



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

Tuesday, 16 May 2006.

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

—
Dé Máirt, 16 Bealtaine 2006.
Tuesday, 16 May 2006.
 —

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 2.30 p.m.

—
Paidir.
Prayer.
 —

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Programmes for Government.

1. **Mr. J. Higgins** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the progress to date in implementing An Agreed Programme for Government. [14275/06]

2. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on progress to date on implementing An Agreed Programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16017/06]

3. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on progress in the implementation of the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [16086/06]

4. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the implementation of An Agreed Programme for Government. [16186/06]

5. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach if he will make a statement on the implementation to date of An Agreed Programme for Government. [17141/06]

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

Progress on the implementation of the Government programme is kept constantly under review. Deputies will be aware that for every full year Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats have been in Government, we have published an annual progress report. The third annual progress report of the current Administration was published on 25 July 2005. Work has commenced on the fourth annual progress report and it is intended to publish this later this summer.

The progress reports set out the progress to date in implementing every single commitment contained within the programme for Govern-

ment. It is the responsibility of each Minister to ensure that the commitments in the programme that fall within his or her portfolio are fully implemented.

The Department of the Taoiseach derives its mandate from my role as Head of Government. As such, it is involved to some degree in virtually all aspects of the work of Government. It provides support to me as Taoiseach and to the Government through the Government secretariat and the Cabinet committee system and through its involvement in key policy areas and initiatives.

The current key strategic priorities of the Department are set out in its strategy statement. They include Northern Ireland, EU and international affairs, economic and social policy, social partnership, public service modernisation, the information society and e-Government. I and the Ministers of State in my Department answer questions in the House on these issues. In all its work, my Department works closely with other Departments and offices. Individual Ministers are answerable to the House in respect of their specific areas of responsibility.

The key areas for which my Department is responsible in terms of An Agreed Programme for Government can be broadly summarised as follows: supporting the development and implementation of social partnership, working with the British Government and the parties in Northern Ireland to achieve the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in all its aspects, co-ordinating the e-Government initiative to bring about an expansion in the range and quality of on-line Government services and ensuring that Ireland's key objectives in the European Union are carried forward in the context of my role as a member of the European Council.

Mr. J. Higgins: Does the Taoiseach accept that as he moves towards the fifth year of a second term in Government the vast bulk of An Agreed Programme for Government should have been implemented at this stage? How does he explain to the people who watched the RTE "Prime Time" special last night that a senior doctor in the British health service would compare with the Third World some of the conditions in a world-class health service the Taoiseach promised to deliver in An Agreed Programme for Government? Elderly people were slumped on chairs in accident and emergency departments—

An Ceann Comhairle: A brief general question is in order but if the Deputy has a detailed question on health, it should be submitted to the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children.

Mr. J. Higgins: The question asked if the Taoiseach would report on the progress to date in implementing An Agreed Programme for Government.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, but not to go into detail.

Mr. J. Higgins: I am anxious to establish with the Taoiseach, in view of what the people witnessed last night, what timescale he is setting for the achievement of the health section of An Agreed Programme for Government and to put to an end the disgraceful position of elderly people begging that they would not be sent to hospital—

An Ceann Comhairle: I have to rule the Deputy out of order.

Mr. J. Higgins: —which should be a place of healing but which they were afraid would kill them.

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot have an omnibus question—

Mr. J. Higgins: I recognise the tremendous dedication of health service staff—

An Ceann Comhairle: Detailed questions on any Department should be sent to a line Minister.

Mr. J. Higgins: The Taoiseach must answer when the world class health service will be delivered, which is the first sentence in the health section of An Agreed Programme for Government.

The Taoiseach: Generally, in many aspects of health we have seen enormous improvements—

Ms McManus: Enormous what?

The Taoiseach: —in cardiac surgery and the cardiovascular and maternity areas of which this country can be proud and which are second to none.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Not the maternity section in Monaghan, with respect.

The Taoiseach: I am sure Deputies would agree with that. On the issues pointed out in the “Prime Time” programme which showed the distress of patients and their families about the conditions and the waiting times in some accident and emergency departments in some acute hospitals, I understand the distress. That is why, with the Health Service Executive, we are determined to reduce the unacceptably long waiting times for patients. No stone is being left unturned to address these problems when they occur. All the necessary funding is being made available and this has been acknowledged by the Health Service Executive. The HSE has drawn the attention of management to this as never before. We will support the commitment of the doctors, nurses and staff to improve patient care continu-

ally and ensure that the accident and emergency departments of many hospitals work well. We are confident that the improvements we seek will be achieved. It is for all of us — the Government, the Department and the HSE — to work to achieve that.

Mr. Kenny: Does the Taoiseach regard as disgraceful what has occurred in recent days where hundreds of thousands of commuters have been discommoded? They cannot meet appointments, attend for interviews or attend college because of the disruption to the transport system.

An Ceann Comhairle: A general question, Deputy, please.

Mr. Kenny: Will the Government’s improvements to mainline rail services and rolling stock continue?

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

Mr. Kenny: This matter has to do with the programme for Government and obviously there are complex, well-tested mechanisms in place to deal with such issues. Because this is a wildcat strike, does the Taoiseach have a view on how it can be settled?

An Ceann Comhairle: The matter does not arise.

Mr. Kenny: It does in terms of implementing the Government’s programme.

An Ceann Comhairle: It does not arise.

Mr. Kenny: Is the Taoiseach aware there are trawlers to the value of €400 million tied up in Killybegs for the past few months because—

An Ceann Comhairle: That matter does not arise.

Mr. Kenny: It does in terms of the marine and natural resources programme.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a matter for the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources. Successive incumbents in this Chair have ruled on these matters.

Mr. Kenny: In case the Ceann Comhairle has not read Question No. 2, it asks if the Taoiseach will report on progress to date on implementing An Agreed Programme for Government, and if he will make a statement on the matter.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, it deals with general questions, but questions appropriate to the line Minister should be directed to the line Minister.

Mr. Kenny: I am simply asking the Taoiseach to report on progress on implementing the programme, which is signed by the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste.

An Ceann Comhairle: The specific issue raised is entirely one for the line Minister.

Mr. Kenny: I am not sure where the precedent exists from the Chair.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should read the Standing Orders. Such rulings date back from the foundation of the State.

Mr. Kenny: I am asking a question about An Agreed Programme for Government, which was signed by the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste. Will the Taoiseach give an update in terms of implementing the Government's programme for the development of the marine industry, in view of the fact that trawlers valued at €400 million are tied up in Killybegs for the past three months?

The Taoiseach: On the first matter, without going into detail, the Government's programme on rail transport shows that €177 million has been invested in the supply of new rail cars this year. Most of these are now coming on stream and various discussions have been taking place since 2000 to make provision for them. Those discussions were concluded last January and I understood everything was resolved, but clearly there is a small group of people who do not agree. Before the action was taken yesterday, there were scheduled meetings to take place between the official union representatives and the Department of Transport. From the point of view of the programme for Government, I hope the implementation of a large capital expenditure programme to improve public transport, with mainline rail, the national work on the safety of the lines and the work on a number of rail routes such as the Kildare route will be allowed to proceed speedily without unnecessary disruption. Such improvements are for the benefit of the customers.

Regarding marine matters, Deputy Kenny is aware of the difficulties in Killybegs. During the lifetime of this Government and the last one we invested major capital expenditure to finish work on the pier and the infrastructure in the Killybegs area. There are some difficulties with which the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources will deal, but from a Government perspective we put in much needed facilities that were sought for 20 years in terms of marine capital infrastructure. I do not know for how long the current problems will continue. Some serious matters are involved, but they are not related to the programme for Government because, to the best of my knowledge, the capital expenditure programme for Killybegs is concluded.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Can the Taoiseach confirm that the programme for Government, which came about following the general election in 2002, was agreed between the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste, Deputy Harney, and that both of you signed off on it? If that is so, can the Taoiseach confirm that the programme commits the Government to the core objective of developing, among other things, a world-class public health service? Is that one of the stated core objectives? Can he confirm that the programme commits the Government to provide 3,000 additional public health beds? That was set out in the Government's health strategy of 2001, which predated the programme for Government. Can the Taoiseach confirm that the programme states the Government "will implement" a full range of measures to provide accident and emergency services—

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is going into detail.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I am simply citing an agreement to which the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste are party.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy wants a detailed reply, he should submit a question to the appropriate Minister.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The programme states with regard to accident and emergency services—

An Ceann Comhairle: It may well do that but it is still a matter for the line Minister.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: —that this will be done by significantly reducing waiting times and having senior doctors available at all times. Does the Taoiseach agree that is stated in the programme?

If the Taoiseach accepts all that, and the evidence strongly supports the questions I am asking, can he explain why the Tánaiste, who is the co-signatory to this agreement, speaks and acts—

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should submit a question to the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: —as if it was only in recent weeks that she became aware of these important elements in addressing the problems within the health services?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy must obey the ruling of the Chair like everybody else.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Of course, a Cheann Comhairle, I always do. Is the Taoiseach aware that my constituency, which I share with the

[Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin.]

Ceann Comhairle, now has no intensive care beds?

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, but I must ask the Deputy to resume his seat.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: You are not as sorry as the people I represent.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy must obey the rules of the House like everybody else.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The Taoiseach must answer the questions we put.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Chair has told the Deputy that these questions should be submitted to the line Minister.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: We are discussing the programme for Government and——

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, Deputy, but the Chair has ruled, as have several incumbents of the Chair in the past, that questions for line Ministers should be submitted to line Ministers. Deputy Joe Higgins and Deputy Kenny have accepted that and you must also accept it.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: With respect, I do not accept that they have accepted it——

An Ceann Comhairle: There cannot be a special Standing Order for the Deputy.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——because nowhere does it state that the question must be in broad, brush-stroke terms. This is the programme for Government, including its details——

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, and the details are a matter for the line Minister.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: ——and the Taoiseach is one of those who negotiated and signed it.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy must resume his seat. The Taoiseach will answer his first two questions.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On the implementation of the programme for Government, how is the Cabinet currently addressing the issues I have raised, which were committed to in the programme for Government? What role does the Cabinet health committee have, if any?

The Taoiseach: Obviously, the commitments have been laid down so I need not refer back to them. The Cabinet committee on health operates with the relevant Ministers, the HSE and the Department of Health and Children, reviewing current issues such as accident and emergency services, the capital programme, negotiations

with doctors, nurses and general practitioners, out-of-hours services and so forth. That is how the system works.

