry, which is always desirable from an Exchequer perspective. Shannon, Ireland west and the north-west region could be said to have pioneered this concept last year when they came together to undertake a special strategic marketing initiative. The exposure and impact achieved by these three regions through pooling their funds and other resources far exceeded the sum of what they could have achieved individually.

It is important, however, that this initiative is not viewed in isolation but rather as one element of a much larger regional strategy being pursued by Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, several elements of which are designed to heighten the regional impact of Ireland's marketing activities both nationally and overseas. From the extra funding secured for tourism marketing, the agencies will maintain an opportunities fund of €1 million to allow them to respond to regional opportunities which may arise during the course of the year and which are not anticipated in current programmes. Fáilte Ireland is also introducing a new €1 million local area marketing fund to support the industry in generating additional business in 2006 and 2007. Full details of this fund, with application forms, are to be found on the Fáilte Ireland website.

Fáilte Ireland has an innovation fund of approximately €1 million, the immediate priority of which is to encourage innovation and investment across a range of new products with a strong emphasis on products designed to attract and hold visitors outside the mature urban tourism areas. Full details of this fund, with guidelines and application forms, are to be found at www.failteireland.ie.

Apart from providing a policy impetus in addressing the regional issue, I have no role in the administration of the funds and initiatives, and neither I nor my Department decide on applications to be supported or the detailed content of relevant marketing programmes. On the basis that activities and attractions — things to do and see — are central to increasing visitor spend, Fáilte Ireland will continue to assist in product development, including developing and promoting looped walks, angling, festivals, cycling routes and equestrian, golfing and water-based activities.

As I stated in response to an earlier question, these initiatives are being taken against a backdrop of a restructuring and refocusing of the delivery of tourism at regional level that will effectively lead to the provision of a one-stop-shop for the tourism industry in the regions, with strong regional representation.

Mr. Wall: I agree with the idea of centralising, for want of a better description, the different regions. However, I cannot understand how Ireland east can include Dublin with the other counties. From a marketing perspective, if an overseas visitor receives a listing in regard to Dublin, the midlands, the east and counties Cavan and Monaghan, that visitor will focus on Dublin. We will not break down the barriers that have existed for the short-term visitor who believes Dublin is the place to visit, and counties such as Kildare and Wicklow will lose out given the proposed format.

I cannot believe that Dublin was not given a separate identity to the east region. If that were the case, we would have a level playing pitch for the east region. The midlands is suffering at present. Visitors know of the south and the west and simply travel through the midlands. Particular efforts to draw in visitors have been made in Kildare with regard to race meetings at Naas, the Curragh, the Punchestown festival and elsewhere. I agree with the new initiative because it reduces the number of tourism areas from eight but I cannot understand the logic of including Dublin with the rest of the eastern region. Dublin will be the central focus, which will reduce the impact of other areas in Leinster and counties Cavan and Monaghan in Ulster. Dublin should have been removed and an Ireland east region should have been created, separate from Dublin, to accompany Ireland west and Ireland south.

The current proposal will do nothing for the other counties in the eastern region. Given that only €1 million is to be provided and given the

impetus of the Dublin area with regard to tourism, little funding will be left for the other areas, which include all of Leinster and Cavan and Monaghan. It does not seem logical to break down that amount of funding over such a large area. The focus of tourism seems to be on Dublin and the south and west. The midlands and the east coast counties of Wexford, Wicklow, Meath and Louth suffer accordingly.

The Minister said that the initiative is only a marketing concept and that the input of his Department is to provide funding to Fáilte Ireland. Does he not agree that the structure will do nothing to improve the focus on attracting tourists to the midlands, east coast and counties Cavan and Monaghan? Given the wide area involved, Dublin attracts most of the tourists at present. It has been said repeatedly in the House that we have not been able to draw tourists away from Dublin to the regions, which is why bed and breakfast accommodation providers are suffering. However, we are now placing them first in this regard. We put Dublin, the midlands, the east and Cavan and Monaghan after them. We did not even put them last, which might have given some context to the other areas. Can anything be done in this regard? Does the Minister agree Dublin should have been taken out of the super regions, leaving the other three regions to be funded accordingly?

Mr. O'Donoghue: The Deputy and I will need to agree to disagree. If I had taken Dublin out of the eastern region, I would have needed to ensure Dublin was marketed on its own. The market has completely changed. We now have cash-rich and time-poor visitors coming to Ireland. People are booking at shorter notice and coming for shorter breaks. I will deal specifically with the eastern region as requested by Deputy Wall. Dublin is the third most popular capital in terms of visitors. We have indications that it is becoming even more popular among visitors from the European Union and even beyond. I hope it will soon have a new conference centre resulting in additional visitors to Dublin.

Dublin is marketed with the east to ensure those interested in coming to Dublin are aware of an entire hinterland extending far beyond Dublin, which is of equal if not greater interest to a potential visitor depending on his or her preference. We are marketing not just Dublin, but the entire eastern region. To this extent the eastern region outside Dublin will have the advantage of benefiting from the attractiveness of Dublin. Equally visitors who may prefer to be predominantly in the countryside can decide to visit Dublin also, thereby benefiting Dublin. Dublin and the eastern region are marketed together to ensure they can gain a mutual benefit. People understand that they can compare and contrast and will have alternatives by coming to the eastern region. They can have an urban or rural experience or can have both.

It makes sense to promote the area as a region. In an international context we are seen as a very small dot on the periphery of Europe. Dividing the country into three super regions such as these makes perfect sense from a marketing perspective. Introducing super regions is not the only initiative. Fáilte Ireland is investing €60 million in promoting regional tourism in 2006. I believe this will be a record year for Irish tourism, all things being equal. I am interested in seeing a greater degree of equivalence between the regions and the sectors. In other words I want to see less disparity between the larger urban centres and the rural regions, which is best achieved by marketing each of the super regions individually to provide the contrast.

Mr. Gogarty: Like Deputy Wall, I have major concerns about marketing the eastern region together with Dublin. Given the Minister has agreed to disagree on that matter, I wish to place more emphasis on the midlands, an area of lakes, plains, rivers, mountains and bogs, which comes last in terms of tourism revenue and promotion even though it is one of the last remaining unspoilt regions in the country. All of a sudden the midlands have been swallowed into nothingness. In this context, how does the Minister plan to promote the midlands as opposed to the coastal region, if the midlands, *per se*, are not to be promoted?

Internationally it might make sense to spend €1 million changing the website and having nice glossy leaflets printed focusing on the southern region and referring to Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Kerry. While it might be acceptable for an American flying into Shannon Airport to think Gorey and Cahirciveen are twinned in some kind of cultural heritage, what about Irish people who remain a significant part of the tourism market? Will there be separate marketing of regions for Irish people or will we need to put up with the globalised system that throws in Wexford with Kerry, when as every Dub who goes to Courtown knows, there is a big difference between that area and Cork or Kerry? They should not necessarily be included in the same region.

The Minister mentioned the cash-rich and time-poor visitor. Without a proper public transport infrastructure, how is one supposed to get from Wexford to Kerry in any regional context? Given the location of Shannon Airport, it would make more sense to link Kerry with Limerick and Clare. As no rail network of any substance links the areas, people need to drive and it takes a long time to drive from Wexford town to Tralee. The Minister should ask his colleagues in Government to focus more on the product being delivered.

I had the privilege of going to Tralee for a Green Party national council meeting last Saturday. Owing to various delays, it took five hours to get down and the return journey took four and a half hours. To try to save time for everyone, I asked to be served eight slices of toast. The Irish

[Mr. Gogarty.]

person behind the counter said: "Get out of it. I'm too busy." He gave me half the amount. I gave him a €50 note and he looked at me. When I asked him what side of the bed he got out of, he said: "What's wrong with you? I'm doing you a favour". Meanwhile the Lithuanian or Latvian person serving from the trolley was the epitome of politeness and courtesy. While much remains to be done in upgrading our network so visitors can get to the regions, much needs to be done in educating and training our staff so the traditional Irish welcome, which is part of what we are, can be maintained. Otherwise we will have nothing to market.

Would the Minister agree that while it is all very well to apply the bells and whistles and introduce new globalised southern and eastern regions, if the core product no longer remains it is not worth a damn?

Mr. O'Donoghue: The core product very much remains. Last night I presented the CIE Tours International awards and I could not believe the satisfaction ratings, with up to 96% of people saying they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their holiday in Ireland and that they would recommend Ireland to a friend. We have probably the best product in the world.

Regarding the regions and rural tourism, the object of the exercise is to get more people into the regions. We are involved in an aggressive marketing campaign of the regions concerned, emphasising their respective advantages and attractions.

Mr. Gogarty: Is this campaign also aimed at Irish people?

Mr. O'Donoghue: A very serious marketing campaign is ongoing in Ireland, which we are not ignoring. While foreign revenue generated as a result of tourism stands at €4.3 billion, revenue from Ireland was at its highest level last year at between €1.3 billion and €1.5 billion, which represents a very significant market. The significance of the Irish market is not lost on me. The Irish tourist, more than any other, tends to go to rural areas, which is why we are making sure we market Ireland within Ireland.

On the other measures that we are taking to ensure that such places as the midlands benefit from the record numbers of visitors, we asked PricewaterhouseCoopers, through Fáilte Ireland, to examine our structures. It did so and reported to us that the seven regional authorities were fine as administrative entities but that it would be necessary for them to become much more involved than at present. It explained that it was necessary for them to engage in product development, enterprise support and, crucially, targeted marketing. We intend to implement the PricewaterhouseCoopers recommendations and, in that context, Mr. Fergus Flood has been asked to

chair an implementation group, which he is doing quite successfully.

Those recommendations should start to be acted on this summer. I am not saying that all the work will be completed this summer, but they should start to get rolled out then and be tangible so that the original tourism structures will be able to deliver what had been delivered mainly by Fáilte Ireland centrally. In short, we are doing everything possible to ensure that there is less disparity between the greater conurbations and the regions and less disparity within sectors, for example, the hotel and bed and breakfast sector.

National Stadium.

38. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the progress made to date with regard to the Lansdowne Road stadium refurbishment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8260/06]

51. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to recent developments regarding the proposed redevelopment of Lansdowne Road, specifically concerning the dispute between Wanderers RFC and the IRFU regarding the demolitions and relocation of their pavilion during the construction of the new stadium; if he has met the IRFU to discuss this or any other matter regarding such potential difficulties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8187/06]

53. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the progress regarding the Lansdowne Road stadium refurbishment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8264/06]

Mr. O'Donoghue: I propose to take Questions Nos. 38, 51 and 53 together.

I refer the Deputies to my reply to a priority question earlier today about the progress on the Lansdowne Road stadium refurbishment project. I am aware of the issues in the dispute between the Irish Rugby Football Union and Wanderers Football Club, and that discussions have been taking place between the parties.

I have been informed by the IRFU that it has made what it considers a very fair and reasonable offer to the Wanderers club. That included provision for a replacement clubhouse within the grounds, a grant to improve the Wanderers clubhouse on Merrion Road, financial compensation for the loss of income over the period of reconstruction, additional tickets for future matches and an extension of the current licence agreement beyond 2007 for the lifespan of the new stadium.

Those are issues which, in the final analysis, must be resolved by the parties directly involved and I have no intention of intervening directly or indirectly in the dispute.

However, I am disappointed that this matter should have been permitted to enter the public domain at a time of particular sensitivity for the planning of the new stadium.

Mr. Deenihan: I am sure the Minister would agree that the company he has appointed to provide the new stadium should have reached agreement with Wanderers Rugby Football Club before it started planning. That would be a matter of courtesy. As we all recognise in the House, Wanderers is one of the oldest rugby clubs in Ireland. Its clubhouse is a feature of Lansdowne Road and a major attraction. It is very much part of the atmosphere and ambience of the stadium. It is obvious that it would demand guarantees regarding its future accommodation within the new stadium.

Even at this late stage, perhaps the Minister might insist that the company, which reports to him, ensure that a resolution is agreed between the board of Wanderers and the company rather than simply the IRFU. It is the company that is charged with providing the new stadium. The agreement must be reached as soon as possible. If it is a matter of ticket guarantees, let the issue be resolved, as I am sure it can be.

This stadium debacle has been going on for too long and the last thing we want is that the main tenant of the stadium, Wanderers, which has been there since 1922, even before the IRFU, should be embroiled in a planning permission battle with the company that could result in the question going to An Bord Pleanála. I would obviously be very concerned at any objection from Wanderers, perhaps even more so than at other objections. It is very important that this is resolved as soon as possible. Perhaps the Minister will request that the company ensure it happens.

Mr. O'Donoghue: Lansdowne Road is the oldest rugby stadium in the world, and Wanderers is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, rugby clubs in Ireland.

Mr. Deenihan: It is the fourth oldest.

Mr. O'Donoghue: It is particularly sad that agreement could not be reached between the IRFU and Wanderers, given the history of rugby in Ireland and the inextricable link between Wanderers and the IRFU. In that context, it is important to point out that the IRFU has been engaged in talks with Wanderers for over 14 months. The IRFU put before Wanderers what it considered a very fair offer. I have outlined what that offer comprises. I sincerely hope that differences can be resolved. The last thing that Lansdowne Road requires at present is a civil war.

Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.

Adjournment Debate Matters.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 21 and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Devins — to discuss the closure of Shehan Media factory in Sligo with the loss of 91 jobs; (2) Deputy English — to discuss the issues arising from the closure of NEC Semiconductors, Ballivor, with the loss of 350 jobs; (3) Deputy Stagg — the condition under which a school (details supplied) in County Kildare has to operate; (4) Deputy Cowley — to ask the Minister if she will reconsider providing free health care for the estimated 100 women desperately ill with hepatitis C; (5) Deputy Cooper-Flynn — to ask the Minister if he will revise the terms of the water services pricing policy; (6) Deputy Finian McGrath — the need to publish the Farrell Grant Sparks report on the Marino Institute of Education; (7) Deputy Ó Fearghaíl — the need for the Minister to review the operation of the capital loan and rental subsidy scheme; (8) Deputy Boyle — to ask the Minister the reason that primary and secondary schools in the Cork South-Central constituency (details supplied) are being left in an administrative limbo; (9) Deputy Andrews — to ask the Minister if she intends to address the low level of mental health services in the HSE east coast catchment area; (10) Deputy Gogarty — the need for the Government to order a nationwide audit of domestic gas installations from meter to house; and (11) Deputy Eamon Ryan — to ask the Minister his role regarding a possible takeover of Eircom plc and on the possible splitting of the company.

The matters raised by Deputies Devins, English, Stagg, and Finian McGrath have been selected for discussion.

Further and Higher Education: Statements.

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I am delighted to have this opportunity to address the House on recent developments and current issues in higher and further education.

It is important at the outset to put the issues in these sectors in context. We live in a fast-changing world. Ireland has been transformed over the past decade from an underperforming economy at the periphery of Europe to a wealthy, prosperous outward-looking country that ranks among the richest in the EU. As Deputies on all sides of the House appreciate, we now face major challenges in sustaining our success. The Irish model is being emulated by low-cost competitors around the world. We now need to look to new sources of advantage for our future economic and social prosperity. Knowledge, innovation, creativity and workforce skills will be Ireland's key success factors in future. That places our higher and further education systems in a pivotal role as providers of our key national resources — skilled people, knowledge and the ability to put it to use.

[Ms Hanafin.]

In this modern knowledge age, opportunities for lifelong learning are critical to personal opportunity and to meeting the demands of the workplace. The concept of a job for life is increasingly redundant. An ability to adapt and to learn is now the most essential of workplace skills.

Our higher and further education systems are now, therefore, essential contributors to national well-being. The benefits of lifelong learning for personal enrichment and development are well demonstrated. At a wider level, lifelong learning is key to building the overall skill levels of the population to meet our growing needs as a modern, high technology economy. Beyond the marketplace, it is central to wider personal and societal development through the promotion of social inclusion and citizenship.

The Government recognises, therefore, the major national importance of promoting greater participation and improved quality in higher and further education. I want to look at some of the relevant developments in each of those sectors in turn.

It is important to record that our higher education system has come through a period of major expansion. It has been transformed from an elite sector of fewer than 20,000 students in the mid-1960s to a system that now caters for more than 130,000 students and a majority of school leavers each year. That has been a major factor in our ability to attract inward investment in the high technology growth sectors that have been at the foundation of our current economic success.

The Government has continued to invest in the next phase of our development by continuing that expansion over recent years. More than 30,000 additional third level places have been created since this Government took office in 1997. Overall annual investment in the sector has more than doubled over that period and now stands at some €1.7 billion for 2006.

The Government recognises that, in seeking to develop future competitive strengths in the global knowledge era, a determined approach to investment in our skills, creativity and innovation capacity needs to be sustained. The Government's strategic ambition for Ireland is that we continue to develop as a world-leading knowledge economy. To achieve that and to enjoy the consequent social dividends, we need to produce quality skilled graduates at third level and quality researchers at fourth level who are able to serve the high value needs of the emerging sectors of the economy.

We want our higher education system to be at the front rank of international performance. That objective prompted the Government to commission a wide-ranging OECD review of our higher education system. The resulting report of September 2004 set out the major challenges facing us if we are to achieve this goal. The report identified the key issues of strategic objective setting and oversight, internal decision making pro-

cesses, organisational structures, governance and investment. As a Government we have clearly signalled our intention to take on these challenges. Responsibility for the day-to-day management of the institutes of technology will be transferred from my Department to the Higher Education Authority under new legislation that is currently being finalised. This will facilitate a unified strategic policy framework for the sector and allow the gradual devolution to the institutes of technology of greater academic and managerial autonomy.

The strategic agenda for change and reform in our higher education institutions that we have set out is being aligned with our policies for investment and funding so that we support the successful transition from a technology importing, low-cost economy to one based on technology and innovation. Recent funding announcements have given significant impetus to this. As Deputies are aware, additional investment in higher education of €1.2 billion over the next five years, on top of the existing €1.6 billion per annum expenditure, was announced in the 2006 budget. Of the new money, €300 million over the next five years will be allocated to the new strategic innovation fund that has been established for the sector. The fund will drive the transformation of our higher education system by promoting collaboration and change both within and between institutions.

Achieving the desired change is a complex and challenging task but higher education institutions will be able to avail of the fund to support the following key objectives: to incentivise and reward internal restructuring and rationalisation efforts; to provide improved performance management systems; to meet staff training and support requirements associated with the reform of structures and the implementation of new processes; to implement improved management information systems; to introduce teaching and learning reforms including enhanced teaching methods, programme re-structuring, modularisation and e-learning; to support quality improvement initiatives aimed at excellence; and to promote access, transfer and progression and incentivise stronger inter-institutional collaboration in the development and delivery of programmes. The criteria for competitive awards under the fund will place a core emphasis on promoting inter-institutional collaboration so that we can build world class strength within the Irish system by drawing on the collective strengths of our institutions. The overall objective is to achieve new levels of performance at third level.

Building on this, we want to develop a new fourth level system of advanced research and development that can be benchmarked against the highest international standards. The research landscape in higher education has already been transformed under this Government with the establishment of the programme for research in third level institutions, PRTL, Science Foundation Ireland and the two research councils. Since

the launch of the PRTL in 1998, funding of €605 million has been awarded, 33 new research centres have been opened, approximately 800 researchers have been funded and 62 new and expanded research programmes and some 40 new inter-institutional programmes have been established.

The Government recognises the strategic importance of continuing to enhance our national research and development effort at fourth level, which is essential to enhancing Ireland's international reputation as a knowledge hub. An ambitious new national research plan is to be considered by a Cabinet committee shortly and investment in our intellectual capital through higher education will be a central objective of the successor national development plan now being prepared. I look forward to returning to these issues in this House as we continue to pursue these fundamentally important objectives for Ireland's future economic and social prosperity.

In pursuing these objectives, the provision of continuing investment in the basic physical facilities on our third level campuses around the country will be an essential foundation. The budget day announcement included £900 million in capital funding for higher education projects as part of my Department's five year envelope for 2006-10. In all, a total of 53 major capital projects across the system will be progressed by 2010. The capital funding available will also be used to deal with emerging priorities in the context of the overall national strategy for higher education.

In tandem with the expansion and development of higher education, the Government has created a range of enhanced opportunities in the further education sector for people, adolescents and adults alike, who wish to progress educationally. The post-leaving certificate sector provides important opportunities for young people who want to enhance their qualifications and employment prospects or who need an alternate route of entry into higher education. The number of PLC places has increased by 60% since 1997 and now stands at more than 30,000. Such courses provide an important supply of skills to the economy, with some 1,000 courses ranging across approximately 60 disciplines. The sector is well positioned to make a major contribution to developing the future skills required by the economy and it already plays a key role in providing occupationally relevant education to a substantial body of school leavers. PLC courses have also become an important re-entry route for older adults who wish to return to learning. Through local community based access and the provision of education and training programmes in areas of niche need, the PLC sector has become an increasingly important element of Ireland's education system.

Bringing more of our adult population back into education is a prime objective for the Government for social inclusion and economic reasons. Since 2002, we have established a net-

work of posts of community education facilitators to develop community based education opportunities nationwide. Some 35 of these posts are now in place across the vocational education committees. In addition, 35 adult educational guidance service projects are now in place for clients in literacy and adult education programmes and other programmes under the vocational training opportunities scheme, VTOS. Investment in adult literacy has increased from just €1 million in 1997 to €22 million in 2005 and the number of clients availing of adult literacy services has increased more than sixfold over that period. During tomorrow's world book day, we will all want to celebrate the literacy achievements those people have made.

In our knowledge society, the availability of a variety of learning pathways and opportunities at all ages has taken on a new importance. The role of further and adult education is pivotal. The establishment of the national framework of qualifications has been hugely significant for learners in the sector. It has opened up whole new possibilities for access, transfer and progression across all levels of learning and it has created new life-long learning opportunities for traditional and non-traditional learners alike. The Minister of State, Deputy de Valera, has been particularly committed to the continuing development of a strong and vibrant PLC sector as part of these efforts to open up learning opportunities. For my part, I know that the VEC in my Dún Laoghaire constituency, as perhaps the only VEC in the country that does not include a second level element, is very committed to expanding the number of places that it offers and to developing the sector.

Following the McIver report's series of far-reaching recommendations, I know the main partners engaged significantly in identifying priorities for progress. Clearly, complex issues are involved, given the scale and the wider impacts of the recommendations and the challenge presented by the variation in sizes of PLC providers. In mapping the way forward on these and other issues, the over-riding priority that the Minister of State, Deputy de Valera, and I share is to continue to enhance educational opportunity for learners across the further and adult education sectors. As Deputy de Valera will explain further in her speech, a reflection of that is the fact that non-pay expenditure for the expansion of services across these sectors has been increased by €10 million in 2006.

Enhancing access to further and higher education will continue to be a fundamental priority for achieving a more equitable and inclusive society and sustaining a vibrant knowledge economy. The expansion of opportunity to progress to further and higher education has grown with each generation. In 2003, participation in higher education among the school leaver age cohort stood at 54% and a further 13%, approximately, progressed to post leaving certificate programmes.

[Ms Hanafin.]

Funding on access measures, including the student support schemes, has increased from €98 million in 1998 to some €250 million per annum at present. The rates of grant have also increased significantly, from a maximum of €2,098 in 1998 to €5,355 in 2005. There is good emerging evidence of the impact of these measures on participation rates among the lower socio-economic groups.

An important factor in further enhancing access will be an increased emphasis on creating awareness among potential further and higher education students of the supports available to them. I have asked the national office for equity of access to develop and launch a new information campaign in 2006 which will provide more accessible and user-friendly information on the range of financial supports available to students of all backgrounds and circumstances in further and higher education. The full range of supports available will be explained clearly through a range of formats including posters, pamphlets, web-based information and media coverage through a vast network of information points. Members are also aware of the preparation of legislation regarding the grants system.

Unprecedented investment is now being made in our higher and further education systems. The development of the knowledge base to support

4 o'clock Ireland's future growth strategy is a major policy priority for the Government. It is investing in basic research and teaching infrastructure and is promoting excellence through system-wide collaboration and change. It intends to widen access to further and higher education opportunities and to create a new vibrant fourth level sector. These are fundamentally important long-term investments in securing Ireland's future prosperity and in building a cohesive 21st century society. Along with those who will deliver such systems in our further education and higher education sectors, we can look forward with optimism to a society of which we will be proud to be a part.

Ms Enright: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the House on the subject of further and higher education. Everyone in the country relies to a greater or lesser extent on our education system. Generally, the public is very clear on the role played by primary and secondary schools, and increasingly by the third level education sector. However, it may be less clear on the importance of the further education sector.

While this should be challenged, unfortunately the Government has not fully recognised the potential offered by the further education sector. Instead of concentrating on ways to support the development of the further education sector, previously the principal concern has been to cap places on PLC courses which restricts access to further education and affects funding to further education colleges.

In 2003, the Government was presented with a report on further education, namely, the McIver report. As the Minister is aware, the report was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science. The McIver report envisaged further education as a distinct sector in the education system operating under a council of further education colleges, with enhanced staffing and information technology provisions. The report also envisaged education being facilitated both at college and in other locations, as well as through a mixture of distance learning and attendance at centres. This is crucial in terms of accessibility, particularly for regions which do not have ready access to other educational institutions.

Importantly, from the perspective of access to education, the McIver report looks forward to a time when further education colleges will have the teaching capacity to deliver courses all year round from morning to evening and at weekends. What better way to make our colleges real living active environments and to get the best value for money from our buildings and campuses, than by ensuring that our institutions are used as much as possible?

Further education plays a particularly important role in bringing educational opportunity to thousands every year throughout the country. As the Minister is aware, a higher percentage of mature students return to education through the VEC and PLC route, gaining valuable qualifications that enable them to return to the workplace or to change employment. In addition, the further education sector can devise new courses at short notice, providing training to people in business-related skills that change constantly and which may be needed in a particular locality. However, to do so properly, the further education sector needs greater flexibility, funding, autonomy and support. None of the extra funding announced in the last budget went towards the implementation of the recommendations of the McIver report. This was a huge disappointment, and a missed opportunity.

The colleges of further education also require a far higher level of technical expertise. While they have received funding for technical equipment, which is welcome, they struggle to maintain this equipment or to fix any difficulties encountered, without suitably qualified staff. In addition, staff at colleges of further education are employed on the same contracts as teachers at second level schools. This contract structure is not suitable, as further education colleges require a different staffing structure as their remit is so substantially different to second level education. Further education must also be put on a statutory basis.

The colleges of further education are anxious that the recommendations of the McIver report be implemented in full. However, many further education colleges recognise that this is not an "all or nothing" situation. This is also true of the many groups which I have met which represent

those who teach in such colleges. They wish to meet the Minister and her departmental officials to discuss a staggered implementation programme for these recommendations, with a view to eventually having the report fully implemented.

The Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Deputy de Valera, has stated she is in consultation with representatives of the further education sector. I have questioned her in the House a number of times in this regard, as has Deputy O'Sullivan, as I have heard otherwise from the colleges and representative groups. I ask both the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Hanafin, and the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Deputy de Valera, to engage with the representatives of the colleges to discuss the McIver recommendation — which could be implemented now — to draw up a plan for short to medium term implementation and for full implementation in the longer term. This sector has grown and risen on its own initiative. One could almost state that this originally took place more by accident than by design. It has grown without major planning on the part of the Department of Education and Science. However, if the sector is to go further, it now requires greater input from the Department. To conclude my remarks as they relate to further education, action to support the further education sector should be taken and the development of the sector should be underpinned by implementing the recommendations of the McIver report.

For Ireland's future success, it is widely acknowledged that education will be critical. This involves investment in education at all levels which will bear fruit in terms of later engagement in further and higher education. In 2004, the OECD produced a report which recommended change in a number of areas at third level. This report indicated, *inter alia*, that Ireland's investment in the education system as a whole is lower than the OECD average. In public expenditure it ranks only 25th of 30 OECD countries. Between 1995 and 2000 public expenditure declined from 4.7% to 4.1% of gross domestic product. Expenditure per student in tertiary education is also below the OECD average, with Ireland ranking 14th of 26 countries. Moreover, Irish expenditure on research and development as a proportion of GDP is well below EU and OECD averages. However, I acknowledge the changes announced in the budget last December in this respect. Worryingly, the proportion of mature students entering higher education is still extremely low. Great disparities exist in the third level participation of students from families of different socio-economic backgrounds. These are some of the findings of the OECD report which should be borne in mind in this debate.

In addition, we must be mindful that as children and young people are lost from the education system at primary and secondary level, the

potential for their later engagement in third level education is severely restricted. Making better universities and institutes of technology requires a multipronged approach. Not only will we be obliged to focus on funding at third level as well as reforms of management and research, we must also tackle the problem of disadvantage much earlier in the education cycle.

There is still an unhealthy imbalance within our education system which stymies the personal development and future career prospects of thousands of children born into families with financial constraints or in disadvantaged areas. By failing to support all children who might have the wish or talent to proceed to third level but who need greater State intervention to achieve this, our society squanders their talents in an entirely arbitrary manner.

Educational research published in late 2005 showed that some schools have a 60% drop-out rate. In addition, the leaving certificate retention rate for those entering school in 1996 declined when compared with the 1994 cohort. The Government has a clear responsibility to increase the numbers finishing school and has made commitments under the Lisbon Agenda to make this happen. However, children drop out even before entering second level schooling. Currently, more than 1,000 children do not even make the transition from primary to secondary school. This reflects a sharp increase in recent years. This is particularly important, as at second level we can at least infer that some who do not complete their leaving certificate go on to apprenticeships or into employment. However, the 1,000 children who do not make the transition from primary level is more worrying, because they obviously do not enter legal employment. There is also a sharp urban-rural divide in terms of retention rates to leaving certificate level. The retention rates in Dublin city of 69%, and in Limerick city of 72.9%, are far behind those of Mayo and Westmeath, which have rates of 84.6%, and of Roscommon, which has a rate of 85.9%.

I am also deeply concerned at the gender gap in school completion, where only 72.1% of males staying on for the leaving certificate compared with 83.3% of females. This is a gap that must be bridged. Otherwise large numbers of young men will continue to enter adulthood with greatly diminished opportunities. The failure to finish school and the growing problem of the number of children failing to make the transition from primary to secondary education impacts considerably on their later engagement with third level or further education.

How are we meeting the needs of children with special educational requirements? Some 50% of the primary schools still have no access to the National Educational Psychological Service. What chances have children being left behind in primary school of going on to college, university or further education?

[Ms Enright.]

Returning to the OECD report, it is fair to say that this report underestimated the role of the humanities in higher education. In planning for the future in higher education, we must avoid the trap into which perhaps it would be easy to fall of considering higher education simply as an economic means to an end. The role of the humanities must still be an integral part of the higher education system and must be valued on an equal footing. This point, while acknowledged by the OECD report, was not put forward in any detail and was to some extent glossed over by it. We must be in no doubt that higher education in all disciplines is always worthwhile.

As well as education being a pathway through which knowledge is transmitted, recent reports from the Royal Irish Academy also recognise the need for knowledge to be created. This is also fundamental for the future development of higher education in Ireland and when it comes to research activity, Irish third level institutions compete, not only on a national and European stage but on an international stage.

I welcome the fact that in the recent budget the Minister for Finance finally started to recognise the importance of fourth level education. This is crucial. I can only ask that the Government, the PRTL, Science Foundation Ireland and the research councils be brave in their approach to research. It is crucial to the development of this country and to the fostering of a thinking entrepreneurial society.

The Government should make a clear statement also that any moneys raised privately by third level institutions will not be offset by a lower contribution from the Exchequer. This is of considerable importance. This statement would ensure that universities and institutes of technology would continue to possess an incentive to raise moneys and would not feel that being more successful at fund-raising would result in a cut in their Exchequer funding. Will the Minister for Education and Science consult her colleague, the Minister for Finance on this issue?

I also welcome the strategic innovation fund which was announced as part of the 2006 budget and which the Minister dealt with in this debate. She outlined the key objectives of the fund and mentioned that the criteria for competitiveness awards under the fund would place a core emphasis on promoting inter-institutional collaboration to build world class strength within the system. Will the Minister come back to the House at a later stage with examples of exactly how she intends this fund to work?

Ms Hanafin: It is competitive.

Ms Enright: While I recognise it must not be overly prescriptive given it relates to the idea of research, I ask her to give it clearer guidelines.

On the question of structural changes, the funding of the institutes of technology under the

Department of Education and Science is not satisfactory. It is inevitable that for as long as this situation is maintained, the IT sector will be overlooked. The focus of the Department of Education and Science has been traditionally on primary and second level education and it will take a little time to change. I welcome the fact that the Minister has stated that this legislation is being finalised and I look forward to it coming through this House.

Every university cannot necessarily be the leading national authority in every subject area. While universities should be broad institutions in every sense, including in the type of subjects offered, some element of specialisation could also be of assistance in attracting research funding, particularly when competition for funding is fierce internationally and we are competing at that level.

The tiny level of mature students entering higher education is also of great concern. The OECD report noted that the proportion of new entrants into university level education aged 26 and over was only 2.3% in 1997 compared with 19.3% in the OECD as a whole. Meeting Lisbon Agenda targets will be impossible without increased funding to third level from the Exchequer as well as increasing the level of private funding to higher education. Trends in the third level sector point to the increased importance of promoting enterprise and fostering research in the universities and institutes. We need to enable the third level sector to respond quickly and innovatively to change. We need to allow the sector to build relationships with business and enterprise where these will benefit both parties. In short, we need to ensure the sector is given the tools it needs to carry out the demanding responsibilities placed on it. I also welcome the Minister's comments on collaborations between institutions.

In recent years our society has been vastly altered. It is easy to focus on the most obvious changes — the wealth, type of work done, the predominately urban way of life and mass travel — but large-scale access to education has been, without doubt, a catalyst for many of the greater achievements and changes seen in the latter half of the 20th century.

In recognising the important role education plays in society for its own sake and that the pure pursuit of knowledge is always to be supported, we should also acknowledge that economic success can be underpinned by the education sector. This does not undermine the concept of education, rather simply reinforces its importance, not only to the individual, society and culture but also to the economy.

Ms O'Sullivan: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate and I want to touch on some of the issues addressed by both the Minister and Deputy Enright.

I welcome the fact that we are discussing higher and further education together because one of the difficulties is that we tend to sectoralise the different parts of education. The further education sector, in particular, has suffered because it is seen separately from the higher education sector. Even within the latter sector there is the fraction between the institutes of technology and the universities.

Like Deputy Enright, I welcome the fact that the institutes of technology will come under the Higher Education Authority. Perhaps the Minister, in replying, might indicate when we can expect that legislation to come before the House so that at least the two sectors can be more seamlessly integrated. I hope there will be further action on a more seamless approach to education in general and in particular on the further education sector which needs to find and be given its important niche in the context of the spectrum of opportunities in education for young people.

I too would begin by addressing the issue of the further education sector colleges being treated like second level schools, the difficulties the sector encounters as a result and the recommendations in the McIver report that the sector should be treated separately, as it is by most neighbouring European states. There the further education sector is a productive sector in terms of responding to the needs of the economy and to the needs of students who may not be in the 500 points category but who have a real future and in many ways also can use further education as a pathway to higher education. That is the way it operates in this country at present but it has grown in an *ad hoc* manner, developed largely by the vocational education committees without proper funding and structures.

When the McIver report was published in 2003, there was a real hope that the further education sector would be put on a proper footing. There was a particular hope in the approach to the recent budget that the €48 million required to undertake, or at least commence, the major reconstruction work would be provided. From speaking to representatives of the TUI, for example, I know that they were given to expect that the funding to which I refer would be in the budget this year. It did not happen as expected and there was considerable disappointment, not only for the people working in the sector but also for the 30,000 students in the further education sector. They do not possess the simple tools one would expect of people lecturing to third level students such as necessary information technology and library support, canteens, and proper departmental structures and seniority roles.

I have spoken to many working in that sector and wish to read from a letter I received from somebody who works in a city college with more than 1,000 students. It states:

We are lucky to have an information officer employed for four hours daily. She is not

employed as a librarian [this is within the context of the library in the college] because, being classed as a second level school, there is no funding for that position. Our information officer is paid at a part-time administrative rate. She is responsible for the ongoing cataloguing of resources, the issuing of library materials, and the general running of the library and the monitoring of stock.

This is in contrast with [she names an institute of technology which I will not name] which has a similar student population and profile to our own. However, it employs 11 librarians and library technicians. The library has longer opening hours and has 20,000 printed resources.

Our opening hours are entirely dependent on the teachers who supervise the library in the absence of the information officer. In the absence of a teacher filling a slot, the library has to close. Therefore, it often has to close at 2 p.m., for example. Our students, many of whom have come from the third level sector to retrain, find this situation extremely frustrating. We cannot accommodate our night time students because of lack of budget for a second information officer.

Our computers and printers, to work well, depend on dedicated technicians to make the library function. We have in our college one full-time technician for the whole college (500 computers in all). We have to wait in turn along with every other department for the overburdened technician to repair the computers, printers etc. As students depend on the library to complete assignments, projects and study, a library without proper technical support is one not running to its full potential.

The recommendations of McIver would allow us to employ at least two full-time library assistants and two full-time librarians. This is not counting our night time allocation. We could employ at least one dedicated full-time computer technician.

There are two more pages in the letter, which I will not quote, but it gives a flavour of the frustrations of people in the PLC and further education sector. They know what they need, they have a report and they have a commitment in principle but the funding and structures to make that happen have not been provided. The Minister of State will contribute later and I would very much like her to respond to the concerns raised by Members regarding further education.

Many opportunities will be presented over the coming years to be more inclusive and to increase the number of students availing of further and higher education. I fully agree with Deputy Enright that resources need to be implemented at an early stage and the problem of early school leavers also needs to be addressed. We debated this issue during Private Members' business last night. The unemployment rate among early

[Ms O'Sullivan.]

school leavers is higher now than in 1999 and, therefore, opportunities must be offered to them. Opportunities must also be offered to adults who left the system without a proper education. Adult education should also fit this jigsaw. The national adult learning council was set up a few years ago but it was disbanded later. This forum could pull all the strands together. What is the Government's intention regarding the council?

More than half our population avails of higher and further education, which is welcome, whereas a generation ago half the population probably did not go further than primary education. That is a significant success story and the plan is to maintain it. This success is no small measure due to so-called free second level education and free third level fees. I am glad the Government is continuing the policy on third level fees and it is not acceding to the pressure to reinstate such fees. Available statistics suggest all sectors of the populations are participating at third level. A report in this regard will be published tomorrow and it will probably highlight that people from various socio-economic backgrounds participate in third level at a higher rate than previously.

The HEA's target is that 60% of school leavers will enter full-time third level education by 2010. However, one demographic is falling. In 2004, there were 61,000 18 year olds but it is anticipated there will only be 53,000 in 2014. The Department, therefore, could provide more opportunities for people who have various difficulties through access programmes. Entry to third level is provided through such programmes but Ireland lags very much behind its European neighbours and other OECD countries in the number of students who transfer to third level through such programmes. Ireland also lags behind in the number of mature students entering third level. Given the falling demographics, increased opportunities should be available to students to enter third level through such programmes and post leaving certificate courses. People who do well in these courses should be enabled to take up a diploma or degree directly in ITs or universities. While such opportunities are available, they need to be more formalised. Future demographics will give the Minister the opportunity to do that.

More opportunities should also be created for part-time students. People are put off third level education because they cannot afford it. Many of them work and because they can only attend as part-time students, they must pay fees, which is a major obstacle. Recommendation 22 in the OECD reports states: "Every effort should be made to increase part-time student numbers as a proportion of total numbers and, to this end, distinctions between part-time and full-time students should be removed for the purpose of the obligation to pay fees and receive maintenance support and in calculating the recurrent grant to third level institutions." The Minister is

shaking her head because that will be costly but the recommendation has been made.

Ms Hanafin: We cannot afford it and I did not accept all the recommendations.

Ms O'Sullivan: The Minister should move in this direction because part-time students are disadvantaged. It is not their fault they were unable to enter third level when they left school but they are in the workplace and they are anxious to further their education. There probably will be space for them in future and they should be afforded an opportunity. However, to do so, more modularised third level programmes are needed so that such students can take a module on a part-time basis and the programmes are not geared solely towards full-time students. That structural issue also needs to be addressed.

Institutes of technology are about to come under the remit of the HEA. They have developed significantly in recent times and I welcome the release of capital funding to them to strengthen their financial base but a number of them have experienced shortfalls in funding historically. Limerick Institute of Technology and, in particular, the school of art and design, has an excellent reputation but it has endured a funding shortfall, which needs to be addressed. If the Limerick institute has experienced such problems, other institutes may also have done so. When they come under the remit of the HEA, I hope this issue will be addressed.

All the sectors involved have strong roles to play in providing opportunities to as many people as possible. I concur with Deputy Enright's comments on the humanities. There are fears in higher education institutions that greater rewards will ensue if one takes up economic and industry-based programmes, including the sciences, but the social economy and society in general also have significant needs. My colleague, Deputy Michael D. Higgins, in the context of the NUIG Bill, referred to the importance of scholarships and ensuring students in universities continue to think and advance ideas and knowledge. It would be terrible if that aspect of university education was lost in the context of increasing pressure to secure funding in a competitive environment.

I accept there is a role for competitive tendering for funding in any area, but we also need to ensure we retain the core of what a university is about. This is very important in the context of the broader involvement of universities, institutes of technology and other further education colleges in the world around them. The further education colleges are particularly good in this regard. For example, where there is a need for child care workers, hairdressers etc., they have jumped in and filled the gaps. They have the capacity to continue to do this.

Universities and institutes of technology also have a strong role to play in this area. I participated in exchanges with Limerick Institute of

Technology and people from various sectors of the economy in the region recently, and in the Vision 2020 forum two years ago. The institute brought in people such as myself and IBEC and ICTU members etc. These engagements with the wider community are important.

I welcome the opportunity we have had to address these issues. I look forward to hearing the replies of the Minister and Minister of State. I appeal to both of them to address the need to give the further education sector the finance and support structures it needs to play its full role.

Mr. Crowe: I wish to share time with Deputies Gregory and Gogarty.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Crowe: Delivering access to education to everyone on this island is a priority for Sinn Féin. We believe that learners from all social, economic and cultural backgrounds must be given the opportunity to go into further and higher education, especially in today's competitive climate. However, education should not be pursued for solely financial or business gains. It is a powerful tool that can liberate and empower people.

With regard to access to further and higher education, four notable groups are underrepresented, namely, students who are socio-economically disadvantaged, Travellers and ethnic minorities in general, students with a disability and mature students. While the Minister for Education and Science claims to prioritise tackling disadvantage throughout the education spectrum, this seems like empty rhetoric to many. The reality is that most kids from areas of high deprivation will not make it to college.

There are some areas in Ireland where less than 10% of young people go on to higher education. While I welcome the small increase in the number of people from lower income families attending further and higher education, there is a yawning gap to bridge before we achieve fair representation. To widen overall access, we need collaboration between primary, second level, further and higher education. It is important to emphasise not just entry to higher education but also successful participation and completion.

While 75% of Irish people between the ages of 26 and 64 are in employment, less than 10% of these are lifelong learners, compared with 34% in Sweden and 21% in Britain. Lifelong learning here is in a mess and hundreds of thousands of people need retraining, reskilling etc. The ESRI has estimated that up to 400,000 workers in the labour force are likely to suffer deprivation in any economic downturn because they lack the skills for new employment.

According to Forfás, higher education is crucial to Ireland's economic wellbeing. However, the entry rate to higher education reached just 54% in 2003. The education system should be an instrument of progress for everyone, not a means

to reproduce inequalities where medicine and law college places are, for the most part, essentially the reserve of the wealthy. It is imperative that disadvantaged students receive adequate financial support to survive and successfully complete further or higher education. The Department will spend a little over €1 million on stationary services this year, but will spend less on university scholarships. No student from an area of high disadvantage who successfully makes it to third level should be financially worse off than he or she would be on the dole. However, in many cases that is the shameful reality.

Students have expressed their anger to me over the delay in receiving their higher education grants or their back to education initiative money. This issue was ignored in the last budget. There is a great need for substantially increased funding for back to school initiatives where people would not lose their welfare entitlements. People need to be encouraged back to education, not discouraged.

The Government should put its money — I should say our money — where its mouth is and implement the McIver report immediately. Although the former Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Cullen, threw away €52 million of our money on e-voting, the Government cannot find the necessary €48 million to implement the McIver report. Where is the logic in paying €450,000 in consultancy fees, if it does not implement the recommendations?

Further education students also lose out because of the Government's failure. The PLC sector is for some their only real chance of further education. It needs to be enhanced, developed and provided with appropriate resourcing, funding, staffing and restructuring. The sector caters for 30,000 students, the majority from areas of disadvantage. After all the Government's posturing, is it not time, after a lengthy delay of three years, to implement fully the report?

Mr. Gregory: Although the Minister glossed over it in her opening statement, this debate on further education arises from the failure of the Government, specifically in one area of higher education, to act on the recommendations of the McIver report. We probably would not have this debate but for the campaign of the Teachers' Union of Ireland to highlight the neglect of this critical area of further education.

This issue goes back to the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness in 1999 when the social partners, including the Government and the trade unions, gave a clear commitment to review post leaving certificate courses. On foot of that commitment, a steering group was set up in 2000 by the Department to carry out the review. The Department was, supposedly, committed to making progress on the issue. The steering group commissioned independent consultants to produce a report and in April 2003 the McIver

[Mr. Gregory.]

report was published. Now, nearly three years later, not a single cent has been spent and not one recommendation has been implemented.

The Government's commitment to one of the priority issues of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness has been put on the shelf and left there. The main recommendations of the McIver report were the recognition of further education as a sector of education in its own right and not as a misplaced adjunct of second level and that PLCs should be distinct colleges of further education and specially funded and resourced as such. They were to have libraries, study areas, properly equipped IT facilities and staff to maintain them and facilities and resources on a par with institutes of technology and universities.

Instead, the 30,000 students still participate in a system that was set up as a temporary arrangement 20 years ago. The system is overstrained and drastically underresourced. Much of it is in cramped accommodation, it is governed by inappropriate regulations and its teachers carry an excessive teaching load. This is the case despite the fact that the majority of its students are over 18 years of age, with as much as one fifth over 30 years of age. There are more mature students in the PLCs than in all the universities and institutes of education put together.

The McIver report states the sector urgently requires a new management structure to develop the colleges and their study programmes, with the addition of three national agencies to oversee links to industry, computer links between colleges and support services for teachers. These are teachers who teach a huge range of courses designed to meet service industry and community needs.

A separate capital programme is critical for the future of these colleges. However, Ireland is now the only European country with no recognised sector of further education in an economic context, where there is an increasing and critical need to reskill and retrain the less advantaged sections of our young people. The PLC colleges could be perfectly poised to take up this challenge. With the necessary resources, this sector would be a real investment in the future. These colleges are currently the primary providers of second-chance education, yet the Government has turned its back on them. Since last Easter, discussions had been ongoing between the teachers' unions, the Department and the Irish Vocational Education Association based on the belief that something substantial would be delivered in last December's budget, but not one cent was provided for the implementation of the McIver recommendations.