With regard to our commitments, we are providing our health service with resources. We are working for a better service across the board. There are large numbers of additional staff. Most of the resources have gone towards providing the additional staff required to provide an improved service. There are an additional approximately 7,000 nurses, several hundred extra consultants and a large number of paramedical staff in the health service. The capital programme each year is approximately €500 million. All this is improving the service.

Total health expenditure has increased. Ireland has the fastest rate of growth among OECD countries in spending *per capita* on health. There are approximately 32,000 extra staff in the health service. There are more than 2,000 medical staff and 7,000 other professionals. There are various initiatives with regard to public and private beds and day care beds. There has been an enormous increase in the number of day care cases, up to approximately 500,000, which is a much better utilisation of the acute hospitals than the old system. Some 1,000 new beds have been put into the system. This year, we have a large capital programme——

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: We need 3,000 beds.

The Taoiseach: That is argued by the medical professionals. We will see what figure they will come up with in their review.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It is what the Taoiseach admitted.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to continue.

The Taoiseach: The medical card system has been extended. We have worked to get the out-of-hours doctor system resolved. We have used the National Treatment Purchase Fund to lower acute waiting lists. The waiting lists are lower than they have ever been, as seen in recently published figures. A programme of more than €900 million has been provided to improve services for people with disabilities.

I referred previously to the work done in the one area that continues to create many difficulties in 13 to 15 acute hospitals. Several initiatives are being taken simultaneously to get on top of that problem.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: Do we still have a national emergency?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should allow the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: It will have to remain until we get on top of the situation in those hospitals.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: There is still a national emergency.

The Taoiseach: It is accepted that a range of issues must be dealt with and interaction must take place between a large number of different groups to resolve this problem. I appreciate the commitment from the various medical and nursing professions to work to resolve this problem.

Mr. Sargent: Has the Taoiseach ensured there are no typographical errors in the programme for Government? When one reads the line “a world class health system”, one wonders whether the word “third” should be before “world”. Is that what the Government meant to say, given the evidence? Last night’s television programme was more clear evidence of the problems in the health service.

I must take my hat off to the Taoiseach. In the late 1980s, the then Fianna Fáil Government cut bed numbers from 18,000 to 12,000. The Taoiseach now makes a virtue of trying to put back in some beds. That takes the biscuit.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is there a question?

Mr. Sargent: Will the programme for Government deliver any of the measures to which it is committed? Given time is so short, is any mechanism in place to ensure action from the programme for Government is based on meeting the areas of greatest need? Is a mechanism in place to prioritise commitments made? Alternatively is it just a matter of business as usual and ensuring every issue gets the same attention?

Energy resources have become a key issue. People now pay more for fuel than in 2002 when the Government took office, yet the Government has taken no action to respond to it sufficiently. Farmers continue to have the legs cut from under them owing to mislabelling. The programme for Government contains a commitment for the introduction of a distinctive green label for Irish food produce. Will this ever happen? Teagasc claims only 10,000 people will be employed in agriculture by 2025, yet the Government has not put in place the review of small rural enterprises. Will it be delivered? Agencies identify the problem areas. They scream out for action but do not get it. Is there any mechanism for prioritising the raft of measures in the programme for Government? Although all will not be met, will the urgent ones be addressed?

The Taoiseach: Priority has been given to providing resources for the health service. The lion’s share of the increasing annual budget is given to health services. Resources have been given for additional staff, which last year increased again.

Mr. Sargent: What about progress?

The Taoiseach: There has been progress in every area in the health service.

Mr. Sargent: Did the Taoiseach see last night’s television programme?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should allow the Taoiseach to continue.

The Taoiseach: There are problems in some areas. I have pointed out many times on Leaders’ Questions that 3 million people a year use inpatient and outpatient facilities. The operations performed in Ireland are probably as sophisticated as in any other country. To state that it is Third World is totally——

Mr. Sargent: I did not do so. This was stated by doctors.

The Taoiseach: An English doctor would be best advised to look after his own medical services as the British have experienced and continue to experience many problems.

Mr. O’Dea: Indeed.

The Taoiseach: I do not need such advice. While I will take advice from the Deputy, I will not take advice from such a doctor.

Some 3 million people use the service and the in-patient services in our hospitals work effectively. Problems exist in approximately 13 of the 53 acute hospitals and we must try to get on top of them. However, there is greater understanding as to how we must do so. There must be more home care and palliative care packages, as well as more people working in the community to prevent the necessity for patients to go to hospital in the first place.

In addition, we must try to provide better services for the elderly and for those who cannot return home on completion of their acute treatment. While there are pressures involved in trying to do so, we are working on them and are putting major efforts into this issue. Many people in the accident and emergency task force are working to do that. This matter is complex, not easy. I have attended meetings in this regard and it is a difficult issue. If the problem were simply a matter of resources, this would be an easy matter to resolve.

Every week, there are approximately 50 new cases in acute hospitals of patients who could leave but cannot go home owing to various circumstances. While such people may not have a medical condition, they might have difficulties in managing on their own or whatever or may be too elderly. We must provide step-down facilities for such people.

Mr. Neville: It is a lack of beds.

The Taoiseach: Perhaps a different type of bed is needed. I have accepted that before. This is why we must try to take up more beds. There have been many initiatives which have worked very well in many hospitals. For example,

[The Taoiseach.]

Kilkenny, Waterford, Limerick and other hospitals have a superb record of dealing with such issues.

As for out of hours general practitioner services, I hope the discussions, which are now making good progress, will facilitate them in the regions. In particular, I refer to the northern part of west Dublin, where an out of hours GP service for 500,000 people will be opened up. The negotiations aimed to achieve this goal by the end of last week. Hence, these are important issues.

As for all the issues raised by the Deputy in respect of energy, the Minister has already stated that he will issue a paper dealing with all of them. I am unsure of the date.

We have a very good system here in respect of food labelling and traceability. While I am not familiar with the status of all commitments, our traceability is good and food product standards are very high. They match European and international food standards. This is why—

Mr. Sargent: What about the mislabelling?

The Taoiseach: This is why we have an enormous export market in the food ingredients sector.

Mr. Sargent: It is very important.

The Taoiseach: I accept that. Many people are employed in that sector. It is of a high standard and quality and the food industry and the Department intend to maintain such high standards.

Mr. Rabbitte: Has An Agreed Programme for Government been renegotiated at any stage since it was promulgated? Can the Taoiseach be satisfied with the progress of implementation of the programme for Government given the spectacle on view last night in an excellent “Prime Time Investigates” television programme? Is he satisfied to be the Head of a Government which has stood idly by for nine years while the degradation and humiliation of older citizens, who have paid taxes all their lives, was presented in such circumstances as were on view last night?

A core commitment in An Agreed Programme for Government states clearly that: “We will expand public hospital beds in line with a programme to increase ... capacity by 3,000 during the period of the Strategy”. Has that commitment been renegotiated? Is that no longer part of An Agreed Programme for Government? Is that no longer Government policy? Has the commitment to put 3,000 beds back into the system been dropped? Is it not true that the only conclusion one can draw from last night’s “Prime Time Investigates” programme and the following programme is that we are now talking in a purely managerial context and that any reforms introduced will be purely concerned with manage-

ment, deployment of resources and operation of the process?

An Ceann Comhairle: That question is a matter for the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children.

Mr. Rabbitte: I am trying to establish whether the agreed programme we thought we had is still valid.

The Taoiseach: The agreed programme has not been renegotiated. It is still the programme to which the Government is working. Every year, we produce a report on the updated position and Ministers answer questions every day. The individual cases reported in last night’s “Prime Time Investigates” programme on the accident and emergency services were very distressing for the individuals concerned, their families and the public. I understand we have provided approximately 1,000 additional public beds.

Mr. Sargent: 500.

The Taoiseach: A considerable number of beds are being brought into operation in a number of hospitals under the capital programme and this year’s capital programme continues this work. We have introduced step-down beds and beds for the elderly hired from the private sector.

Ms McManus: The Government has reduced the numbers.

The Taoiseach: An initiative by the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children takes private beds out of public hospitals to designate them as private hospital beds. There is a debate within the HSE, which is the reason it is carrying out this re-examination. Senior figures in the HSE and the Department of Health and Children would argue that it relates more to the operation and use of acute beds and ensuring that discharge and admission policies are improved because 500,000 day care cases arise every year. When the last bed capacity review was carried out, the number of day care cases was very small.

I do not know how many acute beds are needed and I will not be drawn into guessing. I accept that our procedures and processes for admissions and discharges, where discharges sometimes do not take place for several days, are light years behind those of other countries. Resources could be better utilised. I do not know how many additional beds could result from better admissions and discharges procedures. In last night’s programme, the HSE argued that the amount of lost capacity is approximately 150,000 bed days per year. The HSE will carry out this study but in the meantime, the Government will continue with its sizeable capital programme for health. More than €508 million will be provided in capital funding this year. We will continue our work in respect of the step-down beds that we

have negotiated with the private hospital sector, the work carried out with the diagnostic services and private hospitals and the national treatment purchase fund.

A considerable degree of State funding will go towards procuring beds in all of these areas. The question of what is the cheapest way to carry out measures if all these beds were brought into operation is academic because the most important matter is to procure these beds. We will need more beds for elderly people because it has been predicted that this country will have 1 million people over 65 within the next 30 years. This is not the position at the moment. The HSE calculates that we probably do not need any more acute beds but an analysis of this issue is being carried out. I have doubts about this argument but I am not the expert charged with carrying out this statistical analysis. Others are carrying out this analysis and the figures will be produced soon.

Mr. Rabbitte: Is the Taoiseach not the head of Government? After five years in Government, did he not decide with great fanfare that 3,000 additional beds would be put into the system? Was this not the cornerstone of the health programme? He now states he is not an expert and does not know the answers and that people are carrying out studies. The previous Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Martin, carried out 113 consultancy studies and there is now another study taking place.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should ask a question.

Mr. Rabbitte: Were the scenes of acute distress that we saw on television last night and the statement by a senior citizen that he would rather die than go back into——

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a matter for the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children.

Mr. Rabbitte: It is a general question.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a direct question to the line Minister.

Mr. Rabbitte: I am merely illustrating the accident and emergency department situation via the experience of the man who said he would rather die than return to it.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is allowed a brief question. It is not necessary to make statements.