In reply to recent parliamentary questions, the Minister of State, Deputy de Valera referred to various other areas for which she has responsibility and asked if she should take money from them for the McIver report. What a cop out. Is that the way strategic planning is undertaken in the Department of Education and Science? Six

years for a review of needs and now it does not even budget for it. Ironically, the amount required, as I said a number of weeks ago, as a major first step is €48 million, which is more or less the same amount as this Government squandered on now discarded and useless electronic voting machines.

Much of this sector provides for the needs of second-chance students, the socially disadvantaged who did not have the opportunity of university but who could now be skilled in post-leaving certificate courses and go on to good jobs or even third level education. Many of these students are themselves parents. The educational benefits for their children and other social benefits could be spin-off results and a real investment in this country's future. Despite this, a Government with enormous financial surpluses and resources fails to meet its responsibility. Is it that the old prejudice against vocational education in the education system has simply not gone away but is alive and well in the way the PLC sector is treated? The only positive answer to this question is to end the lip-service and allocate the necessary resources now. What a fitting way this would be to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the 1916 Proclamation and really cherish all the children of the nation equally.

Mr. F. McGrath: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gogarty: How much time is remaining?

An Ceann Comhairle: Four and a half minutes.

Mr. Gogarty: I suppose that is better than nothing but I wish my party had the seat numbers and the same opportunities to speak as Deputies Enright and O'Sullivan.

Ms O'Sullivan: Perhaps the Green Party will have more seats next time.

Mr. Gogarty: The aforementioned Deputies have outlined the facts and figures very well so I will not repeat too many of their points. While listening to the Minister's speech, I had to agree with her about the improvements that have taken place in the higher education sector, especially in terms of the numbers of people involved in higher education. It is important if we are to continue to develop as a world-leading economy and to have high quality graduates and researchers that our higher education system is in the front rank. No one disagrees with that but we must also stress that there is no point in having a fourth or PhD level when, in some areas, our education system is more akin to that of the second world or the former Soviet Bloc countries rather than the developed world.

In that context, I await with interest the report due out tomorrow and has been touted in today's newspapers, that is, the review of higher education in 2004. Some of the findings have already

been leaked to the media and show, for example, that in the more prosperous areas of Dublin, 90% of students attend third level while only 20% in poor areas of west Dublin do so, which no doubt includes a sizeable segment of my constituency.

Despite the improvements overall, we still have this discrepancy. When the economy is booming we should not have inequality to the extent we do now. We still have approximately 5,000 people dropping out before or just after their junior certificate and one in seven students entering second level from primary not having proper reading, writing and mathematical skills. That is a problem we must address because such people will never get to attend to third level if they leave school early. However, opportunities do not exist for them because of the lack of investment in the further education sector.

We know that there were 21 main recommendations out of a larger number in the McIver report. I have already raised this issue with the Minister of State, Deputy de Valera, as have other Deputies, and the response has always been that we must take one recommendation at a time. The reality is that the €48 million required is a drop in the ocean compared with the amount of money the Government has wasted. Deputy Crowe has given a number of examples already and I wish to provide another one from my constituency which has one of the lowest third level participation rates of the disadvantaged areas.

Close to areas such as Quarryvale in north Clondalkin in my constituency is the M50. That motorway is being widened and will cause significant congestion over the years when it is finished. Originally, the cost was to be €350 million. That rose to €800 million and the Taoiseach said recently that it will now cost €1 billion. In that context, €650 million will be wasted but a small fraction of that would implement all of the recommendations in the McIver report.

I put it to the Minister and Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science that they are not pushing the issue sufficiently with their Cabinet colleagues. There is a lot more to be saved in terms of this economy by implementing the McIver report and spending money on further and adult education than in throwing money at a white elephant road project that will still be congested when it is completed.

It has been found that people with literacy problems are three times more likely to be out of work and to be the lowest earners, only half as likely to be active in their communities and one fifth as likely to participate in adult education. A cost benefit analysis must be carried out on expenditure on education. The Minister admitted, when referring to the High Scope Perry pre-school project in reply to a Dáil question, that investment in adult and higher education for those in the system and in primary and pre-school education for those coming into the system could pay for itself if it results in people earning more,

paying more taxes, being less of a drag on the State in terms of social welfare and not costing the State because they are less likely to go to prison. These are all factors that must be seriously analysed. In that context, I cannot see why €48 million for implementing the McIver report, another €100 million for investing in other areas, as well as an increase from 2% to 5% for adult education is not possible. If we invest in our people, we will get that investment back and save the State money in the long term.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): I am glad of the opportunity to present an overview of recent developments in adult and further education in Ireland. The adult education service has expanded considerably over the past eight years. This expansion has concentrated on giving a second chance to people who did not derive full benefit from their initial schooling, especially those who did not receive upper second level education. National certification for participants in adult and further education is provided by the Further Education and Training Awards Council, levels one to six. Some programmes receive certification from professional bodies and from a number of bodies outside the State.

In the context of lifelong learning policies, the conceptual frameworks for further education, adult education and vocational education and training are becoming inextricably linked. Developments at EU and national level are facilitating greater co-operation, co-ordination and cohesion between Departments with responsibilities in these fields and between the statutory bodies with responsibility for delivery at regional and local level. These developments include the new national framework of qualifications, the consultative process with providers being engaged in by the Higher and Further Education and Training Awards Councils on quality assurance and validation processes, and developments within the vocational education committee, VEC, sector on adult education provision, including the expansion of adult literacy provision, the support to learners from the adult education guidance initiative and the appointment of community education facilitators.

My policy is to ensure that available educational resources are targeted at the most disadvantaged people across all levels of the system. Within the framework of the priorities identified in the White Paper on adult education, the principal objectives of the measures and programmes funded by the Department of Education and Science in the further and adult education areas are to meet the needs of young early school leavers, provide vocational education and training opportunities for labour market entrants and re-entrants, and provide alternative pathways to higher education and second-chance education for adults. These objectives are pursued through full-time programmes such as Youthreach, senior

[Miss de Valera.]

Traveller training centre courses, the vocational training opportunities scheme, post-leaving certificate courses and part-time programmes such as the back to education initiative, the adult literacy scheme and the community education scheme. Adult literacy is the top priority in adult education. This priority was accorded following an international literacy survey of adults aged 16 to 64 published in 1997. It found that approximately 25% of our population, some 500,000 adults, scored at the lowest literacy level used in the survey. In response, a number of immediate and longer-term measures were put in place, with the assistance of the national adult literacy agency and the local vocational education committees, which are the providers of the adult literacy services and funding from European Structural Funds.

Since 1997, the Government has increased funding for adult literacy from €1million in 1997 to €23 million in 2006. As a consequence, the numbers of clients catered for annually have increased from 5,000 to 34,000 in the same period. In this, we are well ahead of the target set in the national development plan of 18,000 annually.

Referral networks were developed by the VECs to ensure that the people who needed them most were made aware of the adult literacy and basic education services. The referral system involves collaboration with other agencies catering for potential literacy students, such as FÁS, employment offices, welfare and community groups and schools. A national referral directory of adult literacy services has been published, showing where services are located, what options are offered and the contact points and telephone numbers.

Staff development programmes have been established on a modular in-service basis for tutors and literacy organisers. Family literacy groups, involving adults and their children, are running successfully. Participants on the community employment scheme operated by FÁS can be released half-time from their work experience programmes to avail of intensive literacy tuition by the vocational education committees. This arrangement enables them to combine work experience and ten hours per week literacy tuition.

The national adult literacy agency, NALA, has trained a number of tutors to provide literacy in the workplace and has promoted the availability of this facility among employer organisations. Following a successful pilot project with some local authorities, the programme is available for local authority outdoor staff nationwide. There are also successful workplace literacy programmes in two hospitals and in a trade union. To supplement the general adult literacy service, a number of specially-targeted literacy programmes have been introduced for people in need of particular literacy services, such as deaf people or

people whose mother-tongue is the Irish language.

To cater for the literacy and basic education needs of immigrant groups, vocational education committees have provided funds to afford free access to literacy, English language and mother culture supports. With a view to informing and improving future action in this area, an action research project, with a full-time co-ordinator, has been carried out in the Dublin area. The aim of the project was to assess the language and literacy needs of asylum seekers, in consultation with key interests, to initiate pilot actions and to make recommendations on a framework and costings to address future needs in this area. A report has been prepared with recommendations on how provision can be mainstreamed. A new intensive literacy programme is on offer, in which six hours of literacy tuition is available per week instead of the usual two hours.

An assessment framework, known as “Mapping the Learning Journey” for the adult literacy service, that will be in line with best international practice is in the course of being introduced as a feature of the literacy services of many VECs. It should be recognised that these initiatives would take some time to impact on the large target-group of adults with literacy problems — 500,000 people. For one reason or another, many people were reluctant to enrol in the public literacy services, even though they knew they had problems. I wish to refer to what is, perhaps, the most effective approach to dealing with literacy awareness, that is, the TV series of which we have had four.

For 2006, it is proposed to provide a new multimedia literacy tuition initiative. This will be done in partnership with the national adult literacy agency, the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland and RTE.

A target of the national anti-poverty strategy is to reduce the proportion of the population in the 16 to 64 age-group, whose literacy skills are restricted, to below 10%-20% by 2007. Irish society has changed radically during the past few decades and is still evolving. Against this background, lifelong learning has become the key to continuing success. Our labour force must be prepared to adapt and participate in this process, and, in response to this need, the adult education sector has expanded. There are many options available for those returning to education and we must ensure that those taking this step are not left without the support and guidance they need. A coherent integrated system of guidance provision must be developed. For anyone to return to education as an adult requires immense courage, dedication, commitment and a willingness to make sacrifices in the short term to find fulfilment in the future. That is the reason I have put particular emphasis on the whole question of guidance where adults are concerned.

The adult educational guidance initiative was launched in 1999 in response to the recognition

of these needs. Some 35 projects have been established and the service is almost nationwide. My Department is funding the further development of Qualifax to enable adult learners to gain access to information. The success of programmes dedicated to preparing participants for employment is continuing to be sustained. Some 90% of students who complete post leaving certificate courses progress to employment or further education. In the case of Youthreach, the figure is 74%; for VTOS, 69%; and for senior Travellers centres, 51%.

In the context of the 2006 Estimates, I was pleased to announce an increase in the rates of non-pay grant for VTOS, Youthreach and Traveller centres of from almost 8% for Youthreach and senior Traveller centres to nearly 19% for VTOS, depending on the category of student and the programme being followed. The back to education initiative, a part-time measure, plays a key role in addressing the needs of those with minimal or no educational qualifications, and provides a re-entry route for those who wish to upgrade their skills. There has been a tremendous increase in the number of people taking up these places. When the programme commenced in 2002, 6,000 places were available but the number increased to 7,000 in 2005. Arising from the undertaking in the White Paper I was pleased to arrange for 34 community education facilitators to be appointed to the VECs on a flexible needs basis. This is important for the roll-out of further and adult education. It is a new category of post and training and support services have been put in place for the facilitators.

Annual grants are given to vocational education committees towards the cost of child care support for participants in the vocational opportunities scheme, Youthreach and senior Traveller training centre programmes. This is to cover child care expenses of people for whom these programmes were designed but who were not able to enrol on them because of child care responsibilities. I have provided increased funding for this in recent years.

I have increased the number of post leaving certificate, course places by 60% since 1996-97. The number of PLC places approved for 2005-06 is up by more than 1,600 on the 2004-05 level. The number of approved places in the sector stands at more than 30,000. Post leaving certificate students are included in the calculation of non-pay budgets issued to schools in respect of running costs.

The McIver report contains 21 over-arching recommendations, incorporating 91 sub-recommendations. It has been estimated, in consultation with management and staff interests, that the recommendations for staffing would involve at a minimum the creation of at least 800 new posts at a cost of more than €48 million. I assure the House that our deliberations will bring to fruition many of the issues discussed at that level.

In addition to the Estimates for 2006 the Minister for Finance has in the revised estimates approved a further €2 million for adult and further education. I have decided that this money will be spent on improving the adult guidance service and on expansion of the back to education initiative as well as putting further emphasis on adult literacy.

Mr. Coveney: I will concentrate on the PLC sector and universities. I welcome the opportunity to have a general debate such as this, that does not necessarily relate to specific legislation on education and that the Government provided time for same.

This debate on further and higher education was initially sparked off by the lack of implementation of the McIver report which makes recommendations for the restructuring of the post leaving certificate colleges sector. My constituency has the highest concentration of PLC colleges in the country. Within a mile of my office in Cork are Cork College of Commerce and St. John's Central College, and Coláiste Stiofán Naofa is a little farther away. Very significant funds were spent in those colleges in recent years, which is welcome.

The McIver report arose from the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and was reaffirmed in the White Paper on Adult Education, Learning for Life. Social partners accepted that PLC colleges cannot continue to operate within a system designed essentially for the second level sector. The McIver report was completed in April 2003, as has been highlighted by speaker after speaker, but its recommendations on supports and structures for the PLC sector have still not been implemented. The TUI met senior officials between the holding of its congress last Easter and September 2005. The Minister of State will know that her Department agreed in principle to the implementation of key aspects of the McIver report on PLC colleges at an agreed implementation cost of approximately €48 million in respect of those colleges with more than 150 students, yet this commitment was not honoured in the last budget.

The PLC sector continues to be increasingly important in educational policy generally. As the Minister of State correctly said, we now live in a very different Ireland from that in which many of us lived ten or 20 years ago. We need to support lifelong learning and those who want to change career, perhaps two or three times in their lives, through reskilling etc. We need to ensure we can adapt the workforce to a constantly changing marketplace, which we certainly have. We should not underestimate the value of the PLC sector to the disability sector and to foreigners who have come to our shores for various reasons and who are adapting to the Irish way of life and preparing themselves to enter the workforce.

5 o'clock

[Mr. Coveney.]

I want to call a spade a spade regarding universities in Ireland and want to put the debate into context. Every year there is an academic ranking of world universities and this year's ranking shows that Ireland's top university does not even make the top 80 in the European Union or the top 200 in the world. Ireland's second and third ranking universities, University College Cork and University College Dublin, do not even make the top 170 in the European Union or the top 400 in the world. The figures in this regard have not improved in recent years — if anything, they have disimproved. The unfortunate reality is that Ireland is running to a standstill in its effort to upgrade its universities to meet the standards of the top universities in Europe and the rest of the world. Unfortunately we are not in the higher echelons of global university education and this should change.

This is almost entirely a resources issue. For the past 15 years, fuelling the economy in a positive way has been the priority of consecutive Governments. Low taxation and a highly skilled, well educated workforce have been the main factors in attracting foreign investment to Ireland. One would assume that if we are to keep Ireland competitive as a location for investment and business, those two policies would be prioritised absolutely by a Government with plenty of money to spend. However, this is not the case in the university sector. We are not nearly spending enough to ensure that Ireland moves into the top class in the third and fourth level education sectors.

When one compares the resources available to the Government for spending on universities with those available for this purpose in other forward-thinking EU countries, one will note that the spend per student in Ireland is significantly lower. If Ireland wants to produce top entrepreneurs and the most highly skilled graduates in the world, to which we should aspire, the resources available to our university sector need to increase dramatically. We also need to increase the number of postgraduate courses and, to that end, I recognise the positive change in the mindset of the Government in recent times. I urge it to continue thinking in this way.

If we are to be honest with ourselves in this debate, we must recognise that calling for extra resources for the university sector has consequences. Money will not appear out of thin air and we therefore need to have a realistic debate on funding third level education. There are many models in other EU countries and further afield, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, which the Minister should consider.

The debate on funding should take on board a number of factors. No new structure for financing third level education should discourage students of any economic background from attending third level institutions in the first place. Irish students should not be at a disadvantage as a result of fee-

paying foreign students being attracted into Irish universities for the purpose of funding courses therein. Most controversially — this is a personal view rather than a party view — those who benefit from third level education should be asked to make some realistic contribution towards the funding of third level education in the future. There are many ways to achieve this without introducing direct fees. Student unions and university management bodies should be included in the ongoing debate on the funding of third and fourth level education.

Let me raise concerns about the funding of medical courses in Irish universities. It is baffling and totally unacceptable that our medical training system uses as a crutch finances provided by fees from students who come from outside the European Union. The result is that there are caps on the numbers of Irish students in medical courses in our universities to ensure that sufficient numbers of fee-paying foreign students can finance or partially finance those courses. Consequently, Irish students doing their leaving certificates who want to do medicine face unfair competition. There are not enough places on medical courses to train the number of doctors we need and, unfortunately, the lack of resources is such that universities are forced to establish quotas of foreign fee-paying students purely to finance courses. The Ministers for Education and Science and Health and Children should try to resolve this.

My final point, which is perhaps the most relevant to me, concerns the European Union. The resources that will be available for research and development in EU budgets between now and 2013 will be massive, amounting to approximately €70 billion, and this will involve a doubling of the research and development fund over the next seven years. Irish universities and colleges, and other institutes of further education, should be tapping into this budget to ensure they are availing of funding opportunities. Other countries will be doing so and other universities have been more effective in doing so than those in Ireland. We should not allow this to continue.

Mr. P. Power: I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate on higher education. It is very timely as we are on the cusp of having a global knowledge economy. I welcome the format of the debate because it is very much like that in the Seanad, whereby one is allowed to make statements outside the context of legislation or ministerial questions. It is right that we should have a more reflective type of debate on issues which are of key importance to our economy and society.

Many people, especially in Limerick, are fond of recalling the far-sighted decision of a Government in the 1960s, taken by the then Minister for Education, Donagh O'Malley, to introduce free second level education. People often cite the decision as the basis of one the most far-reaching

policies to have been implemented by a Minister for Education. It is often argued that it was the foundation and bedrock of this country's educational advances and economic development over the last 20 years. We need to consider whether future generations, when they look back in 20 or 30 years on the wider debate that is taking place at present, will believe that the decisions being made today are as far-sighted and enlightened as those made in the 1960s. We should not lose sight of our responsibility to serve the generations to come. The Lynch report of 1961 formed the basis for the decision to introduce free second level education later in the 1960s. The report, which is often forgotten, was far ahead of its time.

It is generally agreed by the Members of the House that the development of our education system has been the foundation of our economic success. The success of a nation does not relate to economic success only. It involves developing an education system, including a higher education system, that facilitates the personal fulfilment of every person who takes part in it and ensures that young people can achieve their potential, not as workers in our economy but as members of our society. It is important that we should develop our education system as a means of breaking down the traditional social and class barriers which have affected our country. The need to provide for a good education system is important for reasons which do not relate to the development of our economy over the next 20 or 30 years.

I had the honour and privilege of serving for a number of years on the governing authority of the University of Limerick, at a time when the university was focussing on the issues being discussed by the House today. I refer to issues like the movement from traditional third level education to the next level — the fourth level — of higher education, the need to invest in and focus on research and development and the development of PhD courses. The authority learned a number of lessons as it was planning the university's approach to such issues. There is a direct connection between the supply of high-quality PhD courses and foreign inward investment. Much of this country's recent inward investment related directly to the free availability of third and fourth level researchers and PhD students. That is a key factor in this debate.

During debates about research and development, people often forget to focus on the need for this country to develop a good reputation as a centre of excellence in research and development and in PhD courses. We are trying to entice world-class researchers, who tend to be quite discerning, to this country. When they are deciding whether to move to Ireland, they examine the attractions we have to offer, the availability of state-of-the-art research facilities, the quality of our graduates, the number of graduates available to assist them in their research and the role of private sector investment in research. The Uni-

versity of Limerick has found it is a very competitive environment. There are many universities trying to attract world-class researchers. When we draw up our plans, we have to ensure Irish universities are extremely attractive to researchers. Not only do we need to attract researchers from abroad, but we also need to create the conditions in which world-class researchers in this country stay here rather than being attracted abroad. The strategic innovation fund will have a significant role to play in creating such conditions. In that context, I welcome the investment of €300 million over five years, as part of an overall multi-annual package of €1.2 billion for the third level sector.

I would like to refer to a couple of issues on which we need to focus. There is no point in investing substantially in third level education if we do not provide for more research and development and more PhD courses. If we are to invest hundreds of million of euro, we have to put in place a plan that makes a direct connection between the benefits and results of such investment on the one hand, and our economy's skills and social needs on the other. The planned increase in funding for medical education at third level, for example, is designed to meet a skills shortage while addressing a social need. We need to ensure similar thinking is applied to research. We should support research that will lead to further investment. Traditionally, there has been a difference between the European and United States research models. Practically all research in the US has a direct correlation with economic development and job creation. We need to be very careful in that regard.

The national technological park, which is based in the University of Limerick, is a good example of the connection that needs to be made between top quality research and the knowledge-based economy. There is an ongoing roll-out at the park of incubation units and small enterprises, which take seed knowledge from the university and apply it to the practical reality of producing consumer goods and products which can be sold successfully. It is a vital cog in this wheel. The former president of the University of Limerick, Mr. Ed Walsh, who is recognised as a world-class leader, thinker and innovator in the field of higher education, understood the need to make the vital connection between the needs of the economy and the development of third level education. My constituency colleague, Deputy O'Sullivan, who was present at the university's Kemmy business school the other night, is familiar with the collaboration between third level education and the private sector that is taking place at the school. Private funding is being invested in the university to produce real results for the business community. It is not pure academic research, but academic research that is directly linked with the business community. It is another example of what I am talking about.

Deputy Coveney spoke at length about the European context, which is very important. I was

[Mr. P. Power.]

interested in the recent statement of the President of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso, that he intends to develop a European institute of technology to match the world-renowned expertise of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It is important, within the overall framework of higher level education, fourth level education and research and development, that Ireland that should get involved in the project, which is at its inception stage. As it will be one of the European Union's biggest projects in the coming years, we need to get a slice of the action.

I have outlined some of my thoughts on the need for continued investment in third and fourth level education. I emphasise the need to link that investment to the requirements of our economy over the next 20 or 30 years.

Mr. O'Dowd: All Members have their own perspective on this important debate. Last Monday morning, I was called to a local national school where an irate headmaster and teacher were trying to get a student assessed by the HSE. The teachers believed the student had serious behavioural problems and that the HSE and the psychology services ought to be involved, but they had refused to become involved. I made some representation on their behalf and I hope that it has changed a bit.

We must look at what is happening in our primary and secondary schools to make sure that those who try to get into third level have the best chance to get there. Those who may not have the resources required in existing primary and secondary schools ought to have them. We should prioritise investment so that we first look after those whose education is compulsory. Subsequently, we should look after those who are on a different level. I do not mean to say that third level education should not be funded properly. However, there are inequalities in the present system that need to be addressed to allow people to get a better chance to get in the door of our third level institutions.

Are our secondary schools failing our students? Is there an increasing number of students going from the traditional second level school to the grind school? Is there an increasing number of schools being set up that charge fees to provide more advanced teaching and technology to get people into the career of their choice? There has certainly been an increase in the number of students going to these institutions. Teachers and administrators in mainstream education ought to look at how they present their courses, how they run their disciplinary systems and their in-house ethos. If a student feels he must go to a private school to get the points required to get into medicine or whatever, that means the local second level school is failing him. We need to look at the connections between the Department, second level education and the points system. The points system alone is a shameful way to get into a

career of choice. Thousands of students are lucky to get 300 to 400 points. However, one needs almost 600 points and must be as smart as Einstein to get into medical school nowadays. Students unable to get into the course of their choice feel the system has failed them. It is not that the academic standards of the courses involved are so high, but rather that there are not enough places. We need to address this in a far more radical manner. Third level institutions ought to introduce other ways to measure the ability of second level students before they come through their hallowed doors.

We should take the total development of the second level student into account. Students who have achieved success in sports, drama and other activities that cannot be measured by an exam paper, should have those achievements included in assessments to get into third level institutions. Many people enter a career based on the points achieved and not because they really want to enter that career. They have done very well in their exams, but they may not be suited to the career chosen. Another student who might have always wanted to study for that career cannot get in for a lack of five points. Such a student will attend a grind school and get the points the second time. There are inequalities in our education system and between schools, such as the local VEC school and the fee-paying secondary school. The State should provide extra resources to the VEC school. There should be a level playing field for everyone. If people are lucky enough to have wealthy parents, then fair dues to them. However, we should not develop a politics and education of envy, but an education of esteem whereby all our children are seen as equals. We should strive to have the excellent facilities of our private schools in all of our secondary schools. We should do much more for students who come from poorer backgrounds so that they too can attend an educational centre of excellence.

Deputy Coveney made some excellent points on the international status of our third level institutions. We seem to fail at third level in an international context. However, we are now getting a much more dynamic interaction between the major multinational companies in our university cities. Many of them have funded third level courses geared to creating a greater centre of excellence for future employees of their own companies. We need a proactive policy and enlightened companies are making much progress in this respect. We should explore further tax breaks and incentives for them so that they will invest in our third level institutions. We do not tax the horse racing industry and that creates many jobs. If we could create similar incentives for companies to invest in our third level institutions, that would make a big difference.

Ireland has changed a great deal since the 1960s. There were only four scholarships available in County Louth in 1965, which meant that only four students could go for free to university.

That situation was the same right around the country. The intervention of Donough O'Malley in that debate to make university courses more available represented a major initiative that has worked right through the system. People who came from poorer parts of towns and cities and who worked hard in their factory jobs can now look with pride on their sons and their daughters who are really succeeding in our society. However, we still need to address inequalities and we need to put more resources into students who are being failed by the system.

Some students are so disruptive that they are about to be excluded at seven years of age from our primary school system and the resources are not there to help them. There have been phenomenal changes at second level and we need to put more investment into schools where children are at a greater economic disadvantage. I am confident the future of our young people is in good hands and our universities are very fine places of education.

We should look again at the points system so that more people will get into courses for which they are eminently suitable. Without an interview and without taking into account the total development of a student, the points system alone is not fair. We must address that serious problem.

Ms O'Donnell: I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate on education outside of a legislative context. It allows Deputies on all sides of the House to reflect perspectives and criticisms they are picking up in their constituencies. I listened with interest to comments by Members of the Opposition on the further education sector and I will make a few remarks on that topic. We tend to talk about the importance of a skilled population when we speak about Ireland's progress in recent years. However, it is important to clarify what we mean by a "skilled population" in the education context.

Of the many contributors to our recent economic success, known as the Celtic tiger, the availability to both indigenous and foreign investors of an exceptionally well educated workforce has perhaps been the most important. When the Tánaiste, Deputy Harney, was appointed Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, it was accepted that all our efforts and policies of fostering research, enterprise and initiative were and still remained dependent on a first rate education system. Our economy is changing. The nature of work began to change in 1997 and in the last few weeks we have seen how this change poses challenges for the traditional sectors of manufacturing, processing and assembly.

Despite creating more jobs than can be filled due to full employment, workers in some sectors experience problems. Manufacturing industry, in particular, is finding it increasingly difficult to compete globally. We are creating more high quality, high paying jobs. It is a true race to the

top in terms of job creation and education. The Minister said she wants us to build our intellectual capital in order that Ireland will become a knowledge hub. These aspirations are legitimate but an imbalance appears to be slipping into the system, whereby we are ignoring some parts of the education landscape.

A key element of how Ireland copes with this economic transition is the level to which our education system not only continues to develop and turn out top class graduates but also how it facilitates training, upskilling and re-skilling of workers. It is also about how we service the educational needs of school leavers who do not opt for the university or IT route. Deputies have praised the record funding of our education system, particularly since 1997. There has been a trebling of the overall spend on education from approximately €850 million in 1997. There is now a multi-annual strategic innovation fund for higher education and a new PhD or fourth level of education is being developed and significantly funded. The Government is also committing €900 million to the third level sector in the next five years as part of the Department of Education and Science capital envelope — €630 million from Exchequer funds and the balance from PPP initiatives.

Notwithstanding this, I share the concerns expressed by Opposition Members and their dissatisfaction with the level of support for one element of the education system, namely, the further education and post-leaving certificate sector. I referred previously to the importance of upskilling and re-skilling in our changing economy. The Chambers of Commerce of Ireland has called for a serious evaluation of our training policy to ensure priority is given to upskilling those already in employment.

There has been a remarkable change in the composition of the labour market. The correctness of our low tax, pro-enterprise model has been borne out spectacularly. Employment rose from 1.1 million in 1991 to over 1.9 million in 2005 and it is predicted that 2 million will be employed in 2006. Simultaneously, real earnings have increased substantially while the tax system, through reform, has allowed the overall burden on work to be reduced. We now have the most favourable income tax system in the European Union for those on low to medium incomes. However, there are fears for those with low skills who have entered employment in this environment of labour shortages. They may find themselves vulnerable to either a downturn in the economy or changes in the nature of work. The further education and post-leaving certificate sector plays a critical and under-appreciated role in addressing this vulnerability. In 1997 there were 18,000 enrolments in PLC courses; today there are over 30,000. That is more than the number of school leavers entering third level education each year.

[Ms O'Donnell.]

Courses are delivered by a network of over 210 schools and colleges in the vocational, secondary and community school sector. The bulk of provision is in vocational colleges. In all, over 1,000 courses are provided in more than 60 disciplines. The value of what these courses achieve and the benefit they provide for the individual and the community can hardly be over-stated. Why, therefore, are further education and PLC courses the Cinderella of our education system? Look at how the sector has been treated in the 20 years since 1985. PLC courses started to develop around that year, a time of high unemployment, but, incredibly, it was 15 years before a report was commissioned to recognise that huge resources were needed to support the work being done in the sector and make appropriate recommendations. This is the so-called McIver report. To put the delay in context, negotiations are under way to agree the seventh partnership agreement, a successor to Sustaining Progress. The examination of required support and resources for schools providing PLC courses was based on a commitment given in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness in 2000.

The McIver report outlined changes needed to allow schools and colleges to provide these valuable courses and comply with the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act. The deadline for implementation of new structures under the Act is June this year. After the publication of the review in 2003, the Department set up a group to examine how the McIver report might be implemented. It is now 2006. The report conceded that costs would be significant and that a phased approach was required but still nothing has happened. What is the problem in dealing with these recommendations?

Frustration levels are high among principals in the sector. They complain that further education and PLC courses operate within second level structures and second level budgets, buildings and time in schools where provision bears no relationship to the reality behind the service being delivered. That is the crux of the problem. Two weeks ago I tabled a parliamentary question about funding and recognition for the further education sector. I specifically asked what progress had been made in implementing the McIver recommendations. Regrettably, the reply confirms the suspicion that progress on helping and responding to the PLC sector is inert and lacklustre. The reply points to support for the PLC sector and the increase in the number of places by 60% since 1997. The number of PLC places approved for 2006 is up by more than 1,600 on the previous year. However, while the enrolment numbers reflect the importance of the sector, they are not an accurate measure of commitment, unless increased enrolment is matched by increased funding. There is scant reference in the 2006 Estimates to additional funding for schools

and colleges providing further education or post-leaving certificate courses.

There is a perception of drift in overall policy for this important sector. Schools and colleges are struggling with an increasingly complex and demanding situation, as they have for many years, without the appropriate support structures being put in place, as was recommended in the McIver report. The introduction of maintenance grants for students with effect from September 1998, the waiving of tuition fees and the PLC maintenance grants scheme provide some help. PLC grant-holders received €23 million in direct support in 2005. I also welcome the inclusion of PLC students in the calculation of non-pay budgets and the supplemental non-pay grant towards running costs specifically for PLC schools. However, the central, 20 year old issue lingers, that is, a failure to give due recognition to the sector in its own right. The Minister of State's reply to my parliamentary question mentions the 21 overarching recommendations and 91 sub-recommendations of the McIver report. It states extensive consultations have been held with management and staff interests with regard to such issues as the prioritisation of recommendations, the structural changes envisaged in the report, their implications and associated costs in the context of the overall provision of resources for further and adult education.

The Minister of State has repeated this evening that the Department is still at this stage of analysis of the recommendations and working through priorities. Given that the McIver report was published in 2003, the fact its recommendations are still being prioritised in 2006 raises questions about the commitment to this sector. I support the efforts of the Minister to accelerate the prioritisation of action in this area. We need interim action given that so many recommendations are involved. Let us take the necessary steps to support this sector properly and negotiate the new teacher arrangements, if required.

A sense of elitism is evident in all this. There has been a tendency to give preference to the traditional third level and now the fourth level university sector. We must get away from any notion that further education and post-leaving certificate courses are part of a sector for disadvantaged students. For some students, these courses are their first choice to continue their education following the leaving certificate. They deserve the attention that is demanded for them.

The work being done in these colleges is firmly focused on the labour market. The indigenous services sector in particular has a need for skilled people. I encourage the Minister to continue to support this sector and to introduce the necessary changes.

Mr. Broughan: It is often rightly said that the education system has been the keystone of the Celtic tiger economy and our economic success in the past decade and a half. While that is the case,

another characteristic of the economy and society is the remaining high level of educational disadvantage, especially in low income and deprived urban areas.

The Labour Party's policy document of December 2004, *Tackling Educational Disadvantage*, presented by Deputy O'Sullivan, outlined startling statistics on educational deprivation. These included the suggestion that 800 to 1,000 children per year do not transfer from primary to second level schooling, 4% of students leave school without reaching junior certificate level, 18.5% of students leave school before the leaving certificate and 80% of children from Traveller families do not get a chance to go on to second level. In addition, high levels of literacy problems remain among 30% of children according to the Education Research Centre's report of 2004, and the Department of Education and Science's report on educational disadvantage suggested that while the greatest percentage of disadvantaged children are to be found in rural areas, the greatest concentration is in parts of the cities and urban areas, particularly Dublin. Perhaps of greatest concern is that the statistics highlighted the continued low level of participation in third level education among young people from poor and low income backgrounds, which is perhaps the greatest scandal in our society.

In a famous work from 2003, *Power, privilege and points: The choices and challenges of third level access in Dublin*, written for the Dublin Employment Pact, of which I used to be a member, Ted Fleming and Anne Gallagher of NUI Maynooth found that Dublin has the second lowest participation rate nationally at 38%. Only County Donegal's rate is lower at 35%. There were major disparities between the highest socio-economic groups and the six lowest socio-economic groups which are seriously under-represented at third level. The highest third level participation rates are in Dublin 18, where 77% of children go on to third level, Dublin 6, which has 70% participation, Dublin 4, which has 59% participation, and Dublin 16, which has 56% participation. By contrast, only one north side district had an admission rate for third level greater than 50%. The postal districts with the lowest participation rates in the State were my own area of Dublin 17, which had 8% participation, and Dublin 10, which had 7% participation. The north inner city also had a very low rate of 9% participation, Dublin 22 had 13% participation, Dublin 11 had 14% participation and Dublin 20 had 17% participation. In two postal districts, Dublin 11 and Dublin 22, there has actually been a decline from 1992. These figures are disgraceful and appalling.

There has been much discussion about the celebration of 1916 and the beginning of our move towards the foundation of a republic. One measure we could take to celebrate 1916 would be to cherish all the children of the nation equally by ensuring they all receive a full education in the

next decade and can go, if they so choose, all the way through to third and fourth level education.

I wish to focus on the generally disgraceful treatment of the post-leaving certificate sector, to which other Deputies referred. This sector performs a vital function for the high proportion of our citizens who did not have a chance to reach leaving certificate level. The courses have been taught valiantly by hard-working teachers in the 200 institutions referred to by my colleague. These institutions have been given a chance in the past two decades to try to catch up despite often operating in the most difficult of circumstances, with overcrowded buildings and classrooms, and with teachers being required to teach very large classes over a full teaching week although, effectively, they were teaching at third level. The PLC sector has been disgracefully neglected and has been the Cinderella of our education system.

I pay particular tribute to the schools in my constituency. Most educators and teachers — I am a former teacher — will not mind if I single out one college, Coláiste Dhúlaigh in Coolock, which has been a trailblazer in that area. Many of the residents of Coolock and surrounding districts have been enabled by the college to get a professional qualification. Many journalists, including some working in Leinster House, began their journalism and media training in Coláiste Dhúlaigh, and a range of other courses was also provided. I salute the staff who have undertaken this vital work in the past two decades.

As the Minister knows, the McIver report was presented on 15 March 2002 but, unfortunately, it has been virtually ignored since then. We all had great hopes in the lead-up to the 2006 budget that this sector would be provided with additional funding to allow for significant extra teaching resources and ancillary staffing, but nothing happened. Instead, the Minister for Finance dealt with fourth level education. While I accept hard choices must be made given that Ireland has among the lowest spending on social provision of the 15 older European Union member states, there was plenty of scope to deal with PLCs and fourth level education. A choice between the two was not necessary.

The McIver report described the grave difficulties under which the valiant teaching staff operated, including long teaching hours, large class sizes and lack of provision of all kinds, including with regard to canteens, computers and the basic ancillary supports that any teacher would need. Despite grave difficulties, they delivered a wonderful achievement for the 30,000 students.

The key recommendations of the McIver report were that the sector be regarded as a distinct system with its further education courses being fully recognised, and that the separation from second level would be recognised, especially where there were large concentrations of further education students. As all teachers know and

[Mr. Broughan.]

many Members have experience of first, second or third level teaching, second and third level are as different from each other as first and second level. It is unfair on adults who have not had a chance to attend second level to be placed in a second level ambience.

This point also applies to all the other benefits that make college so wonderful for those like myself who were fortunate enough — in my case, through the diligence of my parents — to get a chance to attend third level, such as the additional recreational and social pursuits and accomplishments that stay with a person for his or her life. These could perhaps include public speaking or playing hurling or football for the college or otherwise, but these benefits cannot be had given the current situation in the PLC sector.

The report recommends a variety of delivery mechanisms, including modular structures for courses, which even the great universities have begun to recognise is the way to do business and to integrate education into the modern world. Flexibility of location by going out to companies and industrial estates, flexibility of times particularly for hard-working parents, and changes in the timing and number of hours third level teachers need to work could be implemented. It is said that the Minister of State is serving her final year, which I regret, and I congratulate her on her achievements as Minister of State. Perhaps she might advise the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Hanafin, that we need the recommendations of the report implemented.

On a local level, we have a third level institution which has served this sector very well. Recently *The Irish Times*, with its usual weasel words, published its league tables and then claimed they were not league tables. It was striking how many students went to a third level college in their own region. Having institutes of technology in Blanchardstown and Tallaght are valuable steps forward. Given that a new city is being built in my constituency and that Swords is to become the fifth largest city in Ireland in the next ten to 15 years and will have a population of 50,000 to 60,000, we should have a new third level institution — perhaps on the Coláiste Dhúlaigh campus — which can become a full third or fourth level institution for the north side.

We have had several Taoisigh from the north side with their distinguished lifestyles and the current incumbent is allegedly going for his three in a row. However, they have never delivered a third level institution for us. While we have our great university, Dublin City University, it is a national high technology university and unfortunately not too many people from the north side have had the opportunity to go there. While the Leas-Cheann Comhairle might advocate the same for his constituency, we should have a senior third or fourth level institution on the north side.

Dr. Devins: Education was, is and will remain the single most important factor in ensuring that we, as a country, develop to our full potential. It has always been a core tenet of the party to which I belong that a high quality education system should be available to all our citizens regardless of age, sex or ability to pay. I am delighted that in the Minister for Education and Science we have a person who continues to deliver on the best education service possible. Through her training as a teacher she has an inherent grasp of the intricacies of the educational system. She has demonstrated that, since becoming Minister for Education and Science, she has the empathy with the two main components of the education system, namely, students and teachers, to ensure that system develops to its full potential. I thank her for continuing to invest in much needed capital projects at primary, secondary and third level.

In my constituency of Sligo-Leitrim, new secondary schools are being built in Sligo for the Ursuline College and for Summerhill College, which is the largest boys' school in the west. New primary schools have been built and existing schools throughout the constituency have been expanded. I am delighted that my constituency colleague, Deputy Perry, will agree entirely.

Mr. Perry: Absolutely.

Dr. Devins: The continued expansion of Sligo Institute of Technology bears witness to the importance this institution plays in the third level system. In the year that Sligo Institute of Technology celebrates 30 years of existence, it is fitting that we reflect on exactly what the college has achieved in that time. From very humble beginnings — its gestation, birth and early existence were opposed by many senior people in the education sector at the time — it has now grown to where it is today. It now has almost 4,500 full-time students or their equivalents and is viewed as one of the main reasons for the regeneration not just in Sligo, but in the north west as a whole.

Its close links with local industry and its ability to respond rapidly and effectively to new and innovative courses is well recognised. Two weeks ago during the Taoiseach's visit to Sligo, we were delighted to learn that Sligo Institute of Technology has now got the right to grant its own postgraduate qualifications up to and including PhD level. Some years ago I had the honour of being chairman of the governing body of Sligo Institute of Technology when it attained the right to confer its own degrees. However, the icing on the cake was the granting of the right to confer postgraduate qualifications. This is a clear recognition of the robustness of its academic qualifications and is a tribute to the wonderful staff of the college. In all but name, Sligo Institute of Technology now operates at the equivalent level of a university. However, it has the advantage over a university of retaining the step-like progression of certificate, diploma and degree, which

has been central to the institute of technology sector philosophy.

Hand in hand with the academic achievements have been the changes in the campus infrastructure. Landmark new buildings have been erected for the college in engineering, business innovation, technology, student facilities, *aula maxima* and administration. Sporting facilities have been provided to match those of any third level institution in the country. In this regard, I acknowledge the role played by the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, Deputy O'Donoghue, who has supplied money to provide a state-of-the-art Gaelic pitch, an all-weather running track and a soccer pitch. Construction is nearly finished on changing facilities allied to a new much expanded *aula maxima*.

When one considers that in excess of €1.7 billion will be provided to the third level sector this year, it is obvious that the Government is committed to continuing the massive investment in education. The Government continues to provide free education at third level at an annual cost in excess of €270 million. I welcome the commitment to focus on research and development, which is essential to help us maintain our employment levels. Recently the Kelly review group recommendations for capital investment for the period from 2006 to 2010 were accepted by Government. I welcome the inclusion of the refurbishment of the old engineering wing of Sligo Institute of Technology at a cost of €2.5 million. I urge the Minister to consider allowing the college to proceed to architectural planning for the next stage of its capital development.

The Minister should continue drafting legislation to transfer responsibility for the institutes of technology from the Department of Education and Science to a reconstituted higher education authority. The body must be reconstituted so that the institutes of technology are given parity of esteem with universities, which is the only way for both sectors to thrive and potential conflicts of interest to be avoided.

Student support grants provide a vital support in enabling students to maintain themselves in college during the year. This year €228 million will be paid in various maintenance grants. In addition to these grants, which are means-tested, the social inclusion chapter of the national development plan provides for a third level access fund aimed at increasing representation at third level from three specific groups, namely, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students and students with a disability. I know at first hand the importance of these third level access funds. I ask the Minister to ensure they continue beyond 2006.

Education is not the preserve of any single sector. The future of our country is dependent on all our citizens getting the opportunity to experience third level education, whether it be for the first time or to re-skill or retrain. We must look beyond the traditional route of intake of students

and, in this regard, the large pool of mature students has not been fully employed.

The Minister's recent announcement that she will simplify the administration of student grants is most welcome. I urge her to continue pressing ahead with what is undoubtedly a positive development. Irrespective of what difficulties are encountered by her, the end result will be welcomed by all students on maintenance grants. It is not right that some do not receive their grants until close to Christmas. To me at least, there appears to be a wide disparity between agencies in how quickly and effectively grants are paid. In that regard, it is always the student who suffers, and that must not be allowed to continue.

I also welcome the improvements in the further education sector. The high uptake of literacy programmes and the remarkable success of Youthreach are just two of the developments in further education that are having a great impact. Youthreach, which is targeted at early school leavers, is a wonderful programme and I am aware of the great success it is having in Sligo and the surrounding area. I recently witnessed a former Youthreach participant graduate with a degree from the institute of technology in Sligo. She addressed the Youthreach function a few months ago, giving one of the most moving speeches I have heard. The interaction between her and the audience was incredible.

I congratulate the Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Hanafin, and her Ministers of State on ensuring that education remains to the forefront of the Government's agenda.

Mr. Ferris: I wish to share time with Deputies Catherine Murphy and Sargent.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Ferris: Martin Luther King once stated, in one of his so articulate addresses, that education was freedom. While I concur completely, unfortunately, because of inequalities in the society in which we live, a full education is denied to many. It happens not by choice but through economic inequalities. Let us take the number of children who start out with great intentions and gifts yet do not realise or fulfil their potential owing to their being unable to complete their education as a result of their economic background.

That is nowhere more true than in working class estates. I know from first-hand experience where I live in Tralee that the number of children from working class estates who go on to third level education is minimal when compared with middle and upper class areas. That is also reflected in mature students. In particular, women in working class estates strive to fulfil their abilities. However, owing to financial restraints, they are unable to do so. It is reflected too in people with disabilities who, because of

[Mr. Ferris.]

society's inequalities, cannot fulfil their gifts. A determined and proactive political approach is necessary to bridge that gap and allow people from less well-off backgrounds the opportunity to fulfil their potential and abilities.

I wish to comment on the institute of technology in Tralee, which provides a fabulous service. A previous speaker referred to the IT in Sligo, and Tralee is comparable. A fantastic service is provided and there is now a tremendous sporting facility. However, the difficulty has been that it has taken years to get to where it is today. It has struggled to secure money to provide that service. I compliment everyone associated with Tralee IT on the work they have done in attracting funding, often granted begrudgingly. Many would argue that Tralee IT has the personnel and facilities to achieve university status, and I hope that is not too far off.

Ms C. Murphy: When a major study such as the McIver report is commissioned by the Government and published, one expects its implementation. The Government has obviously been taken by surprise by its findings. Otherwise, it would have anticipated the cost of implementing it. We are constantly being told that we must move up the value chain in our economy. Those who will drive that move will not necessarily be those in classrooms at the moment but also those in today's workforce. We are reactive rather than proactive when it comes to arming people for change and moving up the value chain. Flexibility is very often discussed in a negative context regarding employees. It is only when an industry closes down that we react by rushing to upskill people, although it should be an ongoing process.

The post-leaving certificate sector has a role to play in that. Every response to a parliamentary question on the McIver report that I have seen details either how much is being spent on the sector or how much it will cost to implement. That stands in sharp contrast to the lack of evaluation that has occurred with the likes of property-based incentive schemes, which are now being very slowly phased out. Implementing something such as the McIver report would have a much more beneficial effect on the economy than many of those schemes.

ICTU has spoken of the Government's failure to date to implement the McIver report on further education, which it commissioned, calling into serious question its commitment to developing further education and lifelong learning. It states that the report seeks to provide for a proper and long-overdue structure for staffing and facilities in further education colleges. In a strong comment, it contends that nowhere in western Europe has further education been treated more shabbily than in this State. ICTU also says that further education colleges exist only because of the enthusiasm and commitment of

teaching staff who recognised a real need and sought to address it.

The same has happened in first level education where one has seen such initiatives as gael scoileanna and Educate Together schools which were very much driven by parents who were enthusiasts for those types of education. They are now lauded as great successes. Perhaps this sector must also be examined in the context of the imagination shown by the people delivering the services.

Mr. Sargent: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta Ferris as a chuid ama a roinnt. Tá sé an-tábhachtach go mbeadh an díospóireacht seo ann, agus cé nach bhfuil ach cúpla nóiméad agam, is mian liom cúpla pointe a lua.