Mr. Rabbitte: Is it not the case that there is no point in confusing day care patients with people who present at accident and emergency units?

An Ceann Comhairle: That is a matter for the Minister for Health and Children, not questions to the Taoiseach.

Ms McManus: It is in the programme.

Mr. Sargent: The Minister for Funerals.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It seems the matter has nothing to do with the Minister at all.

An Ceann Comhairle: I have allowed the Deputy to ask a general question, with which I have no difficulty, but detailed questions must go directly to the line Minister.

Mr. Rabbitte: Yes. The question all Deputies sought to ask today is whether the core commitment to provide additional bed capacity is still Government policy. To anyone listening to the Tánaiste last night and various public statements on behalf of the HSE, it would seem perfectly clear that it is no longer Government policy to provide those beds. While there was a commitment to provide community care or step-down beds, it has not been done commensurate to demand. It remains a commitment only.

In the broadest terms, is the Government still in charge of health service policy or has it been ceded to an agency that has diagnosed the problems as being purely managerial? The programme announced with such fanfare by the then Minister, Deputy Martin, and the Ballymascanlon House Hotel brouhaha in advance of it——

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to answer the question.

Mr. Rabbitte: Did it mean anything? Was promising 3,000 additional beds a con on the Irish people? Nine years later——

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is becoming repetitive. He should allow the Taoiseach to answer his question.

Mr. Rabbitte: If anything is repetitive, it is the failure year after year to correct the accident and emergency situation.

An Ceann Comhairle: These are questions to the Taoiseach. The Deputy has other ways to raise the matter and will have more time to be repetitive if he wishes.

Mr. Rabbitte: The failure of the Government to deal with the accident and emergency situation is repetitive.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is being disorderly.

Mr. Rabbitte: I am trying to establish whether there is a commitment to honouring the pledge

[Mr. Rabbitte.]

of 3,000 more beds in the system given to the Irish people.

An Ceann Comhairle: That is approximately the tenth time the Deputy has repeated his question.

The Taoiseach: I would like to believe that if we had every one of the beds today, it would sort out all of the problems in accident and emergency units, but that is not so and Deputy Rabbitte would not believe that either. The Government has provided and built new high-cost acute beds and will continue to do so in the capital programme for this year in respect of a number of new units.

I was making a point on day care beds. I am not confusing the issue with accident and emergency units. When one has more day care cases, with which our medical profession is doing well — we have 500,000 day cases whereas we used to have 10,000 or fewer not that many years ago — it takes away the need to have as many acute beds. We have provided——

Ms McManus: It does not.

The Taoiseach: If the Deputy knows more than the doctors, that is fair enough, but this is what they say.

Ms McManus: I know what is and is not the truth.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to answer the question, please.

The Taoiseach: The truth is we have 500,000 day care cases.

Ms McManus: It does not mean we do not need more beds.

The Taoiseach: Those people do not need to hold acute beds on a weekly basis. That is the argument. The HSE argues that we need to get a far better utilisation of our current number of beds. This is one issue. We need more step-down beds for the elderly and for people who have finished their acute care and are required to be discharged to a suitable setting. We do not have enough of those beds and that is why——

Ms McManus: The Government closed them down.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to allow the Taoiseach to continue.

Ms McManus: We have fewer now.

The Taoiseach: I am dealing with the problems of the past few years, I am not talking about what happened in previous years.

Ms McManus: I am talking about the time since 1997.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to resume her seat and allow the Taoiseach to continue without interruption.

Ms McManus: Let him tell the truth. He has closed down community beds since 1997.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's leader was afforded the courtesy of being heard without interruption.

Ms McManus: He is more courteous than I am.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach the same courtesy.

The Taoiseach: Those step-down beds are crucial and we have hired them from the private sector because they are not available in the public system. Last year the Tánaiste announced that 1,000 beds in acute hospitals that are designated private will be redesignated as public beds to improve the flow of public patients in our hospitals.

These are just some of the issues concerning beds but there is a whole range of other issues that will help the flow of patients through our accident and emergency departments, who number 1.3 million every year, or 3,300 per day, and ensure they have better services. A small proportion of patients, although it is still too many, wait for long periods for a bed. The idea is that nobody will wait, initially, for over 24 hours in accident and emergency units or over six hours once it has been declared that he or she should be admitted. That is the policy set down by the HSE and the requirement is to get on top of the problem. In the meantime, to give more dignity to patients, we provided additional resources last year and again this year to provide reception wards for people who will be admitted but for whom a bed is not immediately available, to improve the services for them.

These are good initiatives. We require the co-operation of everyone in the health service to improve matters. I welcome comments made in recent days and weeks at various health conferences about people working together to do that. It is not a question of resources. The Government has shown, by increasing resources by over €1 billion per year, that it is prepared to invest in health and will continue to do so.

Let us remember that there are 53 acute hospitals in this country, 35 of which are involved with accident and emergency services in a major way and 13 of which are experiencing difficulties. We must work to overcome those difficulties but that should not take away from the extraordinary work, of a world-class nature, that is being done in our hospitals on a daily basis by the skilled people who are employed in our health services. I

accept there is an accident and emergency service problem. We must do our utmost to resolve it as quickly as possible and with the resources, staff and policies, we can do that.

Mr. Naughten: One of the key objectives in the programme for Government is ensuring balanced regional development. In light of the fact that there is not 50% of greenfield foreign direct investment in the BMW region, there are serious energy and infrastructural deficits in the west, the tourism sector is on its knees and decentralisation is being abandoned by Government, what is the Government doing to ensure that its target is met and that we reduce, rather than widen, the gap between the east and west coasts?

The Taoiseach: Deputy Naughten will acknowledge that the Government was right to fight for balanced regional development. He will recall it was not a popular issue when I fought for the division of the country into two regions to obtain greater resources for the Border, midland and western regions.

Mr. Naughten: There was a lot of support for that from this side of the House.

The Taoiseach: There is now, but there was not at that time. Deputy Naughten will be glad that those regions have done better than the eastern and southern regions, according to all analyses, in terms of employment, investment and other areas. Hopefully, in the period of the next national development plan, we can maintain those improvements by giving positive incentives through grant aid and greater expenditure on infrastructure. There are difficulties, as the Deputy said, with energy but we will try to address all the infrastructural issues, including rail, road and local airports to achieve balanced regional development. Decentralisation will also improve matters in many of the regions. The Government will continue to implement these proposals even if, as I said the other day, we will be a bit slower in achieving it.

Priority Questions.

Comhairle na Tuaithe.

63. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he is satisfied with the progress made to date by Comhairle na Tuaithe in developing a national countryside recreation strategy; his views on the need to develop such a strategy; when this task will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18385/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I appreciate the work carried out by Comhairle na Tuaithe over recent

years. I established Comhairle na Tuaithe in 2004 to address the three issues of access to the countryside, developing a countryside code and developing a national countryside recreation strategy. This decision followed consideration by the rural agri-tourism advisory group of a report presented by the consultation group on access to waymarked ways. The establishment of a countryside council was the key recommendation of the report.

Comhairle na Tuaithe comprises representatives of the farming organisations, recreational users of the countryside and State bodies with an interest in the countryside. Comhairle na Tuaithe's established separate working groups, which report at regular intervals to the full comhairle, to address the three specific areas of its mandate.

In its work to date, Comhairle na Tuaithe has identified and agreed a set of access parameters to the countryside, which it believes will serve as a basis for conflict prevention and which integrates a variety of needs and responsibilities. Comhairle na Tuaithe has also agreed the key features necessary for countryside code development, with a focus on the potential application of the internationally recognised leave no trace initiative. Leave no trace is an outdoor ethics programme, which explains to visitors their role in caring for the countryside, others and themselves while visiting the countryside, forest or other areas of outdoor recreation.

Details of the access parameters and the countryside code are available in a booklet which I launched last September and are on my Department's website at www.pobal.ie. Comhairle na Tuaithe works in partnership with stakeholder organisations to develop a national countryside recreation strategy. Its strategy working group heads up this work. All members of Comhairle na Tuaithe have been actively involved in the development of the strategy and I appreciate that they have devoted time from their busy schedules to carry out this important work.

The purpose of the countryside recreation strategy will be to define the scope and vision for countryside recreation as agreed by Comhairle na Tuaithe. It will set out the broad principles under which Comhairle na Tuaithe recommends that sustainable countryside recreation can be managed into the future.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

To ensure the development of the strategy is informed by the wishes of the many stakeholders in this area, Comhairle na Tuaithe embarked on a consultation phase before beginning work on drafting the strategy. It invited submissions from interested individuals and groups. This invitation appeared in the national and provincial newspapers at the end of October last year and, in addition, Comhairle na Tuaithe wrote to groups representing recreational interests, State agencies

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and relevant Departments seeking their views. A total of 190 submissions were received in answer to this call. The work of examining the submissions received has been completed and the drafting of a countryside recreation strategy is proceeding.

I expect Comhairle na Tuaithe's report to include a synopsis of the views received in the submissions from interested parties, Comhairle na Tuaithe's vision for countryside recreation over the coming years, a discussion on the challenges to achieving that vision and an implementation action plan. I look forward to receiving a report on a national countryside recreation strategy from Comhairle na Tuaithe over the coming weeks.

Mr. McGinley: I am sure the Minister agrees that when one considers Comhairle na Tuaithe has been established for more than two and a half years, few concrete results can be seen. As far as hill walking or walking in the country is concerned, the number of visitors to our shores who want to engage in that pleasant activity has dropped by 50% since 2000. I believe Leader published figures indicating such a drastic drop.

This will have major consequences and detrimental effects on rural areas. The Minister is responsible for rural development. One need only consider the number of bed and breakfasts and guesthouses in rural areas closing and taking down their signs because people are not coming. This is the tourism for which such establishments cater. Walkers do not usually go to five star hotels. One does not find them in Dromoland Castle or Ashford Castle. One finds them in little bed and breakfasts in picturesque areas of the country.

Will the Minister agree that something must be done? The number of angling tourists has also dropped. This has a detrimental effect on the economy of picturesque areas of rural Ireland. How do Scotland, England and Wales manage? I am told that England and Wales have seven times the number of hill walkers we have. It is not beyond the Minister's capability and that of Comhairle na Tuaithe to solve this problem. The farmers and hill walkers are reasonable people. Surely the two sides can be brought together so the tailspin we have gone into, as far as hill walkers are concerned, can be reversed. Following from this, these bed and breakfast accommodations, as well as other facilities in rural areas in the west of Ireland, can have an economic future.

Éamon Ó Cuív: I agree numbers are down, and we must ask why. The product is the same as it was in 2000. As the Deputy will know, two issues have had an influence on numbers. The first was the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, which nobody could do anything about. The way we

handled it was the best way, but there were clear disadvantages to it.

The second and more damaging issue is one which we have set out to ensure will never be repeated. This is conflict on the hills and the reporting of conflict on the hills. I have no doubt that the stories of conflict and people being challenged, which are reported extensively nationally and internationally inhibits people coming to our country. The first action carried out by Comhairle na Tuaithe was to get people around a table to get agreement on how parameters would work. I have already outlined how this was done.

The rest of the market has moved on. It became obvious when we began to examine the issue that even if those downturns had never happened, our product was not developed enough. We have looked at international best practice. When I was in New Zealand around St. Patrick's Day, we had extensive discussions regarding matters in New Zealand which were very similar to here. That country is considered to have best practice. We are also developing a countryside recreation strategy, and it is useful to be able to benchmark it with best international practice.

There has been extensive consultation, and 190 submissions were received. I hope to receive the Comhairle na Tuaithe recreation strategy in the near future. It will be a road map; it will outline the steps we must take to ensure we have top-class rural recreation facilities, not just walkways.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Minister should be brief. We have already spent seven minutes on this question.

Éamon Ó Cuív: The Deputy can be assured we have a very clear roadmap worked out, and we are working steadily towards an ultimate goal. We will succeed.

National Drugs Strategy.

64. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress made by each of the ten regional task forces to date in 2006 in the implementation of their action plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18227/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): Ten regional drugs task forces have been established in areas not covered by local drugs task forces. Thus, all parts of the country are now serviced by a drugs task force.

The overall role of the regional drugs task forces is to prepare and implement regional action plans that identify existing and emerging gaps in services relating to education and prevention, curbing supply, treatment and rehabilitation. The regional drugs task forces provide a mechanism for the co-ordination of mainstream services in the regions, while at the same time allowing communities and voluntary organisations to par-

ticipate in the planning, design and delivery of those services.

Membership of these task forces includes representatives of all the relevant agencies, such as the Health Service Executive, the Garda, the probation and welfare service, the Department of Education and Science, the local authorities, the youth service and FÁS. The task forces also include representation from voluntary agencies, community representatives and elected public representatives. Each task force has a voluntary chairperson and was assigned an interim co-ordinator. The recruitment of full-time co-ordinators is ongoing and it is expected that all ten will be in place by the middle of June. Each task force has an operational budget that facilitates the employment of a project development worker and an administrative assistant.

Progress is now being made by the task forces, all of which have prepared action plans for their regions. A sum of €5 million has been allocated to the ten task forces towards the implementation of those plans for 2006. Funding will be increased on an incremental basis over the coming years to achieve the full roll-out of the action plans, which are estimated to have a full cost in the region of €12.2 million per annum. It is expected that the rate of progress being made by the task forces will accelerate in the latter part of the year, especially in view of the employment of the full-time co-ordinators.

Mr. O'Shea: Does the Minister of State agree that progress to date with the regional drugs task forces has been far too slow? They were established in 2003, and as the Minister of State has mentioned, €5 million was allocated to them for 2006, with the full allocation being €12.2 million. Does this indicate that by the Government's estimate, less than half of the roll-out will have happened by the end of this year? In terms of the magnitude of the drugs problem and its relentless spread throughout all areas, is the figure of €12.2 million pathetic with regard to what has to be faced in areas apart from those where local drug task forces operate?

Mr. N. Ahern: No, the purpose of task forces, both regional and local, is to analyse the situation. They are not starting from square one, and are rather investigating gaps in services. Other agencies, including the HSE, for example, have always provided services. The purpose of regional drugs task forces is to analyse problems and investigate if gaps exist. They put plans forward, and these plans amounted to €12.2 million. It will take a couple of years for these to be up and running. Some are already proceeding better than others, but we allocated €5 million for this year, which should be more than enough.

Based on what has happened in Dublin, it would take two or three years to get a full plan in place. The task forces are working on this, although they were slow in the early days. At this

stage they had interim co-ordinators, some of whom were probably pushing the issue better than others. All ten full-time co-ordinators have now been selected and they will all be in place within a couple of weeks. At that stage the process will proceed more quickly. At the end of the year, the money allocated for this year will all be spent, more or less.

Mr. English: In December, perhaps.

Mr. O'Shea: I do not accept that the urgency required by this matter is being reflected in what the Minister of State is saying. The cocaine market has grown ten-fold in the past four years. Networks have been broken up by the Garda in locations such as Portlaoise, Killarney, Meath, Skerries and Maynooth. It is a very serious scenario. To speak of a plan that will be fully rolled out and operational two years hence is too lax and not focused enough on the problem out there. It is not coming to terms with it.

Mr. N. Ahern: I apologise if I have come across as too calm.

Mr. O'Shea: I would settle for calm. My problem is the Minister of State is not urgent enough.

Mr. English: The Minister of State is sleepy.

Mr. N. Ahern: Our job was to set the task forces up, which we did. They all consist of a group representing the various interests. We had to get the plans in and assessed, and then provide funding. That is all done.

Mr. English: The Minister of State is meant to drive the issue.

Mr. O'Shea: Why is the process so slow in being rolled out?

Mr. N. Ahern: It was slow initially. I am not behind the issue now, and it is for the task forces themselves to act. They have submitted the plans and we have provided funding. The driving force should now be at the regional drugs task force level. Of the €5 million provided, about €1.3 has been pulled down as of the middle of May. The process is happening, but some task forces are better than others. The Deputy's own in the south east is probably ahead of the pack. Its spend is probably nearly equal to the rest of the task forces spend altogether.

The task forces that did not have a full-time co-ordinator will only get into top gear when there is a person to drive the whole committee and claim ownership of it. The process has been slow in recent years, but it will take off from now on.

Community Development.

65. **Mr. Boyle** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if his atten-

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tion has been drawn to the real concern among community partnership networks that the current cohesion process may bring about an erosion of capacity, knowledge and expertise in social inclusion work, in view of the fact that the resource of volunteering to the boards and sub-structures is currently under threat. [18229/06]

Éamon Ó Cuív: Arising from the review process I initiated in conjunction with my colleagues, the Ministers for Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Justice, Equality and Law Reform, in January 2004, the Government agreed a series of measures designed to improve delivery of services on the ground, arrangements under which community and local development initiatives are delivered and improve cohesion and focus across various measures. As a first step towards achieving better co-ordination of service delivery, cohesion funding of the order of €3,248,600 was provided to city and county development boards, CDBs, in 2004 to encourage local and community development agencies to advance improvements in links, cohesion and sharing resources.

The core objective of the 2005-06 round is the alignment of local, community and rural development organisations to achieve full area coverage. The major advantage of this approach is that the State will be able to deliver programmes such as the local development social inclusion programme and the rural social scheme through the new unified structures because they will have all-area cover. The intention is that, from 2007, there will be one structure delivering services in any given area and fewer structures overall in the country.

The extension of the Leader or partnership model of delivery, which is already proven in a number of cases, to all rural-based local development agencies will lead to better delivery of services. These agencies, when fully integrated, will deliver both rural and local development programmes, have personnel with expertise in a wider range of fields and be better positioned to formulate effective co-ordinated local and community development strategies.

The Government is fully committed to supporting participation in volunteering and recognises the valuable contribution made by volunteers on the boards of local, community and rural development agencies. Of the €4,836,927 awarded in respect of cohesion initiatives during 2005, some €1,463,400 was allocated to promote participation in volunteering at local level. A further €760,600 has been awarded for volunteering measures from the Cohesion Fund since the beginning of the year.

The procedures for the establishment of the boards of the new bodies will be addressed in the context of the cohesion process, with particular reference to ensuring that genuine community representation is achieved. It is in this context

that I see the participation of volunteers best safeguarded, in a way that recognises and respects their contribution.

Mr. Boyle: Absent from the Minister's response was an acceptance of the need to increase local democratic involvement and control of many of these bodies. The problem seems to have been addressed from the perspective of achieving better administration, which is no bad thing. The Minister is probably aware that many State officials double up on a number of similar boards. Voluntary groups have expressed the fear that streamlining structures will result in a diminution in the voluntary input. The Minister's response does not inspire any confidence that the case will be otherwise. Can the Minister revisit the criteria he and the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government have for the cohesion process? Can he accept the need for greater voluntary involvement, particularly in local decision making? If this requires a change in the bias from State official to volunteer involvement is the Minister prepared to consider that?

Éamon Ó Cuív: I am puzzled by the question. The Deputy has clearly received representations and heard various stories to the effect that the Leader programme is taking over partnerships or *vice versa*. I often wonder who is looking after whose interests.

Until now there have been four elements to the boards of all these bodies. Often, as the Deputy quite rightly said, the same people serve on two or three of the boards, running from one meeting to another. Local community representation is sometimes divided between those elected on an area basis and those representing, for example, the Traveller community or people with a disability. The second group normally represented on these boards comprise public representatives, in other words local councillors. The third group is the State agencies. The voluntary sector often wants the State agencies to attend board meetings because it is the one opportunity they get at local level to call on State agencies to co-operate and account for their actions. The final elements of the boards at the moment are the social partners, such as trade unions or, in rural areas, a representative from the IFA. I have no intention of changing that structure and I made that clear at the meeting we had in the Davenport Hotel a few months ago. Nobody in the sector has suggested that I should do so. I do not know which one of the four groups one would leave out.

I am concerned about a number of issues. First, there needs to be a reasonable balance. In other words, local representation should form a reasonable proportion of each group. Second, we have all heard people call for the selection of community representation, to be open and transparent. I do not care who is on the boards. I care that everybody in the area sees the process as fair,

open and transparent. I will examine that issue during the year.

There appear to be major arguments between boards. In a small number of cases people seem to think they have to jockey for position for next year. However, all these boards were due to come to an end at the end of 2006 so, in the case of community representation, all would be up for re-election at the end of the year anyway. Nobody could presume they would retain their positions on the boards so I am puzzled by it. This policy is designed to bring about a cohesive structure that applies nationwide and ensures that the citizen can avail of a wide range of services in a one-stop shop.