I listened carefully to the Minister talking about how Ireland faced many challenges. That is correct. She also said that it was being emulated by low-cost economies. There was a great deal of jargon, so one had to decipher what she said and perhaps even ascertain whether there was anything behind it. She spoke of incentivising the delivery of programmes and world class strengths. There was all sorts of terminology that sounds great but boils down to meaningless talk. It is important that we address the kinds of challenges we face. We must call a spade a spade and make matters very clear. It is welcome that there has been an increase in post-leaving certificate places and there are many other welcome measures.

I am not sure yet whether the degree to which research and development are fundamental to the challenges we face is understood. We are talking not only about market share in a global economy but also about putting in place the means and measures by which we can manage without oil. It is that simple. That is a fundamental objective this country must address. Further education is critical if we are to be successful in that challenge. We are not even talking about running out of oil, until which point we have a great deal of time. We must put in place a society that is post-fossil fuels on account of climate change, no matter what supplies of oil remain. That means converting this economy to an eco-economy, with major job opportunities. Denmark has led the way in Europe but countries such as South Korea have also provided a number of good examples. Costa Rica has committed itself to being dependent totally on renewable energy by 2025 and Sweden has set a similar target for 2015.

I ask the Minister and the Government to set for this country clear objectives on which our further education sector could lead by expanding the numbers of people in those professions that are fundamental to an eco-economy. If I may list just a few of those, I suggest we need more wind meteorologists, foresters, hydrologists, recycling engineers, aquaculture veterinarians, ecological economists, geothermal geologists, environmental architects, bicycle designers and mechanics and wind turbine engineers. Indeed, a wide range

of jobs need to be developed alongside research and development in those fields. In Balbriggan where I live, the development of a marine conservation centre demonstrates the new awareness people have about how fundamental our marine environment is for our future survival given our need for energy, food and other resources.

Those issues must be part of the further education agenda, but I hear nothing about such matters from Deputies on the Government benches. We hear them talk about market share, moving up the value chain and, in a general way, improving research and development, but they do not mention specifics or talk about what vision, if any, the Government has.

Mr. Andrews: With the Acting Chairman's permission, I will share my time with Deputy Fiona O'Malley.

Acting Chairman (Mr. McCormack): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Andrews: Listening to Deputy Sargent's list of future courses, I thought he was about to start suggesting courses for people to become Green Party press officers and speech writers as everything seemed to be very much orientated towards Green Party ideas. However, the Deputy has underlined the fact that the key achievement of further education is flexibility and responsiveness to new needs such as those of what he described as the eco-economy, which I am sure will unfold in the coming years if the Green Party gets into Government.

Mr. Sargent: It is the future.

Mr. Andrews: Obviously, that is a possibility given the fact that Greens have not ruled anything out. I think that his party is available to go into Government with anybody.

Mr. English: Fianna Fáil has not ruled anything out either.

Mr. Sargent: The debate is supposed to be about further education.

Mr. Andrews: I want to underline the contribution that further education makes under three headings: the integration of non-nationals into our society, the impact of lifelong learning on the economy, and early school leavers.

Dealing with the last issue first, I want to highlight the Dún Laoghaire report, *Moving Beyond the Barriers*, which recommended, among other things, that extra learning options should be provided for early school leavers in Further Education and Training Awards Council modules. The report made the point that early school leavers can find it very difficult to return to a secondary school environment to complete their junior leaving certificate but further education provides a crossover opportunity for them. Such problems

are not pronounced in Dún Laoghaire but they exist. Further education has been able to provide a bridge allowing people to return to the education system and thereby move up the ladder through the FETAC modules, in many cases on to higher education.

The impact of lifelong learning on the economy has already been well thrashed out in the Chamber today. As everyone knows, at a time when manufacturing jobs seem to be continually being lost, the Government's stock response is that we must upskill workers and those training so that they are constantly responsive to developments in technology. The further education sector has helped to address that issue by providing training opportunities from which those who have qualified have gone into employment. Few people end up unemployed after qualifying through further education.

I note today that a further 650 jobs are to be created in Cork by amazon.com. While some people are writing the economy's obituary, it is clear that Ireland is still an attractive destination for investment in manufacturing and services. We should not forget that. Although we may wonder why closures such as that at Ballivor occur, we must also acknowledge that the amazon.com phenomenon shows that Cork is still considered a very attractive place in which to invest serious amounts of money. Indeed, about €1 million per worker has been invested in the area, so we should clearly not be so gloomy about the prospects for the economy.

Having attended a number of prizegivings in Senior College Dún Laoghaire and the Cumberland Street college, I know that a large number of non-nationals use further education as a means to begin their education in this country. Although we perhaps lack some vision about how to ensure non-nationals integrate into society, further education provides for such integration a key tool that should be acknowledged.

On the PLC sector generally — I think we are supposed to use the term "further education sector" — I agree that the sector needs to be acknowledged as a separate sector in its own right. As a former teacher of a PLC course, I saw for myself the advantages further education provides for people. I was a teacher in Ballyfermot Senior College for a year so I have no doubt that further education provides people with an opportunity to get on a ladder that will lead them to academic achievement. Indeed, I notice from the website of the Senior College Dún Laoghaire that it is providing new courses in theatre studies and the performing arts. As Deputy Sargent said, the sector is growing all the time and it is flexible.

I welcome the opportunity to debate further education and I urge the Minister to consider implementing some, if not all, of the McIver report's recommendations.

Ms F. O'Malley: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on the subject of higher and

[Ms F. O'Malley.]

further education. It is beyond dispute that education has been the most important element which has led to the economic and social transformation of this country. If we only consider the importance attached to education in the millennium development goals for enabling people in the developing world to reach their potential, we recognise how central education is to the economic and social well-being of any country.

As has been mentioned, our skilled workforce is a major selling point for this country but a workforce capable of changing and adapting to change is now seen as the essential ingredient for keeping our prosperity going. Our education system must be able to provide all our citizens with the opportunity of enhancing their abilities. The philosophy of the Progressive Democrats has always been that a job is the best way out of poverty, but the best way of getting a job is to ensure that the person has the necessary education and skills.

Although this year's budget laudably provides for a fourth level of funding, I believe everybody in the country deserves a chance to enhance their abilities no matter at what level they might be. The large budget briefing documents showed the breadth and extent of the finances invested in the education sector over recent years. The figures are indeed impressive — I do not think anyone would take issue with that — but I think the further education sector has been somewhat overlooked. The McIver report tried to address that by looking at the needs of the further education sector and of PLC courses in particular.

It is worth dwelling slightly, as Deputy Andrews did, on the value of PLC courses. They are perhaps a recognition that the formal education process is not for everybody and that everyone does not develop in the same way. We need to provide the more scenic route — if that is the right phrase — through education. The point is that we are required to provide education for everybody according to their needs. That is why PLC courses are fantastic in providing opportunities for people whose skills might not have been developed through the formal education sector.

It is regrettable that the valuable contribution of further education is not recognised by being given a permanent home in a Department or by having a lead Department to provide proper planning for the sector. Much of the trouble in the PLC sector is due to this lack of planning and not being on an itemised list in the budget every year. The current piecemeal approach to planning is certainly not beneficial for the PLC sector. One point which all Members have in common is that they were brought to this House by the people's votes. Consequently, all are familiar with the needs of their constituents as well as the shortcomings of certain sectors.

I also wish to touch on our new multicultural society. Deputy Andrews commented on the

newer communities that have developed. To an extent, the language needs of the children from those communities which do not speak English as a first language are provided for in schools. However, their parents may not have the opportunity to learn in schools. PLC courses would deliver a very good service in providing language skills to the parents of children who come from countries where English is not the first language. Members should remember that children's education would develop in tandem with their parents' acquisition of English. This is a major opportunity.

As I said earlier, the budget provided for the fourth level of education, which was a worthwhile recognition. Our excellence in the field of education has been recognised worldwide and we should take that into account. Certainly, we have traditionally thrived in the high scale research and development fields and the provisions in the budget will provide for this. All our people deserve the best opportunities. To create a knowledge-based society, all people must be able to extend their abilities.

Mr. English: All Members today have noted that further and higher education is the future. The events last week in Ballivor, County Meath, were a prime example, as were the events in Donegal and many other places, of the changes afoot. Nearly every week, one hears announcements of job losses and of companies moving away from Ireland. Hence, we must begin to increase the numbers of postgraduates as well as undergraduates who are equipped for the needs of the modern jobs market. Otherwise, our position on the world stage in terms of employment providers will quickly fall.

Increased investment in further and higher education is the key in this respect. While education got us to our current position in the first place, we must increase our efforts. People do not realise how high the bar has been raised and we must set our aims high and pump money into the sector.

Simultaneously, we must work with those manufacturing companies who have decided to leave, to try to establish whether there is any way to retain some employment here, even in reduced numbers or mainly in the research and development area. An opportunity exists to work with them and I question the degree to which discussions have been held with many such companies to try to keep them in this country. Do we offer them a plan or a vision? If we put the correct incentives in place, some companies might be able to retain some jobs here, which could perhaps be built upon subsequently.

Our further and higher education facilities remain incorrectly funded and are often underfunded. The Minister informed the House of the millions of euro provided to this sector. However, Members know that these millions are insufficient and are not spent in an inclusive

fashion. Many lecturers and college administrators have approached Members to tell them that they lack the required funds to run their establishments. They are unable to upgrade them or improve their facilities and they cannot offer their desired courses because they do not have sufficient funds. While funding has increased, it is still insufficient to continue into the future.

Our institutions must develop an open door policy to allow entry to further education to all who have the ability and not simply those who have the money. Although there is a problem with those who cannot afford to attend college at third or fourth level, we are informed that there is free education. Similarly, while primary education is supposedly free, it still costs parents €1,000 or €2,000 every year to send their children to school. The same situation applies as far as third level colleges are concerned. It still costs €2,000 or €3,000 between books, registration fees, enrolment fees of all kinds and so on. The costs continually mount. Hence, for many it is not free and many cannot afford to attend.

Those who could not afford to attend previously must be allowed to become our future business leaders, school principals and inventors of the next generation of computer software and hardware. Funding for these future leaders must come from the State's tax take, as every cent spent on education will be returned threefold or fourfold in the form of job creation and sustainable industry that will aid the economy. One's address should not decide what course one takes in college or where one ends up subsequently.

I agree with the Minister's earlier statement to the effect that fourth level opportunities must be enhanced, expanded and developed. We compete for investment on a global basis where the knowledge economy is critically important. As a result, a global education is required. Ireland competes in a high-wage market and to continue to demand high wages, we must be the best in our field. This can only be done through improving our current workforce's skills and by providing excellence in education to new entrants. Our educational offerings must be even better than previously if, as a nation, we are to succeed in supporting our position within the global economy.

In IDA Ireland's annual report for 2003, Seán Dorgan noted that the investment we must now win will seek more advanced skills and will conduct high value work, often connected to research activity. More often than not, they seek a strong urban base with educational and business services that can support sophisticated or complex activities with an international focus. It would be worth reviewing what actions were put in place since 2003 and whether we have delivered. It appears that despite the references to millions of euro, we have not really reacted to the advice given.

In the past ten years, there has been a major shift in the population patterns along the east coast. Unfortunately, further and higher level education provisions have not moved with the

people. A greater investment is required in both our universities and institutes of technology to expand further into the regions, be it through new, dedicated sites, PLC centres or greater use of outreach centres. The funding is inadequate for this to take place. For example, County Meath has a population of more than 160,000 which is rapidly heading towards 200,000. Despite this, it does not have a dedicated higher level facility. In the week of the NEC closure in Ballivor, there has never been a more opportune time to provide the higher education facilities needed to put Meath on the inward investment map.

Meath County Council tried to take the lead in this respect. It developed a higher education strategy some years ago to try to promote Meath and to enhance the county's chances of acquiring a third level college. However, it is impossible to secure even minor Government funding to push the report or use the study to develop educational facilities. The county council was not overly demanding in its plan and it realised that one cannot flick one's fingers and secure a third level college. While this happened fortuitously in Blanchardstown a few years ago, it does not always happen so easily. Hence, the council's plan was to develop courses and a Meath brand of education and to build it up until eventually there would be sufficient activity in the county to demonstrate the need for a third level college on a greenfield site. Sadly, this has not been backed fully and even resources to pursue this option at a lower level are not forthcoming.

The Minister's speech leaned heavily towards the education providers. There was little or no emphasis on one key part of education, namely, the student. A review of access to education requirements must be carried out nationally to establish what courses are available and where. While it might be an adventure for someone setting out from second to third level at the age of 18, what is available for the more mature person whose life is settled? Such people might be returning to education to pursue a new career, may be entering third level education for the first time or may be completing a masters course to advance in their careers.

I will provide two examples. One is a person from County Meath who is married with two children. For the past two years, he has travelled once a week to Belfast to attend university. While he would love the opportunity to stay with his family overnight, effectively he has no choice and must spend two days a week away from them while travelling to and from Belfast. He should have the opportunity to learn closer to home. While we do not provide enough courses close to people's homes, we continually tell them that they must reskill or re-educate themselves and the course choices are not available.

The second example is a person from Wexford who is married with three children. She travels to UCD every day to study for a higher diploma. She leaves home at 5.30 a.m. and returns at 9 p.m.

[Mr. English.]

She makes this major sacrifice to further her education and to join the workforce. Surely this lady deserves to receive this education in her native county. It cannot be too hard to match the lecturers and so on with the students' points of origin. Why are some courses only provided in the cities? We must open up in this regard and give the people of rural Ireland, those who do not live in the urban centres, a chance to attend such courses conveniently and not at great cost in terms of both quality of life and finance.

Another aspect of further and higher education which affects students is the ability to afford four years of education. Grants are not moving with the times. With the rising cost of accommodation and living, students are under pressure. Maintenance grant rates for higher education are outdated and insufficient for today's needs. The full grant of €3,020 is not even enough to cover accommodation costs, let alone the cost of living. The Government must wake up and back students.

Many students are offered placements. I would encourage many more courses to use placements, for example, in the summertime. As the burden of finding placements can be awkward, the Government needs to make them more accessible. During a placement, a student might need help with transport and accommodation costs, especially if he or she must move down the country. The Government needs to look at this issue and see whether there is any way it can help. I would encourage businesses to play a greater role in that regard.

Evening courses and courses provided by private colleges offer other choices but the expense involved may prove difficult for students. Numerous individuals who cannot obtain a grant to attend the course of their choice have come to me for help. The course fee could be €2,000 or €3,000 and it could be a course that would give them their chance in life, yet there is a limited number of places to which one can go for help or a grant if one does not fall within the main categories of education. It can, therefore, be difficult for a person to further his or her education.

On administration and the qualification criteria for grants, it is crazy that one must be over 23 years before being assessed on one's own income. Last year I dealt with the case of a young lady aged 21 years with two children of her own who was assessed on her parents' income. She missed out on getting a grant to go to college because their income was over the threshold. There is something wrong if we cannot change the system to match what is happening in today's world and give people a real chance to further their education.

The points system is out of date when it comes to providing courses. There are people missing out on courses because of it. The number of points is set according to the level of demand for a course, not on the level of intelligence or

academic ability needed for it. That is a great shame. For example, there is a 50% drop-out rate in PE courses because the wrong people are taking them. They see the course on the CAO form as a good one requiring high points but when they get there, they realise it is not the one for them. However, they have taken the place of somebody else. It is a missed opportunity. This is a disgrace. Any missed opportunity is a loss to the country and the economy.

Mr. Gilmore: I support the comments made by my colleague, Deputy O'Sullivan, the Labour Party spokesperson on education. As my comments will relate specifically to the further education sector, I understand I am obliged to indicate that I am married to the principal of a college of further education. More to the point, I have a particular interest in this issue because three colleges of further education are located in my constituency: Senior College Dún Laoghaire, Sallynoggin College of Further Education and Dún Laoghaire College of Further Education. Some of the pioneers of the further education sector in these colleges such as Mr. Jack Griffin, a former principal of the senior college in Dún Laoghaire, were responsible for developing many of the courses offered and ideas pursued.

As has been stated, there are more than 30,000 students in the further education sector. One of the remarkable aspects of the sector is that there was never a formal decision that I can recall that there should be such a sector. There was no consultant's report, White Paper, Act of the Oireachtas or great Government announcement that there would be a further education sector. What happened was that the sector developed through the initiative of schools and teachers and the flexibility of the VEC system in responding to local, social, economic and educational needs. When the country was developing in the IT area, for example, it was these colleges and schools which established courses on computer skills provided by people familiar with them. Before child care, for example, became a topical political issue, the colleges had identified this need locally and were running courses on child care and associated subjects.

It interests me that we hear much about enterprise. One would sometimes think, watching enterprise awards ceremonies, etc., that enterprise was confined entirely to the private sector. This is an example of public sector enterprise which, if it was happening elsewhere, would be the pride and joy of the chambers of commerce. The problem is that the sector is now surviving on the energy, effort and commitment of its staff. Teachers are working way beyond the call of duty, which is not sustainable. The sector cannot be sustained on the enthusiasm of its staff.

Hopes had been raised by the McIver report that the further education sector would be formally recognised and resources provided to enable it do its work. However, I see no evidence

that the Government will implement the recommendations of the report and I am not encouraged, notwithstanding this fine debate and the laudatory comments made about the sector, by what either the Minister or the Minister of State had to say about the issue. The Minister of State, Deputy de Valera, for example, referred to the number of places on PLC courses and spoke about the number being up in the 2005-06 academic year. However, she did not address directly the cap which her Department has placed on the individual colleges. As I understand it, about three years ago they were told the numbers of students they could enrol in PLC courses would be capped at the existing level. This, in turn, has had the effect of preventing the development of new courses.

The Minister, Deputy Hanafin's speech is straight out of the realm of Sir Humphrey. When she referred to the McIver report, she told the House that there had been significant engagement with the major partners in education. She further stated, "Clearly, complex issues are involved, given the scale and the wider impacts of the recommendations and the challenge presented by the variation in sizes of PLC providers," all of which translates as nothing will be done. There is complexity in the sector but in the colleges. Any of the larger colleges of further education might have 1,000 students, 2,500 evening students and over 100 teachers, with buildings that are open and running from 7.30 a.m. until 10.30 p.m. and sometimes at weekends. They offer a range of night classes and have VTOS, second level and back to education initiative students. It is simply impossible to run such a college and organise and manage courses on a management structure designed for the normal second level school.

Among the practical measures that need to be addressed is, for example, the provision of technicians. One might have between 200 and 300 computers but no technician to service them. There is an entire IT unit to provide backup computer services for Members. One could find the same number of computers in some of the larger colleges of further education and there is not even a single technician provided by the Department of Education and Science to service them. There is no librarian provided by the Department to meet the needs of students taking PLC or further education courses. No administrative back-up is provided other than that provided as the normal second level allocation and by the VEC. However, no additional administrative backup is provided in recognition of the range of needs involved. All one has to do is compare the number of students, for example, in further education colleges with the numbers in institutes of technology. The courses and accreditation offered differ but the support, staff and resources required in these colleges bear no comparison.

What needs to be done is straightforward. The Minister of State said it would cost approximately

€48 million to implement the recommendations in this sector. That amount would not buy a second-hand set of voting machines in a country that constantly generates tax surpluses, as we are constantly reminded. The financial issue is that if the further education sector is permitted to decline, it will have to be reinvented at a greater cost to the public purse because our educational needs and economy require it. It makes sense for the Minister and the Department to build on what has been established at a lower cost but if the pioneering work undertaken in the colleges of further education is allowed to decline, it will have to be replaced by another form of further education at a greater cost.

Mr. Healy: I will focus on the further education sector, a unique success sector in our education system. It was established in 1985 which means last year marked the 20th anniversary of its foundation. During that time, it has blossomed. Between 1985 and 2000, approximately 24,000 students passed through it. In 2005 almost 30,000 students attended 220 further education colleges, of whom 70% attended the 50 largest colleges. Approximately 20% of school leavers take up the option of PLC courses compared with 40% who attend universities and institutes of technology. The further education sector is the largest second chance education provider in the State. More than half the students are aged over 20 years, while more than 20% are aged over 30. It is the major sector for second chance education but has been abandoned by the Government.

The McIver report has been at the Government's disposal since it was published three years ago. It was commissioned under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness following a commitment made to the social partners. However, three years later it is still gathering dust. No moneys have been made available for the implementation of its recommendations. The Government cannot claim there is a lack of funding to implement them because the State is awash with money. Last year's budget surplus was €6.7 billion, yet more than €50 million was squandered on e-voting machines and €150 million on PPARS. It is estimated the McIver report would cost €48 million to implement, a drop in the ocean in the context of the moneys available to the Government. This highlights the absolute lack of political will and commitment on its part to the further education sector. The Minister for Education and Science relegated disadvantage, at the core of this sector, in this year's budget. Spending increased by only 3.8%, whereas the education package increased by 8.8% overall. Money is available. I would like the Government backbenchers who proclaimed support for the McIver proposals in the debate to put pressure on the Minister to ensure it is made available to this important education sector.

Mr. Boyle: I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate, given my experience.

[Mr. Boyle.]

I attended an institute of technology at third level. Subsequently, as a local government member, I had the privilege of being a member of City of Cork VEC and chairing the board of management of a further education college, Coláiste Stiofáin Naofa. Even then, prior to my election to the House, I was aware of the frustration regarding proper resourcing and recognition of the sector, which was a current issue. It is even more frustrating and galling that the same issues, particularly those related to proper resourcing, are still a matter of political debate. The recommendations of the McIver report could be implemented at a cost of €48 million. However, the Government has held fast against implementing them and the cost has probably increased to €50 million but that is no excuse for failing to provide the necessary resources.

When I was chairman of the board of management of a progressive, innovative school, I became aware of the wider views of the further education sector. It is sometimes pejoratively known as the second and a half level sector, which undermines the role it plays in society. We do not have the opportunity to discuss the education philosophy being pursued by the Government and it falls down most in this regard. It is locked into an approach to education based purely on economic outcomes, which only pays lip-service to the concept of lifelong learning. If it supported this concept, it would have no difficulty in resourcing different educational sectors appropriately. It was most disappointing that the only reference to higher education in the budget was to fourth level education and the funding of PhDs, doctorates, masters degrees and so on. This underscores the Government's purely economic approach to education. My experience of the further education sector is that not only does it live and breathe the lifelong education approach, it reaches out to sectors of society that education policies of successive Governments have failed to reach.

We must recognise that further education colleges have been born out of the old technical college sector. They have reinvented themselves to represent the communities in which they are sited. They offer opportunities to people to get back into education and to progress to other forms of education. By not recognising properly the role further education colleges play, the Government lets down the people in such communities.

I will conclude with comments on the biggest failure of the Government in terms of economic supports for people availing of further and higher education. Yesterday we had a significant court decision on back to education allowances. I am surprised that despite this issue having been raised twice on the Order of Business, by me yesterday and Deputy O'Sullivan today, the Government has still not indicated how it intends to follow through on that important ruling. If it cannot

do the little things, we on this side of the House despair that it will ever tackle the bigger issues such as the McIver report.

Mr. Perry: It is very disappointing that we have had the McIver report three years and that nothing has been done. It is said that if the only tool one has is a hammer, one treats everything like a nail. The approach of the Government lacks strategic sense. It engages in reactive politics instead of being proactive and taking a long-term perspective on the major issues facing the country. One only has to look at the areas of education, health and transport to see prime examples of poor planning, quick fixes and tortured decision making.

Third level education illustrates the case graphically. Third level students are customers, in the broadest sense, of the education system but they experience at first hand the Government's stingy and short-sighted approach to third level education. There is great talk about the creation and development of the knowledge economy. However, the development of a progressive, innovative and broadly based third level sector needs significant and progressive measures in terms of money and policy initiatives to improve our investment in this area.

The third level sector could be a magnet for home and overseas students in all fields of academic endeavour. A recent OECD study put Ireland in the top five wealthiest countries of the 30 members of the OECD. We could take many approaches to the third level issue and do more for the students of the nation. I suggest we create a partnership between the Government, the universities, third level institutes and the private sector. There is a role for the private sector and there are many ways it could become involved in research and development. This is the only way to find creative ways to release potential. I am aware initiatives in this area are taking place in UCD.

Change and investment are the keys to the advancement of the third level sector here. This needs enlightened guidance and commitment from Government so that all stakeholders can develop. We have the opportunity to make the advances required. All we need to advance are the will and foresight to take a partnership approach with the private sector and the universities and to tap into research and development with the companies creating jobs locally.

We have seen job losses recently in our region in the area of high-cost jobs. Emphasis has been put on a base of third level colleges but, regrettably, significant numbers of students are leaving the region. St. Angela's College in Sligo is a fine college which has a school of nursing and the country's home economics training centre for teachers. Dr. Devins spoke about Sligo Institute of Technology which is a fine college with a fine staff who do a good job.

The Government has an opportunity to involve all stakeholders. Much more can be done. It is disappointing that although the McIver report has been published three years, we are only discussing it now.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Mr. B. Lenihan): On behalf of the Minister, I thank Deputies for their contributions to the debate. The introduction of the strategic innovation fund will address third level reform and ensure that Ireland continues to develop as a knowledge economy in a rapidly changing global environment. The fund will enable the higher education system to achieve a new level of performance that will create a platform for effective return on the wider investments that will be made through to 2013, including investments under the ambitious forthcoming national research plan.

In framing proposals, there will be a requirement on institutions to contribute funds from their own resources to copperfasten the reform efforts. This is important in ensuring that the fund can leverage fundamental change by promoting new thinking and priorities in the use of existing resources. The Minister has committed to seeing a comprehensive and sustainable programme of change through for the long term. The commitment, with its guaranteed five-year fund, allows for far-reaching proposals for change to be brought forward.

The commitment of the Government on higher and further education is evident. On the capital side, the infrastructural developments planned under the €900 million capital envelope are an essential part of that commitment. This has been targeted to continue to upgrade and modernise campus facilities throughout the country and to address development needs in areas of strategic national importance.

On the issue of research and development, there was no dedicated programme of funding for research and development under the Department of Education and Science prior to 1998. Deputies should look at the scale of the €605 million projects approved for funding since then. The Government's intention is to continue to build on this through the new national research plan under preparation. The development of a new fourth level system of advanced research is a key priority as we seek to achieve national goals of enhancing quality and volume of research activity here. This is not an optional issue for the State but something we must do. Investment in higher education will be identified as a central element of the successor to the national development plan for the period from 2007 to 2013.

Third level access programmes have seen the development of close links between the higher education institutions, area partnerships, teachers, parents and students in primary and secondary schools, especially those located in areas of concentrated socioeconomic disadvantage,

through a range of activities and initiatives. These programmes have encouraged and will continue to encourage more young people to access and participate in higher education. It is envisaged that additional financial support will be available to support strategic and effective access initiatives on the part of higher education institutions from both Higher Education Authority core funding and through the strategic innovation fund.

There is no question that the institutes of technology have done a tremendous job in the educational landscape of the country. They became autonomous third level institutions in 1993. They have undergone a number of dramatic changes in terms of the range of courses offered, the staffing, which is up 68%, and student numbers, where full-time numbers are up 51% and part-time numbers up 45%. Following on this period of growth, the institutes now face new challenges. These will be served by transferring responsibility for the day-to-day management of the sector from the Department to the Higher Education Authority. The Minister is preparing legislation to effect this transfer.

Many Deputies referred to the position on further education. The Government's record of investment in this area was outlined by the Minister of State, Deputy de Valera. There has been a 60% increase in PLC places under this Government to more than 30,000 places. This has resulted in new educational opportunities and learning pathways for school leavers and adults returning to education. The relevance of the skills and qualifications provided in this sector to our wider labour market, the widespread availability of programmes and the inclusive nature of access to these programmes is a powerful combination of factors behind the importance of the sector for society and the economy.

From the perspective of individual learners, further education in general offers huge valuable opportunities for personal development and progress.

Ms O'Sullivan: Does the Minister of State expect them to run on a shoestring?

Mr. B. Lenihan: The establishment of a national framework of qualifications has enhanced the value of all learning qualifications for the purpose of building on these through progression and access to further learning. Many PLC graduates now progress to higher education. As we seek to develop a culture of lifelong learning, these formal links will continue to be built upon by the Department.

7 o'clock

Messages from Select Committees.

Acting Chairman: The Select Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights has completed its consideration of the Registration of Deeds and Title Bill 2004 and has made amendments thereto.

[Acting Chairman.]

The Select Committee on Transport has completed its consideration of the Road Safety Authority Bill 2004 and has made amendments thereto.

Estimates for Public Services 2006: Message from Select Committee.

Acting Chairman: The Select Committee on Finance and the Public Service has completed its consideration of the following Revised Estimates for public services, for the services for the year ended 31 December 2006: Votes Nos. 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17 and 18.

Private Members' Business.

School Discipline: Motion (Resumed).

The following motion was moved by Deputy Enright on Tuesday, 28 February 2006:

That Dáil Éireann:

- concerned at growing indiscipline in Ireland's schools;
- noting the findings of the interim report of the task force on student behaviour that the disruptive behaviour in our schools included threats against teachers and their property, fighting, assault and the carrying of dangerous weapons on school property;
- noting especially that some examples of student behaviour notified to the task force were of such a serious nature as to be considered criminal behaviour; and
- accepting that the discipline problems in our schools reduce the performance of students as a whole, and lead to the potential loss of teachers from the profession;

calls on the Government to:

- immediately publish the final report of the task force on student behaviour, under the chairmanship of Maeve Martin;
- outline its legislative response to tackling school discipline problems, in particular, its response to the difficulties posed by section 29 of the Education Act 1998; and
- put in place specific measures to make schools good places to teach, and to learn, including the implementation of a national anti-bullying strategy.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "Dáil Éireann" and substitute the following:

- supports the measured and focussed manner in which the Minister for Education and Science has approached the issue of student behaviour in our second level schools;
 - notes the fact that a Task Force established by the Minister has now completed its work;
 - commends the fact that funding has been provided in 2006 to commence the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force; and
 - notes further the Minister's intention to publish the Report and set out her intended approach to implementation in March 2006.
- (Minister for Education and Science)

Mr. Andrews: I wish to share time with Deputy Cregan. I am delighted to be able to address the House on this issue. As a former school teacher I have had direct experience of disruptive behaviour. As a former pupil, I have also had direct experience of it as have many other Members, I am sure.

It is a curious time to introduce this topic on Private Member's Business by virtue of the fact that the final report has not been published. The interim report has been published but this has the feeling of half-time entertainment while the real event is waiting to be rolled out. A great range of types of behaviour is in danger of being described by this motion, from so-called messing, natural high spirits and exuberance that one would expect of young people right up to violent behaviour that is the real concern of many. While acknowledging this range of behaviour, we must also acknowledge that it is only at the very top end of the scale that a problem exists. The rest is manageable by teachers, or at least should be, as part of their professional abilities.

The stress that disruptive behaviour places on teachers can be very difficult to bear. I have seen the damage it does to their private and personal lives when they are targeted by children who see a weakness in them. It is an issue that must be taken seriously and for that reason, I welcome this debate.

I have noticed a common problem in that a set of students is well behaved for one teacher but badly behaved for another. This demonstrates that often the teacher in question will require some help to avoid disruptive behaviour within the classroom. The continuous professional development of teachers has attracted an increase in funding of 15%, to €27 million. I was surprised to see the TUI so critical of the funding that has been secured for this area, when the task force finally reports. There are so many other investments in this area, for example, the money being spent under targets for home, school, community liaison and the school completion programme. There is no doubt all of this investment will

eventually filter down and result in better behaviour in classrooms.

Many parents complain about the damage done to other students when disruptive behaviour occurs but that can be overestimated. It is somewhat like the anti-social behaviour issue. At a low level, it is ordinary children having a laugh, but at a higher level, as was seen on "Prime Time", it is criminal behaviour. Anti-social behaviour has become a catch-all description for so many things and the term "disruptive behaviour" has the same capacity to describe a large number of things. We must be careful and acknowledge that we are dealing with a reasonably limited number of problematic situations.

When I was a teacher some time ago teacher counsellors were introduced. I am not sure if they are still in place following the pilot scheme that was introduced in the late 1990s.

One of the TUI recommendations is to separate children when they are recognised as being disruptive but that should be a last resort, if a resort at all. I strongly recommend that students should be dealt with within their own schools. Otherwise, one is simply transferring the problem and stigmatising children when it is the duty of a school to try to deal with such problems itself and not to separate children out or send them to other schools.

What stands out for me is the need to have a flexible response to the problem of disruptive students. One could set down codes of behaviour and strict requirements for parents, teachers and students but ultimately, every situation is different and every school should be able to respond with flexibility and within a framework. I hope the report from the task force is published soon.

Mr. Cregan: I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this important debate. I wish to refer to the four terms of reference set in place for the task force. It was asked to examine the issue of disruptive students' behaviour as it impacts on teaching and learning, to consider the effectiveness of strategies currently employed to address this issue, to advise on existing best practice, both nationally and internationally, in fostering positive student behaviour and finally, to make recommendations on how best to promote an improved climate for teaching and learning in classrooms and schools.

The task force was set up in February 2005, not because student disruption was at a crisis level in our schools but because the Minister anticipated the work of the task force would be a consolidating influence in contributing to the orderly and harmonious patterns of behaviour that characterise the majority of second level schools. The Minister wants the work of the task force to help provide a basis of support and guidance for those schools that are troubled by persistent indiscipline.

The task force began its work by inviting, by public advertisement, submissions from interested individuals and groups and over 150

were received. The task force prioritised collaboration with the partners in education as a guiding feature of its work. It held 19 plenary sessions in 2005, at which each of the partners in education took part. This process of consultation with the education partners has provided an opportunity for all of the major stakeholders in our education system to be intimately involved in the work of the task force and to inform its final report and recommendations.

I welcome the fact the task force delivered its interim report in June of last year. In the context of that report, it should be stressed that while there was serious concern about disruption levels in some schools, there was also very encouraging and positive evidence that the majority of students in the school system are engaged, compliant and well behaved. In considering the effectiveness of the strategies currently employed by schools, a range of measures and variables is at work. Chief among them are the quality of school personnel, the culture and ethos of the school and the structure and supports in operation.

On the issue of the continuous professional development of teachers, departmental commitment was clearly demonstrated by the budget allocation for in-service training for the current year of almost €27 million. This represents an increase of 15% on last year. The leadership development for schools service provides professional development for school leaders at primary and post-primary level. The National Educational Welfare Board has commenced work on developing guidelines for schools on codes of behaviour, as provided for under section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. A working group on student councils has recently completed very valuable work and has produced much material, including a website to support schools in the establishment and operation of effective student councils.

The post-primary curriculum currently provides a variety of programmes designed to meet the needs of a diverse cohort of students. It includes the junior certificate programme, transition year and the leaving certificate programmes, applied and vocational. The Department provides a variety of support services which assist schools in developing and implementing school plans and policies in support of the delivery of subjects such as social, personal and health education and civic, social and political education. All second level schools receive a quota of hours to provide guidance and counselling to their students. The National Educational Psychological Service is a support service to schools for individual students who encounter difficulties. Under the delivery of equality of opportunity in schools, a continuing emphasis should be placed on the development of effective transfer programmes by building on the existing work of the community liaison system and the school completion programme. Other areas, such as extending access to guidance counselling and student councils, will also be facilitated through the action plan.

[Mr. Cregan.]

The interim report suggests that promoting positive behaviour in schools depends on a number of factors including the following: effective and visionary leadership, professional development of teaching skills and methodology, a broad and balanced curriculum that motivates and raises self esteem, access to a range of in-school activities, co-operation between schools and parents, access to a range of behavioural supports and provision for a minority of students of supports not ordinarily available in mainstream classrooms.

Personal behaviour is important and we encounter it in many walks of life, whether in driving behaviour or behaviour in schools. People must be responsible for and take account of their behaviour. I am glad we have a Minister who is a former teacher, a caring person, who is well briefed and keen to ensure our children get the best possible education with the supports and grant-in-aid put in place. Our teachers have a difficult and stressful job and by and large do a good job. I commend the Minister on her work in this area.

Mr. Grealish: I wish to share time with Deputy Power. I am delighted to have an opportunity to speak on this motion about school discipline. School discipline and how it is handled has changed. During my school days if one came home and told one's mother and father that one had been slapped at school, one was asked what one was up to and got another slap. The position has changed for the better.

I share many of the sentiments expressed in the first part of the Fine Gael motion. Few could fail to be concerned about growing indiscipline in schools, and it is a problem. I would not like the problem to be overstated. Certainly the level of school discipline has changed since my time at school and certainly the tactics employed to maintain discipline have changed utterly. While we all welcome the end of corporal punishment, how a teacher maintains order in a modern classroom must be a difficult task. The problem must not be overstated.

The Minister has explained clearly that the task force on student behaviour was not set up because student disruption is at crisis level but rather to reinforce the fact that the majority of our second level schools are orderly and harmonious. The interim report of the task force confirms this. While problems exist in some schools, the majority of students in the school system are engaged and behaved and are thriving in our excellent education system. This is due in no small part to the determination of the Minister and the Government to increase resources.

During the next two years there will be 500 extra teachers in primary schools to reduce class sizes and tackle disadvantage, and capitation rates for primary and second level schools will be increased. The Progressive Democrats, along with our colleagues in Government, have urged that

such increases be well ahead of inflation to ensure that new funding not only maintains standards but delivers real improvements. Teachers need support in their work. They are to be commended on the often unrecognised work they do in classrooms day in, day out. The Progressive Democrats Party, along with its Fianna Fáil partner in Government, seeks to provide for the continuous professional development of teachers.

Reference was made to the budget allocation for in-service provision for 2006 of €27 million, an increase of 15% on the amount for 2005. I welcome this development.

Students must feel they have the support needed to succeed in their studies. Today's students must deal with tremendous pressure, especially as they approach junior and leaving certificate examinations. A range of support services are provided in schools. These are intended to help schools develop and implement school plans and policies. The support in schools is to deliver civic, social and political education. In addition, secondary schools receive an extra quota of hours to provide guidance and counselling to students. I understand the National Educational Psychological Service is available to schools to help individual students who encounter difficulties. My only concern is that students may not be fully aware of the help available to them if they experience difficulties. I encourage schools to ensure awareness of such services is raised in an appropriate way, sensitive to the concerns of students who are at difficult stages in their studies.

The motion calls on the Minister to publish the final report of the task force under the chairmanship of Maeve Martin. I am satisfied not only that the Minister intends to publish the report and set out the intended approach to its implementation in March 2006, but that €2 million has been allocated for 2006 to enable the implementation of the report. That scheme will commence this year.

Mr. Naughten: When?

Mr. Grealish: These developments illustrate the Government's commitment to researching issues in the educational system properly and resourcing the findings of that research. Contrary to the impression given by Members opposite, we are determined to put in place the necessary reforms and resources to provide the best education system possible. This includes providing a safe and harmonious environment in which teachers can work and students can learn. I commend the Minister and the Government on the approach adopted in this regard.

Mr. P. Power: I wish to share time with Deputy Curran.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. P. Power: It is normal at the start of a debate such as this to welcome the placing of a motion before the House. While I welcome any motion on education, is the timing of this one appropriate? Reading through the motion, there is little in it with which one could disagree. I would have thought it would have been preferable to have had a fuller debate when the Martin report, the final report of the task force on student behaviour, was published. While I welcome any motion that advances further discussion on education, we could have had a more enlightened and better discussion if we had had the benefit of the recommendations of that report. When we see what is proposed, we can decide to have a more enlightened discussion.

There are two issues on which I wish to concentrate, the first of which is parental responsibility. There has been little discussion of parental responsibility in the debate so far. Ultimately, in all these matters, whether it is anti-social behaviour in communities, bullying in the streets or indiscipline in classrooms, much of it comes from the home environment. How is it that in hundreds of classes and hundreds of schools throughout the country the majority, more than 90% according to the report, are fully compliant students engaged in the learning process and only a few cause disruption and indiscipline? How is it that the majority of students can go to school and engage in the learning process and a few can go to school and cause disruption? No matter what recommendations or initiatives are introduced by the Government, there will always be that intangible element to the debate that students ought, in the first instance, to go to school with some modicum of self-discipline that has been inculcated in the family environment. That is vital and not enough emphasis has been put on it in the debate.

Another aspect that should be dispelled is the suggestion that schools that derive their cohort of students from socially deprived and disadvantaged areas give rise to the majority of indiscipline. That is a notion that ought to be dispelled. Indiscipline, bullying and disruption can occur in any classroom in any school no matter what area of the country. My final point relates to the issue of teachers' ability to control their classes and establish a properly regulated and happy class environment in which young pupils can fulfil their potential. All of us, regardless of our background, know that some classes, regardless of their configuration or the nature of the students, suffer from rampant indiscipline because the teachers are simply unable to stamp their authority on them. However, in other classes there are no problems whatsoever. The students who run riot in one classroom, and who can reduce teachers to tears and practically assault them, are like sheep 40 minutes later in another classroom. This leads one to question the authority that certain teachers impose on their classes. I do not blame the teachers but one must acknowledge that some have difficulties in this

area. A key part of the strategy should be the continuous professional development of teachers. As discipline becomes more difficult to handle and as society changes, teachers should be given, on an ongoing basis, the most up-to-date information, training and skills to control their classes.

I welcome the motion and look forward to the publication of the task force's report and to discussing how best to implement its recommendations.

Mr. Curran: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on student behaviour and discipline. As the last person from a group of five to speak, I note that all the good points have been made. Deputy Cregan nearly echoed my sentiments word for word and the €27 million has been referred to.

Deputy Enright stated last night:

The Department guidelines entitled, *Towards a Positive Policy for School Behaviour and Discipline*, were published in circular M33/91 in 1991. It is time to revisit the guidelines and make changes where necessary.

I agree wholeheartedly with the Deputy. The report of the task force will allow for the types of structural changes required and there will be quality research to guide us in making those changes.

On first reading the motion, one might think there is a crisis. There is a long standing problem, but we should not consider the matter in terms of crisis, nor should we regard the Minister's setting up of the task force as a response to a crisis. She mentioned specifically last night that she set it up in the first instance because she recognised the potential for indiscipline to become a serious problem. She was asked to set up the task force by the unions, including ASTI and the TUI, and she was swift in doing so. She said she established the task force not because student disruption is at crisis level in our schools but to ensure that we spread examples of best practice more widely. The Department has the right policies and supports in place to enable schools to provide a positive learning environment for all students.

Circumstances have changed significantly since the early 1980s when corporal punishment was banned. Some Members, such as Deputy Enright, went to school at a time when there was no corporal punishment.

Ms Enright: Technically, anyway.

Mr. Curran: In my time in school there was corporal punishment. There were always problems with student behaviour and banning corporal punishment did not contribute to them. When I attended school, we lived in fear of many of our teachers. The removal of corporal punishment changed the whole environment and there have been many positive consequences. For example, pupils are now more confident than they were when I was in school. There have been very sig-

[Mr. Curran.]

nificant changes but I appreciate that there are many problems arising from student disorder in schools.

Deputy Peter Power's point that indiscipline occurs under some teachers but not under others was interesting. This is why supports and a range of services are necessary. Many and various factors can make a student disruptive, including his or her home environment or a learning problem such as dyslexia. Disruption can be a symptom masking something else. On the factors that lead to disruption, Deputy Enright stated:

. . . the Minister has failed to provide real educational alternatives for young people displaying challenging behaviour. While we must support the right of schools to expel in certain situations, we must also address the needs of those students who do not fit into the school system. A more dramatic response is required. We should examine the establishment of a small network of new schools which would be designed for students with very challenging behaviour, who have been expelled or dropped out from mainstream second level schools.

I would not support this policy.

Ms Enright: They work well already.

Mr. Curran: I do not know if the Deputy has thought this out, or where she envisages that these schools will be located.

Mr. Stanton: What is Deputy Curran's alternative?

Mr. Curran: I do not know whether she intends having them in towns and villages or having a few in cities around the country. One should consider the logistics and the stigma attached to those attending. At a time when we are by and large trying to introduce pupils into mainstream services, the Deputy's proposal represents a step backwards. If it is Fine Gael policy, it needs to be clarified. I was certainly disappointed with it. It involves saying there is no hope for certain pupils, taking them from their existing environment and putting them somewhere else, where they could be stigmatised. We should identify students with behavioural problems at a very early stage and make efforts in each case to identify the causes. Removing pupils from their existing environment is not the solution.

Mr. F. McGrath: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for the opportunity to speak on this important debate on indiscipline in schools. I commend our teachers, the INTO, the TUI and ASTI for their commitment, bravery and professionalism in dealing with this major issue. I commend the vast majority of students and pupils who go to school each day without causing any disruption or hassle for their teachers and parents. I pay tribute to those pupils from very severely disadvantaged areas characterised by

poverty, syringes on stairways, major anti-social behaviour and bad housing who still come to school each day and make a great contribution thereto. These heroes and heroines are often forgotten about by the wider society. For more than 20 years I had the honour and privilege of teaching some of them. I salute them and commend them on their courage and integrity. It is up to all Members in this House to stand by them.

The carer children should also be praised and thanked for their efforts and dedication. I refer to the beautiful child in the violent or dysfunctional family who not only gets up every morning for school on his or her own initiative but who also cooks the breakfast for his or her siblings and brings them to school safely. This is the reality for many children and they need to be helped in a positive, non-intrusive way. Sadly, we lose some of these children in their later teenage years through suicide and drugs. This nightmare for children has to end. Teachers on the front line are important because they are among those who spot these pupils. I commend teachers who put their lives on the line when dealing with cases of child sexual abuse. Many teachers have been assaulted or threatened because they have defended the rights of children in such cases. The Government and the educational authorities are responsible for supporting such teachers.

Our schools should not tolerate violence or the carrying of weapons. Bullies and violent students should be suspended, rather than victims being forced out of schools. This is the core issue for me. Schools which dither on this issue are not doing their teachers or pupils any favours. Emphasis should be placed on suspension, rather than expulsion. My civil liberties instinct tells me that a child should be given a second chance. We need to bear in mind that many children change. I urge Deputies to listen to this debate and to ensure pupils and teachers in our schools are assisted.

Mr. Crowe: I would like to share time with Deputies Cowley, McHugh, Connolly, Healy and Gogarty.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Crowe: Like Deputy Curran, I suppose I am on the grey wing of the House because my memories of school are dominated by corporal punishment. On my first day at school, at five years of age, I was very excited about the whole concept of going to school because all my older friends were there etc. As I arrived at the school, I saw a nun with a blackthorn stick beating lumps out of a child. My sister likes to tell the story of how I ran up to the nun, kicked her and ran out of the school. I did not return to the school for a further two years because I was terrified. I suffered under the strap and the cane during my school days. Some people of my generation think such punishment did not do us any harm, but it

did not do us any good either. We live in much more enlightened times now, fortunately. It is clear that indiscipline is a problem in our schools. There is growing concern among teachers, parents and students about the effects of that problem on classes.