National Drugs Strategy.

66. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the use of moneys seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau for drug prevention and drug treatment programmes, in view of the increasing misuse of drugs and the need to enhance funding for the national drugs strategy; if he will urge his Cabinet colleagues to support the granting of such moneys for this purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18386/06]

Mr. N. Ahern: In principle I welcome the use of moneys seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau for drug prevention and drug treatment programmes. This idea has been explored by my officials. However, the critical issue is the level of overall funding made available for the implementation of the national drugs strategy and in that regard, I am fully satisfied with the amount of €43 million made available this year.

The earmarking of revenue for specific expenditure purposes is generally avoided as it is much more cumbersome to operate than utilising a central fund. In any case, the allocation of drugs-related CAB money to the work against drugs misuse would imply uncertain and variable amounts coming available. Furthermore, the allocation of CAB receipts would not necessarily imply an increase in overall funding.

The Government's spend on drugs initiatives amounts to much more than the amount taken in by CAB over the years. Also, the process of releasing such money from CAB takes several years. Overall, an allocation of €43 million has been made to my Department's Vote for the drugs initiative and young people's facilities and services fund in 2006. This represents an increase of 37% on the original 2005 allocation and a 61% increase on the 2004 allocation. I am satisfied that current Government expenditure on drugs is sufficient to meet the needs of those involved in tackling the effects of the misuse of drugs.

Mr. English: I am disappointed by the Minister of State's response to the effect that, while he welcomes the money, he is happy with what the

Government is spending. Currently people who want to wean themselves off heroin and enrol on a treatment programme have to wait 19 months in some parts of this country. It is a year in some parts of Dublin and eight months in Navan, from where I come. The Minister of State is satisfied with the amount of money being spent but the delays are a direct result of the fact that not enough money is being spent.

Money raised through CAB is money made from drugs crime. Money made on the back of drugs and the hurt, death and destruction associated with drug abuse should be put back into solving the drugs problem. Some €16 million has been made from CAB in recent years. The money should be put straight back into the fight against drugs crime. There is neither enough money nor enough urgency.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy should ask a question.

Mr. English: It is a question. The Minister says he is happy that €5 million has been given to the regional drugs task forces but that is less than €250,000 per county to tackle drugs. It will not even cover four or five staff in a treatment centre or working with young people to prevent them taking the drugs road. Will he return to the Government and ask for an increase in money to fight drugs? Youth groups, voluntary groups and youth federations hold table quizzes and fund-raising events every week to raise a few euro to pay their staff and their electricity bills and the Minister of State says he does not want the money raised through the profits from drugs crime to be put back into the fight against it. We do not even spend €1 million per week in the fight against drugs but drug dealers are making millions per day from drugs. With so little funding available, we have no chance of tackling the problem.

I am disappointed to hear the Minister of State claim to be in favour of using moneys seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau for drug prevention and drug treatment programmes given that his Government voted down the opportunity to ring-fence the €16 million raised by the bureau in recent years. This amounts to only a few million each year and the revenue the CAB will raise each year is easy to predict. This money is needed on the ground to tackle the drug problem. No one can argue that money made from the sale of drugs should not be spent on preventing drugs being peddled. I am disappointed to hear the Minister of State argue that this cannot or will not be done. We need all the money we can get to tackle drugs. The groups seeking on our behalf to keep young people off drugs are not being given the help they need. The use of CAB moneys for this purpose offers an opportunity to put another few euro their way to assist them in their work. The problem can only be addressed through money, resources and staff. There is

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something seriously wrong in this country of which we are so proud when a person must wait 12 months for a place on a drug treatment programme.

Mr. N. Ahern: While I note the Deputy's comments, money collected by the Criminal Assets Bureau is not available to anybody.

Mr. English: It becomes available after a few years.

Mr. N. Ahern: Yes, after seven years. The Criminal Assets Bureau was only established about eight years ago.

Mr. English: It was established in 1996 and has been seizing assets since 1997. Moneys it seized are, therefore, available to be spent.

Mr. N. Ahern: As these moneys are ring-fenced for seven years, only a small amount has become available to the Exchequer in the past 12 months or thereabouts. While it would be fine if more CAB money were to come our way, I am more concerned about the overall amount of money available for drug treatment, rather than its origins.

The Deputy referred to a figure of €43 million available for community treatment projects this year. When an additional €25 million mainstreamed to other Departments is added, this amounts to funding of more than €70 million. More than 600 people are employed on projects, services or facilities which started at community level.

As the treatment funding to which the Deputy referred is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive, I have no control over it. Approximately 450 people outside Dublin are participating in methadone programmes. A couple of years ago, no one outside Dublin was involved in such programmes because anyone who wanted to participate in them had to take a train or bus to Dublin every day.

Mr. English: Are only 500 of the 15,000 heroin addicts on methadone treatment programmes?

Mr. N. Ahern: Of approximately 8,000 people on methadone, about 450 are located outside Dublin. A country in which half of heroin users are on methadone is doing damn well by international standards. As I indicated, however, funding in this area is a matter for the Health Service Executive.

Waiting lists are increasing in towns outside Dublin, particularly in Leinster, because services are being provided outside Dublin. The reason there were no queues in the past was that services were not available. It takes time to extend services because not everyone can distribute methadone and it takes time to train doctors to levels 1 and 2. Nevertheless, 450 people are part-

icipating in methadone programmes outside Dublin.

Mr. English: Methadone is only one form of treatment and many groups want to treat drug users. The Minister of State will be aware the Aisling group in County Meath, for example, does great work but operates on a shoestring budget. It is directly funded by the Department but has been unable to secure additional funding.

Mr. N. Ahern: I presume the Aisling group submitted an application for funding, features in the regional plan and is drawing down the money allocated to it.

Mr. English: Is €500,000 sufficient to operate a plan?

Mr. N. Ahern: Has the group drawn down the funding? Is it seeking further funding?

Mr. English: It sought but did not receive further funding.

Mr. N. Ahern: As I indicated, the regional drug task forces were established and later submitted plans which were approved. The Deputy should not blame me if the task forces did not seek adequate funding. They cannot put their plans into place on one day. It takes time and some of them are moving quicker than others. Overall, approximately €70 million per annum is being spent on programmes which started at community level and between 600 and 650 employees have been recruited to work with and look after drug users.

Mr. English: Youth groups are waiting for money.

RAPID Programme.

67. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his proposals to implement the recommendations of the Committee of Public Accounts that objectives, targeted results and funding priority for the RAPID programme should be more precisely documented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18228/06]

Éamon Ó Cuív: My Department, supported by Pobal, co-ordinates the implementation of the RAPID programme. As part of its co-ordinating role, my Department receives regular updates on the implementation of the programme. These updates range from informal *ad hoc* updates to reports prepared for the quarterly RAPID national monitoring committee which I chair. These reports can be accessed at www.pobal.ie.

The Committee of Public Accounts found that a recurring difficulty with the RAPID programme since its launch in 2001 is the different levels of expectation as to what the programme

should produce. It recommended that the objectives, targeted results and funding priority for the RAPID programme should be more precisely documented. I will take the views and recommendations of the committee into account in the ongoing development of the RAPID programme.

As is clear from paragraph 4.4 of the report, my Department is well aware of the concern expressed by the Committee of Public Accounts and, as already indicated to the House following discussions with my Department, Pobal has initiated a formal evaluation of the programme. As I have indicated previously, the new, re-focused RAPID programme provides a long-term model to support disadvantaged communities and should continue into the future.

Mr. O'Shea: Does the Minister agree that the co-ordination of the RAPID programme by his Department is a complete mess? In regard to the recurrent difficulty outlined by officials from his Department to the Committee of Public Accounts in respect of the different expectations as to what the programme should produce, is it the Minister's view that the RAPID programme should provide for the front-loading of resources under the national development plan for targeted areas of disadvantage or should it enable substantial additional funding, not restricted to projects outlined in the NDP, to be pumped into the RAPID areas?

Éamon Ó Cuív: I do not agree the RAPID programme is a mess. However, I concede that in its initial phase, when groups were asked to draw up plans, the criteria were perhaps not clear enough and the plans were cumbersome and, in certain respects, insufficiently focused. The strand two plans, however, were much more focused on what was achievable.

Consultants have been examining the issue of trying to quantify the scope of measures which were additional to those which would have been introduced in the RAPID areas under the national development plan. This is a challenging task and the Department will examine the issue in the 2007 iteration of the programme.

As the Deputy will be aware, under the original RAPID programme the intention was to match the National Development Plan, 2000 to 2006. As we approach 2007, the review carried out by the Committee of Public Accounts and another review currently under way are proving useful in guiding the Department on what changes should take place.

In the years since I became Minister with responsibility for the RAPID programme, I have made a number of significant changes. For example, I introduced the leverage fund which has had a significant impact on the ground. I incrementally increased the involvement of the local RAPID committees — area implementation teams or AITs — in the process because they were making day-to-day decisions. We also pro-

vided that a significant amount of the dormant accounts fund would be ring-fenced for RAPID areas, which recently received an allocation from the fund towards small projects that would otherwise have fallen through the cracks.

The Department has been building incrementally on a good idea, analysing the difficulties encountered in the programme — in this regard the analysis of the Committee of Public Accounts has been useful — and continuously improving the programme. The general feedback I am receiving from RAPID committees, representatives of which I will meet on 1 June, is that they believe the programme has delivered and made an impact in the areas in which it operates. They have also given me ideas on how to improve the programme.

Mr. O'Shea: The Minister did not address the statement made by officials from his Department at a meeting of the Committee of Public Accounts. Does he believe the purpose of the RAPID programme is to front-load funding for projects within the national development plan or to attract funds for programmes which do not feature in the NDP? Given that this matter was raised by departmental officials at a meeting of the Committee of Public Accounts, it must be a major problem. The Minister has given no indication as to how he views it or intends to tackle it in the new national development plan.

Éamon Ó Cuív: I thought it was self-evident that we have gone far beyond the national development plan in the way in which we have operated the RAPID programme. Neither the leverage fund nor the dormant accounts issue arose under the NDP. RAPID is also about co-ordinating the various agencies to get a better and more co-ordinated delivery.

Within a national development plan, front loading means that in the 2000 to 2006 period, for example, one receives the money between 2002 and 2004 rather than between 2004 and 2006. That would not be a major gain. I am concerned about additionality, that at the end of the next national development plan, we will be able to state clearly how much extra money was invested in the RAPID areas over and above what those areas would have received had there been no such scheme, because every area receives money from the national development plan.

There are two issues: front loading, which means early payment, and what one might call uploading or giving more money to areas with greater problems. The first issue is only a temporary palliative but I am focusing on the second issue. We need better ways of measuring that system because some Departments have done better than others in delivering. As chairman of the national monitoring committee, I have made it clear that we need to see results from mechanisms that demonstrate there is an extra benefit in being in RAPID and in the roll-out of various

[Éamon Ó Cuív.]

programmes under the national development plan.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I remind the House that supplementary questions are limited to two minutes.

Other Questions.

National Drugs Strategy.

68. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if his attention has been drawn to recent comments from the Garda Commissioner at the AGSI conference in Killarney that the drugs trade is no longer confined to cities but has spread to provincial towns; if he has had discussions with the Garda Commissioner or Garda representatives regarding the spread of drugs to the provinces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18114/06]

Mr. N. Ahern: While I am not aware of the comments outlined concerning a spread of the drugs trade to provincial towns and such views were not included in his formal speech, it may well be that the Garda Commissioner made such comments in the course of the AGSI conference. While the drugs trade may be more pronounced in cities, I accept it is unrealistic to think it would be confined to the largest centres of population. This reality has been acknowledged through the national drugs strategy and the consequences arising from this situation are being addressed through the implementation of the strategy. In that regard, I am in regular contact with senior members of the Garda Síochána and my officials also have ongoing contact with members of the force.

All regional drugs task forces, RDTFs, have action plans in place and money has been allocated to the ten task forces to progress implementation of their plans this year. Funding will be increased on an incremental basis in line with the progress and capacity of the task forces over the coming years to achieve the full roll-out of these plans, which are estimated to have a full cost in the region of €12.2 million per annum. The premises initiative, which was originally designed to meet the accommodation needs of community-based drugs projects in local drugs task force areas, has been expanded to include the whole country.

Recent allocations under the young people's facilities and services fund illustrate the move towards a countrywide focus. This fund was established to assist in the development of preventative strategies and initiatives in a targeted manner through the development of youth facilities and services in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the poten-

tial to develop. Up to now, the focus has been on the 14 local drug task force areas in Dublin, Cork and Bray, but Limerick, Waterford, Galway and Carlow have also been included for some service projects. The Deputy will be pleased to know that recently I allocated €2 million for the development of high quality youth facilities in Waterford and Carlow. The Department is also examining the possibility of including some more urban centres under this initiative.

Fieldwork for a new drug prevalence study will be carried out from late 2006 to mid-2007. Preliminary analysis will be undertaken in the months following, with a first report of national prevalence figures and trends expected in late 2007. With the base figures available from the original 2002-03 survey, the outcome of this work will give a more solid basis for assessing developments in the drugs trade.

Mr. O'Shea: I am rather surprised that the Minister of State was not aware of the statement attributed to the Garda Commissioner and quoted in a national newspaper to the effect that the drugs problem was no longer confined to cities but had spread to provincial towns. In an earlier question I tabled, I provided the Minister of State with statistics showing that, as of last year, the national cocaine market is estimated to be worth €210 million. This represents a tenfold increase over four years, which is an horrific figure. In the earlier question, I also said that, according to Garda sources, networks have been smashed in a number of areas, including Portlaoise, Killarney, Meath, Skerries and Maynooth. I fail to understand how the Minister of State was not aware of this Garda information which has been published openly.

The Minister of State said that I was criticising his calmness. Calmness is a virtue but lack of urgency is the issue with which I have a problem. The public can see these statements and can also see what is happening in their local areas. It is about time the Government, including Ministers with an input into the drugs area, demonstrated the urgency the situation requires. An estimate of €5 billion worth of cocaine coming into the country between 1995 and 2004 is a serious matter. That is just cocaine, not to mention heroin, ecstasy or cannabis, which is still the most widely used drug.

We hear a lot of guff but the problem lies in the lack of an urgent and speedy roll-out of the necessary services to meet a rapidly worsening situation. I find it extraordinary that the Minister of State was not aware of that statement by the Garda Commissioner.

Mr. N. Ahern: There is nothing startling in what the Commissioner is reported to have said. I have said the same several times. In any case, the comment was not in his official speech of which I have a copy. He may well have said it in a newspaper interview but there is nothing ter-

ribly new about it. We all accept that illegal drugs have spread throughout the country. That is why we have regional drugs task forces and Garda drugs units in every division. It is also why every Garda division has a special drugs plan. All these initiatives are taking place and a fortune is being spent on them. Some €43 million has been allocated under the Department's Vote this year, which represents a 37% increase on 2005 and 60% on 2004. If the Deputy can find any such increase under any other departmental heading, he should tell me where it is.

Urgent action is being taken and nobody denies that. I am not just talking about the financial allocations, however. Approximately €25 million has been mainstreamed out of my Vote to other Votes, so we are spending about €70 million on projects that began at community level. The Health Service Executive spends more than that each year, not to mind the expenditure undertaken by the Department of Education and Science and the Garda Síochána.

A sum of €200 million per year is being spent in the fight against drugs. It is not all being spent on treatment or supply reduction. We are also spending a great deal on prevention and young people's facilities. The work of local drugs task forces is spreading and I am sure the Deputy is pleased with the money that was allocated to Waterford lately. Prevention is the key to this matter.

Mr. English: Now that the Minister of State has finally accepted that there are drugs in every village and town in the country and that we have a serious epidemic, does he believe that every Garda station should have a specific drugs unit or drugs squad? If gardaí are not present to tackle drugs specifically, it will be difficult to obtain results. Gardaí may deal with other crimes first and drug crime gets left to one side unless there is a specific drugs unit or drugs squad assigned to every Garda station. I am not talking about access to a drugs unit that can be summoned from Dublin but one based in every local Garda station to tackle drugs.

Mr. Sargent: I am interested in the Minister of State's claim that everything possible is being done. Does he agree the courses being conducted in my local area by the Balbriggan Awareness of Drugs group, which are parent to parent type courses, need to be promoted so parents who we need to become involved do so. All too often, those who are more likely to be aware of drugs come to find out more information rather than those who are in denial about the issue. What does the Minister of State suggest needs to be done to encourage involvement? Is funding going to that area? The Minister of State was not clear on this point when he referred to prevention.

4 o'clock

Mr. Crowe: Does the Minister of State accept there is a crisis throughout the country with regard to drugs, which is the message that seemed to come from the Garda Commissioner at the conference? Does he accept we need to roll out services to deal with that crisis? Unfortunately, as in the past, young people are coming forward to look for help but services are not available in country areas. Will the Minister of State contact the Department of Health and Children and its Minister, and his own Department, with a view to rolling out these services? Does the Minister of State accept the services are needed and that it is disgrace we are not supplying help to those who seek it?

Dr. Cowley: As a resident of a rural area, I know there has been an increase in the talk one hears about drugs and in the number of drug related prosecutions. We have had the introduction of remote control gardaí but there is now an added difficulty given that gardaí are being taken from rural areas. Does the Minister of State believe this loss of gardaí to bigger cities and towns is inversely proportional to the increase in drug problems in rural areas?

Mr. N. Ahern: The Garda Síochána stresses that all members of the force are engaged in the effort against drug misuse. In addition, each division has a drugs plan and a drugs unit. It is for the Garda to manage its own resources. While many small stations might have only a couple of gardaí—

Mr. English: They are not specifically for drugs. It is not worth their while chasing that crime.

Mr. N. Ahern: Each division has a drugs unit and a drugs plan. Gardaí have all the necessary resources. At the end of the year there will be 14,000 gardaí and while Members claim they are not based in their areas, they must be somewhere as they are on the payroll. Given last week's figures, we may soon be accused of being over-policed or a police state. The Garda Síochána insists that gardaí are dealing with the problem and that each division has its own plan.

To respond to Deputy Sargent, we are spending a lot on prevention.

Mr. Sargent: Such as what?

Mr. N. Ahern: I am sure Balbriggan was once upon a time under consideration for a local drugs task force. I have met people in Drogheda and Balbriggan who are doing good work. I am sure the groups there now come under the north-east drugs task force.

There are different levels. Much of the original strategy and local drugs task force plans dealt with people at disadvantaged level. There are other groups which comprise dedicated volunteers, including the Balbriggan group, which I

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met on a number of occasions. The voluntary side can do much work without the service being professionalised.

We are spending significant resources on prevention. Over 300 people, many of them youth workers, will be funded under the young people's facilities and services fund, mainly in disadvantaged areas. The clear message for years has been that there is no point telling young people not to get involved in drugs unless they can be pointed in the direction of other healthy pursuits, whether youth clubs or otherwise. Every euro spent on prevention more than pays for itself later.

Mr. Sargent: That is the theory.

Mr. N. Ahern: In response to Deputy Crowe, the services are being rolled out. Approximately €70 million per annum worth of services which began at local drugs task force level are now being rolled out. Over 600 people—

Mr. Crowe: Why are people coming to Dublin to ask for help for their children? It is because the services are not available locally.

Mr. N. Ahern: The methadone service may not be available everywhere because it is for the HSE to set it up. However, it is being set up. There are approximately 8,000 people on methadone and some 450 of these are outside Dublin. A couple of years ago hardly any drug user outside Dublin was on methadone and those who wanted it had to come to Dublin. It takes time to get the local doctors on level 1—

Mr. Crowe: The services are based in Dublin. They need to be rolled out in other areas.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We must move to the next question.

Mr. N. Ahern: The services are spreading to the Leinster towns but it takes time to train and upskill doctors who want to be at level 1 or level 2 to deal with drug users.

Ranganna Gaeilge.

69. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. Sargent** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta ar léigh sé alt le duine (sonraí tugtha) agus cad é an plan atá aige chun freastal ar na cuspóirí a bhí ag Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann agus an mbunóidh sé institiúid taighde don Ghaeilge chun téarmaíocht agus straitéis don teanga a fhorbairt agus tacaíocht a thabhairt do na ranganna Gaeilge do dhaoine fásta a bhíonn ar siúl ar fud na tíre.

[18163/06]

Éamon Ó Cuív: Baineann an t-alt a luann an Teachta go príomha le hobair Fhóram na Gaeilge agus leis an gceist maidir le ráiteas polasaí ón

Rialtas i ndáil le ról agus tábhacht na Gaeilge sa lá atá inniu ann.