The Minister for Education and Science has been urged to bear in mind that the failure to implement the findings of earlier reports on school discipline has had a negative impact on schools. Research conducted by Dr. Maeve Martin of the task force on student behaviour in second level schools found that student disaffection and behaviour difficulties are more prevalent in areas of significant socioeconomic deprivation. Selective enrolment procedures invariably mean that problem students are more likely to be dumped on public sector schools than on other types of schools. Other Deputies have spoken about the phenomenon of difficulties outside the school manifesting themselves in the classroom. ASTI research relating to the problem of indiscipline found that over the course of a school year, 71% of teachers taught in classes in which some students engaged in continuous disruptive behaviour. There are fears the task force on student behaviour will underestimate the extent of the problem of indiscipline in schools, which is undoubtedly a societal problem. It is important not to underestimate the negative impact that a minority of disruptive students can have on other students. Teachers require professional development in classroom management to help them to deal with this sensitive problem. Teachers and students must be allowed to teach and learn in an environment that is free from disruption and indiscipline.

I am concerned that the interim report of the task force on school discipline has not prioritised the issue of class sizes. A significant starting point in addressing that issue would be the implementation of the 2001 McGuinness report's recommendation that the pupil-teacher ratio should be reduced. The Government has failed to implement that recommendation to date, however. It should be noted that mainstream classes are not always the best place for our children. Withdrawal and cooling-off rooms have been used with considerable success in Britain. The neglect of special needs students is exacerbating the problems caused by large class sizes. The National Educational Psychological Service, which does not have enough psychologists working in our schools, should be sufficiently resourced so students with intellectual disabilities can be dealt with properly rather than treated as nuisances. It is hardly surprising that the behaviour of some students with special educational needs can be disruptive, given that they are faced with inappropriate curriculums in over-sized classrooms and do not receive enough classroom support. In such circumstances, it is inevitable that students and teachers are disrupted.

I call on the Government to initiate a new national anti-bullying campaign. The 1993 guide-

lines on countering bullying behaviour are obsolete in the modern era of mobile telephones and e-mail, which are being used as new tools for bullying. Students are afraid to report bullying and most teachers are not trained in how to handle such situations. The Government must act to ensure the right of all students to a positive and safe learning environment is protected. I urge the Minister to ensure the final report of the task force, which was due at the end of last year, is published as soon as possible.

Dr. Cowley: Going to school is an imperative. A report on the literacy difficulties of young offenders, published by Dr. Mark Morgan and Ms Mary Kett in 2003, found that literacy is central to participation in society and avoidance of social exclusion. When I was visiting the Rosspoint five in prison last summer, I was impressed by Mr. Micheál Ó Seighin, who told me that many young offenders came to him because they wanted to learn how to read and write. There are strong indications that approximately 10% of pupils leave primary school without the basic skills they need to cope with the everyday demands of reading and the normal demands of secondary school. According to the action plan of the National Forum on Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage, intervention at an early stage needs to be a priority of the State in this regard. It is not acceptable that just €200,000 was allocated for reading discovery in 2003.

It is considered essential to retain professionals, especially teachers, in areas of disadvantage. It has been argued that if the educational welfare service is to work adequately, a further 95 educational welfare officers are needed to complement the 84 officers who are currently in place. I was horrified to discover that a child in County Mayo can be absent from school for at least 60 days before action is taken. That is clearly not acceptable. As no educational welfare officer is available in the county, reports of absenteeism will not receive a response for 60 days. The educational welfare system was established to identify the reasons for absenteeism. Many family and social problems can be identified on foot of regular absences from school. The children of County Mayo should be given the same opportunities as the children of every other county because all children are equal under the Constitution.

There is just one consultant child psychiatrist to cover all of County Mayo. It is clear, based on the population of the county, that there is an immediate need for at least one more child psychiatrist. That mentally troubled children have to wait more than two years to be assessed by a child psychiatrist tells the full tragic tale of neglect. It is no wonder there is indiscipline in our schools. It is a disgrace that vulnerable children are waiting for so long without being seen, especially as we are all aware of the implications of such a delay. Children who need psychiatric services should receive them immediately, rather than

[Dr. Cowley.]

having to wait for two years, by which time it may be too late if they have grown up with their problems.

Mr. Healy: I am happy to have an opportunity to speak briefly in support of Fine Gael's Private Members' motion on school discipline, which is an important matter that needs to be addressed urgently. I agree we should note the interim findings of the task force on student behaviour, which reported serious difficulties in our schools, including threats against teachers and their property, fighting, assaults, the carrying of dangerous weapons on school property and the taking of drugs on school property. It is obvious the anti-social behaviour in our schools is a reflection of what is happening in our wider society. The vast majority of students want to learn, but they encounter serious difficulties in doing so because of the disruptive behaviour of a small number of students. I urge the Minister to publish the final report of the task force immediately. Not only should the task force be funded, but funding should be provided to all bodies involved in this area. Deputy Grealish suggested that the €2 million that was allocated in the budget was an indication of the Government's commitment in this area. If that is a commitment, it is a minor one. We need real commitment and political will to effect real change in this area. Schools should be given the resources they need to deal with ill-discipline.

Mr. Connolly: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. Anything that causes 40% of those working in a profession to consider early retirement is a major problem. Some 67% of the members of the teaching profession who have taken early retirement have done so as a result of stress and depression. If this problem was encountered on the same scale in the nursing, medical, dental or legal professions, or in the public or Civil Service, there would be a public inquiry and rightly so. Students can be quite ruthless in targeting people and they know when to twist the knife. That leaves teachers in a dangerous position. There are a number of reasons for this behaviour, such as the student's domestic situation. It can be a case of "monkey see, monkey do". Bullying at home can be transferred to a school setting, because the student thinks that is normal behaviour. Another problem arises when a condition remains undiagnosed, such as dyslexia or attention deficit disorder. This is where the National Educational Psychological Service comes into play. We must provide proper resources to psychological services so that they get the opportunity to tease out these difficulties. We must put support mechanisms in place for teachers, such as an early warning system, so that problems can be identified and reported as soon as possible. School management should have strategies and policies in place to support the teacher and nip the problem in the bud. It is a case of a stitch in time. We could call for more parental

support, but in situations like these, many parents may only inflame the situation. Teacher training policies will have to address this problem.

We must take action to make the teaching career attractive once more. It was once an attractive career and we must try to get back to that.

Mr. McHugh: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on this motion. In particular, I will address the part of the motion that seeks to put in place specific measures to make schools good places to teach and learn. I recently attended a meeting with primary school principals and deputy principals from the INTO branches in my constituency, at which they expressed great frustration at their current situation. Their demands are very modest, but if implemented, they would make schools better places in which to teach and learn. They would also help remove the extreme frustration felt by principal teachers in the discharge of their duties. The tasks that cause greatest stress to principals and deputy principals include non-educational tasks, paperwork required by the Department and other agencies, special education needs, conflicting demands on teaching principals between class teaching and school leadership, and lack of resources including IT, secretarial, care-taking, special needs assistants, resource teachers and physical work space. Other issues include people management problems such as parents, boards of management, disruptive pupils and so on, a new revised curriculum and the proliferation of a litigation culture.

While most principals feel these activities fall within their remit, with the exception of non-educational responsibilities, it is the increased volume and complexity of activities required to be done concurrently which causes the problem. Much of this increased workload has arisen from new legislation which places new responsibilities on principals without providing any new resources to enable them deal with them. I want to put forward a few proposals which would make schools better places to teach and to learn. We need to provide adequate accommodation. Clear roles and responsibilities should be set out for deputy principals and post holders, as well as for boards of management. Funding should be provided from central funds for part-time teachers and caretakers. A clear channel of communication must be set up between the Department and principals and deputy principals to eliminate their frustration in trying to contact the Department of Education and Science. I heard a story about a teacher who spent two hours in a classroom on a mobile phone, trying to get through to a relevant official in the Department, while trying to teach a room full of schoolchildren at the same time. That is chaotic and it is not good for our students, our teachers and does not help make our schools good places to teach and to learn.

Mr. Gogarty: On behalf of the Green Party, I support the motion calling on the Government to

publish immediately the final report of the task force on student behaviour, to outline its legislative response to tackling school discipline problems, and to examine the difficulties posed by section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

In some schools, parents claim that their children are being bullied, when the reality often is that children have not spent time with their parents who are working all day and they do not know how to play with other kids. That causes its own problems in an increasingly litigious society. There may be differences in nuances, but all of the Opposition parties are in agreement on this issue. Bullying and indiscipline are growing problems. They are part of a wider social malaise, but they cannot be tolerated. While everything must be done to tackle the root cause, the difficulties being experienced by a minority of students must not be allowed to disrupt other students. However, let us not wash our hands of these students. It will cost them and the State dearly in the years to come.

Last night, Deputy Enright spoke of addressing the needs of students who do not fit into the school system. While I agree with the Minister that referring to students "not fitting in to the school system" is the wrong choice of words, let us not be pedantic. We must address the issues facing those students whose educational needs cannot be met by the mainstream system. This should take place in a classroom context in the first instance, with all of the necessary supports being provided. In this context, the first thing to be done is to provide a parallel system to enable certain students to continue their education at the school within a model that suits their educational requirements. This could be suitable in certain cases, particularly with regard to the old personality clash issue, minor incidences and low level bullying.

However, it may be that the factors that lead to a student being disruptive are such that a separate facility is required within each geographical cluster of schools. We need a facility where a disruptive student can learn in an environment suited to his or her needs, while at the same time allowing students, whose education has been disjointed because of the disruption, to benefit from classes without interruption. I disagree with the Minister when she suggests that a network of facilities is unnecessary and simply amounts to dumping students. I visited Edgeware School in Sydney, and having spoken to current and former students at the school, I am convinced that it is a model that deserves serious attention. As a member of the education committee delegation that visited the facility, I would like to share with the House some of the inspirational stories that we heard.

We visited Edgeware School in the western suburbs of Sydney, where disruptive children are sent as a last resort. In New South Wales, an effort is made to deal with disruptive children within the classroom in the first instance. That is why I agree with Deputy Enright's motion. As a last resort, we need some form of facility outside

the school that is appropriate to the student's needs. Edgeware school is an example of this. The students cannot be dealt with in an isolated situation in their own school, because the children have become dysfunctional long before they reach second level. Once a student has educational needs of such a serious nature, it is very hard to deal with his or her repressed anger and the inability to express it in the right context. When teachers are not seen as recognising that pain, they are seen as being dismissive. A student will not be educated in that context.

In Edgeware, I met a 14 year old boy called Sean. He said he was doing nothing in his old school, but there are just two students in his class in Edgeware. He said that children were being bullied in the mainstream, but not in Edgeware. He could come and go as he pleased as he was given that amount of leeway. If he did not feel like doing mathematics at a certain time, he could do it later. That model of education will not turn him into a PhD graduate, but it will keep him within the system. He is happy enough to go to school now. He gets jobs fixing fences and this allows him to obtain practical skills, to build up trust and respect. The principal is friendly but he is not the friend of the students. This respectful manner is appreciated by the students. I also met a former pupil who went into the army. He obtained a vocational qualification and he sings the praises of the school. In some cases, the children do so well there that they can go back to the mainstream school. However, they need to be provided with some form of opportunity. Leaving them in the school when the approach is not working is a fate worse than death in some ways. They will not be of any benefit to themselves or society. Some of these schools could be produced in a geographical cluster to cater for the specific needs of students. All of society would benefit from that.

Mr. Naughten: I wish to share time with Deputies Neville, English and Ring.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is agreed.

Mr. Naughten: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion and I thank my colleague, Deputy Enright, for putting it before the House. Changing values in society have led to an increasing problem of disruption in schools. The past ten years have seen increasing instances of anti-social behaviour. ASBOs, an acronym unheard of in this country eight years ago when the Education Act was passed, are now seen as a necessary mechanism to help address the mounting tide of anti-social behaviour.

Some of those responsible for anti-social behaviour outside school at night are sitting before teachers in classrooms the following morning. They form a small minority disrupting the education of the majority of students in the classroom. The interim report on student behaviour found that up to 10% of second level students

[Mr. Naughten.]

engage in constant, low level disruption. In the average classroom of 30 students, therefore, this means that two to three students are behaving in this way all the time. The report also highlighted some more serious breaches in discipline. A worrying trend in behaviour is lewdness and vulgarity, especially directed at young female teachers.

Serious breaches in school discipline can have a profound negative effect on teachers and on the educational attainment of students in the classroom. We must accept that disruptive students do not have the right to undermine other young people's educational opportunities. Many teachers believe that the rights of non-disruptive students are being ignored while the rights of the ill disciplined, out of control pupils are being strengthened by legislation. We must address how to preserve the rights of the majority of motivated, engaged students while, at the same time, safeguarding the welfare of the minority of students who challenge the system to breaking point.

At present, teachers have few options open to them when dealing with continually disruptive students. It is always the aim of a teacher to keep a student in the classroom setting but if it becomes impossible, the teacher has no option but to withdraw the student from that situation. However, to what will they be withdrawn? Teachers have told me that resources are needed for early intervention programmes where somebody would be available with the time, expertise and training to withdraw the student from the class, deal with the behavioural problem and draw up, in consultation with the teacher, a programme for that student's reintroduction into the classroom. Such early intervention would ensure that disruptive students receive the help and support they need while also allowing other students to learn.

In this regard, the provision of only €2 million for indiscipline in last December's budget means the Minister is only committed to token measures and not to addressing the issue. One of the most practical steps the Minister could take to improve the quality of discipline in schools is to reduce class sizes, a Government commitment which has been ignored. The large class sizes in schools exacerbates the problems of negative behaviour. There are almost 5,000 primary schoolchildren in classes of more than 35 pupils and the average class size in this country is 24.5 pupils.

Practical class size in second level schools is 24 students. Can the Minister imagine 24 students doing wood technology, metal technology, engineering or construction studies with access to and operating dangerous machinery? It is a challenging task for a teacher in this environment to maintain discipline but it is almost impossible to deal with a disruptive student. What is required is a general workshop technician who would work alongside the teacher, look after the operation of

machinery and help the teacher focus on his or her teaching.

The Minister should review the Department's published guidelines for teachers for dealing with discipline problems. The current circular, which dates from 1991, is wholly unacceptable and inappropriate in today's environment. I also call on the Minister to review section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, which requires school management to ensure that each school has a code of discipline in operation. However, there is no standard format for such a code, which leaves decisions by boards of management open to challenge because the Minister is not prepared to provide direction. Teachers need ongoing training and development to relate to their students. At present, once a teacher qualifies, they are abandoned in the classroom. There is no monitoring, support service or assistance.

The Minister talked down this motion. She should look at her record. There is an increase of €2,000 for the National Educational Psychological Service, a service that is not available to half the schools in the country. The Educational Welfare Board requires more than 200 additional staff just to deal with the current problems of truancy and non-attendance. This Minister has been good at spin and public relations but she has failed in the basic elements of delivery. There is little point talking down to the Opposition when she cannot get her act together. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr. Neville: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this subject. I congratulate Deputy Enright on tabling the motion. In the course of her contribution, she raised the issue of enhanced resources and pointed out that half of all primary schools do not have access to NEPS. Many young children who need extra assistance from an early stage in their education are being left behind by the Government. By the time these children reach second level, they have become increasingly frustrated with the system and this contributes to disruptive classroom behaviour.

The Minister of State, Deputy de Valera, is in the neighbouring constituency to mine and one could say she is a good neighbour. However, while Deputy Enright said 50% of schools do not have a psychological service, in Limerick only 9% of schools are covered by NEPS. Why are Limerick primary schools being discriminated against by the Government in the provision of educational psychological services? The Minister of State is aware of the importance of these services, especially for children with special needs and for the teachers who need advice to deal with the many difficulties that now arise in schools. These difficulties often lead to the disruptive behaviour referred to in the motion.

I formally call on the Minister for Education and Science to address immediately the fact that the lowest level of service from the NEPS is provided in Limerick, with only 13 of the 148 primary schools assigned NEPS cover. In February 2005,

the figure was an unacceptable 33 schools or 22% of Limerick's primary schools. The figure of 9% a year later compares unfavourably with places such as Galway, on the north side of the Minister's constituency, which has 72% coverage. Why does Limerick only have 9%? Access to the dedicated psychological service of the Department of Education and Science should not be dependent on where a child lives. Why should children in Limerick have less service than those in Galway?

All schools should have this service. The service is in place to support the personal, social and educational development of all children through the application of psychological theory and practice in education, having particular regard to children with special educational needs. It is a disgrace that Limerick schools have the least service in the country.

The fact that the number of primary schools nationally with direct access to psychologists is averaging 50%, which includes special schools, has been severely criticised. Psychologists assess the requirements of pupils with special educational needs. They should be available at times of critical incidents such as tragic deaths, including deaths of members of a pupil's family from suicide, road deaths and other tragic deaths or tragic events for school pupils. The excuse the Minister for Education and Science put forward in the Dáil last week, namely, that the increases in net numbers must take account of public policy on public sector numbers, is totally unacceptable.

Mr. English: I will concentrate on the aspect of the motion concerning bullying and the lack of any co-ordinated national strategy to tackle it. Bullying is not a new phenomenon. It has been part of society since the beginning of civilisation. However, the harm caused by bullying and its effects have only been properly realised in recent years. The main consideration we must examine is the harm caused and the hurt felt due to bullying. The effects of being bullied might not surface for some years with certain people. Bullying can and does tarnish a person for life, and can be and is a reason for many suicides.

These are some reasons why we, as politicians, must see bullying as the major problem it is. When we talk about bullying in schools, we must consider the issue in distinct ways, in particular with regard to cause and effect. There have been numerous research studies into the causes of bullying, which vary from person to person. Some, because of a human defect or low self esteem, wish to forcefully intimidate others. Modern technology including mobile phones and e-mail has unfortunately made the practice so terribly easy it is frightening. The effect of this is that somebody fails to develop to his or her full potential as a person. He or she feels inadequate and cheated, and can find it hard to relate to others.

The extent of bullying in schools and the workplace is extremely difficult to quantify. The sad side of bullying is that many often suffer in silence, a situation we have all witnessed at school and in the workplace. Often, it will take a tragic event before what is going on surfaces.

One often subconsciously thinks of the bully as one who is strong and the person being bullied as weaker. This, like so many other concepts of bullying, is wrong. It is now, more than ever, vital that those with responsibility, such as teachers, have access to and are trained to the highest standards and best practice in recognising and dealing with bullying. I accept that this will take resources. No programme worth its salt will come cheap. However, what price do we put on the quality of life or the life of a person?

As many High Court cases have proved, the Government has a duty of care to our young people under the Constitution. Without properly equipping our teachers and boards of management, and without making them implement a strategy with the necessary equipment and education to tackle the menace of bullying, the Government will fail in its obligations, as it is currently failing. The days should be gone, rightly so, when a teacher would say: "Now, now, dear. It will be grand." to a student who tells them he or she has been bullied. Bullying can only be tackled by helping the person being bullied and the perpetrator. Time, money and sufficient resources must be dedicated to preventing school bullying. Otherwise, we will still be talking about it in ten years' time. We need the immediate implementation of a national anti-bullying strategy.

We want an education system for all but it is not yet in place. We do not have an all-inclusive education system which gives everybody a chance. Not everybody fits into mainstream education and the result is indiscipline in schools. Pupils are bored and do not fit in — school is not their scene. We need to encourage students to blend in by providing education with which they are happy.

I was insulted when the Minister yesterday referred to certain schools as "dumps", despite the great work they do in Waterford, Limerick and elsewhere to help students who do not fit into mainstream education, who have had difficulties and caused difficulties for others, and who need extra help and direction. Such schools are certainly not dumps. They provide an excellent service and give a fair chance to young people who do not always fit in, for different reasons.

There has been much recent debate on how disciplinary problems affect teachers. We have been told that teachers are highly trained and will be given additional training to help cope with the difficulties of modern education. A booklet due to be published this week details how teachers should adapt in their first couple of years teaching. The booklet contains four or five headings but none deals with discipline or how to control a class. Despite this, the Minister told the House

[Mr. English.]

last night that much had been done, that teachers were being looked after and that €27 million was being invested in training courses. However, a simple booklet to help new teachers cope with discipline problems fails to highlight the issue.

A national strategy on discipline is required. Standard departmental guidelines for every school on how to deal with disciplinary issues and correct forms of punishment should be in place. It should not be left to individual schools to implement their own discipline policy. It is a grey area which makes it difficult for boards of management and teachers to act in this regard. National guidelines on discipline are needed to allow teachers to act without fear of the law.

Mr. Ring: I welcome the motion and compliment the Fine Gael spokesperson for bringing it before the House. I listened to the Minister's contribution to the debate. Perhaps she should do more listening and less lecturing. This is a sensible motion. We, as politicians, listen regularly to constituents' complaints with regard to problems within schools.

Bullying is a serious issue. A school friend of mine was bullied at school but went on to do well in education. However, every time he was interviewed for a job, the effects of bullying caused him to stutter. That poor man was affected but he never received the support he needed from the State when the problem was identified. He went on to get a fine job but it took him many years to do so. He had to go to the private sector to have his problem dealt with. He rather than the State paid for the treatment to correct his problem, which had been caused by school bullying.

Teaching is not an easy job. Teachers feel frustrated because they believe the State has not provided the support and training they need. We must be honest in this regard. Society has changed and its structure has broken down, resulting in increasing problems, many of which are brought into the schools. Teachers are faced with problems they did not have to face 20 or 30 years ago. It is a different ball game now. Teachers find it increasingly difficult to control their classes and serious situations have resulted.

Support from the State is not evident. When teachers have a problem, they are vulnerable due to the lack of support from boards of management and the Department of Education and Science. While talking about support, one thing the Government has been good at is providing support to programme managers and those spinning the message to the media. Every year, I am told how much money will be invested in education in deprived areas, where schools will have special finance, special teachers, special this and special that. Why then do so many parents who have children with special needs come to my constituency office to complain that their children cannot be dealt with? Why are these parents frustrated? Why do they feel nobody is listening to

them and that there is no support and nobody to help them? Why do public representatives attend so many public meetings with regard to education, particularly education for the disadvantaged or children with special needs? As there are not enough such parents to create a political storm, they feel nobody is listening to them.

The Constitution states that all children should be treated equally but this is not the case. The strong do well and the weak fall behind — all reports point to this conclusion. I hope the Minister and her Department will listen to our case. They should put resources where they are badly wanted, namely, into disadvantaged schools and areas which need support and funding. Teachers are vulnerable. There are so many problems they do not know how to deal with them.

During the Christmas period, I visited a family who suffered a serious tragedy when one member of the family committed suicide. I compliment Deputy Neville and Dr. John Connolly as two of the only people I hear discussing the issue of suicide, which is a serious problem in this country. I recently heard that coroner's reports give the benefit of the doubt in certain cases as they do not wish to upset families. This means there are more suicides than are reported because coroners say a death was caused by misadventure, and it is left at that. Two previous suicides had occurred in the family and on the night after Christmas the mother dropped dead when she heard her son had committed suicide. On the same night her two brothers also died and her husband's brother died in the same week. I never saw such a thing in my life.

Last week I wrote to the Health Service Executive asking that a social worker or other professionally qualified person to deal with the family. The HSE sent out the community nurse. While she does a good job and is a very good person, she was not trained to deal with that family. While we have been told each day that the services are available, this is not true. It is time for the Government to provide the money for the services that are needed.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): I am glad to have this opportunity to express my support for my colleague, the Minister for Education and Science for the manner in which she has approached the issue of student behaviour in second level schools.

I disagree with the negative tone of Deputy Enright's speech. Concentrating on the separate provision for students who do not fit, so to speak, does not accurately reflect the tone of the interim report of the task force. The interim report accepted that although there was serious concern about disruption levels in some schools, there was also encouraging and positive evidence that the majority of students in the school system are engaged and enthusiastic.

The Minister established the task force on student behaviour not because student disruption is at crisis level but to ensure that we can spread examples of best practice and working solutions more widely. The development of the right policies and supports will be based on the true position reflected by those working in the system. The Minister has indicated her clear intention of acting on this issue in a measured and effective manner. To this end, a provision of €2 million was secured in the Department's budgetary allocation even before the task force had delivered its final report, which clearly signals the Minister's intention to act upon this report.

She has prioritised improvements in training and support services for teachers, greater access to leadership development for school principals and the provision of more guidance counsellors. Continual professional development for teachers has benefited from the provision of nearly €27 million this year, an increase of more than 15% on last year. Training available to school principals has been prioritised through a major expansion of the leadership development for schools service. This recognises the positive impact that leadership can have in promoting a positive school climate conducive to learning and teaching. This initiative will be further developed in the years ahead.

The Government will continue to ensure that the voice of students within their schools continues to be enhanced. The supports already provided through the working group on student councils demonstrate this commitment. Many schools have found that giving students a say in school decision making helps to create a spirit of partnership between students and staff, which contributes to the development of a positive environment in schools.

The Minister has demonstrated her determination to enhance the guidance function in schools through her announcement in April last of an extra 100 guidance teachers for the current school year. Under the new action plan for disadvantaged schools, DEIS, 200 schools will receive enhanced guidance and supports. Under DEIS, a continuing emphasis will also be placed on the development of effective transfer programmes. This will build on the existing work of the home-school-community liaison scheme and the school completion programme. Other areas, such as extending access to guidance counselling and student councils, will also be facilitated through the action plan. These are real and concrete improvements which will be supplemented by specific actions to be taken in response to the recommendations of the report of the task force.

The Government is committed to reform of the school curriculum and, where necessary, to make it more relevant and ensure it meets the needs of today's students. The Department already provides a variety of support services such as the school development planning service and the second level support service. These services

provide schools with assistance in developing and implementing school plans and policies. Support services also support schools in the delivery of subjects such as SPHE and CSPE which teach students about respect for themselves and others.

The National Educational Psychological Service is also available as a support to schools for individual students who encounter difficulties. NEPS works with principals, guidance counsellors, resource and learning support teachers and members of the pastoral care team in developing effective responses to the problems causing and caused by disruptive behaviour.

Regarding section 29 of the Education Act, Deputy Enright seems to suggest that we should make it easier for schools to expel students. It has always been the Department's position that expulsion should be a means of last resort. The Department has consistently enhanced the supports available to schools to support this position. In some instances expulsion will be warranted and the statistics on appeals over the past three years support the view that where it is a last resort, the decision of the school will stand up to scrutiny and challenge.

I confirm the Minister's commitment to ensuring that the necessary measures are put in place to support schools in dealing with the issue of student behaviour and discipline and reaffirm her intention to publish the report and set out an intended approach to implementation in a few weeks.

Mr. Stanton: I wish to share time with Deputy Enright.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Stanton: I welcome this timely motion. Unlike some speakers on the Government side, I believe we cannot talk about this important topic often enough. The more often we debate it, the better. When we talk about indiscipline, we do not talk about normal exuberance or other normal behaviour. We are talking about serious transgressions. As I am a member of the Teachers Union of Ireland and have been a guidance counsellor and a teacher, I have a personal interest in the issue. For some time I worked as a guidance counsellor and as a home-school-community worker with students who presented the most difficult of problems which most Members of the House would never have encountered. I came across students who were suicidal. Nobody has dwelt on the impact of alcohol and drugs on some students.

I agree with speakers on all sides of the House who have emphasised that a small number of students are causing the problem. However, one student with a major disciplinary problem disrupts the whole school. As I have been there, I know what I am talking about. Such a student may engage with many different students and not just the members of a 24-student class group. He

[Mr. Stanton.]

or she also engages with many different teachers and can cause considerable stress in the classroom.

According to a survey carried out by the ASTI in April 2004, 71% of teachers said they had taught classes in which some students engaged in continual disruptive behaviour. When the Minister speaks about the professional guidance of teachers, what proportion of that guidance is specifically dedicated to coping with disruptive behaviour? Much professional development of teachers relates to the subject matter and how it is taught. We need to take more notice of how teachers relate to students with personal problems and I hope this will be highlighted when the task force reports.

Members have spoken about why students misbehave, which at times relates to attention seeking. Often teachers are not trained in how to cope with attention seeking. They give attention to behaviour that is not appropriate, thereby reinforcing the behaviour. Some students are engaged in power struggles. Some students come in with the intention of being destructive and not just disruptive. Some students have given up completely. I agree with an induction scheme for all young teachers and support along the way, as well as for older teachers, who at times come across issues for which they were not trained and that they have never before encountered. I note from other research that the stress that it is causing to teachers is leading to their wanting to leave the profession. The ASTI has said that 60% of male teachers with disability claims are suffering from depression and stress, and 53% of female teachers. That is a big issue which we must examine. I have seen teachers stressed and crying in staff rooms, totally at their wits' end. Many teachers are talking about leaving the profession as a result. I hope that when the task force report is published we will all attend again to debate and discuss it fully, instead of coming to the House pretending that everything is all right, since that is not the case.

The student council issue has been mentioned. Many areas have no such councils, and some recent research suggested that some boards of management and staff were not aware that a council existed in their school. In general, students did not have a good opinion of the student council. A great deal of work remains to be done. The other area on which we need to work — the two Ministers responsible are here — concerns youth service, which has a great part to play in helping students having problems or being disruptive by picking them up. However, that service is more or less non-existent in this country. Some pockets are doing a great deal of work, but much more could be done. It is not happening, but it must happen.

Years ago I came across a quote that stayed with me: schools cannot compensate for society. That is a fact. We cannot expect schools to solve

all the problems. However, we must support teachers and pupils in school and in the work they are doing. One pupil in a class can upset everyone else if his or her behaviour is bad enough. What does one do when one has tried everything and expels a student who is perhaps 13 and a half years old? What happens to that student? Where does the student go? What supports are there for that student in provincial towns across the country? I challenge the Minister to tell us what supports she has for that student and his or her parents.

The home-school community liaison project is fantastic, and it must be beefed up and supported. I applaud that. There is very little between us on this motion. It would be far better to have a unit for that disruptive student whom the system has failed. That student must receive the support or help he or she needs. It is not there currently. The student, one hopes, would eventually be integrated back into the mainstream. That is not happening. Instead, ever more pressure is being put on schools and teachers to retain the student in the system that has failed him or her. It is causing pressures all over the place — for principals, classroom teachers, the student and families. That must be addressed. I welcome the fact that a task force report is being published very soon. The Minister said it would be published in March. We are already in March, and I would like to see it tomorrow. Let us put it into the public domain so we can debate and discuss it. Why hide it? This issue is very important and must be debated many times over.

My colleague, Deputy English, spoke about bullying, which is going on all the time. With modern technology, text-messaging is creating a new avenue for insidious forms of bullying, and that must be addressed. This is so serious that we cannot debate it often enough. The futures of young people are at risk. We see many of them ending up in jail or in correction homes because systems have failed. As a Legislature, we must start to grapple with this now.

Drugs are causing serious problems. Of all the issues with which I dealt when teaching and with which my former colleagues are still dealing, the drugs scene in school is the most challenging and the most difficult to cope with. The child using or dealing is caught in a trap, perhaps not of his or her own making, but it is extraordinarily destructive. My colleagues and I have seen too many young people dying at 18, 19 or 20 years of age. The system failed them. There were and are very few safety nets once they have been expelled. Most principals do not want to expel students; it is the last thing that they want, since it causes such stress. We must re-examine, debate and discuss section 29. If it needs to be changed, so be it. I am disappointed at the defensive attitude of the Minister and the Government in this area, which we should open up. Let us shine a light on it, talking about and discussing it. We should not be so defensive.

Ms Hanafin: That is why I set up the task force.

Mr. Stanton: It is no laughing matter.

Ms Enright: I thank all those who spoke on this motion. There have been no attempts whatsoever on this side of the House to overestimate the problem that we face. I warn those on the opposite benches especially that we should not underestimate the scale of the issue. I presume the Minister read the interim report. Last night she was appalled at our motion and described our press release as extremely alarmist. However, we were quoting from the interim report of Dr. Maeve Martin, which is where the motion's contents originated; that point must be made.

Ms Hanafin: The Opposition picked up on a minority of comments.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow Deputy Enright without interruption.

Ms Enright: The Minister must face reality on this issue. We were merely quoting the report and putting a factual motion before the House.

Ms Hanafin: It was clear it was not the majority opinion.

Ms Enright: I made that clear in my speech, Minister, when I said it was 5% to 10% and a minority.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please allow Deputy Enright, who should direct her remarks through the Chair.

Ms Enright: The Minister must face up to indiscipline, which is growing whether we like it or not. We cannot tackle any problem unless we admit its existence. If the Minister of State, Deputy de Valera, found my speech negative last night, I wonder if she too is aware of the reality.

Ms Hanafin: We both spent years in schools.

Ms Enright: I was clear in my speech about a small number of students misbehaving. I applauded students' energy, inquisitiveness, questioning, resourcefulness, activity, individuality and creativity, but we must face difficulties where we meet them. I am disappointed at the Minister's lack of willingness to consider alternatives——

Ms Hanafin: I did not say that.

Ms Enright: ——and her reactive attitude. She is unwilling to engage in real debate or consider any proposals except her own. I must ask whether she or Deputy Curran has ever met the parents of a child who has left school, willingly or otherwise, and found himself or herself with no place else to go. I beg them to open their minds on the

issue and think outside the box. Let us help all those who can and wish to stay in school, doing everything we can to keep students there. However, let us also not turn our backs when it comes to those for whom school is not working. Exciting alternatives are available that are already successful in this country. I reject the attempt to describe them as ghettos or dumps.

Ms Hanafin: It is Deputy Enright who is using those terms.

Ms Enright: I have never used that term. The only person who used it last night was the Minister.

Ms Hanafin: She spoke of the child who does not fit.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please allow Deputy Enright to speak without interruption.

Ms Hanafin: I am sorry, a Cheann Comhairle.

Ms Enright: Yes, and the word “dump”——

Ms Hanafin: That was her language.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Minister to allow the Deputy to speak.

Ms Enright: Some 18% of students are not staying on at school, and the Minister is doing nothing to tackle that. There is a real need for an alternative, and if one looks at such exciting projects as XLC in Waterford and sees the work that it has been doing — Deputy O'Sullivan mentioned others — one sees that a difference can be made. The Minister's solution last night when interrupting my speech was to call the gardaí. That must be a last resort and not simply a throwaway remark——

Ms Hanafin: They should be called if there has been criminal activity.

Ms Enright: ——that children with difficulties should be sorted out or looked after in such a manner.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please allow Deputy Enright without interruption.

Ms Enright: Locking them up is the wrong solution. The Minister also spoke about schools having effective codes of behaviour in place. However, many do not have such codes, and the Ombudsman for Children's submission clearly stated that. The Minister did not accept my proposal on student involvement. I am not talking simply about student councils involved in deciding and drafting school codes of behaviour. Not every school has a student council. I want students involved in every aspect of the school's approach to discipline, considering the demo-

[Ms Enright.]

cratic schools model. That is why that element would have to be piloted; the model is not currently in operation in this country. The Minister should look into this and not simply close her mind. She devoted much of her time last night to school league tables. Clearly, the Minister did not read or could not grasp a simple proposal that was not about league tables. Perhaps she also needs advice on our proposals but she should read them. Under her watch schools have had to focus on third level entry alone because she has ignored all the other valuable work that schools do. Through her inaction real information has been stifled—

Ms Hanafin: Deputy Enright's party wanted us to publish results but I rejected that approach.

Ms Enright: Perhaps the Minister deliberately filled her speaking time in that way so that she could ignore the part of the motion that deals with school bullying. Her reason for failing to mention the issue is that she refuses to implement a national anti-bullying strategy.

Ms Hanafin: Every school is required to have a policy on bullying.

Mr. Naughten: What about a national policy?

Ms Enright: The Minister keeps claiming that every school must have a policy on bullying, but her claim and the reality are very different things. She does not ensure that schools have an anti-bullying strategy. If they fill in the form and send the report back to her Department, the Minister is happy with that. However, she does not check whether schools have a policy in reality.

Ms Hanafin: The schools are required to follow guidelines.

Ms Enright: The guidelines on dealing with bullying were introduced when I was still in school. Let us face the reality.

Ms Hanafin: They are as relevant today as they were when they were introduced.

Ms Enright: Things have moved on since then but the Minister fails to accept that.

I am glad that the Minister has finally said she will publish the task force's final report this month, but I want her to get a real grasp of the issue. I have never suggested that indiscipline affects every school or is a problem of crisis proportions but it is a serious problem for those whose children, families, schools and communities are affected. I do not want the Minister to be in a perpetual state of being appalled and alarmed, as she seems to be, but I wish she would open her eyes to the depths of the problem.

Amendment put.

The Dáil divided: Tá, 63; Níl, 54.

Tá

Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Brady, Martin.
 Brennan, Seamus.
 Browne, John.
 Callanan, Joe.
 Callely, Ivor.
 Carty, John.
 Cassidy, Donie.
 Collins, Michael.
 Cooper-Flynn, Beverley.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cregan, John.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Davern, Noel.
 de Valera, Síle.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Ellis, John.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Dermot.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
 Glennon, Jim.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Jacob, Joe.
 Keaveney, Cecilia.
 Kelleher, Billy.

Kelly, Peter.
 Killeen, Tony.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Tom.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 McDowell, Michael.
 McEllistrim, Thomas.
 McGuinness, John.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Donal.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M.J.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Donnell, Liz.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Keeffe, Ned.
 O'Malley, Fiona.
 O'Malley, Tim.
 Parlon, Tom.
 Power, Peter.
 Power, Seán.
 Roche, Dick.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Dan.
 Wallace, Mary.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Boyle, Dan.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Connolly, Paudge.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Cowley, Jerry.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Gregory, Tony.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Healy, Seamus.
 Higgins, Joe.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McGinley, Dinny.

McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Paul.
 McHugh, Paddy.
 McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Gay.
 Moynihan-Cronin, Breeda.
 Murphy, Gerard.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Pattison, Seamus.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Ryan, Seán.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Twomey, Liam.
 Upton, Mary.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Kitt and Kelleher; Níl, Deputies Kehoe and Stagg.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 64; Níl, 54.

Tá

Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Brady, Martin.
 Brennan, Seamus.
 Browne, John.
 Callanan, Joe.
 Callely, Ivor.
 Carty, John.
 Cassidy, Donie.
 Collins, Michael.
 Cooper-Flynn, Beverley.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cregan, John.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Davern, Noel.
 de Valera, Síle.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Ellis, John.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Dermot.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
 Glennon, Jim.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Jacob, Joe.

Keaveney, Cecilia.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Killeen, Tony.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Tom.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 McDowell, Michael.
 McEllistram, Thomas.
 McGuinness, John.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Donal.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M.J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Donnell, Liz.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Keefe, Ned.
 O'Malley, Fiona.
 O'Malley, Tim.
 Parlon, Tom.
 Power, Peter.
 Power, Seán.
 Roche, Dick.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Dan.
 Wallace, Mary.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Boyle, Dan.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Connolly, Paudge.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Cowley, Jerry.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Gregory, Tony.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Healy, Seamus.
 Higgins, Joe.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 McCormack, Pádraic.
 McEntee, Shane.

McGinley, Dinny.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Paul.
 McHugh, Paddy.
 McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Gay.
 Moynihan-Cronin, Breeda.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Ó Caoláin, Caoimhghín.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Pattison, Seamus.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Ring, Michael.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Ryan, Seán.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Twomey, Liam.
 Upton, Mary.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Kitt and Kelleher; Níl, Deputies Kehoe and Stagg.

Question declared carried.

Adjournment Debate.

Company Closures.

Dr. Devins: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for allowing me raise this important issue. As no doubt the House will be aware, Saehan Media recently announced that it is to cease manufacturing capability in Sligo in the near future. This will result in the loss of approximately 90 jobs and will bring to an end the company's involvement in Sligo dating back to the mid-1980s. In its heyday the factory employed more than 400 people. Unfortunately, for the past number of years there has been a steady decline in the number employed in Saehan Media.

The factory manufactures video cassettes and following the introduction of DVDs there has been a considerable decrease in the world-wide market for video cassettes. It could be argued, with some justification, that the company should have seen the threat posed by DVDs and responded accordingly. However, the company did not do so and all these arguments are now academic because the workers are losing their jobs.

Our thoughts must be with those workers. I understand that if a worker leaves the factory between the announcement of the closure and the actual closure he or she may not be entitled to full redundancy, yet the natural inclination of any

worker is to look for alternative employment once he or she has been informed of the job loss. I ask the Minister of State to consider putting in place some mechanism whereby workers can avail of redundancy in such a situation.

These job losses in Saehan Media follow previous job losses in Tractec Limited and Platters Food. While there are different reasons for the closures of the three factories and I acknowledge that the overall unemployment rate in Sligo is still low, it constitutes a worrying trend. I am delighted that the Minister of State has responded to my request and the requests of my Oireachtas colleagues from Sligo-Leitrim to meet with us. We look forward to proposals from him on how the situation can be resolved in the future.

I mentioned the closure of Platters Food. The excuse offered by the company concerned, Kerry Group plc, was that there was not enough room for expansion of its operation in Sligo. Instead, the company is moving its manufacturing to Dublin. I have been in touch with the local employment agencies and I am assured that there is plenty of room for expansion, yet here is an Irish multinational moving an indigenous Sligo industry to the over populated and over resourced east coast. This is contrary to the national spatial strategy and Government policy in this area. It is a move I deplore. I ask Kerry Group plc, even at this stage, to reconsider the decision to move. I know that all the local agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and FÁS will be very supportive.

I mentioned previously the closure of Tractec Limited. This factory, although successful, was taken over by the Eaton Corporation of America a short while before its closure. The same company has a factory in Manorhamilton in north Leitrim. I have been in touch with IDA Ireland and am assured that it has every confidence in the long-term viability of Eaton in Manorhamilton. The importance of Eaton, not just to Manorhamilton but to north Leitrim, cannot be underestimated. I ask the Minister of State to use his good offices to ensure that IDA Ireland and all other State agencies actively continue to work with Eaton so that this vitally important industry remains in Manorhamilton.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. M. Ahern): I thank Deputy Devins for raising this matter. I was very concerned to hear that Saehan Media Ireland Limited, Sligo, has announced that it will close with the loss of 70 permanent and 22 temporary jobs at the end of April 2006. The decision was communicated to the employees on the 17 February last, at which time the company requested employee representatives to enter into consultations on the basis for the implementation of the redundancies.

I am very conscious of the effect of these job losses on the workers involved and their families, as well as the community in the surrounding area. This is very disappointing news for those who will lose their jobs and I wish to assure the people concerned that the State agencies will provide every support they can. The priority will be to find alternative employment for those involved. The role of FÁS will be particularly important in assisting those who are to lose their jobs. FÁS has already been in contact with the company and its full range of services will be made available to the workers concerned if they wish to avail of those services.

Saehan Media plans to offer redundancy terms of five weeks per year of service inclusive of statutory redundancy, similar to the norm in previous lay-offs at the plant. The company will also draw up a skills profile of its staff to assist in establishing contacts for them with other companies who may be seeking employees.

As Deputy Devins stated, the market for their product has been in decline since the late 1990s with the advent and growth of DVD technology and its increasing affordability. Because of keener competition in a diminishing market the company has recorded a series of increasing losses which are not sustainable. These market conditions are also being experienced by Saehan in the US, where the company expects to close a video tape production plant with the loss of 180 jobs in the coming months. In both cases, demand for the product will be serviced by the company's Korean and Chinese facilities, which have spare capacity.

The industrial development agencies will be making every effort to secure alternative employ-

ment for the area. IDA Ireland is promoting Sligo and County Sligo to potential investors on an ongoing basis and every effort is being made to secure further industry for the area, by progressing the development of a knowledge economy in order that the area can compete both nationally and internationally for foreign direct investment. The agency is also working with its existing client base to expand their combined presence in the county.

To support this strategy of moving to a more knowledge-based economy, IDA Ireland is working closely with educational institutions in the Sligo region in developing the skill sets necessary to attract high value-added employment to the county. As part of the transition to re-positioning the county to a more knowledge-based economy, IDA Ireland is marketing Sligo as a key location for investment in the pharmaceuticals, chemicals, medical technologies, engineering, consumer product and financial services sectors. It is also working with FÁS to provide guidance in developing the skills needed by those in the workforce who are interested in up-skilling.

Over the past five years, IDA Ireland's focused strategy for Sligo has been to promote the county as part of an integrated north-west region with access to a population base of over 220,000 people. Job announcements for Sligo during the last year include the consumer telecommunications company, IDT Toucan, which will create 300 new jobs at its customer service centre in Sligo, and Litec Moulding Limited, which announced its intention to increase its workforce to 42 as a result of new business and the expansion of existing operations.

Enterprise Ireland has introduced a new programme called Enterprise Start aimed at people who are considering a career move and would like to learn more about starting their own business. Last year Enterprise Ireland organised a briefing on the new Enterprise Ireland strategy, which was launched in Sligo in May 2005 by the Minister, Deputy Martin, to companies from across the north-west. The strategy sets out the role Enterprise Ireland will play in transforming Irish companies into market-focused and innovation-driven businesses with the ability to compete successfully on world markets.

I assure the Deputy that the State development agencies under the aegis of my Department will continue to market Sligo and the surrounding area for investment and will make every effort to secure alternative employment for the staff who will be made redundant. I will examine the redundancy issue and I will contact the Deputy later in this regard.

Mr. English: The announcement last week that 350 employees will lose their jobs at NEC in Ballymor was a devastating blow. Many of them were married and had bought new houses. Five, six and seven members of families were employed by the

[Mr. English.]

company. Our hearts go out to them following this bad news, which is a devastating blow to Ballivor and counties Meath and Westmeath where most of the workers reside. The knock on effects will be significant. It is estimated the company was worth €20 million to the local economy because many spin-off companies were set up in the area.

NEC was established in Ballivor in 1976 and last week's announcement was a bolt from the blue. County Meath has suffered significant job losses, particularly over the past ten years. The number of IDA supported jobs in the county has reduced. CTM Limited in Kells closed a number of years ago with 270 jobs lost. Navan Carpets closed in 2003 with the loss of more than 200 jobs, while 50 jobs were lost at Crannac Furniture in Navan. Trimproof Limited, another manufacturing company, relocated its operations from Trim a few years ago.

County Meath has taken a number of hits and the IDA should make it a priority. Recently I obtained information on the number of IDA visits to the county. It has been the subject of half the visits of neighbouring counties, which is dismal. Political will needs to be devoted to the county so that it has a fair opportunity to develop the local economy. Meath's population has increased by one third over the past few years to 160,000 and will soon reach 200,000, but no new jobs have been created during the Celtic tiger era. More than 20,000 people commute to work in Dublin every day.

What notification had the Minister of State's Department or the State agencies such as the IDA of NEC's intention to pull out? Did discussions take place? What efforts were made to persuade the company to remain? The company requested meetings. Were its representatives seeking anything in particular? Was there an opportunity to save the jobs? Was an effort made to save jobs in the research and development section or to divert a number of jobs elsewhere?

What does the Minister intend to do to find suitable employment for the 350 employees who will lose their jobs next September? What will he do to retain jobs in the area, attract new business or provide replacement jobs? What courses are being offered to the employees? What opportunities will they have to upskill? They have been specifically trained to work in NEC and they do not want to have to spend hours commuting to jobs in Dublin. Congestion costs Dublin €650 million a year and additional commuters from County Meath are not needed to add to that. What efforts have been made by the Department to retain the NEC factory so that it will be easy to attract a replacement employer or to use as it an enterprise centre for smaller companies to start up in incubator units? It is essential that the building should be retained. NEC and Ballivor have been good for each other over the years. I ask that the company should be asked to give a

little extra back to the community. It has always done its bit for local clubs but we need it to go a step further.