Mar atá mínithe agam i bhfreagra eile ar Cheist Uimh. 103 inniu, iarradh tuairimí ó chomhaltaí Fhóram na Gaeilge sa bhliain 2005, i gcomhthéacs an róil chomhairleoireachta a tugadh don ghrúpa, maidir le plan straitéiseach 20 bliain a fhorbairt don Ghaeilge mar aon le tosaíochtaí gaolmhara gearr-théarmacha, agus tá obair ar na ceisteanna sin idir lámha.

Tá an cheist maidir le ráiteas soiléir ón Rialtas i ndáil le ról agus tábhacht na Gaeilge tagtha chun cinn mar ábhar tosaíochta sa chomhthéacs sin. Tá dul chun cinn suntasach bainte amach faoin ábhar seo agus tá súil agam a bheith in ann tuilleadh a rá faoi seo go luath.

Níl aon fhreagracht orm mar Aire maidir le hiar-Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann, cé nach miste dom a lua go dtuigtear dom go raibh dualgais ar an eagraíocht sin a bhí níos leithne ná ceist na Gaeilge amháin. Mar is eol don Teachta, tá eagraíocht ann — Foras na Gaeilge — a bhfuil freagracht uirthi an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn mar theanga bheo labhartha ar bhonn uile-oileánda agus a dhéanann freastal ar saincheisteanna den chineál atá luaithe sa cheist Dála, cosúil le téarmaíocht. Maidir le ranganna do dhaoine fásta, mar shampla, maoiníonn Foras na Gaeilge eagraíochtaí a chuireann a leithéid ar fáil, ina measc Conradh na Gaeilge, agus tá sonraí faoi na ranganna ar fáil ar láithreán gréasáin Fhoras na Gaeilge www.gaeilge.ie, áit a bhfuil neart eolais faoi na tionscadail eile sa réimse seo.

Mr. Sargent: An aontaíonn an tAire go bhfuil gá le chur chuige agus straitéis chuimsitheach le freastal ar na daoine atá ag obair go tréan agus go deonach ag cur ranganna Gaeilge ar fáil do dhaoine fásta? Níl aon chúrsa traenála oiliúna ann do dhaoine i mbun na ranganna sin. An nglacfaidh an tAire nach leor suíomh Idirlíon, is cuma cé chomh snasta agus atá, chun an jab sin a dhéanamh agus nach leor maoiniú, cé go bhfuil sé deas airgead a fháil? Ní hionann sin agus straitéis le ranganna do dhaoine fásta a chur ar fáil. Tá na fadhbanna agus an dúshlán céanna os comhair daoine ar fud na tíre atá ag obair go deonach ina leithéid de ranganna. Níl aon chabhar ann dóibh ach amhainn suíomh Idirlíon agus maoiniú anois is arís ó Fhoras na Gaeilge más féidir leis na postanna go léir a líonú.

Tá gá le dul chun cinn san obair seo. San alt a luaigh mé, tá ceist ar stádas na teanga sa saol mór. Ar chomharthaí bóithre ar fud na tíre, tá an Ghaeilge mar theanga shóisearach ar chomharthaí atá in ainm is a bheith dátheangach. Tá na litreacha chomh beag agus is féidir go minic agus na litreacha Béarla i bhfad níos mó go bhfeicfead iad. Sa Bhreatain Bheag tá cothrom na Féinne ann. Le comhlacht Sualannach, tá an tSualainnis, an Bhreatnais agus an Béarla ar chomh-chaighdeán, mar is ceart. An aontaíonn an tAire nach bhfuil stádas na Gaeilge sa saol chomh soiléir agus gur ceart má tá muid i ndáiríre faoin

dátheangachas agus go bhfuil ról aige féin agus ag an Aire Comhshaoil, Oidhreacht agus Rialtais Áitiúil san obair seo?

Tá mise mar mhúinteoir do ranganna do dhaoine fásta ag lorg cabhrach agus tá neart eile cosúil liom. Níl an chabhair sin ann ach amháin i suíomh Idirlín atá go deas. Ní hionann sin agus cúrsa traenála agus acmhainní leis an dúshlán seo a chur chun cinn.

Éamon Ó Cuív: Bhí trí cheist shoiléir ag an Teachta. Tagann ceist na ranganna Gaeilge ar ais chuig ceist acmhainní d'Fhoras na Gaeilge agus tagann sin ar ais do cheist an Fheidhmeannach ó Thuaidh. Tá súil agam go dtiocfaidh sé ar ais agus ansin, féachfaimid ar na cúramaí atá ann i láthair na huaire. Beimid in ann forbairt chearta a dhéanamh ar na forais tras-Teorann. Tá mise agus an Rialtas dírithe ar sin agus tá súil agam go mbeidh na páirtneírí eile sa bpróiseas dírithe air sin fosta. Cloisim an méid faoi chaighdeán agus oiliúint. Caithfear tabhairt faoina rudaí seo agus maoiniú agus traenáil a chur ar fáil. Ó lá go lá titeann freagracht ar na rudaí seo ar Fhoras na Gaeilge.

Tá sé in am anois ráiteas soiléir a dhéanamh faoi cén ról atá ann don Ghaeilge sa saol 2006. Tá an Rialtas i mbun na hoibre sin agus tá sé pléite le Fóram na Gaeilge. Tá súil agam go mbeimid in ann brú ar aghaidh leis sin go gairid. Tá sé tábhachtach go ndéanfaí sin. Ar a laghad beidh bunlíne leagtha síos i 2006 i gcomhthéacs nuaimseartha ag baint leis sin.

D'achtaigh muid an tAcht teanga sa Teach seo agus as sin, tá rialacha faoi chomharthaíocht. Beimid a rá go gcaithfidh túis áit a thabhairt don Ghaeilge ar stáiseanóireacht agus comharthaí. Ní bhaineann sé le comharthaí bóithre ach chuile cineál comharthaíochta eile. Tá cúiseanna teicniúla ag baint leis sin. Aontaím i bprionsabal go hiomlán. Bhí an t-am ann nuair a gheofá stáiseaneara i Ranna Stáit agus an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla ar chomh-chéim. Go minic anseo chaithfí duine microscope a fháil leis an Ghaeilge a léamh. Ba cheart go mbeadh siad ar a laghad ar chomh-chéim agus tá mé ag díriú air sin. Tá mé ag tabhairt na rialacha ansin isteach go gairid. Nuair a thug muid eilimintí eile den Acht ar aghaidh, thosaigh an plé i ndiaidh an ruda seachas roimhe agus bíonn gá le ham a thabhairt do dhaoine dul i dtaithe le rudaí. Tá sé in am anois brú ar aghaidh.

Ní bhaineann sé le rialacha. Is féidir rialacha a thabhairt isteach ag am ar bith. I mí Iúil, beidh an tAcht teangacha achtaithe trí bliana agus tiocfaidh chuile fhoráil de i bhfeidhm i mí Iúil.

Mr. Sargent: Chuir mé ceist faoin traenáil atá de dhíth le ranganna do dhaoine fásta a chur ar fáil. Luaigh an tAire maoiniú agus tá an cheist sin ann. An iarrfaidh sé ar Fhoras na Gaeilge plean a chur ar fáil leis an traenáil sin a chur ar bun? Tá muid ag caint faoi rud éigin níos fearr na suíomh Idirlín. Tá seo ag titim amach i dtíortha eile ach níl a leithéid ag tarlú an seo.

Éamon Ó Cuív: Feidhmíonn an foras ó lá go lá neamhspleách ón Aire. Tógfaidh mé an cheist leis cinnte agus cuirfidh mé in iúl don Teachta.

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 Ó Fearghaíl — the need for the Minister to facilitate the development of an Irish language education campus at a site (details supplied); (2) Deputy Ring — that the Minister update the position with regard to a property (details supplied) in County Mayo; (3) Deputy Ferris — the delay in the construction of Tralee Community Hospital; (4) Deputy Gormley — the need for the Minister to introduce the housing (miscellaneous provisions) Bill; (5) Deputy Connolly — to discuss the temporary use of available bedspace at St. Davnet's Hospital, Monaghan, to free up bedspace in Cavan and Monaghan general hospitals; (6) Deputy Cuffe — to discuss the situation of a group of asylum seekers from Afghanistan who are on hunger strike in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin; (7) Deputy Ó Caoláin — the need for the Minister to make herself fully accountable to the Dáil for the crisis in our health services; (8) Deputy Ó Snodaigh — the need for the Minister to intervene immediately to prevent the crisis in relation to the Afghans in St. Patrick's Cathedral seeking refugee status; (9) Deputy Cowley — that the Minister review the asylum applications of the hunger strikers in St. Patrick's Cathedral and if he will recognise the critical situation which exists currently; (10) Deputy Joe Higgins — concern over the situation of Afghan refugees in St. Patrick's Cathedral; and (11) Deputy Costello — the need for the Minister to take urgent measures to resolve the hunger strike by 41 Afghans in St. Patrick's Cathedral.

The matters raised by Deputies Ring, Ferris, Ó Fearghaíl and Gormley have been selected for discussion.

Leaders' Questions.

Mr. Kenny: The "Prime Time Investigates" programme exposed once again what is probably the greatest scandal of modern Ireland, that is, the growing numbers of people who have to brush with death rather than go into accident and emergency units. As one of the wealthiest countries in the world, we have failed to provide even basic health care for our people, especially the old and vulnerable. Eileen Reilly said she would sooner die than go back into an accident and emergency department. The late Jimmy Kerry asked his family why he was on a trolley when he would be better off at home where he had a bed. Marie Kilkenney said she wished she would never

[Mr. Kenny.]

have to go near an accident and emergency department again and the late Robert Hamilton, as the Tánaiste will know, refused to go into an accident and emergency department. This time, this hard-working man kept his dignity and was staying at home.

The fact is these people worked all their lives to build up this economy but their experience, stories and, in some cases, deaths prove how the Government has failed to use the wealth they created and generated to deliver a proper accident and emergency service to look after them. Some €60 billion has been spent to deliver a lack of privacy, sensitive information discussed in overcrowded conditions, intimate procedures carried out in full view of patients and their visitors, and dangerously overcrowded conditions which have turned our hospitals from sources of healing to sources of infection.