Will the Minister of State re-examine the national spatial strategy, which we were informed in 2003 would direct investment and infrastructure and so on? Meath was practically left out of the strategy. No hubs or gateways were selected in the county, yet it should play a vital role in linking Dublin with hubs such as Dundalk, Monaghan and Cavan. A minor reference is made to Meath in the context of the greater Dublin region but that is no good.

The rate base in the county is suffering badly because of a lack of jobs. NEC was the second largest employer in the county after Tara Mines. The local authority cannot afford to lose companies such as this and the finance it derives from them. The council does not have the money to service the increased population in County Meath. A recent report highlighted that the Government has also neglected the county in the area of local authority funding. The council receives 70% of the national average, yet Meath people pay 110% of the national average in tax.

The county is getting a raw deal. Thousands of IDA jobs have been lost over the past ten years and Meath needs a break. The Department should set up a task force in the county. Significant numbers of people are moving into the county but investment in jobs has not increased. The unfortunate people of Ballivor are an example of that. They will have to travel outside the county to seek employment. A political effort must be made to secure replacement jobs. We have a well educated workforce and it is only fair that the county should be given a fair opportunity to develop. As our local Minister, Deputy Noel Dempsey said, Meath is suffering from an infrastructural deficit but he has been in office for almost ten years. I question how he could go on local radio last week and state he did not know of the problems relating to job creation in County Meath and the first he heard about it was from council staff. I have been blue in the face saying it in the House.

The Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and our new Minister for trees surely know the problems we have in County Meath regarding jobs. It is not good enough for him to say he was not aware of the problems. We have been neglected. While the Minister of State may not be able to save this company, more jobs must be provided. The employees affected must be given an opportunity to upskill. Action and political will are needed.

Mr. M. Ahern: I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. I was very disappointed to hear that NEC Semiconductors Ireland Limited based in Ballivor, County Meath, had announced on 21 February that it was closing, with the loss of 350 jobs. The decision to cease production at Ballivor was taken by NEC's parent company in Japan.

On 22 February, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment met representatives of Meath County Council and the State development agencies to discuss the follow up to the closure announcement. The Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Deputy Noel Dempsey, was also part of a deputation that visited NEC's offices in London last week but it did not have great success.

The reasons for the closure include a poor business performance by the parent company and increasing operating costs. The overall competitiveness of the Ballivor plant has been reduced, especially when compared to plants in China, Singapore and Malaysia. Full closure is expected by September 2006.

I am very conscious of the effect that these job losses will have on the workers involved and their families, as well as on the local community. This is very upsetting news for those who will lose their jobs. I assure the people affected, however, that the State agencies will provide every support they can. The priority will be to find alternative employment for those involved in the shortest timeframe.

The role of FÁS, the State training agency, will be particularly important in assisting those who will lose their jobs. The agency met company representatives on 27 February and an action plan has been drawn up. The agency envisages an on-site employment services office, which will provide daily access to its full range of services. Following one-to-one consultation with staff over the coming months, FÁS will deliver on site training for staff in conjunction with the company. The company has initiated discussions with employee representatives and State agencies on compensation packages and professional support services to ensure the impact on employees, their families, and the local community and economy is minimised.

Recent data produced by management highlights that the Irish plant is the least competitive in terms of productivity when compared with NEC's three plants in Japan as well as its other plants in China, Singapore and Malaysia. On competitive issues in general, maintaining Ireland's attractiveness as a competitive and profitable location from which to do business is a key priority for my Department. Our economy is undergoing a fundamental transition to a higher value added, knowledge economy and we should no longer expect to compete as a low cost location for manufacturing investment. It is inevitable that the investment decisions of some companies will be influenced by the low cost attractions of alternative locations. The focus of my Department and its agencies is firmly concentrated on managing this transition of our economy through the use of the best blend of policies to strengthen competitiveness both at national and company level.

Finding alternative employment for the NEC workers will be a priority for the State develop-

ment agencies. I assure the Deputy that IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and the county enterprise board, in addition to FÁS, will play their part in developing a way forward for both the affected workers and the surrounding area.

As part of its new strategy, Enterprise Ireland is working intensively with high potential start up companies at their initial start up phase in order to accelerate their growth. Since 2003, Enterprise Ireland has approved over €7 million in support to its client companies in County Meath and paid out over €5 million. Funding of over €635,000 has been approved by Enterprise Ireland in support of community enterprise centres at three locations in the county, including nearby Trim. These centres foster the development of micro-enterprises and particular emphasis is placed on creating and developing employment and enterprise space for people who lose their jobs.

The NEC workforce in Ballivor is highly skilled, some with almost 30 years experience. It is possible that some of the workforce will avail of the supports provided by Enterprise Ireland to develop their own technology-based businesses.

The Meath county enterprise board, in liaison with Enterprise Ireland, is preparing a number of initiatives to promote the idea of new start ups to the employees of NEC. The enterprise board has advised NEC that it is prepared to co-ordinate a general information evening of all State agencies at a local venue to make presentations and provide advice to the employees on the range of services and opportunities that they may wish to avail of. The State bodies to attend will include Enterprise Ireland, FÁS, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, Meath Leader 2 and TIDE.

Meath County Council will host a business showcase at the IFSC in Dublin on 8 March to promote the county as an attractive business location. Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland are actively supporting the council in organising this event.

The NEC workforce in Ballivor is highly skilled and I know that the loss of these jobs will be a severe blow to the area. I am confident that the industrial development agencies will strengthen their marketing and promotion efforts in County Meath. This will be done in partnership with the county council and other key players to maximise the flow of potential investors for the county and to convert these into investment and job opportunities for Ballivor and the surrounding area.

Schools Building Projects.

Mr. Stagg: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for accepting this matter for discussion. I also thank the Minister for coming in to take the debate. I appreciate that.

Kill national school, on the edge of the Naas dual carriageway, was built in 1951 to serve the primary education needs of the picturesque vil-

[Mr. Stagg.]

lage of Kill and its rural hinterland. It now consists of the old building, an extension to it and a tangle of nine prefab classrooms placed on what should be the play area for the pupils. It caters for a population of some 4,000 people. The school is now in the middle of a virtual building site, one of the largest engineering projects in the country. When that project is finished, the school will be on a traffic island on the newly constructed N7, the road with the heaviest traffic load in the country.

In 1998, the newly appointed principal, Mr. Tom Kinnane, commissioned a study of the educational needs of the area. On foot of that study, the Department agreed in 2000 that a new school was required and instructed the Office of Public Works to purchase a suitable site. Six years on, the OPW has failed to do this. It has done sweet Fanny Adams about the issue.

It is the responsibility and duty of the Minister for Education and Science to ensure the necessary resources are made available to provide schools where required — and we have plenty of resources. The Minister decided in 2000, six years ago, that a new school was required in Kill, but all she has done about it since is to visit the school during the by-election last year and promise another prefab. She has failed to discharge her duty as far as Kill and its children are concerned.

There are now nine prefabs at the school and one more is needed for this year's intake. That will be the last prefab as no more will fit; there is no room left in the yard for any more. There are 432 pupils in the school and this number will rise to 465 in September 2006 if the prefab is provided.

As a result of the Minister's failure to provide a new school and the continued zoning of land for houses by Fianna Fáil councillors, I have sought a moratorium on further house building in the area until a new school is provided. This request has been rejected and zoning and planning permissions are granted with gay abandon, with no regard for the needs of the children in the area. There is a basic need for a properly designed and built national school in a suitable location. Kill has not got this.

The board of management and the school principal, Mr. Tom Kinnane, have succeeded in the most difficult circumstances in providing first-class education for the children of Kill. However, they have now reached a crisis that even they cannot solve. Simply, there are more children seeking places in Kill national school than can be accommodated. In September of this year, 23 children, some of whom have had places booked in the school since they were born, will be turned away because there is no room. If the requested prefab is not provided, that figure will be over 50 children. Where will these children go in September? In September 2007, at least 47 children will be turned away. There is no room either

in the adjoining towns and villages as they are full to the gills.

Tom Kinnane, who has worked miracles since his appointment to Kill, cannot solve the problem presented to him. There are more pupils than the school can accommodate. This will mean that some children will be close to six years of age before they can get a place. Even that is not guaranteed. This is a scandal and disgrace that the Minister has failed to tackle or resolve. Kill needs as a basic requirement a new 24-classroom school with all supporting facilities. This requires a new site. There is no scarcity of land in the vicinity of the village and all the Department needs to do is go out and buy it.

I demand on behalf of the children of Kill, their parents and teachers that this matter be dealt with as a matter of urgency. The Minister must deal with the acute accommodation crisis at Kill national school. Given that the Minister has come in to reply, I hope she has good news for Kill.

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I thank Deputy Stagg for raising this matter. One of the reasons I am replying is because I have visited Kill national school and I am conscious of the excellent quality education being provided and the leadership given by the principal and staff in a school building that is anything but quality accommodation. I am concerned by the fact that the school faces not just demographic pressure but also pressure from the roadworks. Anybody travelling along the route can see the school. I am conscious of the conditions under which the school operates.

I am anxious that Kill national school should be one of the 1,300 schools to benefit from the schools building projects fund of approximately €500 million. The rate of growth in the school has been enormous over the past few years. Currently the school has 426 pupils, a principal, 15 mainstream assistants and four special needs teachers. It has grown in the past six years by 94 pupils, from 332 in 2000-2001 to 426. In that short time the rate of increase has amounted to three class groups.

When the school applied initially to the Department for an extension, it was on the basis of a 16-classroom school. The school has a priority one rating, the highest priority that can be given. Obviously, we are committed to seeing that this school and schools like it in rapidly developing areas are prioritised and make progress more quickly than other schools. When the Department decided initially on a 16-classroom school, the technical assessment of the site deemed it unsuitable to provide the level of extra accommodation needed to match the requirement.

The property management section of the OPW acts on behalf of the Department of Education and Science with regard to site acquisitions. It was asked to acquire a suitable site for the school. I understand a number of sites have been iden-

tified and the OPW is awaiting a recommendation from the valuer on the options. As soon as the preferred site is identified, it will be acquired in the shortest timeframe possible. I am waiting for the valuer to come back to me through the OPW.

In recent years we have used very innovative methods of delivering school buildings. With the use of generic design and design build, we have actually built schools in ten months. One example of this is the Archbishop Ryan school in Lucan. As soon as we get the site, I will be determining that we should use the fastest possible method of building the school.

In light of the recent demands on the school for enrolment, we now do not believe that a 16-classroom school will be big enough, particularly when one looks at the long-term enrolment needs of the area. Deputy Stagg seems to agree. We have to undertake an immediate review of the long-term enrolment needs of the school to ensure that the additional accommodation provided will be sufficient to meet the expected demand for pupil places in the foreseeable future. We will look at all relevant factors including enrolment, demographic trends, the rate and pace of proposed housing developments in the area, along with the projected occupancy rates. This review is being carried out as a matter of urgency and the outcome will be discussed with the school authority as soon as it comes to hand.

With regard to the immediate needs in Kill national school, as outlined by the Deputy, we have an application for temporary accommodation on hand to facilitate enrolment for September 2006. I am concerned that what the school has applied for will not be sufficient to meet the demands on it for September. I have asked the school planning section to meet the school immediately to make sure that we can expedite the matter and ensure that the accommodation needed can be made available, bearing in mind that there are site restrictions.

As soon as the Office of Public Works finds a site, as been instructed, we will purchase it and build the school as quickly as possible. In the meantime, we need to identify how big that school is going to be and that work is being done as a matter of priority. We also need to determine the temporary accommodation needed, which will be signed off with the school as quickly as possible.

I am acutely conscious of this particular school and I commend the principal, Mr. Kinnane, and his staff for the genuinely quality education they are providing in those circumstances.

Mr. Stagg: I thank the Minister for her reply and will be happy to monitor progress on the matter with her.

Marino Institute of Education.

Mr. F. McGrath: I am grateful for the opportunity to raise on the Adjournment the need to

publish the Farrell Grant Sparks report on the Marino Institute of Education. Before going into detail on my concerns, I wish to record my total support for the staff and students at this excellent college of education, which is the backbone of Irish primary education. I commend their efforts, professionalism and integrity. However, I must raise serious issues regarding the way in which the college has been run recently. I raise these issues to get at the truth and ensure that education wins.

I must challenge the media statement issued by the trustees of the Marino Institute of Education on Friday, 24 February 2006. That statement asserts that Coláiste Mhuire has no legal existence. Are we to believe, then, that public funding is being paid into a private organisation that cannot be subject to freedom of information requests? Is this the case? How can the Minister be sure that her Department's annual capitation funding for primary teacher training is being used for that purpose alone? What system of checks and balances is in place to ensure that taxpayers' money is used for its intended purpose? With regard to the shortcomings identified in the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, are there now separate bank accounts for Coláiste Mhuire and other sections of the Marino Institute of Education, so that funding intended for primary teacher training is clearly ring fenced for that purpose? How are site overheads and costs shared between all users on the campus?

I urge the Minister to call for the full publication of the Farrell Grant Sparks report. Why has it not been published? This is further evidence of the culture of secrecy dominating the institute. The trustees have stated that there is no evidence of a systematic regime of bullying or harassment of staff and nothing to corroborate the allegations that the trustees, governing body or senior management were taking decisions inimical to the interests of primary teacher training at the institute, now or into the future. How can that be true when a substantial settlement was paid to Ms Caoimhe Máirtín? Why is it that high-quality staff members have left Coláiste Mhuire in recent months, citing an unhealthy and unacceptable work environment as the reason for their departure? Two of these staff members were also members of the governing body.

Will the Minister expand on the nature of the direct involvement of the Department of Education and Science with the trustees, as referred to in its media statement? What was the interim arrangement referred to in the statement? Is the direct involvement of the Department of Education and Science to continue? Will Farrell Grant Sparks and the trustees dictate the future role of the Department with regard to the Marino Institute of Education, despite the departmental injection of between €5 million and €6 million on an annual basis? What is the Minister's view on this? These are key questions.

I stand by the professionalism and integrity of Ms Caoimhe Máirtín, who has been driven out

[Mr. F. McGrath.]

of the college. She is a true teacher, leader and visionary for Irish education and I hope we have not lost her because some people have another agenda. I thank and commend all the staff and students at the Marino Institute of Education. I strongly support their efforts for truth and justice. Their only agenda is to put Irish education first.

Ms Hanafin: I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to Deputy McGrath on the issues he has raised.

Coláiste Mhuire, Marino is one of five privately-owned denominational colleges of education recognised by my Department for the purpose of training primary teachers. It is part of the overall Marino Institute of Education. The institute is registered as a charitable trust and it is privately owned. It is governed by a governing body on behalf of the institute's Christian Brother trustees. It also operates conference facilities and continuing professional development programmes.

Following allegations of financial impropriety at Marino Institute of Education, I asked the accountancy firm, PricewaterhouseCoopers, to examine the use of moneys paid by my Department to the institute for the purposes of training primary teachers and associated activities. The main findings of the review, which I published in August last year, revealed that there has been no misuse of the public moneys paid by my Department to the Marino Institute of Education. In my press release welcoming the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, I stated that although my Department did not have any concerns regarding the funding provided for the purpose of training teachers, it was, nevertheless, important to demonstrate clearly that Department funding was correctly allocated for teacher training.

In addition to the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, the trustees of the institute commissioned a separate report by Farrell Grant Sparks to review, among other things, management structures at the institute and to recommend a long-term governance structure for the institute. Although the internal governance arrangements and management structures at the institute are the direct responsibility of the trustees, in light of the highly-publicised and well-documented difficulties at the institute, officials from my Department assisted in putting in place interim governance arrangements. This was done because of the public interest in a college of education and the need to assure students of the continued provision of high quality teacher training, for which the college is well known. My officials received the full co-operation of trustees, management and staff at the institute. I understand that the interim

arrangements had been working quite well up to now.

Under the terms of the interim arrangements, the trustees of Marino Institute of Education appointed an interim director and interim president until a more lasting solution could be found. In addition, a senior official from my Department has recently joined the governing body of the institute for the interim period. The aim of the process was, among other things, to arrive at an interim arrangement which would guarantee the continuation of high quality teacher training for both existing and the incoming cohort of students for the next academic year. I assure the Deputy that, in the interest of the students attending Coláiste Mhuire, Marino, my officials will continue to be available to engage in a process with the trustees, management and staff pertaining to the teacher training college element of the institute.

I stress that my Department does not have any direct role in matters covered by employee and employer relations. In general, my Department does not have a role in staff management in Coláiste Mhuire, Marino because it is a privately-owned college. This also applies to other privately-owned colleges. My Department's funding is provided for the training of primary teachers at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Apart from the provision of funding, my Department also has a role with regard to the quality of trainee teachers similar to its role in the other colleges that prepare primary teachers. On the basis of the information received to date my Department has no cause for concern in this regard. As part of ongoing quality assurance measures a sample of final year students on teaching practice is monitored by the inspectors of my Department and this measure also applies to other colleges.

I mentioned earlier that the Farrell Grant Sparks report was commissioned by the trustees at the institute. I understand from the statement released by the trustees last Friday and from a very recent meeting between them and my officials that it is not their intention, for legal and commercial reasons, to publish their report. I also understand that a special governing body meeting will be held tomorrow at which the report will be discussed. I am sure this will be first of many engagements on the matter.

I am hopeful that management and staff at the institute can and will work collaboratively to ensure that high quality teacher education remains and continues to be of the utmost importance for all concerned.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.30 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 2 March 2006.

Written Answers.

The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies received from the Departments [unrevised].

Questions Nos. 1 to 15, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 16 to 30, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 31 to 38, inclusive, answered orally.

Official Travel.

39. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding his recent visit to India; the efforts he made to promote Irish tourism and the arts here during that trip; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8192/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I visited India last January as part of a major mission led by the Taoiseach. The purpose of this mission, which visited Bangalore, Delhi and Mumbai, was to move the long-standing relationship between Ireland and India to a broader and deeper level of co-operation and partnership, particularly in the light of India's emerging importance as a global player.

The departmental objectives of my participation in the mission to India were fourfold: (1) to sign, on behalf of the Government, a cultural co-operation agreement with India; (2) to promote tourism; (3) to promote Ireland as a location for Indian film-makers; and (4) to promote Ireland as a source of high-quality thoroughbred mares and stallions for the Indian market.

In relation to cultural co-operation, I signed an agreement with India on 19 January 2006 in the presence of the two Heads of Government. My Department has begun work on a draft implementation framework which it will submit to the Indian side in due course with a view to seeing tangible benefits flowing from this agreement.

India is now emerging as a significant outbound tourism market. Tourism Ireland has established an office in Mumbai and there were two tourism-related functions, one in Delhi and one in Mumbai. The Taoiseach and I attended and spoke at both events.

There was a very strong turn-out and an excellent response from the trade. Media presence and coverage was extensive and very positive and did a lot to start building a wider awareness of Ireland as a destination.

India is home to the largest film industry in the world, in terms of number of full length features made. The two film boards, North and South, in

conjunction with Tourism Ireland, used the mission to highlight the attractions of Ireland as a location for Indian movies.

In recent years India has become a growing market for Irish thoroughbreds. There were three thoroughbred-related events, including a very successful first running of the Irish Thoroughbred Marketing sponsored Irish trophy race at Mumbai racecourse which, I am pleased to say, was won by an Irish horse ridden by an Irish jockey.

Tourist Accommodation.

40. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the ongoing closure of bed and breakfast outlets here; his further views on the general fall-off in profitability in this sector of the tourism industry; if he has had discussions with industry representatives in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8199/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): As I have previously advised the House, I do not have responsibility for the registration and listing of tourist accommodation facilities. This is a day-to-day function of Fáilte Ireland under the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003.

However, I understand that the key issues affecting the performance of the bed and breakfast sector have been examined in a major review commissioned by Fáilte Ireland. This review identifies the reluctance of younger families to become involved in offering "Irish Home" or bed and breakfast type accommodation as other proprietors retire from the business as being a significant factor in the decline in the number of approved premises.

It is also true to say that there have been other contributory factors to the loss in market share of the bed and breakfast and guesthouse sector such as changes in consumer preferences, growth in urban and short-break holiday taking and the large addition of budget hotel accommodation stock.

Deputies will appreciate that just as visitors cannot be compelled to visit particular locations neither can they be obliged to avail of particular products or types of accommodation. The responsibility primarily lies with the individual communities and operators in the sector to identify and market persuasively unique product offerings that will provide the visitor with a quality holiday experience and deliver value for money.

Having said that, Fáilte Ireland recognises that staying in an Irish home can be a defining experience for overseas visitors and it is determined to ensure that this should remain a significant element of the Irish tourism brand. The importance of the product is reflected in the fact that over half of the 3,000 nominations received in 2005 for the Irish Welcome Awards were in

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

respect of people running bed and breakfast accommodation.

I understand Fáilte Ireland has identified a number of actions designed to encourage suppliers to both remain in and enter the sector. In particular, the approach to marketing both individual premises and the sector overall is to be refreshed. Overall, the authority is committed to working with the relevant representative bodies and recognised marketing groups to implement the findings of the strategic review, a copy of which can be downloaded from Fáilte Ireland's corporate website *www.failteireland.ie*.

Question No. 41 answered with Question No. 37.

National Stadium.

42. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when work will commence on phase 1 of Campus Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8276/06]

46. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if all necessary repair works have been undertaken at the National Aquatic Centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8263/06]

60. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the expenditure to date on the Campus Stadium Ireland project; the further expenditure likely to be incurred; the future plans for the development of the facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8202/06]

64. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the commencement of work on the first phase of the Abbotstown Sports Campus; if the work is proceeding as scheduled; the timetable for the completion of the facilities at Abbotstown; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8194/06]

143. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his future plans for the development of the Abbotstown complex including Campus Stadium Ireland; the costs associated with the plan to date; the future costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8589/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 42, 46, 60, 64 and 143 together.

Deputies will recall that in November 2005 the Government gave its assent to the commencement of phase one of the development of the sports campus at Abbotstown.

CSID, the company charged with developing the project, undertook an in-depth preparatory process and has drawn up proposals for the development of the sports campus in a series of phases. Phase one of the development control

plan will provide a national field sports training centre catering for rugby, soccer, Gaelic games and hockey; a national indoor training centre which will provide world class training facilities for over 30 governing bodies of sport; accommodation for sports men and women; sports science and medical facilities; and all-weather synthetic pitches for community use.

Funds for the delivery of the project have been provided in my Department's capital envelope for 2006-10. The estimated cost of the project is €119 million, with a four to five year delivery schedule — 2006 to 2010. A sum of €9.5 million has been provided in my Department's budget for 2006 and funding has been agreed for the period 2007-10. None of this funding has been drawn down to date. The National Aquatic Centre, the first facility developed on this site, was completed in 2003 at a capital cost of €71 million.

Campus and Stadium Ireland Development Ltd is now proceeding with the delivery of the Abbotstown sports campus. In addition to providing the sports facilities I have just listed, discussions have commenced on the provision of a site for a hospice on land adjacent to the James Connolly Memorial Hospital. Discussions are already under way with FA Ireland about the relocation of its headquarters to the former State Laboratory building at Abbotstown.

The repair work on the National Aquatic Centre, occasioned by the damage caused during the severe weather conditions on 1 January 2005, was completed on 20 May 2005. I can assure the Deputy that all necessary repair works have been carried out and that the centre was reopened to the public on the day work was completed. There are some "snag list" issues outstanding and there is a process in train to have these completed as quickly as possible. Day-to-day repairs are a matter for the operator of the facility, Dublin Waterworld Ltd.

Departmental Expenditure.

43. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the spend on sport by his Department, both current and capital, in the most recent year for which figures are available; the proportion of this which relates to horse-racing and greyhound racing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8247/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): In 2005, my Department's total expenditure on sport amounted to €184.5 million on the sport capital programme, the local authority swimming pool programme, the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road, Campus and Stadium Ireland Development Limited, the Irish Sports Council, Horseracing Ireland and Bord na gCon. Spending on horse-racing and greyhound racing accounted for 37% of total spend on sport in 2005.

The national lottery-funded sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, is the primary means of providing capital funding for sports facilities to clubs and voluntary and community organisations throughout the country. The programme is advertised on an annual basis. In 2005, a total of €56.8 million was paid out in respect of grants allocated under the sports capital programmes. Since 1998, a total of €395 million has now been allocated to 4,923 projects throughout the country providing for the needs of organisations and participants in the areas of physical recreation, training, coaching and competition at all levels of sport in Ireland.

Considerable progress has been made in advancing grant applications under the local authority swimming pool programme, which is administered by my Department. In 2005, €14.1 million was spent under the programme supporting the construction-refurbishment of local authority swimming pools. In that year, two new pools opened to the public in Tuam and Ballymun and two refurbished pools opened in Clonmel and Churchfield in Cork City. In addition, five projects were approved for grant assistance allowing construction-refurbishment work to commence at various locations throughout the country. Seven pool projects were approved to seek tenders for construction and a further nine projects had their preliminary reports approved allowing the preparation of contract documents.

In January 2004 the Government agreed to provide funding of €191 million, phased over five years, to the joint IRFU-FAI project for the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road Stadium as a 50,000 seat state-of-the-art stadium. This project has now been taken to the planning stage and an application for planning permission was lodged with the city council in January. Expenditure in 2005 amounted to €9.5 million.

In 2005, a total of €1.4 million in current funding was provided to CSID, the company charged with the development of the sports campus. In November 2005, the Government approved the commencement of phase one of the development of facilities at Abbotstown and funds for the delivery of the project have been provided in my Department's multi-annual capital envelope for 2006-10. Phase one provides for the development of a national field sports training centre catering for rugby, soccer, Gaelic games and hockey. In addition, a national indoor training centre is planned to provide world class training facilities for over 30 sports, accommodation for sportsmen and sportswomen, sports science and medical facilities and publicly accessible, all weather floodlit synthetic pitches for community use are also included.

The Irish Sports Council was established in 1999 as the statutory body responsible for the promotion and development of sport in Ireland. It spent more than €34 million in 2005 on initiating, developing and enhancing a wide range of

programmes aimed at increasing participation and raising standards in Irish sport.

Government support for the horse and greyhound racing industries is provided under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund, as approved by the Oireachtas. Under the provisions of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act 2001, the fund receives a guaranteed level of finance based on the excise duty on off-course betting. A total of €68.35 million was provided under the fund in 2005 of which €54.84 million was allocated to current expenditure and €13.51 million to capital programmes. In 2004, the Oireachtas approved regulations to increase the limit of the fund from €254 million to €550 million to continue the fund for a further four years to 2008.

The 2004 Report on the Economic Value of the Horse Racing and Bloodstock Breeding Industry, completed by Indecon International Economic Consultants on behalf of Horse Racing Ireland, HRI, the Irish Thoroughbred Breeders' Association, ITBA, and the Irish European Breeders Fund, IEBF, confirmed that horse-racing and thoroughbred breeding are significant net contributors to the Irish economy and have an important role to play in generating employment, particularly in the tourism and rural sectors. The report showed that the thoroughbred breeding industry makes a gross contribution to the Irish economy of €330 million per annum and that it pays tax of approximately €37.5 million. The report showed that Ireland is now Europe's largest producer of thoroughbreds, accounting for 42% of total output and is the third largest producer worldwide, behind only the USA and Australia, and that employment figures of 16,500 are shown to be generated from the racing, breeding and associated industries.

This unprecedented level of investment in sport is clear evidence of the importance which the Government attaches to the putting in place of modern, well equipped and well managed sporting facilities supported by a wide range of programmes which are having a real benefit to our communities.

Tourism Industry.

44. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the recommendations of the tourism review report which have to date been implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8256/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The Report of the Tourism Policy Review Group was published in September 2003. To give best effect to the implementation of the recommendations of the review group, I established a Tourism Action Plan Implementation Group chaired by Mr. John Travers, who had chaired the Tourism Policy Review Group. The implementation group has already presented two

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

formal reports to me, in August 2004 and April 2005.

I refer the Deputy to the April 2005 report of the group and in particular to page 2 where it states:

Overall, the Implementation Group is satisfied that the strategy for the development of Irish tourism set out in the New Horizons Report is being well advanced both by the industry itself and by Government. A preliminary analysis of the progress reported in relation to the original 76 recommendations by the Review Group has found that by the end of March 2005, 28 actions have been delivered, 7 more have been partially delivered and good progress was reported on a further 19 and that the pace of progress is unsatisfactory in the case of some 20 actions.

The full text of both reports are available on my Department's website, www.arts-sports-tourism.gov.ie.

I am expecting to receive the group's third and final report shortly. It is my intention to bring it to Government and to publish it as soon as possible thereafter, as was done with the first two reports.

Arts in Education.

45. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will establish a special committee to examine the role of the arts in both primary and post-primary schools here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8271/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): Giving the arts a higher, more consistent profile at both primary and second level can not only benefit the arts but also bring significant benefits to the students concerned, which will stay with them all of their lives. It is important also to stress that this applies to all students, and not just to those who are recognised as being particularly gifted artistically.

Every parent in the country wants their children to be creative and imaginative, and to express that creativity and imagination as best they can. Because the future of the arts in Ireland rests with our children, it is vital that the arts are embedded into our education system at a fundamental level, beginning at primary and pre-primary level, and continuing on from there. I have always believed that the benefits of the arts for the individual are greatly increased if exposure to the arts takes place during a person's most formative years, and for that reason it is a real priority of mine to enhance the position of the arts in our education system.

Clearly, an issue of this priority merits the focused consideration that a special committee, established under the Arts Act 2003, can bring to bear. I have already announced my intention to establish such a committee. My Department is

currently in consultation with the Department of Education and Science about this committee and its terms of reference and I expect to make a further announcement on the matter shortly.

An arts and education committee will make recommendations on the actions, not words, that are needed to achieve this. I will be calling on the Arts Council, our colleagues in the Department of Education and Science, teachers, parents and our arts community to join me in tackling once and for all this important task.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 42.

Appointments to State Boards.

47. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on whether it is desirable that the chairperson of Bórd na gCon should be appointed for an indefinite period; if there is any other board or body within the remit of his Department in respect of which the chairman is appointed for an indefinite period; if he intends to introduce an amendment to the legislation to deal with this anomaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8181/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The current legislative position relating to the appointment of the chairman of Bord na gCon is set out at section 8 of the Greyhound Industry Act 1958. That section states that the chairman shall hold office at the pleasure of the Minister. There is no other State board or body under the remit of my Department in respect of which the chairman is appointed for an indefinite period.

On 31 January 2006, I requested Mr. Tim Dalton, former Secretary General of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, to carry out an independent assessment into issues, *inter alia*, relating to corporate governance in Bord na gCon. I expect to receive Mr. Dalton's report in a matter of weeks and I intend to give immediate consideration to his recommendations.

Pending receipt of his report, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any of the issues currently under investigation by him.

Film Industry Development.

48. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the efforts being made to encourage Indian film-makers to shoot their films here; if he received firm commitments in this regard during his recent visit to India; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8191/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The promotion of Ireland as a location for international film-making is a matter

for the Irish Film Board, which is independent of Government on a day to day basis.

During my recent visit to India I attended a number of events to showcase the numerous benefits that Ireland can offer as a location for film-makers, and I met a number of Indian film-makers on whom I strongly impressed the strengths of Ireland in this context.

It would not have been realistic to expect firm commitments at this stage. These meetings were about making contacts with key players in the Indian film industry, making them more aware about the possibilities offered by Ireland as a location and opening doors which will be and are already being actively followed up by the Irish Film Board. It was a very successful visit and I would be very hopeful that it will ultimately result in Indian film-makers coming to Ireland in the future.

As a direct result of the Indian visit, Tourism Ireland and the Irish Film Board are facilitating a familiarisation trip for a group of ten to 12 Indian producers. This trip is scheduled from 29 March to 1 April.

National Theatre.

49. **Mr. Coveney** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the redevelopment of the National Theatre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8268/06]

56. **Mr. Sherlock** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if the examination of the possible public private partnership procurement models for the redevelopment of the Abbey Theatre at George's Dock is complete; if he has brought a report to Government in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8197/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 and 56 together.

In December of last year the Government approved the redevelopment of the Abbey Theatre at George's Dock and agreed that my Department, in conjunction with the Minister for Finance, the Office of Public Works and the National Development Finance Agency, would examine possible PPP procurement models.

An examination of the possible PPP procurement models is currently being undertaken and I will report back to Government on this shortly.

National Concert Hall.

50. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the redevelopment of the National Concert Hall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8255/06]

58. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if there is any further update

on the options for the delivery of the development of the National Concert Hall; if his Department is continuing to assess these options; when he will be in a position to make a recommendation to Government in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8195/06]

63. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his proposals to improve the accommodation available to the National Concert Hall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8266/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50, 58 and 63 together.

I refer the Deputies to my reply to Question No. 17 of 26 January 2006 when I advised that the Government has approved, in principle, the development of a new National Concert Hall on a public private partnership basis.

A provision of €42 million has been included in the 2006-10 capital envelope of my Department for site purchase. The options for the delivery of the project, as a public private partnership initiative, will be assessed by my Department in association with the Department of Finance, the Office of Public Works and the National Development Finance Agency over the next few months following which I will report to Government on the procurement issues involved.

Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 38.

Appointments to State Boards.

52. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the information available to his Department in regard to the number of management or senior staff in Bord na gCon who have had their positions terminated in the course of the past five years and in respect of whom financial settlements were made; the amount paid in respect of such settlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8184/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): Bord na gCon was established as a statutory body under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958. Under the provisions of that Act, responsibility for the day-to-day administration of the organisation, including staffing issues, lies with Bord na gCon and my Department has no role in such matters. Accordingly, the information sought by the Deputy is not available to the Department and he should, therefore, address his request directly to Bord na gCon.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 38.

Tourism Promotion.

54. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount to be spent in

[Mr. Allen.]

2006 promoting Ireland as a tourist destination abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8267/06]

62. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the projected North American tourist numbers for the 2006 season; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8259/06]

68. **Mr. Crawford** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the projected tourist numbers to Ireland from European Union states for the 2006 season; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8258/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54, 62 and 68 together.

For 2006, I secured an unprecedented level of Exchequer resources for tourism development — €138.5 million — representing an increase of over 11% on 2005. This investment will enable the tourism agencies — Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland — to deliver in full their ambitious plans for 2006. This allocation includes the largest ever allocation of €40 million to the tourism marketing fund which supports the promotion of Ireland as a tourism destination abroad.

Tourism Ireland, the all-island marketing agency, expects to receive a total of €64 million from both jurisdictions to enable it deliver its overseas marketing programme. Tourism Ireland also receive additional funding from Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board for the promotion of niche tourism products overseas.

While it is too early to make predictions about this year's season, ambitious growth targets have been set for the year, with almost 5% growth sought in visitor numbers and 6.7% growth targeted for tourism revenue.

Within this overall growth target, Tourism Ireland is targeting growth of 8.5% from the North America market which will see overall numbers exceed the 1 million mark. In order to ensure that this growth can be achieved, Tourism Ireland and an industry steering group are undertaking a review of the North American market to ensure that Ireland is well positioned to grow this market.

From mainland European markets, Tourism Ireland is targeting 8.4% growth in visitor numbers for 2006. This targeted growth will, if achieved, result in visitors numbers from mainland Europe surpassing the 2 million barrier.

Appointments to State Boards.

55. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if, prior to his reply to Question No. 247 of 15 June 2005, his attention had been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) who is a member of Bórd na gCon was

the subject of a High Court order made on 11 November 2003 specifying that they should not for a period of five years be appointed to act in any way whether directly or indirectly as a director or secretary or to be concerned or take part in the promotion or formation of any company unless it met certain requirements; if he stands over the reply he gave to Question No. 247 of 15 June 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8183/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): In my reply to Question No. 247 of 15 June 2005, I stated that I was not aware of any appointees to State boards under the auspices of my Department currently disqualified from holding a directorship of a private company. This remains the position.

Under the terms of the Greyhound Industry Act 1958, as amended by the Greyhound Industry (Amendment) Act 1993, I appoint the members of the board of Bord na gCon which consists of seven members, a chairman and six ordinary members. Ordinary members are appointed to serve for a three-year term on the expiry of which they are eligible for reappointment for a further term.

In the case referred to by the Deputy, I sought and obtained advice from the Attorney General's office that there was no legal impediment to his reappointment. At the time of the reappointment of the person in question there was no restriction on that person serving on the board under the Companies Act 1990.

Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 49.

Olympic Games.

57. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on establishing a steering committee to co-ordinate Irish participation in the 2012 Olympic Games in line with the recent recommendations of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8198/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I welcome the recommendations of the recent report of the joint Oireachtas committee in relation to the staging of the Olympic Games in London 2012. Currently, I am finalising arrangements for the establishment of a committee to ensure that Ireland can capitalise on the opportunities which will be presented as a consequence of the allocation of the 2012 Olympic Games to London. This committee will address the issues outlined by the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in its report Ireland and the Olympics: From Athens to London.

There are currently a number of measures in place aimed at providing a co-ordinated structure

for Irish participants in the Olympic and Paralympic Games both in Beijing 2008 and London 2012.

Arising from the Athens Review 2005, the Irish Sports Council put together an operational plan, which identifies key performance indicators, timescales and costings and the roles of the various agencies in supporting Ireland's Olympic and Paralympic preparations for Beijing and London. The plan encompasses elements such as the introduction of targeted sport performance plans including prioritising junior, development and elite athletes; a review of the international carding scheme; proposals for the development of an Irish institute of sport; maintaining and enhancing the role of the Olympic and Paralympic Performance Committees to ensure optimum co-operation in the preparation and performance of the Irish team for the Beijing and London Olympic Games; and the strengthening of the Olympic Council of Ireland's administrative capability.

The Olympic Performance Committee and the Paralympic Performance Committees have recently met on a number of occasions in this regard. The meetings have focused on strengthening co-operation between the key agencies and on athlete preparation, particularly in relation to pre-games training camps, acclimatisation and full medical and science support. The Sports Council is also finalising its proposals for the development of an Irish institute of sport. The planned facilities at the sports campus at Abbotstown and the considerable progress being made in providing a network of high quality facilities throughout the country will deliver the infrastructure needed for the further development of our elite competitors.

I am confident that this path of long-term programme delivery by the ISC will ensure maximum return from the opportunities provided by London 2012 and provide a legacy in high performance sport.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 50.

National Conference Centre.

59. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the development of the national conference centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8265/06]

65. **Mr. S. Ryan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the award of the provisional tender for the construction of the national conference centre in Dublin; if he still expects a final decision on this issue later in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8196/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 59 and 65 together.

On 17 November 2005, I informed the House that, on the advice of the National Conference Centre Steering Group and with approval by the Government, I had designated Spencer Dock International Conference Centre Consortium as the provisional preferred tenderer for the provision of a national conference centre in Dublin.

In accordance with the competition process, the contracting authority, the Office of Public Works, is currently engaging with the provisional preferred tenderer to negotiate, settle and agree any required amendments to the project agreement. Assuming that these negotiations prove successful, the next step will be the appointment of the provisional preferred tenderer as preferred tenderer. During the preferred tenderer phase, the preferred tenderer will develop and provide the full range of project documents which will require review and approval by the contracting authority. I look forward to the early completion of the next stages and to a final decision by Government by mid-2006.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 42.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 37.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 54.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 50.

Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 42.

Question No. 65 answered with Question No. 59.

Tourist Activities.

66. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of tourists to Ireland who rent vehicles while on holiday here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8257/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): My Department has no function in the collection of statistical data regarding the number of overseas visitors to Ireland who rent vehicles during their holiday in Ireland. Both tourism State agencies — Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland — have a role in tracking business from the rent a car sector and as such I have asked them to provide the Deputy with whatever information is available to them in that regard.

Tourism Promotion.

67. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has received a copy of the findings of a recent Tourism Ireland survey, Marketing Insights — Image of the Island of

[Mr. Broughan.]

Ireland; his views on its conclusion that Ireland's cities are becoming indistinguishable from other European destinations for holidaymakers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8200/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I am aware of the document mentioned by the Deputy. It was published on Tourism Ireland's corporate website in December 2005 and presented to the industry at a seminar in Dublin in February 2006. The document was compiled from a number of surveys conducted on behalf of Tourism Ireland over the course of the past number of years as part of its ongoing tracking of consumer perceptions of Ireland as a tourism destination.

To me, the key message from the research is that Ireland's core appeal remains strong and attractive to potential overseas visitors. The core elements of our image remain people, place and living and historic culture.

I understand this research is based on people's perceptions of Ireland rather than their actual experience, that is, most people interviewed will not have visited Ireland.

I was interested to see that, where people have already visited Ireland, their perceptions of Ireland as a holiday destination improve significantly. This is equally the case in relation to some of the negative perceptions around prices, poor travel infrastructure, safety, etc. Fáilte Ireland's surveys of actual visitors' experience of a holiday here also bear this out.

This document highlights a key finding that I have mentioned in the House before, namely, that in some of our main markets, especially Britain, potential visitors are not clear what there is to do, see and experience while on holiday in Ireland. The perceived lack of a distinctive Irish holiday experience is very much linked to this issue.

Tourism Ireland's response to this has been the development of a €50 million marketing brand campaign which I launched in December last. This new global advertising campaign, the Discover Your Very Own Ireland campaign, brings to life the wide range of holiday choices and activities available both in rural and in urban Ireland.

Fáilte Ireland's research of actual visitor experience remains very positive, with 96% of those surveyed feeling that their holiday matched or exceeded their expectations.

There has also been a slight improvement in visitor ratings of value for money in 2005, with 67% finding it fair, good or very good which is the first improvement on this measure since 2001.

Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 54.

Appointments to State Boards.

69. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his views were sought by the chairman of Bórd na gCon prior to the decision to hold a press conference in Harold's Cross Greyhound Stadium on 4 February 2006; the views he conveyed to the chairman on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8182/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The chairman of Bord na gCon did not seek my views prior to his decision to hold a press conference on 4 February 2006.

The position is that on 2 February 2006, I wrote to all members of the board of Bord na gCon informing them that I had requested Mr. Tim Dalton to carry out an investigation into certain matters relating to the corporate governance of Bord na gCon. In this letter, I requested that they co-operate fully with Mr. Dalton in the conduct of his investigation and that they ensure that all papers relevant to the inquiry would be made available to him. I also requested that all matters under inquiry should be dealt with in the course of the inquiry and not otherwise.

The inquiry by Mr. Dalton is under way and I expect to receive his report in a matter of weeks. I do not wish to make any further comments on this matter until I have received and considered Mr. Dalton's report.

Film Industry Development.

70. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism his views on the present down-turn in the film industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8275/06]

138. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of films currently in production here; if this represents a desirable variation from previous years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8582/06]

139. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he is satisfied with the current production levels in the film industry here; if his attention has been drawn to the concerns in the industry; his proposals to address the issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8583/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 70, 138 and 139 together.

The Irish Film Board is responsible for the promotion and support of film-making in Ireland. The board is funded by my Department, but is independent on a day to day basis.

My Department does not have information on the number of films in production at any given time. However, the section 481 scheme provides a tax-based incentive for investors in film pro-

duction. Twenty-eight projects were certified under section 481 in 2005 representing a total project spend of €125.5 million and a total Irish spend of €63.9 million.

I am aware that difficulties have been experienced in the Irish film industry in recent times. These were due to various factors, including improved enhancements and incentives in other jurisdictions, unfavourable exchange rates, and increased competition from jurisdictions perceived to have lower cost structures than Ireland can offer.

The Government has acted decisively to address the position. Funding for the Irish Film Board has increased from €15.950 million in 2005 to €17.126 million this year, an increase of over 7%. It should also be noted in this context that the 2005 figure includes a supplementary provision of €1.5 million, which I made available to the board late last year to provide an extra stimulus to film activity. The increase in 2006 over the initial 2005 provision is of the order of 18.5%.

Critically, the Minister for Finance has announced his intention to make important enhancements to the section 481 scheme, a tax-based scheme to encourage investment in film production. The maximum amount that can be raised will increase from €15 million to €35 million, and it will now be possible to raise up to 80% of the total cost of making a film, instead of the existing limit of between 55% and 66%. While these changes require EU approval, they have been extremely well received in Ireland and overseas and are seen as doing much to restore our competitiveness as a location for international film-makers.

Informal indications are that the industry is already seeing some strengthening of activity and the changes referred to above, once they feed into the system, should make a very significant additional difference.

Proposed Soccer Stadium.

71. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will expand on recent comments that he views the development of a stadium for soccer exclusively as a preferable option for the new stadium for Shamrock Rovers in Tallaght; if he will withhold funding for the new stadium if it is also to be used for hosting Gaelic games; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8188/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): An amount of €2.4 million has already been provided by my Department under the sports capital programme for the development of a soccer stadium in Tallaght. The site provided and previous works carried out were based on the requirements of a soccer stadium. The detailed design specification which South Dublin County Council has obtained and is using

to finalise a contract to complete the project works is also based on soccer stadium dimensions.

My continued support to South Dublin County Council in putting together a financial package to ensure the completion of the stadium in Tallaght was always based on the plan to provide a soccer stadium for Tallaght which would serve as a viable, long-term home for Shamrock Rovers Football Club. While a final cost on the completion of the stadium has yet to be determined, it is clear that significant funding will be sought from my Department. To ensure that any such funding is justified and will provide value for money, serious consideration must also be given to the stadium accommodating two soccer clubs on a ground sharing basis, a concept recommended for Dublin clubs in the 2005 Genesis report on the Eircom League.

That completed stadium will remain in the control of South Dublin County Council and therefore the management and additional usage of the stadium and any ancillary facilities will be a matter for the council to decide. Facilitating the possibility of ground sharing by two Eircom League soccer clubs at the Tallaght stadium is a priority, while at the same time I would welcome the multi-usage of the facilities at Tallaght for all other sports whose organisers deem the completed facility to be suitable.

I welcome the decision taken by South Dublin County Council at its meeting of 13 February 2006 to complete the stadium at Tallaght to the specification originally planned. It means that discussions can now take place to determine the immediate priorities for the project to ensure an early commencement of works on the site. As I have already publicly stated, I am anxious that the stadium would be completed as a matter of urgency.

Wexford Festival Opera.

72. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the position regarding the redevelopment of the Wexford Opera House; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8262/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): Last December I approved a grant of €26 million towards the cost, estimated at €30.28 million, of refurbishing and remodelling the Theatre Royal in Wexford. Wexford Festival Opera will raise the balance of the capital cost. The Office of Public Works is providing project management services for the development.

Demolition of the old theatre is under way. Advertisements for the construction of the new theatre were placed in the EU Official Journal and on the eTenders Public Procurement website at the beginning of February 2006. It is anticipated that contracts will be in place by this summer and that construction will be completed by July 2008.

73. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the increase in the numbers of new vehicles licensed in 2005 compared with 2004; the increase in new vehicles licensed in January 2006 compared with January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8403/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt): The CSO's annual release

titled Vehicles Licensed for the First Time 2005 indicated that there were 219,284 new vehicles licensed in 2005. This represents an increase of 23,777 or 12.2% on 2004. Full details of all classes of new vehicles licensed for 2004 and 2005 are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Details of new vehicles licensed in 2004 and 2005

Taxation Class	Year 2004	Year 2005	Difference	% Difference
Private Cars	149,635	166,270	16,635	11.1
Goods Vehicles	31,165	38,396	7,231	23.2
Tractors	2,881	3,168	287	10.0
Motor Cycles	3,833	3,240	-593	-15.5
Exempt Vehicles	5,099	4,851	-248	-4.9
Public Service Vehicles	1,181	1,400	219	18.5
Machines or Contrivances	1,241	1,359	118	9.5
Other Classes	472	600	128	27.1
Total	195,507	219,284	23,777	12.2

The CSO's monthly release titled Vehicles Licensed for the First Time, January 2006 reported that there were 29,962 new vehicles licensed in January 2006. When compared with

January 2005, this represents an increase of 5,906 or 24.6%. Full details of all classes of new vehicles licensed in January 2005 and January 2006 are set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Details of new vehicles licensed in January 2005 and January 2006

Taxation Class	Jan. 2005	Jan. 2006	Difference	% Difference
Private Cars	19,992	24,605	4,613	23.1
Goods Vehicles	2,929	3,899	970	33.1
Tractors	246	328	82	33.3
Motor Cycles	246	253	7	2.8
Exempt Vehicles	353	464	111	31.4
Other Classes	290	413	123	42.4
Total	24,056	29,962	5,906	24.6

Health Service Staff.

74. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children her proposals to ensure that a sufficient number of speech and language therapists are trained to meet current national needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8450/06]

97. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children her proposals in regard to the crisis in the speech and language therapy service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8451/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 97 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, intensive efforts have been undertaken to improve staffing levels in speech and language therapy in the public health service. The success of these measures have contributed to an increase of 162 speech and language therapists, or 42% over the number employed at end-December 2000, and reflects significant increases in the numbers employed in promotional grades. There were 548 whole time equivalent speech and language therapists employed in the public health service at end-September 2005.

In addition, three new speech and language therapy courses commenced in the 2003-04 academic year in UCC, NUIG and UL. In total, these courses provide an additional 75 training places in speech and language therapy. This expansion in training numbers was identified in the Bacon report as sufficient to meet the long-

term demand-supply balance for speech and language therapists in Ireland. The first graduates from the two year Masters course in UL completed their studies in June 2005. The first graduates from the BSc courses in UCC and NUIG will graduate in 2007.

The aspect of the Deputy's question in relation to the management and delivery of health and personal social services is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this aspect considered by the Health Service Executive and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Child Welfare.

75. **Dr. Upton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the laws which would apply and the procedure that should be followed if a member of the public becomes aware that a small child is being left alone regularly throughout the day and informs the gardaí about same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8286/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): The Child Care Act 1991 as amended sets out the statutory framework within which the Health Service Executive provides family support and child welfare and protection services.

Where a member of the public has a concern about a child they should inform the local health office of the Health Service Executive about it. The gardaí and the Health Service Executive work closely in relation to child welfare and protection issues. While the gardaí have power to act under section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991 as amended, in effect this would only happen in circumstances where there was a need to take a child to safety: (a) where there is an immediate and serious risk to the health and welfare of a child; and (b) it would not be sufficient for the protection of the child from such immediate and serious risk to await the making of an application for an emergency care order by the Health Service Executive. If the Deputy will let me have details of the case concerned, I will ensure that the appropriate authorities are informed.

Health Services.

76. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Clare did not qualify for 40 hours for a personal assistant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8296/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery

of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospitals Building Programme.

77. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of meetings she has held with the Health Service Executive in relation to her proposal to build private hospitals on the grounds of public hospitals; the dates of these meetings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8307/06]

78. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of meetings officials from her Department have held with the Health Service Executive in relation to her proposal to build private hospitals on the grounds of public hospitals; if she was present at any of these meetings; the dates of these meetings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8308/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 78 together.

The issue of developing private hospital facilities on public sites to increase the stock of beds available to public patients was among the topics discussed at a number of meetings between officials of my Department and the Health Service Executive, HSE.

The meetings in question were held on 7 July, 26 August, 23 September, 22 November 2005 and 22 February 2006. I did not attend those meetings. The issues were also discussed, along with other topics, at a meeting I attended on 27 October 2005 with the Secretary General of my Department and the chairman and chief executive of the HSE.

Medical Cards.

79. **Mr. J. Higgins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason a medical card holder (details supplied) in Dublin 12 cannot get the cost of dental treatment covered by their medical card. [8314/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Nursing Home Subventions.

80. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will review the nursing home subvention payments where both parents are in a nursing home at the same time and the children are being asked to contribute (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8323/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Services.

81. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that new patients can no longer be referred to the neurological services in the mid-west; the action she will take regarding same; if she will ensure the appointment of a consultant neurologist is delivered to the region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8324/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): As part of the Estimates for health services in 2006, additional funding of €3 million was allocated specifically for the further development of neurology and neurophysiology services. This funding was provided to allow the Health Service Executive further progress the implementation of the recommendations made by the former Comhairle na nOspidéal in respect of these services.

My Department is advised by the executive that the development of three new neurology units will commence during 2006, one in the mid-west, one in the north west and one in the south east, with the appointment of multi-disciplinary teams comprising consultant neurologists and support staff.

Domestic Violence.

82. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if core funding for the prevention of violence against women, which remains fixed at 2003 levels of funding, will be increased in view of the incidents of domestic violence and lack of services for women and their families experiencing violence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8377/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Deputy's ques-

tion relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Care Conference.

83. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the names of the Health Service Executive delegation who went to the Vancouver conference; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8378/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I presume that the Deputy is referring to the International Society for Quality in Healthcare's 22nd International Conference which was held in Vancouver in October 2005. My Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly in relation to the information requested.

Health Service Staff.

84. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the terms and conditions of those who have been appointed as consultants to Professor Drumm; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8379/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Section 24 of the Health Act 2004 empowers the Health Service Executive to engage such advisers as it considers necessary for the performance of its functions. My Department has therefore asked the executive to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to this matter.

Medicinal Products.

85. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the studies which have been carried out by her Department into the risk of variant CJD from products containing or exposed to bovine derived materials; the findings which have been published; the screening processes which are in place to ensure that such bovine derived materials in products such as POLIO SABIN, PRIORIX or the various MMR vaccines are sourced in countries that are free from variant CJD; if her Department has ever analysed the necessity of using bovine derived as opposed to alternative materials; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8404/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Irish Medicines Board is responsible for the licensing of human medicinal products in Ireland. Any company

wishing to place a medicinal product on the market is required to submit a license application which is then assessed by the board: the board must be satisfied that the product is of an appropriate quality and that it is safe and effective for use.

In the context of variant CJD, the European Medicines Agency, EMEA, has issued a Note for Guidance on Minimising the Risk of Transmitting Animal Spongiform Encephalopathy Agents via Medicinal Products. With regard to the vaccines referred to by the Deputy, any relevant materials present in these vaccines must be in compliance with the EMEA guidance, thereby minimising any theoretical risk of transmitting variant CJD.

As appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that medicines placed on the Irish market are safe and effective, it is not proposed to undertake any studies in this area.

Health Care Costs.

86. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to a new international study which estimates that cardiovascular diseases cost Ireland more than €866 million in 2003, or €108 for every person here, with health care making up 62% of the total cost; her views on the findings of this study; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8405/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The study to which the question refers is the Economic Burden of Cardiovascular Diseases in the Enlarged EU, by Leal J, Luengo-Fernández R, Gray A, Petersen S and Rayner M. *European Heart Journal*, doi:10.1093/eurheartj/ehi733.

I understand that the authors set out to provide an estimate of the economic costs of cardiovascular disease for EU countries. Data were obtained from published studies of health care costs and health service utilisation. It appears that all costs for health care in Ireland were extrapolated from costs in other countries.

It is unclear how some of costs were estimated, for example, annual loss of earnings or the cost for a day's inpatient care. The data on costs and resource implications were used to estimate the costs of cardiovascular disease.

Given that the authors may have underestimated the true costs in Ireland, there are question marks about the accuracy of the overall findings as they relate to this country. It is also possible that the authors did not include the costs of services provided in the private sector.

There has been rapid expansion in cardiology services in Ireland in recent years. The cardiovascular health strategy, *Building Healthier Hearts*, was launched in 1999. The report makes recommendations about the prevention, treat-

ment and surveillance of coronary heart disease across a number of sectors and the full range of health service activities in health promotion, primary care, pre-hospital care, acute hospital services and cardiac rehabilitation.

Since 2000 the Government has committed over €60 million towards the implementation of the strategy. This funding has supported a wide range of new regional services and initiatives, which have had a measurable impact on the diagnosis and treatment of patients with heart disease. More than 800 new posts have been created, including 19 additional consultant cardiology posts.

We have made progress in addressing the key challenges in the implementation of the cardiovascular health strategy in relation to (i) improving population health by supporting inter-sectoral work for health promotion to reduce risk of cardiovascular disease and improve quality of life; (ii) ensuring equitable access to services by continued provision of resources and support to fully implement outstanding cardiovascular health strategy recommendations to meet the needs of the growing numbers of older people and to provide new treatments for which there is evidence of effectiveness; and (iii) improving the quality of services by developing and implementing practice guidelines, the implementation of cardiovascular health information systems, support for clinical audit and for research to enhance the quality of services.

It appears that the study may not reflect the current level of expenditure and service provision. The study is useful, however, in drawing to our attention the high costs of cardiovascular disease both in Ireland and at European level, not just the costs of health care but also the costs to the economy and to families and carers.

Cardiovascular Disease.

87. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the proportion of cardiovascular disease treated here which is related to obesity. [8406/06]

88. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the proportion of cardiovascular disease treated here which is related to smoking. [8407/06]

89. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the proportion of cardiovascular disease treated here which is related to childhood obesity. [8408/06]

90. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the proportion of cardiovascular disease treated here which is related to alcohol abuse. [8409/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87 to 90, inclusive, together.

Death rates from coronary heart disease and stroke have been decreasing steadily in Ireland in recent years. Half of all deaths in Ireland in 1980 were attributed to cardiovascular disease. By 2004, the proportion of all deaths attributed to cardiovascular conditions was 38%.

I understand that factors associated with the trends in coronary heart disease death rates between 1985 and 2000 were studied in a mathematical model by Dr. Kathleen Bennett and colleagues in the department of therapeutics, Trinity College Dublin, based at St. James's Hospital. The IMPACT model estimated that 61% of the trends in mortality were due to improved risk factors, 49% to more effective treatments but that the decrease would have been 14% greater were it not for deterioration of factors such as body weight, diabetes and physical inactivity.

While it is not possible to state the proportion of current cases attributable to obesity, the IMPACT model estimated that deaths would have been 4% lower in 2000 but for the increase in obesity in the population.

It is too soon to see the effects of childhood obesity on deaths and sickness from vascular diseases. A slowing, a halt or even a reversal of the current decreasing death rates in middle age would be expected when the current cohort of children and teenagers enter their late 40s and 50s.

The model estimated that there were 25% fewer coronary heart disease deaths in 2000 due to lower prevalence of smoking in the population compared to 1985.

The effect of alcohol on death rates was not included in the above modelling study. High alcohol intakes are associated with increasing risk of cardiovascular disease, through increased blood pressure, increase in body weight — also associated with increased blood pressure — through deterioration in blood fats, and through poorer eating habits and higher prevalence of smoking in those with high alcohol intake. The high alcohol intakes of those currently in their 20s would be expected to increase their risk of coronary heart disease and of stroke when this cohort enters middle age.

Grant Payments.

91. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will take special steps to assist a person with the cost of two funerals in the special circumstances (details supplied). [8426/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and per-

sonal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

92. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of men on a referral list in Mayo General Hospital for urology appointments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8444/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

93. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the amount of male patients awaiting urology services at Mayo General Hospital on a yearly basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8445/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Staff.

94. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of agency nurses employed in hospitals here; the breakdown of these hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8446/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

95. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the position in relation to the health centres in the west Wicklow area; if the centres can be opened in order that people in need can visit the community welfare officer in their areas at regular times as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8447/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

96. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the position in relation to the service at the health centre in Balinglass where the telephone answering service for the public health nurse is to discontinue due to a lack of staff, expanding area and workload; if a secretarial service can be sanctioned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8448/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 97 answered with Question No. 74.

Cancer Screening Programme.

98. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the recent calls by a person (details supplied) to establish the BreastCheck programme in the west of Ireland sooner than outlined; her views on whether, in view of the fact that BreastCheck will not be rolled out nationally until 2007, it will be 2009 before all eligible women are contacted and screened; her further views on whether the national roll-out of BreastCheck needs to be speeded up; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8460/06]

99. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children her views on using the

national treatment purchase fund as a means of enabling women of the west of Ireland to access BreastCheck services in view of the fact that proper screening will not occur in the west of Ireland until 2009; if not, if she will offer a workable alternative to save lives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8472/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 and 99 together.

I recently met with representatives of BreastCheck and they are fully aware of my wish to have the programme rolled out nationally as quickly as possible. For this to happen, essential elements of the roll-out must be in place, including adequate staffing, effective training and quality assurance programmes. For this purpose, the Department has made additional revenue funding of €2.3 million available to BreastCheck this year to provide, *inter alia*, for the early recruitment and training of staff.

BreastCheck is confident that the target date of 2007 for the commencement of roll-out to the west will be met; a more exact date for roll-out will depend on the availability of adequately trained medical and technical staff, particularly radiographers. BreastCheck recently interviewed for a clinical director for the west and is in the process of making an appointment. BreastCheck is also recruiting radiographers and a second consultant radiologist. BreastCheck also recently received planning permission for the static unit at University College Hospital Galway and is now proceeding to tender for the construction of this unit.

The primary purpose of the National Treatment Purchase Fund is to make arrangements for the provision of hospital treatment to those waiting longest for admission to hospital particularly in relation to surgical specialties. Pending the provision by BreastCheck of the necessary facilities and staff, I do not believe that the National Treatment Purchase Fund would be in a position to source providers who could provide a service along the lines suggested by the Deputy.

Any woman irrespective of her age or residence who has concerns about breast cancer should contact her GP who, where appropriate, will refer her to the symptomatic services in her area.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

100. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Wexford is still waiting for an appointment; the efforts being made to reduce the unreasonable waiting times; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8475/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Freedom of Information.

101. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if, in relation to the Freedom of Information legislation, the Health Service Executive has a section 16 manual that has been updated in the past three years; the way in which to access this manual; if it is not available the reason therefor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8476/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Freedom of Information Act 1997 requires each public body to publish the rules and procedures relating to enactments and schemes administered by the body in respect of services to which the public may be entitled. The Health Act 2004 established the Health Service Executive as a public body under FOIA and required the executive to meet this requirement by 1 June 2005. Compliance with this statutory requirement is a matter for that body.

The thrust of this provision of FOIA is to ensure that individuals are not deprived of a service by reason only of the application of a rule or requirement of which they were unaware. There is an onus on the executive to ensure that any deficiencies in the guidance published under section 16 do not lead to unfairness in the administration of services.

Electronic publication is expressly permitted under the Act. Prior to 2005, each health board published material under this section of FOIA. Bodies such as the Health Service Employers Agency which were incorporated into the executive published similar material on their websites.

The Health Service Executive has yet to publish a document or digest under this provision of the Act. As the Health Service Executive is a public body in its own right under the Act, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to address this matter and respond directly to the Deputy.

Medical Cards.

102. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the way in which the award of medical cards is assessed; if detailed guidelines are publicly available; the areas in which they can be accessed; if they are not available the reason therefor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8477/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Responsibility for the determination of eligibility of applicants to medical cards and GP visit cards is statutorily a matter for the Health Service Executive. Under section 45 of the Health Act 1970, medical cards are provided for persons who in the opinion of the HSE are unable without undue hardship to arrange GP medical and surgical services for themselves and their dependants. Section 58 of the Health Act 1970, as amended, provides for GP visit cards for adult persons with limited eligibility for whom, in the opinion of the HSE and notwithstanding that they do not qualify for a medical card, it would be unduly burdensome to arrange GP medical and surgical services for themselves and their dependants.

Eligibility is determined on the basis of the assessment of income and medical need. Income guidelines are used by the HSE. The income guidelines are not statutorily binding and medical cards may be granted by the HSE to persons in circumstances where the income guidelines may be exceeded but the particular circumstances of the case warrant such a decision.

Since 2005 there have been significant improvements to the way in which people's eligibility for medical cards and GP visit cards is assessed. In January 2005, the income guidelines used in the assessment of medical card applications were increased by 7.5%. In June 2005, the means test for both medical cards and GP visit cards was simplified. It is now based on an applicant's and spouse's income after tax and PRSI, and takes account of reasonable expenses incurred in respect of rent or mortgage payments, child care and travel to work. This is much fairer to applicants. On 13 October 2005, it was announced that the income guidelines for both medical cards and GP visit cards would be increased by an additional 20%. This means the income guidelines are now 29% higher than they were at the end of 2004. It will be noted that the income assessment guidelines used for GP visit cards are 25% higher than those used for medical cards.

In December 2005, the Department asked the HSE to take account of the welfare, taxation and other changes announced in the budget on the operation of the income guidelines and to identify any changes which may be required in order to ensure that medical cards and GP visit cards continue to be available to those who need them. The HSE has recently responded and its report is under consideration.

The HSE has publicised the changes, as outlined above, to encourage people to apply and has made the application process as simple as possible. It has introduced a national information line at 1850 24 1850, which operates from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday to Saturday. Information is also available on the HSE's website and in local

health centres where application forms for medical cards and GP visit cards are available. A copy of the current guidelines is provided. If the

Deputy has a particular case in mind, I would be happy to have the matter investigated for her with the HSE on receipt of the details.

Single Person Living Alone	Medical Card	GP Visit Card
Aged up to 65 years	184.00	230.50
Aged between 66-69 years	201.50	252.00
Single Person Living with Family		
Aged up to 65 years	164.00	205.00
Aged between 66-69 years	173.50	217.00
Married Couple / Single Parent Families with Dependent Children		
Aged up to 65 years	266.50	333.00
Aged between 66-69 years	298.00	373.00
Aged between 70-79 years (Footnote 1)	595.50	745.00
Aged 80 years and over (Footnote 2)	627.00	783.50
Additional Allowances for Dependent Children		
For first 2 children under 16 years	38.00	47.50
For 3rd and subsequent children under 16 years	41.00	51.00
For first 2 children over 16 years	39.00	49.00
For 3rd and subsequent children over 16 years	42.50	53.50
For a dependant over 16 years who is in full time third level education and not grant aided	78.00	98.00
Other Additional Allowances		
Reasonable Weekly Rent/Mortgage		
Reasonable Weekly Child Card Costs		
Weekly Travel Costs to Work (Actual cost of public transport of mileage @ €0.50 per mile)		

Footnote 1: This is the weekly rate used to assess a couple where one person is aged 70 years or over and the other has not yet reached 70 years

Footnote 2: This is the weekly rate used to assess a couple where one person is aged 80 years or over and the other has not yet reached 70 years

Health Services.

103. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the way in which entitlement to home help is assessed; if detailed guidelines are publicly available; if so, the areas they can be accessed; if not, the reason therefore; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8478/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Deputy's question refers to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

104. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the criteria used to determine whether a person obtains a place in a public nursing home; if detailed guidelines are publicly available; if so, the areas they can be accessed; if not, the reason therefore; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8479/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Deputy's question refers to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

105. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the way in which entitlement to the new home care packages are assessed; if the assessment takes account of a carer on the carer's allowance or benefit; if detailed guidelines are publicly available; if so, the areas they can be accessed; if not, the reason therefore; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8480/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Deputy's question refers to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary

[Mr. S. Power.]

affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

106. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of County Mayo patients on referral waiting lists for rheumatology services on a yearly basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8489/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question refers to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

National Health Strategy.

107. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the planned programme for implementation of the primary care strategy in the forthcoming 12 months; the number of additional primary care teams and networks to be put in place in that period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8490/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Government is fully committed to the implementation of the principles contained in the primary care strategy, which provides a template for the reform and development of primary care services over a period of ten to 15 years. The chief executive officer of the Health Service Executive has also emphasised the importance of developing primary care services as the appropriate service for the majority of people's health and social care needs and to complement the services provided by acute hospitals. This is an important priority of the executive and has my full endorsement. The implementation process at operational level is a function of the HSE which, under the Health Act 2004, is responsible for the management and delivery of health and personal social services.

In order to support further implementation of the strategy in 2006, additional revenue funding of €16 million has been provided. Of this funding, €10 million is to support the establishment of between 75 and 100 primary care teams nationally. This will enable 300 additional front-line personnel to work alongside GPs in order to provide integrated and accessible services in the community. I have been informed by the HSE that work to establish these primary care teams in development is under way. I understand that the executive will be targeting the funding so as

to provide each local health office of the HSE with the potential to develop up to three primary care teams. The executive hopes to focus on areas of disadvantage and health inequalities in its planning for the establishment of these teams.

A sum of €4 million has been provided for the establishment of additional GP training places and €2 million to enhance GP out of hours co-operatives. This means that taking into account development funding provided since 2002, €28 million is available in 2006 specifically to support the implementation of the primary care strategy. However, other development funding will also be used to support the delivery of services in line with the principles of the strategy.

Wider implementation of the primary care strategy will focus on developing new ways of working and reorganising the resources already available to the health service in line with the service model described in the strategy. This whole system approach to implementation means change will be required in many sectors in the health service, not solely within primary care itself.

Registration of Nurses.

108. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason a fully qualified nurse (details supplied) from Croatia has been refused registration as a nurse here and cannot therefore obtain hospital work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8492/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): An Bord Altranais has statutory responsibility for the registration of nurses under the Nurses Act 1985. I am sure the Deputy will appreciate that An Bord Altranais must process each application thoroughly to ensure that all those entered on the register of nurses are deemed professionally qualified and competent for such registration. The protection of the public underpins this process. I am satisfied that the board discharges its functions in a professional manner.

An Bord Altranais, as the competent authority in the Republic of Ireland, utilises Directive 77/453/EEC to inform its strategy for assessing non-EU applications for registration from applicants qualified as nurses in countries outside of the EU. The assessment also includes reference to relevant post-registration education and relevant post-registration clinical practice experience. Given the statutory functions of the board it would not be appropriate for the Minister to intervene in individual applications for registration.

Health Services.

109. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if a further three hours of home help will be allocated to a person

(details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8498/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Deputy's question refers to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

110. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of County Mayo patients on ear, nose and throat waiting lists for referral and appointment to University College Hospital Galway and Mayo General Hospital; the length of time they are on the lists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8510/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question refers to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Ambulance Services.

111. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will ensure that requests for voluntary ambulance service providers to co-operate do not mean they will not be fully consulted and involved in decision making, in view of the contributions they have made over the years (details supplied). [8523/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question refers to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

National Repayment Scheme.

112. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 12 will receive a final reply from the national repayments scheme. [8525/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): As the Health Service Executive has responsibility for administering the national repayment scheme, inquiries concerning individual cases are referred to the parliamentary affairs division of the executive. My Department has asked the HSE to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

National Health Strategy.

113. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will ensure that the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street, is given priority in terms of the McKinsey report and task group; and if support will be given to this project. [8530/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): On 3 February, the Health Service Executive published a report on the delivery of tertiary paediatric services in this country. The report, which was commissioned by the HSE at my request and prepared by McKinsey and Company, recommends that best outcomes for children should be provided by one national tertiary paediatric centre, which would also provide all secondary paediatric services for the greater Dublin area.

Arising from the report's recommendations, a joint HSE and Department of Health and Children task group has been established to progress matters and to advise on the optimal location for the new facility. My primary concern is to ensure that we arrive at a solution which is in the best interests of the children of this country.

Mental Health Services.

114. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the additional funding provided in 2004 and 2005 to programmes aimed at satisfying the mental health elements of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 and the Disability Act 2005; what these programmes are; the allocation of funds for such programmes planned for the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8591/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): An integral part of the national disability strategy is the implementation of the provisions of the Disability Act 2005 and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. The multi-annual investment programme for disability services, published in December 2004 by the Government, contained details of specific commitments on the provision of specific high priority disability services over the period 2006 to 2009. This programme, together with the enhancement of other key support services, will be a key factor in build-

[Mr. T. O'Malley.]

ing additional capacity in health services, including mental health services.

The cumulative value of the multi-annual investment programme when published was €900 million, the bulk of which to be spent on health services. In 2005 the Department made available an additional €15 million for the further development of mental health services. Details of the services provided are a matter for the Health Service Executive.

National Health Strategy.

115. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the elements of the home care package for the elderly which will be in place in 2006; the body that will deliver the services; the way in which it is intended to ensure equality of service nationally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8592/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): As the Deputy will be aware, additional funding of €150 million has been allocated in budget 2006 for services for older people and palliative care, €110 million of which is to be invested in 2006 and €40 million in 2007. Approximately two thirds of this money, €109 million, has been allocated to meet the full year cost of community support for older people. Well funded and viable alternatives to long-term residential care will be developed in the form of home care packages, additional home help hours and other supports.

Of this investment package, €55 million has been allocated for the provision of home care packages. This is a full year cost, with the figure for 2006 being €30 million, and will provide 2,000 additional packages by the end of this year. Approximately 1,100 home care packages are being provided at present and the increase will triple the service provision. The packages are delivered through the HSE by a range of providers including the executive, voluntary groups and the private sector.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question regarding the delivery of these services, the Deputy will be aware that the Health Act 2004 provided for the Health Service Executive, which has responsibility to manage and deliver or arrange to be delivered on its behalf health and personal social services. This includes responsibility for the provision of home care packages. Accordingly, the Department has requested the parliamentary affairs division of the executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Child Poverty.

116. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the RAPID report, which outlined

the socio-economic deprivation in Tallaght west, and the report entitled How are our Kids?, which found huge inequalities in the provision of education with 27% of children leaving school with no qualifications while 34% finished at junior certificate level; if, in addition, according to Combat Poverty, almost one fifth of the population was at risk of poverty in 2004 and, in view of these reports, if her Department had any meeting specifically on the findings; and the new measures, sanctions or proposals she proposes to introduce in response to the considerable problems highlighted. [4562/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): As the Deputy is aware, RAPID aims to ensure that priority attention is given to tackling the spatial concentration of poverty and social exclusion within the 45 designated areas. The priorities for each RAPID area are identified locally by each RAPID area implementation team, and are incorporated into a plan for each area. In west Tallaght, RAPID covers three areas, namely Killinarden, Jobstown and Fettercairn.

RAPID is implemented locally by a cross-sectoral area implementation team, AIT, and is supported by a RAPID co-ordinator. The city and county development boards monitor the programme locally. The RAPID national monitoring committee, chaired by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Ó Cuív, oversees the programme nationally. Each RAPID area has produced a plan for the implementation of the programme in its community. These plans contained a variety of proposals to Departments and State agencies for the funding of new projects. They also contained proposals to improve local co-ordination of public service delivery. I assume this is the RAPID report to which the Deputy refers.

Some small-scale proposals from communities are responded to through a range of dedicated RAPID funds, which resource projects such as playground developments, small-scale housing estate enhancements, small-scale community health initiatives, equality for women measures and traffic safety measures. Larger-scale local proposals are responded to through Government prioritisation of RAPID areas in the use of mainstream departmental resources and in the allocation of funds such as dormant accounts, the equal opportunities programme, the sports capital programme and the community-based CCTV programme.

Existing programmes in the Tallaght RAPID areas include, *inter alia*, playground schemes, local authority housing estate enhancement scheme, sports capital programme funding, traffic measures scheme, health projects, parenting, child and family services and after-school services, community-based CCTV, Garda diversion and drugs task force projects.

The How Are Our Kids? research project undertaken by the childhood development initiative and Dartington social research unit was published in October 2004. The report was one of eight preliminary research documents which culminated in the publication of *A Place for Children*, a ten-year strategy by the childhood development initiative in Tallaght west.

As the Deputy is aware, the ten-year strategy was launched by the Taoiseach in October 2005. At that time, the Government welcomed the goals and aims of the initiative and it is clear that the strategy is the result of an enormous amount of work at community level.

The objective of the strategy is to improve children's health, safety, learning and achieving and to increase their sense of community belonging. The Government has put a number of initiatives in place with the ultimate aim of improving children's lives in areas such as Tallaght west. As a Government-designated geographic area of disadvantage, namely a RAPID area, it has been estimated that approximately €27 million was spent in the year 2004-05 by statutory bodies on children's services in the part of it covered by the strategy. I know the project recognises that.

Developments through this and other programmes in the areas of education, health and youth justice at national level are mirrored in the approach outlined in the childhood development initiative's ten-year strategy.

A number of meetings between representatives of this and other related projects have already taken place with the relevant Departments' officials. In December 2005, the Government announced the bringing together of a number of functions relating to children and their well-being in the Office of the Minister for Children, OMC, to bring greater coherence to policy making for children. In that context, the Office of the Minister for Children will co-ordinate developments on this matter on behalf of the Government.

Tax Code.

117. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide a full listing of all foods subject to VAT at 21%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8430/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that it is not possible to supply a complete listing of all food items which are subject to the 21% rate of VAT. In general, under paragraph (xii) of the Second Schedule to the Value Added Tax Act, 1972, most food sold by retail shops is liable to the zero rate of VAT. This includes most basic foodstuffs, for example, bread, butter, tea, sugar, meat, milk and vegetables. However, certain food items which are specifically excluded from the zero rate of VAT are subject to either the reduced VAT rate of 13.5% or the standard rate of 21%.

Examples of foods which are subject to the reduced VAT rate of 13.5% include flour or egg-based bakery products such as cakes, crackers and certain wafers and biscuits. These are provided for under paragraph (xxxi) of the Sixth Schedule to the Value Added Tax Act, 1972.

Examples of foods which are subject to the standard VAT rate of 21% include sweets, chocolates, wafers and biscuits wholly or partly covered or decorated with chocolate or other similar product, confectionery, crisps, ice-creams and soft drinks, and also frozen desserts, frozen yoghurts and similar frozen products.

Hot food, including hot cooked chickens, sold by retail shops or supermarkets is liable to the reduced VAT rate of 13.5%. However, freshly baked bread supplied in the course of a grocery business is liable to the rate appropriate to the same food when cold.

A dedicated VAT information leaflet, no. 19/01, on the rates of VAT applicable to food and drink is available on the Revenue Commissioners website at www.revenue.ie. Access to a database providing VAT rates for specific items, including food items, is also available on the Revenue Commissioners website.

118. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the practice by which builders and property developers avoid stamp duty at 9% by building under licence; the value of such transactions; the estimated cost of tax and stamp duty foregone to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8382/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): Stamp duty is a charge on documents, which are mostly legal documents, used in the transfer of property. Where a property is purchased or swapped, stamp duty is charged on the conveyance or transfer effecting change of legal ownership of the property concerned. Under the stamp duty code, a builder or developer can obtain a licence from a vendor to build on land owned by the vendor without incurring a stamp duty charge at that stage of the venture. Once the buildings, whether commercial or residential, are completed, the conveyances or transfers of such properties to purchasers are chargeable to stamp duty in the normal manner unless specific exemptions are available to such purchasers. A similar stamp duty treatment would also arise in a situation where a builder or developer contracts to purchase land from a vendor without taking legal title to the land. The developer might complete the contract and not take a conveyance but rather, under a power of attorney given by the vendor, have the power to convey completed buildings to the ultimate purchasers. The normal stamp duty charge will arise on conveyances or transfers of the newly built properties to sub-purchasers subject to any exemptions applying. In

[Mr. Cowen.]

such cases the stamp duty, if any, is paid but at a later stage.

Certain developments structured in the manner outlined above have come to the notice of the Revenue Commissioners and the situation is being kept under review. I have asked Revenue to report the outcome of its review to me and I will decide what action, if any, is required bearing in mind the effect on the housing market and the cost to the Exchequer.

As regards capital gains tax, from the point of view of the person who grants a licence to the developer rather than making an outright sale of the lands concerned, the same amount of capital gains tax would arise as if there was such a sale.

Drug Seizures.

119. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Finance the number and value of drug seizures made by customs officers at Dublin, Shannon and Cork Airports in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8400/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the number and value of drug seizures made by customs officers at Dublin, Shannon and Cork Airports in each of the past five years is as follows:

Year	No. of Seizures	Value
		€
2001	361	3,532,700
2002	274	4,173,500
2003	381	5,157,000
2004	1,302	4,725,100
2005	1,110	5,507,700

In total, Customs have made 3,428 drug seizures with an approximate street value of just over €23.1 million at these three airports in the past five years.

I am further informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the most significant trend in recent years has been the steady increase in the number and volume of cocaine supply detection seizures made mainly at Dublin Airport but also more recently, in 2005, at Cork Airport. The volume of cocaine seized at airports has increased from over 19 kg in 2002 to over 60 kg in 2005. The value of drug seizures has been increasing year-on-year except for 2004 when the number of seizures increased and the value decreased marginally.

The large increase in the number of seizures in 2004 and 2005 can be attributed in the main to the opening of the airport mail unit at Dublin Airport. The controls performed by this unit were previously carried out elsewhere. Drug seizures by this unit generally consist of high numbers of small user quantities concealed in letter post. The

year 2003 also saw the greatest volume of Khat seized in recent years with just three seizures amounting to 1.05 tonnes of the product with a value of €2,040,000.

Revenue's Customs service is continuously engaged in the analysis and evaluation of seizure trends, routes and smuggling risks and consequential resource deployment. In the past five years, for example, Revenue has relaunched its drugs watch programme and increased its use of drug detector dog teams.

Customs Staff.

120. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Finance the number of customs officers based at Dublin, Shannon and Cork airports on the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8401/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that there are 71 customs officers based at Dublin Airport. This figure includes officers engaged on both enforcement and trade facilitation work. Additionally, for special enforcement operations, the Dublin Airport resource is supported by enforcement officers from locations within the Dublin region.

There are 26 at Shannon Airport, which also includes officers engaged on both enforcement and trade facilitation work. In addition, further enforcement officers based in Limerick are available and are used to augment the Shannon Airport resource on a risk basis.

There are six officers at Cork Airport. These officers are almost exclusively engaged in enforcement work. Further enforcement officers based centrally in Cork are available and are used to augment the Cork Airport resource on a risk basis.

The Office of the Revenue Commissioners has responsibility for the collection of all import duties and the enforcement of prohibitions and restrictions which may apply at import or export. In particular, the office has the primary responsibility for the prevention, detection, and seizure of controlled drugs at importation. They have responsibility for implementing import controls at points of entry into the State, specifically at airports, ports, including licensed airfields, and on the land frontier.

All customs operations are risk-focused and staff are deployed according to the level of risk.

121. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the number of customs officers stationed at Cork Airport is sufficient, especially to deal with the drugs problem; the average number of staff on duty at weekends; if he will confirm that no customs staff are rostered for duty after 11 p.m.; the procedures in place for monitoring flights that land after this hour; and if

he will make a statement on the matter.
[8402/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): Revenue's Customs service is continuously engaged in the analysis and evaluation of seizure trends, routes and smuggling risks and consequential resource deployment. In the past five years Revenue has relaunched its drugs watch programme and increased its use of drug detector dog teams with the introduction of dog units. X-ray technology is also deployed to detect concealments in baggage and merchandise.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that Cork Airport operates between 5.30 a.m. and midnight. There are six officers permanently stationed there, rostered between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m., Monday to Friday. There are 13 additional officers available to augment these numbers. These additional officers are not rostered and are not confined to the 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. work period. They operate seven days a week on a risk analysis basis. They are available to augment the permanent staff from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. or to work on their own outside of those hours. Included is a dog drug detector unit. The airport is covered from a customs perspective during all hours that it is operational. I am further advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they consider the coverage as sufficient, as witnessed by the increasing number and value of seizures at Cork Airport over recent years.

Tax Code.

122. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance if there have been an unusually high number of errors in tax credit statements in 2006; the reason for these errors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8487/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the overall percentage of incorrect tax credit certificates, TCCs, that issued in 2006 was relatively small. Where errors have arisen these have now been corrected and employers have been notified of the revised credits due for the majority of affected employees. Any remaining amended notices will have issued to employers by the end of this week. Amended TCCs are issuing to employees as part of this process and their entitlements will be backdated to the start of the year.

Given the scale of the operation, which involves 2.2 million certificates, it is inevitable that a small proportion of TCCs will be incorrect and will have to be revised. This year the new PAYE computer system, put in place by Revenue last October, gave rise to some additional problems with incorrect TCCs, but the overall percentage of incorrect cases remained relatively small.

Later this year Revenue intends to introduce an on-line service for PAYE taxpayers and to expand the range of other self-service and telephony options for this category of taxpayers. These initiatives will facilitate PAYE taxpayers in self-managing their tax affairs including adjusting their TCCs to reflect their correct entitlements.

Departmental Staff.

123. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance, further to Question No. 108 of 2 February 2006 and subsequent correspondence received from his office, if his special adviser engaged such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8488/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I take it that the Deputy is referring to public relations and media advice services in the years 2003 to 2005. My special adviser did not engage such services.

Tax Code.

124. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the case made by the Arts Council that artists' relief should apply to dance compositions and screen direction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8575/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I have no current plans to change the scheme in the way suggested, having just reviewed it. As regards the areas mentioned, there are already very significant supports for the arts and film industries through the tax and public expenditure systems. I believe that demands for changes in any scheme should take account of the overall context.

Mobile Telephony.

125. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for Finance if licences to install mobile phone base stations on public buildings have been granted to companies (details supplied) since December 2005, either directly through the Office of Public Works or indirectly through sub-licensing agreements with a company or other companies. [8595/06]

126. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for Finance, further to his recent offer to meet residents affected by the installation of new mobile phone base stations at Shankill, his views on whether to meet with parents of children attending schools (details supplied), who are affected by the continued presence of mobile phone base stations on a public building adjacent to the schools. [8596/06]

127. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for Finance the licence under which companies (details supplied) have been granted permission to operate mobile phone base stations in Dublin 6. [8597/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 to 127, inclusive, together.

Two mobile phone companies have been granted a licence by the Commissioners of Public Works to install telecommunications equipment on the State-owned building, Ardee House, in Rathmines.

The Commissioners requested that the companies deactivate their equipment on Ardee House pending the report of the inter-departmental committee on the health effects of electromagnetic radiation. The companies refused to comply with this request and, provided they continue to comply with the terms and conditions of the licence agreement, the Commissioners have no contractual basis for insisting the equipment is deactivated. The companies have not been granted any further licences in respect of State-owned buildings since December 2005.

In the circumstances, I feel a meeting with local parents would not serve any useful purpose at this stage.

128. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the procedures in place to monitor mobile phone masts from a public health point of view; if these facilities are monitored, checked or inspected on an ongoing basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8395/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): My Department maintains a watching scientific brief on health issues relating to electromagnetic energy, also known as “non-ionising radiation”, including those related to mobile phone base stations. Ireland has adopted European Union Council recommendation of 12 July 1999 on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields — 0 Hz to 300 GHz, 1999/519/EC — and the guidelines established by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection, ICNIRP, and participates in the work of the International Committee on Electromagnetic Safety, which sets standards in this area.

Mobile telephony equipment operators are subject to compliance with these limits in order to qualify for a licence from the Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg. ComReg conducts audit measurements to verify compliance with these limits.

My Department chairs an interdepartmental committee on the health effects of electromagnetic fields. This committee will provide advice to Government on the appropriate action to be taken on foot of the recommendations contained in the Joint Oireachtas Committee report on non-ionising radiation from mobile phone handsets and masts published in June 2005. This committee established and is overseeing the work of an

expert group that will produce a scientific report on the health effects of electromagnetic fields.

Tourism Promotion.

129. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if funding announced was ever sanctioned and awarded towards a project (details supplied) in County Mayo; the position on this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8454/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources

(Mr. Browne): The Mullet Peninsula project group was set up in 2001 by the then Minister for Marine and Natural Resources, Deputy Fahey, as a pilot project to devise a strategy for the development of sustainable marine based tourism in the Mullet Peninsula, County Mayo. The project was allocated a budget of €127,000 for 2002, of which this Department was to provide some €32,000. The balance of funding was to be provided by other State agencies involved in the project. The project group claimed and was paid €4,471.59 from the Department in 2002. I understand that while a number of meetings of the group were held in 2002, it did not prove possible for its work to be completed and no further expenses were incurred.

Broadcasting Legislation.

130. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if he has sought or received information from the various sporting codes in regard to free-to-air televised coverage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8586/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey):

Last December I announced my intention to commence a review required under section 9 of the Broadcasting (Major Events Television Coverage) Act 2003. The purpose of the review is to consider if the list of events designated in 2003 should be amended. As part of the review I initiated a public consultation process and wrote to sports organisations and broadcasters. I have received submissions from event organisers, broadcasters and members of the public via written submission, e-mail and on an Internet forum. The submissions received have been made available on my Department’s website. A report on the review is being prepared in my Department and I intend to complete the review shortly.

Offshore Exploration.

131. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if payments were made or are to be made for the work done by a person (details supplied) on the

Corrib gas pipeline project; if so, the person or entity these payments were or will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8312/06]

132. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if a person (details supplied) who has been appointed by him to carry out work involving the Corrib gas project is receiving payments for their work; if so, the payments made to date; and the details of further payments if there is an expectation of further payments to be made in the future for this person's work. [8313/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 131 and 132 together.

I confirm that no payment has been made to the mediator at this stage. Payment in respect of fees and expenses will be made to the mediator. The level of payment will reflect the time spent and expenses incurred by the mediator in this process.

Human Rights Issues.

133. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will comment on the inconsistency of his statements with regard to US use of Irish air space and ground-based facilities as against their operation of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility; the reason he is content to accept one form of diplomatic assurance while unwilling to accept another emanating from the US Administration on a congruent subject; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8310/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): The two issues raised by the Deputy are separate and need to be considered on their merits, as the Government has done. On Guantanamo Bay, the Government's position on the condition and status of detainees is clear and has been consistently conveyed to the United States authorities. The United States has set out its general approach to the issue on many occasions. The Government's position, on the other hand, is as set out by me in the House on 22 February, namely, that we fully endorse the views of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, that those held in Guantanamo Bay should either be charged or released and that the United States should close the facility.

The position with respect to allegations of extraordinary rendition is completely different. In this matter, the Government has sought and received explicit assurances from the US Government. This states that prisoners have not been, nor would they be, transferred through Irish territory without the express permission of the Irish authorities. It has been made clear by the Government that, in conformity with the relevant domestic and international law, permission would

not be granted for the transit of an aircraft participating in an extraordinary rendition operation or for any other unlawful act.

The Government has carefully considered the value of these assurances having regard to their obligations under international law. This has included an examination of the European Court of Human Rights' consideration of a contracting party's entitlement to rely on diplomatic assurances made to it by a third state in the different context of extradition or expulsion of known individuals to that state. The Government is satisfied that it is entitled under international law to rely on clear and explicit factual assurances given by the government of a friendly state on a matter which is within the direct control of that government.

Emigrant Services.

134. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if assistance will be given to the homeless Irish in England; and the supports given to Irish emigrant groups in England. [8529/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): In pursuit of the Government's strong commitment to the Irish abroad, some €12 million is available for emigrant services in 2006. This figure represents an increase of 45% on 2005. The needs of the Irish community in Britain is a particular priority for the Government. In 2005, more than 100 groups in Britain received grants from my Department amounting to €7.06 million. These included a range of organisations which provide support and services to homeless people, either exclusively or as part of their wider remit. The groups in question are Acton Homeless Concern; Aisling Return to Ireland; Arlington House; Broadway, London; Cara; Cricklewood Homeless Concern; Irish Centre Housing, London; Fireside Day Centre, Birmingham; St. Theresa's House, Peterborough; The Passage; The Simon Community; St. Mungo's; and Connection at St. Martin's.

In addition, many of the other centres funded by my Department in Britain, including Brent Irish Advisory Service, Irish Community Care Merseyside and Community Welfare Hammersmith, offer advice to their clients on housing issues as part of the wider information they provide on welfare entitlements.

Sports Capital Programme.

135. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if funding will be provided to a club (details supplied) in County Mayo. [8449/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The national lottery funded sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, allocates funding to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level. The programme is advertised on

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

an annual basis. Applications for funding under the 2006 programme were invited through advertisements in the press on 27 and 28 November last. The closing date for receipt of applications was Friday, 20 January. All applications received before the deadline, including one from the organisation in question, are being evaluated against the programme's assessment criteria, which are outlined in the guidelines, terms and conditions of the programme. I intend to announce the grant allocations for the programme as soon as possible after the assessment process has been completed.

Arts Funding.

136. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of funding awarded by his Department to groups directly involved in the promotion of all aspects of the arts in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8579/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): In the past 12 months my Department has awarded funding totalling €41.325 million, primarily for capital development, to groups involved in the promotion of arts. Details of the individual grants are provided in the table below.

Project	Grant Amount
	€
Wexford Opera Festival	26,000,000
Gaiety Theatre, Dublin	4,000,000
Caherciveen Arts Centre, Kerry	1,600,000
Comhaltas Ceoltoirí Éireann	2,500,000
Tipperary Excel Heritage Company, Tipperary	1,560,000
Dún Mhuire Theatre, Wexford	375,000
Irish Chamber Orchestra, Limerick	100,000
Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford	100,000
Siamsa Tíre, Kerry	120,000
Triskel Arts Centre, Cork	20,000
Belltable Arts Centre, Limerick	320,000
Spraoui, Waterford	40,000
CREATE, Dublin	6,000
Graffiti Theatre Company, Cork	10,000
Irish Film Institute, Dublin	25,000
Thurles Arts Centre, Co. Tipperary	40,000
Tinteán Theatre, Co. Kerry	350,000
Strand Theatre, Co. Tipperary	250,000
Tech Amergin Waterville, Kerry	150,000
Abbey Theatre, Dublin	509,000
Anna Livia Opera Festival	250,000
Light House Cinema, Dublin	1,000,000
Píobairí Uileann	2,000,000
Total	41,325,000

The principal source of non-capital State funding for the arts is the Arts Council which, although funded by my Department, is independent in its day-to-day operations.

Sports Capital Programme.

137. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if, having regard to its major contribution to the sporting, social and cultural life of the area, favourable consideration will be given to the application for grant aid towards its redevelopment programme in the case of a club (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8580/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The national lottery-funded sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, allocates funding to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level. The programme is advertised on an annual basis. Applications for funding under the 2006 programme were invited through advertisements in the press on 27 and 28 November last. The closing date for receipt of applications was Friday, 20 January. All applications received before the deadline, including one from the organisation in question, are being evaluated against the programme's assessment criteria, which are outlined in the guidelines, terms and conditions of the programme. I intend to announce the grant allocations for the programme as soon as possible after the assessment process has been completed.

Questions Nos. 138 and 139 answered with Question No. 70.

Tourism Promotion.

140. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to a fall in tourism in areas outside the capital; his proposals to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8584/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I refer the Deputy to the reply given earlier in response to priority Question No. 31.

141. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has issued instructions to the tourism promoting agencies with a view to maximising the promotion of tourism in tandem with the Ryder Cup; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8585/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The hosting of the Ryder Cup at the K Club in September is a key event for tourism this year and a unique opportunity to market all that Ireland has to offer as a tourism desti-

nation. In recognition of this the Government has made a significant level of resources available to Fáilte Ireland to ensure the tourism spin-off to Ireland and golfing tourism in particular is maximised. The 2006 Revised Estimates Volume published last week allocated an additional €4.5 million to Fáilte Ireland to support an enhanced programme of marketing and promotional activities around the Ryder Cup, including a national branding programme and a number of golf marketing initiatives. The aim of this programme, to be delivered in conjunction with Tourism Ireland, is to capitalise on the opportunities offered by the unique event that is the Ryder Cup, with a view to promoting an enduring positive image of tourism here. Fáilte Ireland will also engage with the European tour for delivery of an appropriate complementary programme of events around the Ryder Cup, including the official opening and closing ceremonies and other initiatives intended to raise the profile of the occasion.

Tourism Ireland's network of overseas market offices is being deployed to maximise the positive publicity the television coverage, with an expected audience of more than 1 billion in 150 countries, will generate. Responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels is primarily devolved to the Arts Council, a State body funded by my Department and independent in its day-to-day operations.

Arts Funding.

142. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of community based groups involved in the production of musicals or festivals which received grant aid from his Department in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8588/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): Responsibility for the promotion of the arts at all levels throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council, a State body funded by my Department. Fáilte Ireland allocates funding to assist festivals and cultural events through its festivals and cultural events initiative. Further details on the festivals and cultural events initiative is available on the Fáilte Ireland website www.ireland.ie. Both the Arts Council and Fáilte Ireland are independent of my Department with regard to daily operational matters.

Question No. 143 answered with Question No. 42.

Job Losses.

144. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of task forces which have been set up in the past five years arising from job losses in particular areas; the number of employees who lost their jobs for each of the task forces set up; the works

undertaken by each of the task forces; and the number of replacement jobs found by each of the various task forces. [8311/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): No task forces have been set up in recent years arising from job losses in particular areas. The practice of establishing task forces has changed since the establishment of the county development boards. Rather than establishing a further layer by creating task forces, the relevant CDB is now seen as the body that is best placed to oversee any additional response that is required over and above the work of the industrial development agencies under the auspices of my Department.

I should point out that notwithstanding this, there is currently an interdepartmental group, under the chairmanship of the Secretary General of my Department, which is considering a broad range of issues relevant to the future development of County Donegal.

Grant Payments.

145. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the situation with regard to a grant previously allocated for an enterprise centre at Bray, County Wicklow; if this grant is still available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8482/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): I should point out that the allocation of grants under the community enterprise centre, CEC, scheme is the responsibility of Enterprise Ireland, the agency charged with administering the scheme, and is not a matter in which I have a direct role.

I am informed by Enterprise Ireland that in 2000, the agency approved grant support for Bray Community Enterprise Limited towards the building of a community enterprise centre in Bray and towards the management costs for the first two years. A condition of the grant agreement was that construction should commence not later than 1 September 2000 and be completed not later than 30 September 2001. The project proposal was based on the construction of the enterprise centre in a business park that was to be developed at Fassaroe. The developers had made a site available for the centre. However, in 2000 the business park was refused planning permission and the entire development, including the community enterprise centre proposal, did not go ahead.

In the intervening years, the proposers have made a number of attempts to develop an alternative project proposal. However, they have been unable to put together a viable total funding proposal. In October 2005, Enterprise Ireland stated that it was aware that there was still a commitment by Bray Community Enterprise Ltd. to drive the Bray CEC project forward and of the

[Mr. Martin.]

difficulties that the group has encountered in trying to achieve this. Enterprise Ireland also stated that in the event that a viable proposal for a CEC in Bray was submitted, Enterprise Ireland would be prepared to discuss the project with the group but given the time lapse since the original proposal was approved Enterprise Ireland could not make a commitment as to what its decision might be on such a proposal.

Enterprise Ireland is currently inviting submissions from all interested communities under the community enterprise centre 2006 scheme, which has a fund of €7 million. The closing date for receipt of applications is 27 April 2006. The programme will extend the previous Enterprise Ireland community enterprise centre 2002 scheme with some minor amendments regarding eligibility and evaluation criteria. As a result of the time lapse involved, and the recent launch on the new scheme, Enterprise Ireland is in the process of notifying proposers of projects approved under the previous schemes which have not as yet been taken up, including Bray, that the approval is under final review.

146. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, further to Question No. 670 of 28 September 2005, the grant aid which has been returned to his Department; the discussions his Department has had with the company concerned regarding alternative employment on the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8497/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The company in question has not returned any grant aid to Enterprise Ireland. Discussions between the agency and the company concerning grant aid are ongoing. Progress is being made and I understand that a conclusion should be reached in the near future. The process involves the consideration of complex legal issues and a final decision will have to be made by the board of Enterprise Ireland.

The issue of further investment at Rooskey continues to be discussed with the company but, given the adequacy of its facilities nationwide, no further investment has been forthcoming for the site at Rooskey. However, I should point out that, notwithstanding this, the company has made significant investment in its overall Irish pork processing business over the last few years.

Employment Rights.

147. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if the practice in a hotel (details supplied) has been brought to his attention whereby permanent and other staff are being required to seek unemployment benefit for periods of four weeks by the hotel management as a cost saving measure; his views

on this practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8500/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): It appears that the employer concerned has put the staff on lay-off. An employer is not required by statute to give my Department notice of his intention to place staff on lay-off. In accordance with the provisions of the Redundancy Payments Acts 1967 to 2003, a lay-off situation exists when an employer suspends an employee's employment because there is no work available, when the employer expects the cessation of work to be temporary and when the employer notifies the employee to this effect.

An employee who wishes to claim a redundancy lump sum because of lay-off must serve notice of intention to claim in writing within four weeks after the lay-off ceases. If the lay-off does not cease after four weeks, the employee can serve notice of intention to claim redundancy. Form RP9 must be used for this purpose.

In order to become entitled to claim a redundancy lump sum after a period of lay-off, that period must be at least four consecutive weeks or a broken series of six weeks where all six fall within a 13-week period. An employee who wishes to terminate his or her contract of employment by reason of lay-off must give his or her employer the notice required by his her contract or if none is required, at least one week's notice.

If an employee gives notice to claim redundancy in a lay-off situation, it is open to the employer to contest any liability to pay statutory redundancy to the employee on the grounds that it is reasonable to expect that within four weeks of the date of service of his or her notice, the employee will enter upon a period of employment of not less than 13 weeks during which he or she will not be on lay-off for any week. If the employer is not in a position to offer the employee 13 weeks unbroken service, then he must accede to the employee's claim for statutory redundancy.

An employee who claims and receives a redundancy payment in respect of lay-off is deemed to have voluntarily left his or her employment and therefore not entitled to notice under the Minimum Notice and Terms of Employment Acts, 1973 to 2001. An employee is entitled to receive unemployment benefit while on lay-off.

Social Welfare Benefits.

148. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the rules and conditions applying to the award of rent supplement; if these regulations include actions which the Health Service Executive may take where an allegation is submitted that a recipient may be engaged in serious anti-social behaviour; and his views on the introduction of amending legislation if there is no such provision (details supplied). [8491/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The supplementary welfare allowance scheme, which is administered on behalf of my Department by the Health Service Executive, provides for the payment of a weekly or monthly supplement in respect of rent to eligible persons in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation needs. In order to qualify for rent supplement a person must satisfy a number of conditions including: the person must be a *bona fide* tenant; be habitually resident in the State; have a housing need; and satisfy a means test. In addition, the executive must be satisfied that the accommodation is suited to the persons needs and the rent payable is within the prescribed limits.

In the case of private rent accommodation, anti-social behaviour by a tenant is a matter for the landlord in the first instance. There are a number of avenues open to landlords in such cases, including the mediation service for landlords and tenants operated by the Private Residential Tenancies Board. If necessary, the landlord may seek termination of the tenancy which, if effected, would result in the termination of rent supplement.

The Health Service Executive has authority under legislation to refuse, suspend or terminate payment of a rent supplement in the case of a person who has been required to deliver up possession of a dwelling provided by a housing authority or an approved body where the reasons for that requirement include anti-social behaviour or the interests of good estate management. I am satisfied that these existing measures are adequate and I have no plans to make any changes to the social welfare legislation in this regard.

149. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, further to Question No. 394 of 22 November 2005, the status of an application regarding rent supplement for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8294/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): Rent supplements are payable under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, which is administered on my behalf by the community welfare division of the Health Service Executive. Neither I nor my Department has any function in determining entitlement in individual cases. The western region of the executive has advised that the person concerned was refused rent supplement as the household income was in excess of the means limits applicable in his family circumstances. The person concerned has appealed this decision to the executive's appeals office, which has advised that the appeal is likely to be held shortly and that the person will be notified of the outcome.

150. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the cost in a full year of extending the over 80 allowance to the qualified adults of contributory old age pensioners in full and on a pro-rata basis. [8455/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The over 80 allowance is an extra payment to people receiving social welfare pensions and in budget 2006 I was pleased to raise this to €10 per week. The allowance is paid in respect of the main claimant and is not currently available to those receiving social welfare support as qualified adults on the pension of their spouse or partner.

At present, there are almost 3,700 qualified adults who are over 80 years of age on old age contributory and retirement pensions. The cost of extending the full allowance to this group is about €1.94 million per annum. The equivalent cost of paying it on a pro-rata basis, assuming payment at 77% of the maximum personal rate, is estimated at €1.5 million per annum. The matter will be kept under review.

Harbours and Piers.

151. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Transport the funding which has been allocated to date to a project (details supplied) in County Mayo; the costs which have been incurred to date; the category of each cost; the person to whom this funding was paid; when this project was first announced; when it is envisaged that the project will be operational; if a feasibility study has been carried out on this proposal; if so, at what cost; if the feasibility study has been published; the findings of same; and if he will provide a copy of reports and studies carried out regarding this project. [8453/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): As the Deputy may be aware, responsibility for Westport Harbour Commissioners has transferred from the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources to my Department with effect from 1 January 2006. A payment of €94,276 was made to Westport Harbour Commissioners in December 2002. The Department stipulated that due to curtailment in funding this payment was made on the strict condition that there would be no expectation whatsoever of any further funding. The payment was in respect of expenditure incurred in the preparation and the implementation of the integrated development plan up to November 2002 and related to professional fees regarding the preparation of the integrated development plan and a feasibility study; project development costs including part of the salary of a marine engineer, boat hire costs and general administration expenses; infrastructure work in the harbour; improvements to the navigational channel; and lighting.

[Mr. Cullen.]

The feasibility study was carried out in 2002 by consultants appointed by Mayo County Council and Westport Harbour Commissioners. The cost of this study was €34,001. This study was not published by my Department. I will arrange for a copy of the feasibility study to be forwarded to the Deputy. There remains no possibility that funding will be provided for the disengagement measure of the NDP 2000 to 2006 in respect of regional harbours. The limited resources available for expenditure on regional harbours have been concentrated on public safety works pending the transfer of certain regional harbours to local authority control. Westport Harbour Commissioners have been a substantial beneficiary in the allocation of this funding and have received €411,319 since 2004.

Road Safety.

152. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport the position on the mandatory introduction of digital tachographs; the way in which this will be enforced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8288/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The European Parliament and the Council recently reached agreement on a new EU regulation governing driving times, breaks and rest periods for professional drivers. The regulation provides that the fitment of digital tachographs in new vehicles will become mandatory throughout the community 20 days after the publication of the new regulation in the EU Official Journal. Publication is expected to take place in April 2006 and for digital tachographs to become mandatory for new vehicles from early May 2006.

My Department has already introduced the national legislation necessary to enforce the compulsory fitting of digital tachographs in new vehicles that are registered in the state from May 2006 in line with the EU deadline. From then vehicle operators will be obliged to ensure that any new vehicle they take delivery of complies with these regulations. Where breaches of these rules are detected at checkpoints or premises visits the operator will be liable to prosecution.

Public Transport.

153. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if, in view of the extensive development currently under way at the new town site of Adamstown and the proposed opening of a new railway station on the Dublin to Kildare line in March 2007, which is intended to service the new inhabitants of the town as well as the current users of this train line, an expansion of train services to include larger trains and more frequent services is planned; if so, if such an expansion of services will take place from the opening of the Adamstown train station; if not, his views

on the allocation of funding to facilitate the expansion of services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8393/06]

154. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport if bus services to cater for the new residents of Adamstown will come on stream to cater for the needs of the new residents of the town; the funding which has been made available to Dublin Bus in order to cater for the new inhabitants of this town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8394/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 153 and 154 together.

I am informed by Iarnród Éireann that it plans to provide a commuter service to and from Adamstown when the station opens next year. The station will be served by existing Kildare line commuter trains and the level of service will be optimized within the constraints of the existing double track layout taking due account of InterCity demands. The service will be upgraded and extended following completion of the four-tracking scheme on the line. The public inquiry for this project concluded on 2 February 2006. When I receive the inspector's report following the inquiry, I will be in a position to consider the granting of a railway order for the upgrade works. Subject to the outcome of this statutory process, Iarnród Éireann expect that the upgrade works will be completed by 2010.

The position regarding bus services is that on 20 January 2006, Dublin Bus submitted an application for funding to me for additional fleet requirements. This application takes account of projected growth in demand from the Adamstown area. I will make a decision on this application when the assessment of the application by my Department has been completed.

Harbour Authorities.

155. **Mr. O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport his plans for the development of Baltimore Harbour; if there are proposals that the local authority would take over the harbour board; his plans to have an amalgamation of Baltimore Harbour Board with the Cork Port Authority; and if it is proposed to provide financial support to allow Baltimore Harbour Board continue as an independent board. [8397/06]

156. **Mr. O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport his plans for the development of Kinsale Harbour; if there are proposals that the local authority would take over the harbour board; his further plans to have an amalgamation of Kinsale Harbour Board with the Cork Port Authority; and if it is proposed to provide financial support to allow Kinsale Harbour Board continue as an independent board. [8398/06]

157. **Mr. O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport his plans for the development of Bantry Harbour; if there are proposals that the local authority would take over the harbour board; his further plans to have an amalgamation of Bantry Harbour Board with the Cork Port Authority; and if it is proposed to provide financial support to allow Bantry Harbour Board to continue as an independent board. [8399/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 to 157, inclusive, together.

The Government's ports policy statement, which was launched in January 2005, states the continued operation of many of the regional harbours under the outdated provisions of the Harbours Act 1946 is unsustainable on the grounds of good governance. The policy statement reiterated the view that most of these harbours would best achieve their potential through their transfer to local authority ownership or, where this is not possible, sale to the private sector. In harbours where significant commercial traffic exists consideration will be given to bringing them under the control of a port company.

The Department is working with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to advance the implementation of the ports policy statement with regard to the transfer of the designated regional harbours to their respective local authorities, where appropriate, and to proceed individually in conjunction with the relevant local authorities and harbour authorities, having regard to local requirements in each case.

Baltimore and Skibbereen Harbour and Kinsale Harbour are both candidates for transfer to local authority control. As they are situated in the functional area of Cork County Council, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government requested the council to undertake an overall assessment of the potential of both harbours for transfer. This report has now been received and is currently being assessed.

With regard to Bantry Bay, this harbour still has significant commercial traffic, in particular oil tankers using the Whiddy Island oil storage facilities. However, the level of business associated with the harbour would not be such as to justify the establishment of a separate port company under the Harbours Act 1996. In view of this, my Department is of the view that the best way forward for Bantry Bay Harbour is some form of amalgamation with the Port of Cork Company. This would help the future development of the harbour by giving it access to the best regional port management expertise and marketing skills. A due diligence process is currently underway between Bantry Bay Harbour Commissioners and the Port of Cork Company to progress the matter.

Energy Resources.

158. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for Transport the measures car drivers can take to reduce fuel consumption while idling in traffic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8429/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): My Department supports a policy of seeking to reduce emissions and, therefore, fuel consumption in the transport sector. The significant investment provided for under Transport 21 will improve public transport and reduce road congestion, providing car drivers with alternative transport options and more free flowing traffic conditions.

With regard to the specific measures that drivers can take to reduce fuel consumption, Sustainable Energy Ireland, SEI, has developed a range of motoring tips for improving fuel efficiency, including advice on action to take while idling in traffic. These are available on its website www.sei.ie. SEI operates under the aegis of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

SEI estimates that adopting an energy aware driving style, or "eco-driving", can save approximately 13% on fuel consumption, delivering environmental and financial gains for motorists. In recognition of this potential, my Department will be seeking to promote wider application of eco-driving techniques, including through specific initiatives in the public transport, road haulage and taxi sectors as part of Transport 21.

Air Services.

159. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Transport the discussions currently taking place between his Department officials and EU Commission aviation officials; the way in which these discussions relate to the dual gateway policy at Shannon Airport and to the EU open skies agreement with the US; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8436/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): My officials have liaised closely with officials from the European Commission at all stages during the negotiations of the draft air transport agreement between the United States of America and the European Community, the text of which was agreed last November, and, in particular, regarding the transitional arrangement for Shannon Airport that forms part of that agreement.

160. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Transport the extent to which the Government will be curtailed by Article 14 of the EU draft open skies agreement with the US from implementing an emissions trading scheme; his position and that of the Government's regarding Article 14; if the Government will be proposing amendments to

[Mr. P. Breen.]

Article 14 to the European Commission prior to the agreement being ratified by the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8437/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Neither the Government nor the European Community are in any way curtailed from implementing an emissions trading scheme by Article 14 of the draft air transport agreement between the United States of America and the European Community.

Article 14 of the draft EU-US agreement deals with the environment. The draft text makes it clear that any party to the agreement, including the European Community and each member state individually, may adopt environmental measures in aviation policy without any obligation to agree those measures with the other party, such as the US, beforehand. The memorandum of consultations to the draft agreement makes this clear by stating the two delegations emphasised that nothing in the agreement affects in any way their respective legal and policy positions on various aviation related environmental issues.

The European Commission is clear that there is nothing in the draft agreement that will prevent it from proposing environmental measures such as emissions trading for aviation and I understand the Commission will be making such a proposal later this year. Ireland will consider its response when the details of the proposals are available. In light of the above, there is no reason to propose any changes to Article 14 of the draft agreement and I will not be doing so.

Rural Transport Services.

161. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Transport if a bus run currently operated by a person (details supplied) in County Galway conveying elderly people in north Galway to Tuam would come under the aegis of the rural transport initiative; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8438/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I understand the service referred to by the Deputy is a private bus service operating under a licence issued by my Department but not involved in the rural transport initiative, RTI.

The RTI is a pilot scheme, under which funding is made available to 34 community based organisations across the country to address the transport needs of their rural areas through the provision of local transport services. Pobal administers the RTI on behalf of my Department and, together with the RTI groups concerned, is responsible for all the operational aspects of the initiative, including the areas to be served. My Department has no role in these matters.

The pilot period for the RTI comes to a close at the end of 2006 and I have already announced that I intend to put it on a permanent footing from 2007 onwards. Proposals for the roll out of the RTI from 2007 onwards are currently in preparation and, in due course, will form the basis for a public consultation process. In developing proposals for the post 2006 period I will pay particular attention to the needs of rural communities that do not currently have access to public transport.

Road Safety.

162. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for Transport the number of provisional licence holders that were killed on roads here as a result of a car accident; the figures for the period 2003, 2004 and 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8517/06]

163. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for Transport the breakdown in figures of road deaths by nationality here for the years 2004 and 2005. [8518/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 162 and 163 together.

Statistics relating to road accidents based on information provided by the Garda Síochána, are published by the National Roads Authority, NRA, in its annual road accident facts reports. The most recent report, Road Collision Facts, relates to 2004 and is available in the Oireachtas Library and on the NRA website.

In the years 2003, 2004 and 2005, 335, 374 and the provisional figure of 399 persons respectively lost their lives in road collisions. The report does not provide a breakdown of the licence status of road users killed in traffic collisions. The report gives details of the number of cars and goods vehicles involved in fatal collisions classified by the driver's country of residence. Of 245 cars involved in such collisions in 2004, 18 or 7% were driven by drivers who were resident outside the State. In respect of goods vehicles, eight of 90 or 8% were driven by non-residents. The report does not provide data relating to the number of non-nationals who died in road collisions. Statistics relating to 2005 are not yet fully analysed or authenticated.

Cúrsaí Pleanála.

164. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. McGinley** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén líon iarratas ar dheontais do thithe nua a fuarthas ina Roinn ó Ghaeltacht Dhún na nGall i ngach bliain le linn na tréimhse 2000 go 2005 agus cén líon iarratas a ceadaíodh agus a diúltaíodh sa tréimhse chéanna. [8299/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Seo leanas an líon iarratas ar dheontas tógála faoi Achtanna na dTithe, Gaeltacht, 1929-2001 a fuarthas ó iarratasóirí i nDhún na nGall i ngach bliain le linn na tréimhse

2000 go 2005. Tá an líon iarratasóirí ar ceadaiódh nó ar diúltaíodh deontas dóibh sa tréimhse chéanna leis seo chomh maith. Ní cheadaítear deontas i gcónaí sa bhliain chéanna agus a dhéantar an t-iarratas.

Bliain	Líon iarratas ar Dheontais tógála a fuarthas	Líon iarratas ar Dheontais tógála a ceadaiódh	Líon iarratas ar Dheontais tógála a diúltaíodh
2000	62	31	7
2001	64	58	2
2002	40	52	4
2003	56	46	4
2004	59	33	5
2005	81	50	7

An Teanga Ghaelach.

165. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cathain a fhoilseoidh sé Tuarascáil Bhliantúil don bhliain 2005 ón gCoimisinéir Teanga; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina leith. [8495/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Tá tuarascáil an Choimisinéir Teanga don bhliain 2005 faighte agam uaidh le fíor ghairid. I gcomhréir le halt 30.2 d'Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003, tá sé i gceist agam cóip den tuarascáil sin a leagadh faoi bhráid gach Tí den Oireachtas go luath.

Grant Payments.

166. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he has received an application from a group (details supplied) in Dublin 7 for grant assistance from the emerging needs funds; when a decision will be made on this application; and if his attention has been drawn to the essential rehabilitation services that this project is providing on grossly inadequate resources. [8499/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I am aware of the services being provided by this project and I would like to point out that it is in receipt of substantial core funding of approximately €80,000 per annum as part of the north inner city local drugs task force development plan. In addition, FÁS provides funding through its special category CE scheme for the trainees and supervisor of the project.

An application for additional assistance from the emerging needs fund has been made on behalf of the project. That application is currently being considered, as are a large number of other applications seeking assistance from the fund. A decision on funding will be made shortly.

An Teanga Ghaelach.

167. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. O'Shea** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an aon-

taíonn sé go bhfuil an Rialtas ag tabhairt neamhaird ar Fhóram na Gaeilge (sonraí tugtha); agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [8514/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Ní aontaím leis an dtuairim sin agus dírim aird an Teachta ar an bhfreagra a thug mé ar cheist uimhir 148 den 8 Feabhra 2006 maidir le hobair an fhórait.

Forestry Sector.

168. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the number of hectares of hardwoods which were harvested and sold by Coillte in the past five years. [8473/06]

169. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the number of hectares of hardwoods which were planted by Coillte in the past five years; the areas in which they were planted; and the native trees which were sown. [8474/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 and 169 together.

The number of hectares of hardwoods which were harvested and sold by Coillte in the past five years are outlined in the table below.

Year	Number of Hectares
2001	7
2002	5.7
2003	0
2004	2.1
2005	1.2

Coillte's policy towards the management of broad-leaved trees is to prolong the rotation to a maximum through planned thinning and understorey regeneration.

In the same period, Coillte have planted over 3,000 hectares of broad-leaved trees. The details are outlined in the following table.

[Mary Coughlan.]

Broadleaf Planting by Coillte Teoranta District (hectares)

Area	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Wicklow/Dublin	65	76	136	75	26
Wexford	184	73	34	66	120
Laois/Offaly/Kildare	66	29	63	54	53
Waterford/South Tipperary	86	94	68	86	68
Limerick/North Tipperary	27	28	35	46	69
Cork	58	69	39	77	77
West Cork/South Kerry	11	28	19	27	23
Donegal	0	0	2	19	0
Sligo/Leitrim	16	0	4	19	17
North Leinster	58	7	53	72	24
Clare	82	83	35	63	65
East Galway/Roscommon	24	26	31	66	20
Mayo/Connemara	58	46	35	90	64
Total	735	559	554	760	626

The native trees sown in the period were predominantly ash, oak, alder, birch and rowan. Minor quantities of hazel, scots pine, maple, whitethorn and wild cherry were also used. Other broadleaves such as beech and sycamore were also sown.

Grant Payments.

170. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when a decision will be made on an inheritance application by a person (details supplied) in County Mayo for entitlements under the single farm payment scheme. [8297/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application requesting consideration in respect of the inheritance measure of the single payment scheme. The application of the person named was successful and payment will issue shortly.

171. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the difficulty with respect to an application for the single farm payment for a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8306/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): An application for the single farm payment was received from the person named on 14 May 2005. A land parcel claimed by the applicant was the subject of a dual claim and both persons, who claimed that parcel, were contacted by my Department. This matter was resolved in favour of the applicant. A single farm payment amounting to €2,042.18 will issue to this herd owner shortly.

172. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the position regarding an application for a person (details supplied) in County Wexford for the single farm payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8384/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): My Department has no record of receiving an application for the 2005 single payment scheme from the person named. The person named submitted an application for an allocation of entitlements from the single payments scheme national reserve under category A. Category A caters for farmers who inherited land or received land free of charge or for a nominal sum from a farmer who had retired or died by 16 May 2005 and who had leased out his or her holding to a third party during the reference period 2000 to 2002.

The position is that more than 23,000 applications for an allocation of entitlements from the national reserve were received when account is taken of farmers who applied under more than one category. Processing of these applications is continuing and the intention is to make allocations to successful applicants at the earliest opportunity.

My Department will be in touch with individual applicants as soon as their applications are fully processed. Formal letters setting out my Department's decision will be issued.

173. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when a decision will be made on an application for single payment entitlements from the national reserve in the name of a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8443/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): My Department has no record of receipt of an application form for the national reserve measure of the single payment scheme from the person named.

Milk Quota.

174. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo is entitled to dairy premium on milk quota held in the relevant reference years; if so, when this payment will issue; if her Department has received an application for entitlements from the national reserve from the herd owner; and when a decision will be made on same. [8452/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): Following the adoption of Council Regulation (EC) 1782/2003, it was decided that the 2005 dairy premium and all other direct payments under the livestock premia and arable aid schemes in Ireland would be decoupled from production with effect from 2005, to be replaced by the single payment scheme. The decoupled dairy premium was based on the eligible milk quota held by dairy farmers on 31 March 2005, provided that they had delivered milk produced on their holding during the 2004-05 milk quota year, or prior to 15 May 2005. As my Department has no record of the persons named having held a milk quota on 31 March 2005, they were not entitled to payment of the dairy premium.

My Department has no record of receipt of an application form for the national reserve measure of the single payment scheme in this case.

Bovine Diseases.

175. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the criteria for the payment of veterinarian fees in respect of tuberculosis testing; the reason a person (details supplied) in County Offaly who is paying for tuberculosis testing does not have the right to choose his own veterinarian; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8494/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): Under the existing arrangements for the disease eradication schemes, individual keepers are normally responsible for arranging annual herd tests, within timescales prescribed by the Department, with an authorised veterinary practitioner, and for payment of fees directly to the practitioner who conducted the test in respect of no more than one test per annum. In the case of a disease breakdown, the Department pays for the first test and any necessary second or subsequent test such as contiguous herd tests or reactor retests and the keeper ordinarily pays for the clearance test.

However, my Department is entitled under SI 308 of 1989 to decide whether a TB test should be conducted by the Department or by an authorised PVP nominated by the herd keeper. In view of the very serious nature of the breakdown, which has been ongoing since early 2004 in the herd of the person referred to, my Department has decided that it will conduct the next test — the second reactor retest. If the test is clear and no other evidence of tuberculosis is detected in the interim it is anticipated that the herd will be de-restricted and the farmer will be due to pay for the test.

Grant Payments.

176. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food, further to Question No. 234 of 29 September 2004, the grant aid which has been returned to her Department; the discussions her Department has had with the company concerned regarding alternative employment on the site; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8496/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The last grant payment made by my Department in respect of the Roosky plant in County Roscommon was in June 1997.

My Department and Enterprise Ireland are examining the position regarding contingent liabilities arising from the plant's closure in the wake of a fire in 2002, and the associated legal issues. The process of recovery of any amounts identified as due will follow upon completion of this exercise.

Enterprise Ireland has had a series of discussions with the company on prospects for the Roosky plant where the cannery facility has been retained. The company has undertaken other significant investment in the pork processing sector with primary slaughtering activities at Roscrea and Edenderry, in addition to secondary added value processing facilities at Clara, County Offaly and Jamestown, County Roscommon. This investment profile has led to increased employment levels in the company's pig processing activities and has provided sufficient capacity to meet its current requirements.

Missing Persons.

177. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, following the decision to cease the provision of funding for the missing persons helpline, such a helpline could instead be funded directly through his Department or through the Garda Síochána; if same has been considered by him or the Garda authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8287/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): In March 2005, I established a

[Mr. McDowell.]

new Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime to devise an appropriate support framework for victims of crime into the future and to disburse funding for victim support measures. The commission is entirely independent in its decision making and examines each application on its merits. The commission received an application from the Missing in Ireland Support Service for €71,600 to establish, staff and operate a helpline for missing persons. After careful consideration of the application the commission decided to offer funding of €25,000; however, this offer was rejected by the Missing in Ireland Support Service. It should be borne in mind in this context that the commission is charged with funding support services for victims of crime, and that, while some persons who are missing are crime victims, most are not. It remains open to the Missing In Ireland Support Service to make an application to my Department for assistance, if it so wishes. Any such application will be carefully considered on its merits.

The missing persons' bureau in Garda headquarters is responsible for maintaining data on missing persons. All cases of a person reported missing in suspicious circumstances remain open and under ongoing review and investigation until the person is located or, in the case of a missing person who is presumed drowned, a verdict to that effect by the coroner.

At present, local Garda management takes direct responsibility for missing person cases, and special investigation teams are appointed as necessary. All missing persons are recorded on the PULSE system. When a person is reported missing, the local Garda superintendent takes direct responsibility for the investigation and will appoint an investigation team to include any specialised unit deemed necessary, for example, the national bureau of criminal investigation or the technical bureau. The systems put in place by the Garda Síochána to manage and deal with reports of missing persons are in line with best international police practice, and Garda management is satisfied and has assured me that the systems in place are adequate to deal with any reported case of a missing person.

Garda Strength.

178. **Mr. Eoin Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí currently patrolling the streets of Dublin; his plans to increase this number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8292/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the personnel strength of the Dublin metropolitan region as at 24 February 2006 was 3,861 — all ranks. Of this figure 3,213 members

are at garda rank and 648 members are at a supervisory rank. While a majority of these are uniform personnel, a number are employed on plain clothes duty. Garda personnel are divided into four separate working units, with three working and one resting on any given day.

Garda management states that the availability of Garda personnel for patrolling changes on a daily basis and is consequent on annual leave and other absences due to sickness, court appearances, training and a variety of other reasons including meetings with community groups, non-governmental organisations, etc.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that every effort is made to provide a high-visibility presence throughout the Dublin metropolitan region. Uniform and detective units and divisional traffic corps, supplemented by community policing units and Garda mountain bike units — all of which provide a highly visible local presence — continue to police the community and to take a proactive approach to addressing anti-social/public disorder issues by way of immediate intervention, arrest and prosecution, or advice as appropriate. Policing strategies are predicated on the policy of reducing and preventing incidents of public order offending, the prevention of crimes of violence against persons and property and the maintenance of an environment conducive to the improvement of quality of life.

The timescale for achieving the target strength of 14,000 members of the Garda Síochána in line with the commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government remains as when I announced the Government approval in October 2004 for my proposals to achieve this objective. The phased increase in the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 will lead to a combined strength, of both attested gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year.

As part of the accelerated recruitment campaign to facilitate this record expansion, 1,125 Garda recruits were inducted to the Garda college during 2005. The college will induct a further 1,100 recruits this year and again in 2007, by way of intakes to the Garda college of approximately 275 recruits every quarter. This project is fully on target and will be achieved. The first incremental increase of newly attested gardaí under the programme of accelerated recruitment will take place on 16 March 2006.

The Garda Commissioner will now be drawing up plans on how best to distribute and manage these additional resources, and in this context the needs of the Dublin metropolitan region will be fully considered within the overall context of the needs of Garda regions throughout the country.

Departmental Staff.

179. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of civilian staff and Garda members working in the carriage office in respect of the present and each of the

past eight years; the number of whole-time equivalents in both cases; and if he will make a statement on the adequacy of staffing levels. [8293/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The civilian staffing levels for the Carriage Office as at 31 December 2000-05, inclusively, and as at 28 February 2006 was as set out in the table hereunder:

Year	Staff
31/12/00	5
31/12/01	5
31/12/02	5
31/12/03	5
31/12/04	3.6
31/12/05	3
28/02/06	3

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the civilian staffing levels for the Carriage Office in respect of the years 1998 and 1999 is not readily available.

I made further inquiries with the Garda authorities on the other aspects of the information requested by the Deputy. I will be in contact with the Deputy when this information is to hand.

Corruption Prevention.

180. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his proposals to deal with the issue of corruption; if he intends bringing forward legislation to facilitate persons who may wish to come forward with evidence of corruption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8301/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Ireland has extensive legislation dealing with corruption. Provisions are contained principally in the Public Bodies Corrupt Practices Act 1889, the Prevention of Corruption Acts of 1906 and 1916, section 38 of the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995, which amends certain aspects of the earlier Acts, and the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act 2001. Collectively they are cited as the Prevention of Corruption Acts 1889-2001. This body of legislation comprehensively criminalises all forms of active and passive corruption in both the public and private sector.

In addition, the provisions of the Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Act 2005 complement the penal sanctions already available by introducing provision for a corrupt enrichment order. The purpose of this provision is to deal with the situation where someone, by means of some corrupt act, is able to benefit from the enhancement of value of property legally acquired, arising from the corrupt act. This provision provides for a pro-

cedure for the Criminal Assets Bureau, CAB, to obtain a court order directing an individual to pay to the Minister for Finance, or any other person specified by the court, an amount equivalent to the amount by which the court determines the person was corruptly enriched.

That Act also contains an important preventative measure by providing for the seizure of a gift or consideration which is suspected to be a gift or consideration within the meaning of section 1 of the Prevention of Corruption Act 1906, as amended by section 2 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act 2001. It is modelled on section 38 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994 and will mean that a suspected bribe, as an instrumentality of crime, will be automatically capable of seizure. The 2005 Act also provides for forfeiture by the court of the gift or consideration which has been seized and detained and is modelled on the forfeiture of cash provision in section 39 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994. The court may make an order whether or not proceedings have been brought against a person for an offence with which the gift or consideration is connected, and the standard of proof for proceedings for forfeiture is that applicable to civil proceedings.

On protection of persons who report suspicions of corruption, officials of my Department are, in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, examining the legislative requirements arising from the UN Convention on Corruption, which includes provisions on the protection of so-called whistleblowers. Arising from examination of the provisions, I will, in due course, be bringing legislative proposals to Government to give effect to the convention.

Garda Strength.

181. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí based in Bray, County Wicklow for the years 1997, 2000 and January 2006. [8303/06]

182. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí based in Wicklow town, Arklow town and Blessington, County Wicklow for the years 1997, 2000 and January 2006. [8304/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 and 182 together.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the personnel strength — all ranks — of the Garda stations at Bray, Wicklow Town, Arklow and Blessington as at 31 December 1997 and 2000 and as at 31 January 2006 was as set out in the following table.

[Mr. McDowell.]

Stations	31/12/97	31/12/00	31/01/06
Bray	76	77	85
Wicklow	33	39	36
Arklow	22	24	30
Blessington	12	14	14

It is the responsibility of the divisional officer to allocate personnel within his-her division. The allocation of such resources throughout the division is determined by a number of factors including demographics, administrative functions, crime trends and other operational policing needs. Garda management continues to appraise the policing and administrative strategy employed within each division with a view to ensuring an effective Garda service is maintained.

The timescale for achieving the target strength of 14,000 members of the Garda Síochána in line with the commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government remains as when I announced the Government approval in October 2004 for my proposals to achieve this objective. The phased increase in the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 will lead to a combined strength, of both attested gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year. As part of the accelerated recruitment campaign to facilitate this process, 1,125 Garda recruits were inducted to the Garda College during 2005. The college will induct 1,100

Rank	31/12/00	31/12/01	31/12/02	31/12/03	31/12/04	31/12/05
Superintendent	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sergeant	3	2	3	3	3	3
Garda	20	21	23	23	23	21
TOTAL	24	24	27	27	27	25

It is the responsibility of the divisional officer to allocate personnel within his or her division. The allocation of such resources throughout the division is determined by a number of factors, including demographics, administrative functions, crime trends and other operational policing needs. Garda management continues to appraise the policing and administrative strategy employed within each division with a view to ensuring an effective Garda service is maintained. The timescale for achieving the target strength of 14,000 members of the Garda in line with the commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government remains as when I announced the Government approval in October 2004 for my proposals to achieve this objective. The phased increase in the strength of the Garda to 14,000 will lead to a combined strength, of both attested gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year. As part of the accelerated recruitment campaign to facilitate this record expansion, 1,125

recruits this year and a further 1,100 in 2007, by way of intakes to the Garda College of approximately 275 recruits every quarter. This project is fully on target and will be achieved.

In this regard, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the first incremental increase of newly attested gardaí due to the programme of accelerated recruitment into the Garda Síochána will take place on the 16 March 2006.

The Garda Commissioner will now be drawing up plans on how best to distribute and manage these additional resources and in this context the needs of the Garda stations referred to by the Deputy will be fully considered within the overall context of the needs of Garda divisions throughout the country.

Garda Strength.

183. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí stationed in Westport, County Mayo, for each of the past five years; and the number in each rank including sergeants, detectives, inspectors, ordinary Garda members and so on. [8305/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the personnel strength — all ranks — of Westport Garda station as at 31 December 2000 to 2005, inclusively, was as set out in the following table.

Garda recruits were inducted to the Garda college during 2005. The college will induct a further 1,100 recruits this year and again in 2007, by way of intakes to the Garda College of approximately 275 recruits every quarter. This project is fully on target and will be achieved. In this regard, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the first incremental increase of newly attested gardaí under the programme of accelerated recruitment will take place on 16 March. The Garda Commissioner will draw up plans on how best to distribute and manage these additional resources and, in this context, the needs of Westport Garda station will be fully considered within the overall context of the needs of Garda stations throughout the country.

Proposed Legislation.

184. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, further to

Question No. 1055 of 29 September 2004, if he will report on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8383/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have nothing further to add to the details of my reply to Question No. 435 of 30 November 2004 other than to indicate the following: the Government has accepted the recommendations of the legal costs working group, which I established under the chairmanship of Mr. Paul Haran to examine ways of reducing civil legal costs. I am taking the necessary steps to implement the group's recommendations and recently secured the agreement of Mr. Desmond Miller, FCA, to act as chairman of an implementation advisory group, which will oversee the steps necessary to complete the transformation towards the new system. A family law Bill forms part of the Government's legislative programme announced by the Chief Whip on 24 January 2006.

Court Procedures.

185. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on opening a petition in the extraordinary and extremely sad circumstances of a case (details supplied). [8428/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Any person may apply to have a petition opened in respect of a court judgment against him or her. The circumstances, as outlined in the application, are assessed. If it is decided that the circumstances of the case are exceptional, a petition may be opened. Pursuant to a High Court judgment of 1995, a process is now in place for dealing with applications to open a petition. A form to make such an application has been forwarded to you for the person concerned. On receipt of the completed application, I will be happy to give the matter every consideration.

Grant Payment.

186. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made on an appeal not to allow a grant application for a crèche to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8439/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): As the Deputy may be aware,

responsibility for the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 has been assigned to the Department of Health and Children as part of the establishment of the new Office of the Minister for Children, under the Minister for children, Deputy Brian Lenihan.

With regard to the application by the private provider in question for capital grant assistance under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006, the private provider was not recommended for funding under the EOCP as the project is located in close proximity to a child care project that has received EOCP capital funding, and there was a consequential potential for duplication and displacement between the two child care services. I am advised that the private provider in question has recently submitted an appeal regarding the decision. This appeal will undergo a thorough assessment by Pobal before being submitted to the programme appraisal committee and a subsequent decision being made, of which the applicant will be advised of the outcome.

Registration of Title.

187. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding an application by a person (details supplied) in County Galway under a dealing number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8440/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have requested the Land Registry to contact him directly concerning the current position of the application in question.

Garda Strength.

188. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí stationed in the Letterkenny division during 1997, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8469/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I presume the Deputy is referring to the Letterkenny Garda district in the Donegal division. I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the personnel strength — all ranks — of the Letterkenny Garda district as at 31 December 1997, 2000 and 2002 to 2005, inclusively, was as set out in the following table.

Station	1997	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005
Letterkenny	90	93	92	101	94	97
Carrigans	12	8	8	7	6	5
Castlefin	18	10	4	4	4	3
Brocach	2	1	1	1	1	1

[Mr. McDowell.]

Station	1997	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005
Newtowncunningham	3	3	3	3	3	3
Raphoe	5	9	7	6	4	6
Lifford	22	19	15	17	15	14
Ballybofey	20	20	24	23	24	21
Convoy	2	3	4	4	3	3
TOTAL	174	166	158	166	154	153

The decrease shown in Garda personnel assigned to the Letterkenny district reflects the fact that the necessity for the large Garda presence in the Border counties has significantly diminished since the Good Friday Agreement. The allocation of resources within the Donegal division is a matter for the local divisional officer, who takes into account a number of factors including population, crime trends and the operational policing needs of the division. The timescale for achieving the target strength of 14,000 members of the Garda Síochána in line with the commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government remains as when I announced the Government approval in October 2004 for my proposals to achieve this objective. The phased increase in the strength of the Garda to 14,000 will lead to a combined strength, of both attested gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year. As part of the accelerated recruitment campaign to facilitate this process, 1,125 Garda recruits were inducted to the Garda College during 2005. The college will induct 1,100 recruits this year and a further 1,100 in 2007, by way of intakes to the Garda College of approximately 275 recruits every quarter. This project is fully on target and will be achieved. In this regard, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the first incremental increase of newly attested gardaí due to the programme of accelerated recruitment into the Garda will take place on the 16 March 2006. The Garda Commissioner will draw up plans on how best to distribute and manage these additional resources, and in this context the Letterkenny Garda district will be fully considered within the overall context

of the needs of Garda divisions throughout the country.

Crime Levels.

189. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of crimes detected across all headings in Galway Garda division during 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8470/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The introduction of the PULSE computer system by the Garda Síochána in 1999 has led to more complete and comprehensive recording of crimes reported than was previously the case. Consequently, the statistics provided for 1997 are not comparable to statistics provided for 2000 and subsequent years.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the attached table shows the ten headline group totals for the Garda division of Galway West, which includes the Garda district of Galway.

It should be borne in mind that any interpretation of the crime figures should factor in the increase in our population in the past ten years. In 1995, with a population of almost 3.6 million people, there were 29 crimes per 1,000 of the population. In 2005, with a population of over 4.1 million, there were 24.6 crimes per 1,000 of the population, a reduction of 4.4 crimes per 1,000 of the population. A certain proportion of the increase in the figures for recorded headline crime is due to the increases in recording rates resulting from the phasing in of the Garda PULSE IT system from 1999 to 2002.

Headline Offences Recorded and Detected for the Garda Division of Galway West for Years 2000 to 2005*

	2005*		2004		2003		2002		2001		2000	
	Rec	Det	Rec	Det	Rec	Det	Rec	Det	Rec	Det	Rec	Det
Homicide	5	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Assault	170	110	128	84	183	130	257	175	165	119	62	55
Sexual Offences	77	23	79	36	108	88	237	197	88	51	57	49
Arson	37	0	40	8	30	5	55	13	64	8	20	5
Drugs	51	48	61	60	57	56	72	71	57	55	58	58
Theft	2,136	817	1,847	732	1,893	826	1,842	578	1,543	518	905	339
Burglary	1,096	147	629	89	864	179	1,008	239	763	121	554	135

	2005*		2004		2003		2002		2001		2000	
	Rec	Det	Rec	Det	Rec	Det	Rec	Det	Rec	Det	Rec	Det
Robbery	54	14	49	13	53	21	69	35	46	10	40	14
Fraud	95	48	97	69	120	73	259	191	219	166	196	142
Other	39	25	47	38	39	28	36	26	31	16	6	5
Total	3,760	1,234	2,977	1,129	3,348	1,407	3,836	1,526	2,977	1,065	1,899	803

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

190. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of crimes recorded across all headings in Naas Garda division during 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8471/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The introduction of the PULSE computer system by the Garda Síochána in 1999 has led to more complete and comprehensive recording of crimes reported than was previously the case. Consequently, the statistics provided for 1997 are not comparable to statistics provided for 2000 and subsequent years.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the attached table shows the ten headline group totals recorded for the Garda division of Carlow-Kildare, which includes the Garda district of Naas, for the years 2000-05 inclusive.

It should be borne in mind that any interpretation of the crime figures should factor in the increase in our population in the past ten years. In 1995 with a population of almost 3.6 million people, there were 29 crimes per 1,000 of the population. In 2005, with a population of over 4.1 million, there were 24.6 crimes per 1,000 of the population, a reduction of 4.4 crimes per 1,000 of the population. A certain proportion of the increase in the figures for recorded headline crime is due to the increases in recording rates resulting from the phasing in of the Garda PULSE IT system from 1999 to 2002.

Headline Offences Recorded for the Garda Division of Carlow / Kildare for the Years 2000 to 2005*

	2005*	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
	Rec	Rec	Rec	Rec	Rec	Rec
Homicide	3	0	0	1	4	6
Assault	197	203	222	283	119	70
Sexual Offences	79	87	162	121	77	41
Arson	71	61	62	55	50	51
Drugs	113	86	91	84	82	77
Theft	2,406	2,289	2,298	2,047	1,661	1,210
Burglary	1,635	1,633	1,608	1,676	1,434	1,384
Robbery	97	75	75	80	80	59
Fraud	169	171	211	200	203	215
Other	62	62	53	84	38	10
Total	4,832	4,667	4,782	4,631	3,748	3,123

* Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Visa Applications.

191. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if an application for a visa for a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8481/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The application in question was received in my Department on 24 November 2005. The application sought to enable a non-EEA national join his spouse, who is an Irish citizen, in the State.

The visa officer who assessed the application was not satisfied on the basis of documentation supplied in support of the application, that sufficient finances were available to guarantee the support of the applicant without recourse to public funds or resources. The decision was appealed and following a re-examination of the application by the visa appeals officer, the decision to refuse the visa was upheld.

As each application is entitled to only one appeal, no further review can be facilitated. However, any new application will be fully examined by my Department. In this regard, evidence

[Mr. McDowell.]

of increases in salary will be taken into consideration.

Garda Deployment.

192. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí in Lucan and Ronanstown Garda stations assigned to purely administrative duties. [8519/06]

193. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí in Clondalkin Garda station assigned to purely administrative duties; if this work could be carried out by civilian personnel; his plans to increase the number of civilian personnel supporting the primary work of the Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8520/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 192 and 193 together.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that there is currently one garda employed in an administrative post at Clondalkin Garda station and one garda employed in an administrative post at Lucan Garda station. In this context administrative posts are defined as those whose holders are in receipt of designated post and *ex gratia* allowances and as such are specifically employed on administrative duties. I am further informed that there are no gardaí employed on administrative duties at Ronanstown Garda station.

The civilianisation programme approved by Government in 2001 is to be implemented on a phased basis over a number of years. I am pleased to say that significant progress has been made with the appointment of 113 civilian finance officers who are doing the district finance officer duties which were hitherto performed by gardaí. Moreover, the recent establishment of the Garda Information Service Centre, GISC, in Castlebar, and the pending transfer of civilian staff from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to the Garda Síochána as civil servants of the State are significant developments in the context of greater Garda civilianisation.

The establishment of the GISC alone will, when fully operational, allow for the equivalent of up to 300 gardaí to be freed up for frontline outdoor policing duties. While the immediate focus is on providing the necessary staffing, training and resources so that the GISC will be fully operational during 2006, it is also the case that my Department, on an ongoing basis, reviews the possibility of civilianising other posts where possible, and progress is being made in this regard.

However, the civilianisation programme has to be implemented within the confines of the Government decision of 4 December 2002 which placed a cap on numbers across the Civil Service and public service.

Having said that, I assure the Deputy that I am committed to the ongoing implementation of the civilianisation programme. I am also determined that the additional gardaí being recruited under the current historic expansion of the force will be deployed to frontline, visible and effective policing duties.

In this regard, the timescale for achieving the target strength of 14,000 members of the Garda Síochána in line with the commitment in the agreed programme for Government remains as when I announced the Government's approval in October 2004 for my proposals to achieve this objective. The phased increase in the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 will lead to a combined strength, of both attested gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year.

As part of the accelerated recruitment campaign to facilitate this record expansion, 1,125 garda recruits were inducted to the Garda College during 2005. The college will induct a further 1,100 recruits this year and again in 2007, by way of intakes to the Garda College of approximately 275 recruits every quarter. This project is fully on target and will be achieved. In this regard, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the first incremental increase of newly attested gardaí under the programme of accelerated recruitment will take place on 16 March.

194. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the Garda numbers stationed at Lucan and Ronanstown Garda stations allocated to community policing duties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8521/06]

195. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the Garda numbers stationed at Clondalkin Garda station allocated to community policing duties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8522/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 194 and 195 together.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the number of garda community officers, all ranks, attached to Lucan, Ronanstown and Clondalkin Garda stations as at 31 December 2005 were as set out in the following table:

Station	Total
Lucan	8
Ronanstown	13
Clondalkin	16

These figures are compiled on a quarterly basis and, therefore, 31 December 2005 is the latest date for which figures are readily available.

The timescale for achieving the target strength of 14,000 members of the Garda Síochána in line with the commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government remains as when I announced the Government approval in October 2004 for my proposals to achieve this objective. The phased increase in the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 will lead to a combined strength, of both attested gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year. As part of the accelerated recruitment campaign to facilitate this process, 1,125 garda recruits were inducted to the Garda College during 2005. The college will induct 1,100 recruits this year and a further 1,100 in 2007, by way of intakes to the Garda College of approximately 275 recruits every quarter. This project is fully on target and will be achieved.

In this regard, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the first incremental increase of newly attested gardaí due to the programme of accelerated recruitment into the Garda Síochána will take place on the 16 March 2006.

The Garda Commissioner will now be drawing up plans on how best to distribute and manage these additional resources, and, in this context, the needs of the Garda stations referred to by the Deputy will be fully considered within the overall context of the needs of Garda divisions throughout the country.

Registration of Title.

196. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if the Land Registry office will complete the boundary amendment for a person's land (details supplied) in County Galway and if a new folio will be issued as a matter of priority. [8526/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Registrar of Titles that there is no record of an application pending with the details supplied by the Deputy at present. If the Deputy can provide me with the date of lodgement and a Land Registry reference number, or folio number, I will make further inquiries on his behalf.

Garda Operations.

197. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if gardaí were on duty on Richmond Road on the night of the Shelbourne versus Glentoran match; the reason

windows were smashed at the Ballybough end; and if security on the night of matches at Tolka Park will be improved. [8527/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that a comprehensive policing and security plan was in place for the football match mentioned in the Deputy's question, which included high-visibility patrolling on all adjacent roads and streets.

The incidents of criminal damage in the area concerned are under investigation and there is no evidence at this time to suggest these incidents are connected with the football match.

Local Garda management is satisfied with the policing plan for events such as these, which remains under constant review to ensure that it meets requirements.

Garda Investigations.

198. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding the Stardust fire evidence; and if an investigation will be carried out. [8528/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The position remains as set out in my response to Question No. 392 on 28 February.

Garda Deployment.

199. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Garda hours which were dedicated to administrative work in each of the Garda stations (details supplied) over the same period; what the overall Garda hours amounts to in each station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8569/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and can only be obtained by the disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources relative to the information sought.

200. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of gardaí based at Garda stations (details supplied) over the past five years; and their rank within the Garda Síochána. [8570/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the personnel strength, by rank, of

[Mr. McDowell.]

Donnybrook, Pearse Street, Irishtown, Harcourt Terrace, Rathmines, Terenure and Kevin Street Garda Stations as at 31 December 2001 to 2005, inclusively, was as set out in the tables hereunder.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that during the period concerned the overall Garda strength of the seven stations in question rose by 8.6%, from 730 to 793.

Donnybrook Garda station

Rank	31/12/01	31/12/02	31/12/03	31/12/04	31/12/05
Superintendent	2	1	1	1	1
Inspector	3	4	4	4	4
Sergeant	14	15	16	15	12
Garda	97	94	102	105	104
TOTAL	116	114	123	125	121

Pearse Street Garda station

Rank	31/12/01	31/12/02	31/12/03	31/12/04	31/12/05
C/Superintendent	1	1	1	1	1
Superintendent	2	2	2	2	2
Inspector	8	8	6	7	7
Sergeant	26	24	27	28	28
Garda	179	179	202	214	215
TOTAL	216	214	238	252	253

Irishtown Garda station

Rank	31/12/01	31/12/02	31/12/03	31/12/04	31/12/05
Inspector	1	0	1	1	1
Sergeant	10	10	8	8	8
Garda	43	39	46	48	47
TOTAL	54	49	55	57	56

Harcourt Terrace Garda station

Rank	31/12/01	31/12/02	31/12/03	31/12/04	31/12/05
Inspector	1	1	1	1	1
Sergeant	9	10	9	9	7
Garda	70	68	65	67	66
TOTAL	80	79	75	77	74

Rathmines Garda station

Rank	31/12/01	31/12/02	31/12/03	31/12/04	31/12/05
Inspector	1	1	1	1	0
Sergeant	10	8	8	9	9
Garda	70	58	62	62	61
TOTAL	81	67	71	72	70

Terenure Garda station

Rank	31/12/01	31/12/02	31/12/03	31/12/04	31/12/05
Superintendent	1	1	1	1	1
Inspector	4	4	4	4	3
Sergeant	11	15	12	11	13
Garda	50	64	70	75	80
TOTAL	66	84	87	91	97

Kevin Street Garda station

Rank	31/12/01	31/12/02	31/12/03	31/12/04	31/12/05
Superintendent	1	1	1	1	1
Inspector	5	6	6	6	6
Sergeant	18	19	17	14	15
Garda	93	91	93	98	100
TOTAL	117	117	117	119	122

It is the responsibility of the divisional officer to allocate personnel within his or her division. The allocation of such resources throughout the division is determined by a number of factors including demographics, administrative functions, crime trends and other operational policing needs. Garda management continues to appraise the policing and administrative strategy employed within each division with a view to ensuring an effective Garda service is maintained.

The time scale for achieving the target strength of 14,000 members of the Garda Síochána, in line with the commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government, remains as when I announced the Government approval in October 2004 for my proposals to achieve this objective. The phased increase in the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 will lead to a combined strength of both attested gardaí and recruits in training of 14,000 by the end of this year.

As part of the accelerated recruitment campaign to facilitate this record expansion, 1,125 recruits were inducted to the Garda college during 2005. The college will induct a further 1,100 recruits this year and again in 2007, by way of intakes to the college of approximately 275 recruits every quarter. This project is fully on target and will be achieved. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the first incremental increase of newly attested gardaí due to the programme of accelerated recruitment into the Garda Síochána will take place on 16 March.

The Garda Commissioner will now be drawing up plans on how best to distribute and manage these additional resources and, in this context, the needs of the Garda stations referred to by the Deputy will be fully considered within the overall context of the needs of Garda divisions throughout the country.

Garda Strength.

201. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the Garda strength at the end of 2005 in each of the 18 Garda districts within the Dublin metropolitan area. [8573/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the personnel strength, all ranks, in each of the 18 Garda districts within the Dublin metropolitan area as at 31 December, 2005 was as set out in the table hereunder:

District	Strength
<i>D.M.R. South Central</i>	
A	203
B	327
E	177
<i>D.M.R. North Central</i>	
C	271
D	162
U	209
<i>D.M.R. South</i>	
G	152
M	237
P	167
<i>D.M.R. North</i>	
H	236
R	193
J	171
<i>D.M.R. West</i>	
K	312
Q	181
L	186

[Mr. McDowell.]

District	Strength
<i>D.M.R. East</i>	
F	197
N	182
W	179
TOTAL	3,742

The timescale for achieving the target strength of 14,000 members of the Garda Síochána, in line with the commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government, remains as when I announced the Government approval in October 2004 for my proposals to achieve this objective. The phased increase in the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 will lead to a combined strength, of both attested gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year.

As part of the accelerated recruitment campaign to facilitate this process, 1,125 Garda recruits were inducted to the Garda College during 2005. The college will induct 1,100 recruits this year and a further 1,100 in 2007, by way of intakes to the college of approximately 275 recruits every quarter. This project is fully on target and will be achieved. In this regard, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the first incremental increase of newly attested gardaí due to the programme of accelerated recruitment into the Garda Síochána will take place on 16 March 2006.

The Garda Commissioner will now be drawing up plans on how best to distribute and manage these additional resources and, in this context, the needs of the Garda districts within the Dublin metropolitan area will be fully considered within the overall context of the needs of Garda divisions throughout the country.

Crime Levels.

202. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the headline offences recorded and detected in 2005 under each of the ten groupings used for classification in each of the 18 Garda districts within the Dublin metropolitan area. [8574/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the following tables show the number of headline offences by group, recorded and detected in the Garda districts of the Dublin metropolitan region for 2005.

It should be borne in mind that any interpretation of the crime figures should factor in the increase in our population in the past ten years. In 1995, with a population of almost 3.6 million people, there were 29 crimes per 1,000 of the population. In 2005, with a population of over 4.1 million, there were 24.6 crimes per 1,000 of the population, a reduction of 4.4 crimes per 1,000 of the population. A certain proportion of the increase in the figures for recorded headline crime is due to the increases in recording rates

resulting from the phasing in of the Garda Pulse IT system from 1999 to 2002.

Table 1: Headline offences recorded and detected in Kevin Street Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	7	4
Assault	98	51
Sexual offences	35	13
Arson	26	2
Drugs	217	215
Theft	1,055	228
Burglary	812	128
Robbery	159	66
Fraud	75	47
Other	43	25
Total	2,527	779

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 2: Headline offences recorded and detected in Pearse Street Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	3	3
Assault	163	86
Sexual offences	40	12
Arson	12	2
Drugs	165	164
Theft	3,918	1,311
Burglary	651	159
Robbery	118	46
Fraud	177	50
Other	14	13
Total	5,261	1,846

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 3: Headline offences recorded and detected in Store Street Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	0	0
Assault	90	50
Sexual offences	25	11
Arson	16	4
Drugs	152	152
Theft	4,016	2,386
Burglary	303	103
Robbery	127	44
Fraud	157	49
Other	18	12
Total	4,904	2,811

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 4: Headline offences recorded and detected in Bride-well Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	1	1
Assault	49	29
Sexual offences	24	15
Arson	8	0
Drugs	72	71
Theft	639	190
Burglary	236	50
Robbery	69	25
Fraud	42	16
Other	16	9
Total	1,156	406

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 5: Headline offences recorded and detected in Donnybrook Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	0	0
Assault	28	17
Sexual offences	17	5
Arson	10	2
Drugs	15	15
Theft	963	172
Burglary	700	139
Robbery	34	21
Fraud	73	38
Other	9	6
Total	1,849	415

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 6: Headline offences recorded and detected in Dún Laoghaire Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	1	1
Assault	54	37
Sexual offences	12	7
Arson	21	4
Drugs	58	57
Theft	861	309
Burglary	645	95
Robbery	44	21
Fraud	74	26
Other	14	11
Total	1,784	568

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 7: Headline offences recorded and detected in Crumlin Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	1	1
Assault	48	37
Sexual offences	21	4
Arson	51	4
Drugs	62	62
Theft	708	274
Burglary	485	100
Robbery	68	43
Fraud	37	16
Other	19	11
Total	1,500	552

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 8: Headline offences recorded and detected in Santry Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	28	26
Assault	151	119
Sexual offences	60	44
Arson	33	7
Drugs	116	116
Theft	1,042	388
Burglary	436	101
Robbery	63	19
Fraud	192	133
Other	92	58
Total	2,213	1,011

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 9: Headline offences recorded and detected in Raheny Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	1	0
Assault	49	30
Sexual offences	24	6
Arson	12	2
Drugs	35	35
Theft	836	162
Burglary	434	81
Robbery	74	39
Fraud	57	15
Other	11	4
Total	1,533	374

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

[Mr. McDowell.]

Table 10: Headline offences recorded and detected in Blanchardstown Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	6	1
Assault	99	47
Sexual offences	48	21
Arson	44	3
Drugs	84	84
Theft	2,074	828
Burglary	658	65
Robbery	191	45
Fraud	114	50
Other	80	31
Total	3,398	1,175

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 11: Headline offences recorded and detected in Clondalkin Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	7	3
Assault	80	36
Sexual offences	28	8
Arson	28	0
Drugs	94	94
Theft	1,059	250
Burglary	470	56
Robbery	80	22
Fraud	56	27
Other	42	14
Total	1,944	510

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 12: Headline offences recorded and detected in Tallaght Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	3	0
Assault	146	58
Sexual offences	78	25
Arson	55	3
Drugs	92	92
Theft	2,030	721
Burglary	1,211	129
Robbery	122	37
Fraud	116	47
Other	68	29
Total	3,921	1,141

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 13: Headline offences recorded and detected in Bray Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	1	0
Assault	69	24
Sexual offences	28	6
Arson	45	7
Drugs	42	42
Theft	1,045	162
Burglary	751	73
Robbery	76	32
Fraud	37	15
Other	26	14
Total	2,120	375

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 14: Headline offences recorded and detected in Terenure Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	0	0
Assault	42	25
Sexual offences	22	7
Arson	17	2
Drugs	16	16
Theft	761	145
Burglary	770	73
Robbery	49	27
Fraud	46	8
Other	13	7
Total	1,736	310

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 15: Headline offences recorded and detected in Coolock Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	3	3
Assault	94	62
Sexual offences	67	40
Arson	33	4
Drugs	134	132
Theft	1,395	441
Burglary	550	74
Robbery	67	22
Fraud	72	39
Other	62	28
Total	2,477	845

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 16: Headline offences recorded and detected in Fitzgibbon Street Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	6	4
Assault	89	52
Sexual offences	26	9
Arson	21	2
Drugs	130	130
Theft	1,206	296
Burglary	592	124
Robbery	141	53
Fraud	68	22
Other	43	30
Total	2322	722

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 17: Headline offences recorded and detected in Blackrock Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	1	1
Assault	63	33
Sexual offences	14	3
Arson	13	1
Drugs	50	50
Theft	1,118	331
Burglary	806	94
Robbery	50	30
Fraud	84	29
Other	12	9
Total	2,211	581

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Table 18: Headline offences recorded and detected in Lucan Garda district for 2005*

	Recorded	Detected
Homicide	3	2
Assault	88	32
Sexual offences	40	15
Arson	13	1
Drugs	121	121
Theft	1,261	387
Burglary	401	41
Robbery	63	20
Fraud	82	37
Other	58	26
Total	2,130	682

*Figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

Schools Building Projects.

203. **Mr. Kelleher** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she is satisfied herself with the answer to Question No. 511 of 7 February 2006 in view of the information (details supplied) now furnished to her Department. [8285/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An official from my Department has been in contact with the management of the school in question to discuss how best to address its most urgent needs in a timely manner. I expect that agreement will be reached shortly on how best to progress the works in question.

State Examinations.

204. **Mr. Eoin Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children who sat their leaving certificate in Dublin in 2005; and the number of children who sat their leaving certificate in Dublin's south east inner city and in the Pembroke-Rathmines area in 2005. [8290/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations subject to policy matters being determined by my Department. While, the State Examinations Commission holds details of the centres in which candidates sat examinations. Disclosure of a detailed breakdown of numbers of students by areas-centres would lead to the compilation of league tables. Section 53 of the Education Act enables the refusal of access to data which would enable league tables on the comparative performance of students or schools to be determined. I am on record as opposing the publication of such tables as they provide an unbalanced and grossly limited indication of a school's performance.

My Department publishes reports on school retention in second level schools. The most recent report, published in September 2005, gives details of the cohort of students who entered the first year of second level in 1996 and shows the proportion who remained in school and sat the leaving certificate examination in 2001 and 2002. It can be accessed at www.education.ie. Table 4.2 of the report shows the retention rates for each county and gives separate information for Dublin City, Dublin South, Dublin Fingal and Dún Laoghaire.

School Staffing.

205. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if schools (details supplied) in County Kerry will be allowed to appoint a French teacher; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8315/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The modern languages initiative in primary schools supports the teaching of Italian, Spanish, German and French in almost 400 schools nationwide. The number of schools partaking in the initiative is limited and a waiting list system is now in place. Schools which opt out of the Initiative are replaced with schools from the waiting list. The applications of the schools referred to by the Deputy have been approved in principle by the initiative's consultative group and the schools have been placed on a waiting list for inclusion on the Initiative.

Special Educational Needs.

206. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the special educational measures that have been put in place and will be put in place for the 100 children with autism who have lost their home tuition grants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8325/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department considers that school-based education provision is the most appropriate intervention for all children, including those with special educational needs. In this regard, home tuition is only intended as an interim measure until a suitable school placement is secured.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department referred the cases of school going pupils who were in receipt of home tuition grant to the local special educational needs organisers with a view to ensuring that an appropriate educational response is available in the pupils' school. My officials are considering the outcome of this exercise and it is intended that contact will be made with the parents-guardians of all the pupils in question as well as the relevant schools as quickly as possible.

School Staffing.

207. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will support the application of a school (details supplied) for a technology teacher; and if the maximum support will be given to the school on this priority issue. [8381/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Teacher allocations for second level schools are approved by my Department on an annual basis in accordance with generally applied rules based on recognised pupil enrolments on 30 September of the preceding school year.

Each school management authority is required to organise its curriculum, teaching time-table and subject options having regard to pupils' needs within the limits of its approved teacher allocation.

The rules for allocating teaching posts provide that where a school management authority is

unable to meet essential curricular commitments, my Department will consider applications for additional short term support. The closing date for such applications for the 2006-07 school year is 3 March 2006. To date my Department has not received an application from the school in question for curricular concessions for the 2006-07 school year.

Special Savings Incentive Accounts.

208. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if income and gains from SSIA investments will be included in means testing for student support grants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8386/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I would refer the Deputy to my previous replies to questions on this matter, reference nos. 16760/03, 25116/03, 25167/03, 2713/05, 25279/05 and 26267/05.

For the purposes of determining grant eligibility under my Department's maintenance grants schemes, all investments must be declared, including deposit accounts, savings certificates, life assurance bonds and other financial instruments where the interest-profit is accumulated and paid out as a lump sum at the end of the investment period.

The amount of income to be included in respect of special savings incentive accounts, SSIA's, is the Government grant earned on the savings in the relevant tax year plus in the case of savings accounts, the gross interest earned in the relevant tax year, and in the case of investment accounts, the investment profit earned in the relevant tax year. Investment losses sustained in the relevant tax year are deductible.

Where income is paid out annually, as happens with a bank deposit account, the amount so paid is required to be included in reckonable income. Where income is not paid out annually but is "rolled-up" and paid out with the original investment at the end of a defined term, the annual amount required to be included in reckonable income is the "rolled-up" income divided by the number of years in the term of the investment. This procedure has been in place for the past ten years.

Given its similarity with "roll-up" savings products it was deemed appropriate to include, as reckonable income, income from SSIA's on an annual basis. The treatment of the SSIA's in this regard is consistent with the treatment of similar financial products such as Post Office savings certificates.

Higher Education Grants.

209. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the fact that 21% of Donegal third level students attend institutions in Northern Ireland

and the UK; if, in view of the fact that college fees have been so drastically increased in the North and UK in recent months a scheme is being planned to facilitate Irish students who have to attend colleges there; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8387/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Under my Department's free fees initiative the Exchequer meets the tuition fees of eligible students who are attending approved third-level courses in the State. There are no plans to extend this initiative to cover third level institutions in Northern Ireland or the UK.

Under my Department's higher education grant schemes, maintenance grants are available to eligible students pursuing approved undergraduate courses in other EU member states, including Northern Ireland and the UK. In general, approved courses are those pursued in a third level institution, which is maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from public funds. However the payment of undergraduate tuition fees under these schemes does not extend to approved courses outside the State and there are no plans to change this position at present.

Section 473A Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 also provides for tax relief on tuition fees, at the standard rate of tax in respect of approved courses at approved colleges of higher education including certain approved undergraduate and postgraduate courses in EU and non-EU member states.

Schools Building Projects.

210. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the proposed extension-refurbishment of a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8388/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that, in August 2005, my Department gave devolved authority to County Donegal Vocational Educational Committee for the project in question to proceed to tender and construction.

211. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding a new post-primary school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8389/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the delivery of the new post-primary building project for the school in question through the architectural planning process has been devolved to the vocational education committee. Consequently, the committee will take full responsibility for the progression of this project through architectural planning to the appropriate stan-

dards in terms of quality, sustainability, educational requirements and durability using the guidelines as outlined in my Department's design team procedures.

School Accommodation.

212. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the provision of additional accommodation to a school (details supplied) in County Donegal. [8390/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An application for capital funding towards the provision of an extension has been received from the school referred to by the Deputy.

The project is being considered in the context of the schools building and modernisation programme, 2006 to 2010. The Deputy will be aware that I have made a number of announcements already this year regarding the 2006 schools building programme and will be making further announcements in this regard over the course of the year.

Schools Buildings Projects.

213. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding extension-refurbishment and development of an educational facility (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8391/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I recently announced the provision of a €900 million multi-annual capital programme for the period 2006 to 2010 for the third level sector. Funding for the educational facility referred to by the Deputy is included in this announcement.

Officials from my Department have been in contact with the education facility concerned and are exploring the options available to progress this project.

School Absenteeism.

214. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending primary schools in the Lucan area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8410/06]

215. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending primary schools in the Palmerstown area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more

[Mr. Gogarty.]

than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8411/06]

216. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending primary schools in the Brittas area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8412/06]

217. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending primary schools in the Newcastle area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8413/06]

218. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending primary schools in the Saggart area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8414/06]

219. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending primary schools in the Rathcoole area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8415/06]

220. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending primary schools in the Clondalkin area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8416/06]

221. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending second level schools in the Lucan area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8417/06]

222. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending second level schools in the Palmerstown area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8418/06]

223. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending second level schools in the Clondalkin area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8419/06]

224. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending second level schools in the Newcastle area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average. [8420/06]

225. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending second level schools in the Saggart area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8421/06]

226. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending second level schools in the Rathcoole area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national

average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8422/06]

227. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children attending second level schools in the Brittas area who were absent for more than 20 days in 2004-05; the number who were absent for more than 40 days in 2004-05; the percentage of the student population each figure represents; the way in which this compares with the national average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8423/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 214 to 227, inclusive, together.

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 established the National Educational Welfare Board, NEWB, as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance. The Act provides a comprehensive framework promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. The general function of the board is to ensure that each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education.

Up to 2004, Ireland had no national data on the levels of student attendance in our schools. This matter was addressed by the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, which requires all schools to submit a report to the NEWB on levels of school attendance. In 2004, the NEWB initiated the collection and analysis of the first set of school attendance data relating to the school year 2003-04. Based on the analysis of data for the 2003-04 report, the findings indicated that non-attendance is a national issue and not just confined to areas of disadvantage. At primary level, the average number of days missed is 11 out of 183. At post-primary level, the average absence is 15 days out of 167. The findings indicated that absenteeism is higher in more disadvantaged areas. In the RAPID city areas, the average absence is 20 days. One in four post-primary students misses 20 days or more. Beyond RAPID areas, the average absence at post-primary level is 14 days and almost one in five misses 20 days or more. In RAPID city areas, the average absence at primary level is 17 days, while almost one in four pupils misses 20 days or more. In other areas, the average absence is ten days and one in ten misses 20 days or more.

The average attendance in the most disadvantaged post-primary schools is 86.1%, or 23 days absence, and the average attendance in the least disadvantaged schools is 94.6%, or nine days absence, implying a difference of 8.5%. This difference is also evident in respect of the number of children who miss 20 days or more, that is, 38% of students in the most disadvantaged schools and 8.5% in the least disadvantaged areas, a difference of 29.9%.

The Government has put in place a variety of measures to deal with the traditionally high levels of absence from school of children from disadvantaged areas. We set up the NEWB to monitor school attendance, help parents to get a school place for their child and run promotional campaigns on the importance of regular attendance. Working with parents to promote school attendance is also an important part of the work of the home-school-community liaison co-ordinators appointed to schools serving disadvantaged communities. Through the school completion programme, we are providing increased resources for schools in disadvantaged areas to improve attendance and school completion rates by offering extra supports for their students. These include extra educational supports and services such as breakfast clubs.

In May 2005, my Department launched the DEIS initiative, a new programme for educational inclusion, under which even greater funding will be given to schools serving the most disadvantaged communities to help young people to do better at school. The process of identifying which schools will benefit from the new programme is now complete and those schools which will be receiving support under DEIS have now been contacted and invited to participate in the initiative.

With regard to the issue raised by the Deputy pertaining to the level of absenteeism in particular areas, my Department has requested the NEWB to respond directly to him on this matter.

Education Welfare Service.

228. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of education welfare officers currently employed to cover areas (details supplied) incorporating the Dublin mid west constituency. [8424/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Mr. B. Lenihan): The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 established the National Educational Welfare Board as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance. The Act provides a comprehensive framework promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. The general functions of the board are to ensure that each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education. To discharge its responsibilities, the board is developing a nationwide service that is accessible to schools, parents, guardians and others concerned with the welfare of young people. For this purpose, educational welfare officers have been appointed and deployed throughout the country to provide a welfare-focused service to support regular school attendance and discharge the board's functions locally.

The service is developing on a continuing basis. The total authorised staffing complement of the

[Mr. B. Lenihan.]

board is 94 comprising 16 HQ and support staff, five regional managers, 12 senior educational welfare officers and 61 educational welfare officers. Towns which have an educational welfare officer allocated to them include Dundalk, Drogheda, Navan, Athlone, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Bray, Clonmel, Tralee, Ennis, Sligo, Naas, Castlebar, Longford, Tuam, Tullamore, Letterkenny and Portlaoise. In addition, the board will follow up on urgent cases nationally where children are not currently receiving an education. Since September 2005, every county in Ireland is served by an educational welfare service. In addition to the NEWB staff there are around 490 staff in education disadvantage programmes whose work involves a school attendance element. My Department is anxious to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from these substantial personnel resources. Consequently, work is ongoing to develop appropriate protocols for integrated working between the different services involved.

Regarding the Deputy's question on the number of education welfare officers who are currently working in the Brittas, Clondalkin, Lucan, Newcastle, Palmerstown, Rathcoole and Saggart areas, the National Educational Welfare Board has been requested to respond directly to the Deputy on the matter.

229. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of education welfare officers currently rolled out nationwide. [8425/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Mr. B. Lenihan): The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 established the National Educational Welfare Board as the single national body with responsibility for school attendance. The Act provides a comprehensive framework promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. The general functions of the board are to ensure that each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education. The service is developing on a continuing basis. The total authorised staffing complement is currently 94, comprising 16 HQ and support staff, five regional managers, 12 senior educational welfare officers and 61 educational welfare officers.

In deploying its service staff, the National Educational Welfare Board has prioritised the provision of services to the most disadvantaged areas and most at-risk groups. Five regional teams are in place with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford and staff have been deployed in areas of greatest disadvantage and in areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme. Towns which have an educational welfare officer allocated to them include

Dundalk, Drogheda, Navan, Athlone, Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Bray, Clonmel, Tralee, Ennis, Sligo, Naas, Castlebar, Longford, Tuam, Tullamore, Letterkenny and Portlaoise. In addition to the staff of the NEWB, there are around 490 staff in educational inclusion programmes whose work involves a school attendance element. My Department is anxious to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from these substantial personnel resources. Consequently, work is ongoing to develop appropriate protocols for integrated working between the different services involved.

School Transport.

230. **Mr. Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to run a school bus service for the children of Claregalway and Carnmore to a school (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8434/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): Under the terms of my Department's post-primary school transport scheme, a pupil is eligible for transport if he or she resides 4.8 kilometres or more from the centre serving the catchment area in which he or she lives. The scheme is not designed to facilitate parents who choose to send their children to a post-primary centre outside of the catchment area in which they reside. However, children who are fully eligible for transport to the post-primary centre in the catchment area in which they reside may apply for transport on a concessionary basis to a post-primary centre outside of their own catchment area, which is otherwise known as catchment boundary transport. Children will have to make their way to the nearest pick up point within that catchment area. These children can only be facilitated if spare seats are available on the bus after all other eligible children travelling to the post-primary centre in the catchment area in which they reside have been catered for. As the pupils referred to by the Deputy reside outside the catchment area of the centre attended, they may apply for catchment boundary transport subject to the conditions outlined.

Schools Building Projects.

231. **Mr. Grealish** asked the Minister for Education and Science the situation regarding schools (details supplied); when she expects construction on these two schools to commence; the expected date for completion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8435/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The building project for the first school referred to by the Deputy is at an early stage of architectural planning. A full design team has been appointed and my Department's architects

are currently drawing up proposals as to the layout of the school. The civil and structural engineer has been instructed to carry out topographical surveys and site investigation studies. On receipt of the requested information, a full design team meeting will be organised so that the project can be progressed further.

An application for a new school building has been received from the management authority of the second school referred to by the Deputy. The application has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria which were revised following consultation with the education partners. The project, including the acquisition of a site, is being considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2005-09.

232. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the meetings which took place regarding a proposed project (details supplied) in County Mayo between her Department, Mayo Vocational Education Committee and other interested parties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8456/06]

233. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the studies or reports which were carried out for a project (details supplied) in County Mayo; the costs involved for same by her Department and Mayo Vocational Education Committee; and the person to whom the payments were made. [8457/06]

234. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the costs which were incurred by her Department and by Mayo Vocational Education Committee on a project which had been proposed in County Mayo from the first date the project was mooted to date; the moneys which have been paid to date to architects, auctioneers, land owners and so on; the moneys involved; the expenditure to date on every aspect of this matter. [8458/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 232 to 234, inclusive, together.

The VEC is an independent statutory body. Accordingly, the information requested by the Deputy regarding the VEC should be sought directly from the chief executive officer.

My Department has not participated in any meetings in recent years regarding the proposed project. The commission on school accommodation recently produced an area development plan on the overall area, which included recommendations on the proposed new school referred to by the Deputy. The cost of this report is within the remit of the commission's budget.

Capital funding of in the region of €400,000, including €247,000 for purchase of site, was expended by my Department on the proposed

new school project referred to by the Deputy. It is expected that the sale of this site at an appropriate time in the future will at least recoup moneys expended.

School Services Staff.

235. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to pay school secretaries directly from her Department rather than from the school grant scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8483/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department provides funding towards the cost of secretarial services in primary and secondary schools under two separate schemes. One is the 1978 scheme under which my Department meets the full cost of salary. These secretaries are paid directly through my Department's payroll. The 1978 scheme is being phased out as posts become vacant and no new posts are being created.

The 1978 scheme has been superseded by a more extensive school support grant scheme towards the funding of ancillary services in schools, including secretarial services. The scheme is flexible in nature, giving boards of management and schools discretion as to the manner in which secretarial services are provided. There are no plans to pay the school secretaries funded under this scheme directly through my Department's payroll.

Ministerial Appointments.

236. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason for the long delay in appointing a chairperson for the Grangegorman Development Agency. [8515/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I am, at present, giving active consideration to the appointment of the chairman and membership of the Grangegorman Development Agency and expect to be in a position to make an announcement shortly. As the Deputy will be aware, a sum of €1 million is included in my Department's 2006 Estimates to facilitate the establishment and operation of the agency.

Special Educational Needs.

237. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding a school (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if funding of the ABA unit will be sanctioned as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8594/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department, in the first instance, is most anxious that all children, including children with autistic spectrum disorders, receive an education appropriate to their needs. In this regard,

[Ms Hanafin.]

the preferred approach to the provision of appropriate education for all children, including children with autism, is through the primary and post-primary school network, whether through placement in mainstream classes, in special classes or in special schools. My Department would also support an eclectic approach in regard to the education of children with autism where a range of teaching methods are available, for example, treatment and education of autistic and related communication handicapped children, TEACH, applied behavioural analysis, ABA, picture exchange communication system, PECS.

This Department sanctioned two pre-school special classes for children with autism to St. Catherine's special school in February 2005. The school established a third pre-school class without approval from my Department or the National Council for Special Education, NCSE. As indicated to the Deputy on 21 February last, it is now a matter for the school to proceed with the process of applying for sanction for further classes for children with ASD as outlined to it in my Department's letter of 8 February. When this process is complete, the NCSE, through the relevant special education needs organiser, SENO, will contact the authorities of St. Catherine's special school regarding the outcome. My Department provided further clarification on the process to St. Catherine's in a letter dated 28 February 2006.

I can confirm that I will continue to prioritise the issue of special needs education for children with autism and, in co-operation with the NCSE, ensure that all children with special needs are adequately resourced to enable them to meet their full potential.

Student Councils.

238. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether the findings and recommendations in the recent report entitled *Inequality and the Stereotyping of Young People*, (details supplied), that the working of school councils needs to be improved and that young people should be consulted more with regard to the running of the schools they attend; her plans to follow these recommendations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8598/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): The report *Inequality and the Stereotyping of Young People*, published on 22 February 2006 by the Equality Authority and the National Youth Council of Ireland, is valuable piece of research which I welcome. This report provides a valuable insight into how young people see their relationships with, *inter alia*, the Garda, teachers, politicians and the media. The research centres on ten focus groups of young people from different parts of the coun-

try, including young people with different identities and circumstances and provides an insight into young people's views on how they are perceived by adults.

The report sets out a number of recommendations which it considers would help to address or reduce these inequalities and stereotypical perceptions. These include a suggestion that recommendations for the improved working of school councils emerging out of recent research should be adopted and supported. This is consistent with my and my Department's objectives in this regard.

In 2002 my Department produced and distributed to schools guidelines on the establishment and operation of student councils. Student councils are established in the majority of post-primary schools. I believe strongly that we cannot just teach students about rights and responsibilities in the CSPE class, we also have to give them actual responsibilities in the place where they spend much of their day. I have stressed to teachers' groups the need to not only ensure that each school has a student council but also that councils are given a meaningful role in school decision-making. A working group on student councils in second level schools was established by the National Children's Office in June 2003, in co-operation with my Department, to promote the establishment of democratic student councils in second-level schools.

In order to develop a better understanding of the operation of student councils and discover the needs of students, teachers, principals and schools, the working group contracted the Children's Research Centre at Trinity College to carry out research. The aim of the research study was to describe barriers, enablers and supports to the development and operation of student councils in Ireland as perceived by key stakeholders and to situate this within the international context. The research report was formally launched by my colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for children, Deputy Brian Lenihan, on 25 April last.

The working group also designed a leaflet and poster aimed at students, promoting the establishment of student councils, which were launched by the Minister of State with responsibility for children and distributed to all second level schools in 2004. A student council website was also launched and information on establishing and running student councils is posted on this site. The website is proving to be a valuable resource to students and teachers around the country.

Foreign Conflicts.

239. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for Defence, further to his letter of 25 January 2006 arising from a parliamentary question of 3 November 2005, the sources for the assertion that

it was a Baluba custom that they bore off from the field of battle their most courageous victim; the steps he will take to reconcile the differing accounts of Trooper Browne's death; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8493/06]

240. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the reason a person (details supplied) is reported to have died twice in two different locations in the Congo in 1960; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8559/06]

241. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the reason he contends that a person (details supplied) died at Niemba despite the fact that this is disputed by the two survivors of the massacre as well as by the officer in charge of the search party that failed to find the person in November 1960; if his officials have made an attempt to contact the two Niemba survivors to ascertain their opinions; if not, the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8561/06]

242. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the reason he states that a person (details supplied) died on the battlefield in an attempt to save his comrade's life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8564/06]

243. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the reason he states that a person's body (details supplied) was removed from the scene by the ambushers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8565/06]

244. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the reason for the disparity of opinions concerning the Niemba controversy; if he will commission an independent assessment of the known facts, rather than an army inquiry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8566/06]

245. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Defence the reason the Army's version of events has been seriously challenged, not least by a new book entitled *The Irish Army in the Congo 1960-1964: The Far Battalions*; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8567/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O'Dea): I propose to take Questions Nos. 239 to 245, inclusive, together.

I undertook during Priority Questions last Thursday, 23 February 2006 to ask the military authorities to revisit the matter in light of questions raised by Deputy Finian McGrath. I have asked them to do so and to specifically deal with points raised both last Thursday and those raised in these questions. I expect that this process will be completed shortly. I will communicate further

with both Deputy Gregory and Deputy Finian McGrath as soon as possible.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

246. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the Arklow sewerage treatment plant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8289/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Arklow main drainage scheme is approved for construction in the Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 and the necessary capital funding has been allocated for the scheme in the programme. I am conscious of the urgent need for wastewater treatment facilities to be provided to service the Arklow area and, accordingly, I am anxious for the scheme to proceed as quickly as possible. However, the location of the site for the proposed wastewater treatment plant is the subject of ongoing proceedings in the High Court. Further progress will depend on the outcome of these proceedings which, I understand, are due to resume on 7 March.

Environmental Education Programmes.

247. **Mr. Eoin Ryan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of green flags which have been awarded to schools in Dublin South-East. [8291/06]

256. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of schools in Clondalkin and Lucan which have received green flags; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8516/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 247 and 256 together.

The green schools programme implements in Ireland an international environmental education programme known as eco-schools, a programme of the Foundation for Environmental Education, FEE. FEE is an organisation founded to raise awareness of environmental issues through education. In Ireland more than 2,000 schools participate in the programme which is administered by An Taisce. Inquiries regarding the number of green flags awarded to schools in the specified geographical areas may appropriately be directed to An Taisce, 5A Swift's Alley, Francis Street, Dublin, or greenschools@antaisce.org.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

248. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

[Mr. Neville.]

the position with regard to the upgrading of the sewerage scheme at Dromcollogher, County Limerick. [8298/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Dromcollogher sewerage scheme, which is being procured in conjunction with a number of other schemes in the county, is included in the Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 to advance through planning. I approved Limerick County Council's brief for the appointment of consultants to prepare a preliminary report for the grouped project in June 2005. I understand that the council will shortly submit the selected consultant's fee proposals and an economic assessment of the scheme to my Department for approval and these will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Recycling Policy.

249. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the items which are recycled here; the items which are exported for recycling and to where; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8300/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): National waste statistics for all waste streams are published at three-yearly intervals by the Environmental Protection Agency with the most recent national waste report being in respect of 2004. As outlined in successive national waste reports, we are substantially reliant on foreign-based materials recycling infrastructure, which dealt with 73.8% of recycled waste in 2004.

The export of waste is regulated by local authorities, in accordance with Council Regulation (EEC) No. 259/93 of 1 February 1993 on the supervision and control of waste within, into and out of, the European Community. In this context, it should be noted that clean segregated materials are a sought after resource which are freely traded under EU and international law. This is supported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, Decision of C(92)39 Final on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Wastes Destined for Recovery Operations which notes that the recovery of valuable materials and energy from wastes is an integral part of the international economic system and that well established markets exist for, and can contribute to, the collection and processing of such materials within OECD member countries.

The following table sets out the tonnage of non-notified waste recycled aboard and waste recycled, not including imports, in Ireland during 2004:

Materials	Waste recycled in Ireland (tonnes)	Waste recycled abroad (tonnes)
Paper / Cardboard	118,358	257,240
Glass	3,124	65,680
Plastic	8,718	47,186
Ferrous	3,757	430,232
Aluminium	3,450	15,642
Other Metals	3,849	34,929
Textiles	4,713	5,822
Wood	147,909	13,242
Others	21,751	21,273
Total	315,628	891,240

Spain and the UK are the principal destinations for recyclables exported from Ireland for subsequent reprocessing, accounting for some 82% of total exports in this area. Europe as a whole accounts for almost 92% of all recyclable waste exported from Ireland for further treatment with the remaining 8% exported for reprocessing to the Asian continent, with China being the principal recipient.

While international trade in waste is consistent with Government policy in so far as it supports improved performance in recycling, the Government also recognises the value of a more developed recycling infrastructure in Ireland. To this effect, a market development group was established by Government in 2004 with a view to identifying market opportunities for materials recovered for recycling. A market development programme will be developed by the group in 2006.

Waste Disposal.

250. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he received a request from a council (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8302/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 134 and 184 of 25 October 2005. I am considering advice recently received from the Office of the Attorney General on this matter.

Communications Masts.

251. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has reviewed the operation of the ministerial directive in respect of exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission for communication masts; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this allows masts to be erected on the flood lights of clubs and effectively bypasses efforts by local authorities to only locate

those masts in residential areas as a last resort. [8309/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Communications masts are not exempt from the requirement to obtain planning permission. The Planning and Development Regulations 2001 do, however, set out certain exemptions in this area including, subject to certain conditions, the attachment of additional antennae to an existing antenna support structure, the erection of an antenna support structure in place of an existing antenna support structure and the attachment of antennae to certain existing structures, such as telegraph poles, electricity pylons and certain public or commercial buildings. These regulations were the subject of extensive debate in the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment and Local Government, and were subsequently approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Communications, Marine and Natural Resources report on non-ionising radiation from mobile phone handsets and masts, in 2005 recommended, *inter alia*, that planning guidelines and planning exemptions be examined with a view to ensuring that no “electromagnetic emissions” or “radio frequency emissions” emitting equipment be permitted to be sited near health centres, schools or other sensitive sites such as playgrounds or pitches etc.

On receipt the joint committee’s report, the Government, in September 2005, approved the establishment of an interdepartmental advisory committee and an expert group, working to the committee, on the health effects of electromagnetic fields. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is represented on the committee. It is understood that the committee expects to report to the Government before the end of 2006 on the appropriate action to be taken on foot of the recommendations contained in the report. In the interim period it is not proposed to amend the planning regulations.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

252. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the directive he has issued regarding the upgrading of the Enniscrone sewerage scheme, County Sligo; the negotiations that have taken place; when funding will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8317/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Enniscrone sewerage scheme is included in my Department’s Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 as a scheme to commence construction in 2006 at an estimated cost of €2.04 million.

Sligo County Council’s tender documents for the Enniscrone sewerage scheme are under examination in my Department and are being dealt

with as quickly as possible. Once the tender documents have been approved, the council will be able to invite tenders for the scheme.

Private Rented Accommodation.

253. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the regulations applying to the award of rent supplement to people in need of housing; if those regulations include actions which the Health Service Executive and local authorities may take where an allegation is submitted that a recipient may be engaged in serious anti-social behaviour; and his views on the introduction of amending legislation if there is no such provision. [8484/06]

254. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the system of providing private rented accommodation through rent supplement will be brought within the housing function of the local authorities under the Housing Acts so that the public provision and proper estate management of housing accommodation will be regulated under the Housing Acts. [8485/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 253 and 254 together.

Section 16 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1997 amends the Social Welfare Acts to enable the Health Service Executive to refuse or withdraw rent or mortgage interest supplementation for private houses under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme in the case of persons evicted, excluded or removed from, or refused housing on grounds of anti-social behaviour or in the interests of good estate management. The executive’s discretion in this matter also applies where persons have been evicted or excluded from housing provided by a voluntary body.

Legislation to underpin the new rental accommodation scheme — under which local authorities are providing accommodation for certain recipients of SWA rent supplement who have been assessed as having a long-term housing need — will be made in a housing (miscellaneous provisions) Bill currently being prepared by my Department. The Bill will also strengthen the powers of housing authorities in dealing with anti-social behaviour. I expect to publish the Bill before the end of the year.

Departmental Correspondence.

255. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has received a copy of correspondence (details supplied); if, in the context, he will have same examined due to the situation outlined therein;

[Mr. Penrose.]

and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[8486/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The letter in question was received by my Department on 23 February 2006, and a response is being prepared.

A portion of Connaught Street, Athlone, was designated for residential, commercial and industrial tax incentives under the urban renewal scheme 1999, and I understand that major development is currently under way on that site.

With the phasing out of area-based tax incentives, as announced in budget 2006, the question of new tax-based renewal incentives does not arise at this time.

Question No. 256 answered with Question No. 247.

Waste Disposal.

257. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the assessment which was carried out by his Department regarding a company (details supplied) which has been approved as a private partner for the design, construction and operation of the proposed incinerator in Poolbeg, prior to his Department's decision to agree contractual terms with the company. [8571/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): As I have previously stated, my Department's role in the approval process for the proposed waste-to-

energy plant is limited to validating compliance with PPP procurement norms, as laid down in guidelines issued by the Department of Finance. Having reviewed the detailed proposals of Dublin City Council, and consulted the National Development Finance Agency, my Department was satisfied that the project is designed to provide value for money within the parameters of the above guidelines and certified its compliance accordingly.

My Department is not the promoter of the project and has not purported either to negotiate or to agree contractual terms with the company.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

258. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding an application for funding from Wicklow County Council for upgrading the water main and the access road along which it is laid at Devil's Glen, Ashford, County Wicklow (details supplied); if, in view of the circumstances funding can be approved as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[8578/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I understand that the pipeline works concerned were preliminary proposals being considered by Wicklow County Council in the context of the planning of the Wicklow water supply scheme, which has been approved for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007. The council has since determined that the proposed upgrade is not required and has informed the landowner accordingly.