The real scandal is that this is not a new crisis because four years ago the Government did an analysis on what was needed to fix the then crisis so. There can be no shock-horror now. After nine years in power and three different Ministers for Health and Children, a Tánaiste and €60 billion later, the Government has failed to deliver, look after our most vulnerable, invest in the beds we need and invest in developing proper primary care which is the key to a good health service. Last night's "Prime Time Investigates" programme sums up the Government's story so far: plenty of promises, no delivery, quick to blame and slow to shame. When the Taoiseach saw that programme, as Head of Government, Taoiseach of Ireland and Leader of the Government for nine years, was he not ashamed this could happen in this country in 2006?

A Deputy: No shame.

The Taoiseach: As I said earlier on Question Time, last night's programme showed the distress of patients and their families and the conditions and waiting times in some of our accident and emergency departments. That is an issue I have addressed in the House several times over the winter. We understand the distress. That is why the Health Service Executive is determined to reduce unacceptably long waiting times for patients and all the other issues to which I referred earlier. No stone is left unturned to address problems where they occur. All the necessary funding is being made available. Deputy Kenny is correct in that over a number of years we have put in the resources which effectively have been for extra staff. The HSE is bringing management attention to this as never before. The accident and emergency action group has been working since the HSE was formed early last year and will support the commitment of doctors, nurses and other staff to continually improve patient care. It ensures that in many of our hospitals those departments are working well.

We have 53 acute hospitals, with 35 accident and emergency units, of which about 13 are recognised to have a problem. The other two thirds are working effectively and well. There are many such examples across the country. The task is to bring the remainder into line.

The "Prime Time Investigates" programme also carried an interview with Sir George Alberti about the accident and emergency area reforms in Britain, reforms which we have been carrying out for several years. He said it is important there is faster access to senior decision makers and consultants for extended periods of the day, a vital reform I have spelt out in the Dáil many times. It is not that individual consultants in accident and emergency and elsewhere do not work long hours, but the problem is they are not scheduled to be routinely available to patients at all times when needed. That is the issue that arises. The accident and emergency task force has identified practical actions being implemented to get faster access to patients by consultants. Such actions have been suggested by consultants themselves on the task force, and we are working with the individuals to move that forward.

Many other issues are involved. Some 3 million people use our 53 hospitals annually on an inpatient and outpatient basis. Some 1.3 million people — 3,000 per day — use the accident and emergency services annually. That figure has risen substantially, by 10% during the past year alone, so people are using the accident and emergency services in increasing numbers. That increase of 10% is the biggest for a number of years, so it is a myth that people are not using the services.

Many other issues have been highlighted. The two programmes shown last night, "Prime Time" and "Questions and Answers" must be considered together. Nothing was said in them which I have not said several times before, such as how we avoid hospital admissions, enhanced out-of-hours GP services, greater GP access to diagnostics, rapid access to clinics, increased community intervention time, primary care teams, the chronic illness management programmes and home care packages.

Mr. McCormack: We need action on the ground.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: A lot of excuses and nothing done.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Kenny is entitled to hear the answer to his question.

The Taoiseach: I am not sure how Opposition Deputies call a move from €4 billion to €12 billion a cutback. That is extremely good mathematics.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: The Taoiseach is great at such pronouncements.

The Taoiseach: We have tackled reducing hospital stays, appropriate use of capabilities, beds and facilities, proactive admission and discharge planning, the diagnostics available over extended working days, the consultants providing daily and routine rounds for all patients, the provision of more consultants and working teams and hospital out-reach services.

Mr. F. McGrath: Were we watching the same programme?

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: We have heard it all before.

The Taoiseach: Nevertheless, that is how we will get on top of it. There are more than 2,000 consultants, 4,000 non-consultant hospital doctors, 7,000 extra nurses and 7,000 extra paramedics, all working to get on top of the one aspect of the health services which we must deal with.

Mr. McCormack: There are many closed beds.

Mr. Kenny: The problem is that we did hear it all before. When Professor Drumm addressed the Fine Gael parliamentary party in Portlaoise last year he said that of the 140,000 people who had worked in the health boards, at least 3,500 did not know what their jobs were or where they fitted into the service.

We have heard this all before and the Taoiseach has put the taxpayer to considerable expense producing another consultants' report to identify problems which he knew existed for the past nine years. While the Taoiseach sits here beside the Tánaiste, he has done nothing about after-hours GP care, step-down facilities or getting value for money. The State and the system cannot cope with elderly and vulnerable people who need emergency care. They are not deemed to be a priority and that is the scandal.

When, on 12 October last, I asked the Tánaiste to identify her main target during her Ministry in 2004, her response was accident and emergency care because, as she rightly said, it is unacceptable that people have to spend up to 12 hours on a trolley. Before the report was published, hours before the "Prime Time Investigates" programme was shown, the Tánaiste said that the latest consultants' report on accident and emergency services showed there was no crisis in that area. It seemed to be a case of lurching from a national crisis to a national emergency to no crisis at all, simply because the taxpayer was put to the expense of having another consultants' report to show the same problems that have existed for the past nine years, with which the Government has not dealt.

There is no point blaming nurses, doctors and consultants. This is a problem of Government. The Taoiseach said the spend has gone from €4 billion to €12 billion, but while the extra money is being spent, patients are not seeing the value. The Government has failed to deal with step-

down beds, GP out-of-hours care and the provision of acute emergency care as a priority for elderly people when they arrive in accident and emergency units. As we are told, the chaos in such units costs lives — someone's husband, wife or child.

Tomorrow is the fourth anniversary of the last election. The Government has been in office for nine years, with three Ministers for Health and Children and a Tánaiste in charge of that Department and, while, as the Taoiseach rightly pointed out, the spend has been increased to €60 billion, the issues of out-of-hours GP services, step-down beds and medical priority for vulnerable, elderly people in particular who need emergency care are not being dealt with. The Taoiseach is responsible for that and, as head of Government, was he not ashamed to see the carry-on involving elderly and vulnerable people in some of our accident and emergency units around the country? The television programme showed that what happens in a number of our hospitals is disgusting. The Government has failed to deal with this problem, which it has known has existed for the past nine years.

The Taoiseach: As Deputy Kenny knows, the GP out-of-hours service is excellent in many parts of the country. Until recently, we were not able to resolve the service in a large part of Dublin, covering about half a million patients. Thankfully, those negotiating that issue have now concluded an agreement which will become operational from 1 September. That has been publicly announced. That coverage is very important because up to now, as I regularly pointed out, people without the out-of-hours service had no alternative but to attend accident and emergency units in three or four of the hospitals out of the 13 where there was a difficulty.

Deputy Kenny is not correct on the step-down facilities. Last year, more than 500 beds were used from private nursing homes for step-down beds and already this year over 300 have been provided. About 50 people per week finish their acute treatment in hospitals and they are the people who require step-down facilities.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: The Government is required to step down.

The Taoiseach: This is a serious issue which we are all trying to resolve. The Deputy should not be so silly.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: It is a damn bad effort.

The Taoiseach: The step-down facilities provide continuing care. With regard to the report mentioned by Deputy Kenny, no report like that was done before. This was a detailed report on ten individual hospitals. Until now they were always classified in statistics that were grouped together and did not look at the individual

[The Taoiseach.]

requirements. This is the first time a report has examined the individual difficulties on the ground by talking to the staff who deal with the problems. The report shows that there are different problems and issues. The issues are not all the same in different areas.

The HSE has looked at the recommendations. They deal with the issues of beds, step-down beds, general practitioner out-of-hours service and the ability of general practitioners to access diagnostic services, whether those services are in public hospitals or private operations. It is a huge benefit for general practitioners to be able to get quick diagnostic turnaround. It means patients do not have to go to accident and emergency departments and those departments can be used for their real purpose. Community intervention teams have been established by the HSE which are hugely helpful in dealing with people in their homes and communities. Primary care teams have been set up and the HSE has worked on the chronic illness management programmes.

Many of these programmes are not new. In the past few years, we have examined the best practice we have seen in hospitals such as St. Luke's Hospital in Kilkenny, where there is very good community access. I spoke about this previously. We are trying to take that best practice into other hospitals.

Mr. Rabbitte: Last week I asked the Taoiseach if it was not the case that the decentralisation programme announced by the then Minister, former Deputy McCreevy, had run aground and the Taoiseach denied it. Three days later he contrived an interview in which he announced the climb-down. This programme was to be the major plank of this Government's term of office and involved the biggest relocation of civil and public servants in the history of the State, and the Taoiseach contrived one of his interviews to say that it will not go ahead as planned.

In any of the number of chat show interviews the Taoiseach gave over the weekend he did not deal with any of the questions that are uppermost in the minds of the civil and public servants concerned and in the 53 venues to which the Government pledged to transfer sections of the civil and public service. As a result of the Taoiseach's climb-down, which venues will not get the Departments, agencies or the civil or public servants that were promised? What is the new deadline for any decentralisation that will proceed? How many of the 10,300 personnel pledged by Mr. McCreevy will still be relocated? How many of the agencies will be relocated? Will any of the specialist staff be relocated?

Is it still the Taoiseach's intention to proceed with the relocation of the policy functions and the heads of policy making in Departments? How much of the 200,000 sq. m. of office space which the Office of Public Works was instructed to procure has been procured? Has the Taoiseach told

the Office of Public Works to stop acquiring such space since he announced his climb-down? With regard to the instructions to the OPW to dispose of a similar amount of office space in this city, how is it proposed that will happen given that the people occupying it are not transferring? Does the Taoiseach agree with the Tánaiste who said: "The target will be reached within a very short timeframe and I believe that if we don't reach it quickly the uncertainty that is hanging over the public service will be damaging to the public service and damaging for this Government"?

Is it not time to go back to the drawing board and review a plan that was ill thought out and off the top of the head? It was designed to disperse civil and public servants throughout the country but had little to do with genuine decentralisation or devolution of power. It was never intended to correct regional imbalance and it has now run aground. The Taoiseach has had to climb down on it, which is a major humiliation for the Government. He ought to tell people whose lives have been put on hold precisely who will be transferred and when.

Mr. McCormack: He could not give a date.

The Taoiseach: I am not sure what interview I gave that could give rise to all those questions.

Mr. Rabbitte: There were so many.

Mr. Durkan: He cannot remember all of them.

The Taoiseach: A total of 10,600 civil servants have applied to the central applications facility to relocate. The central applications facility continues to receive new applications every week. It is anticipated interest will increase further as buildings are built and timetables firm up. With regard to property, site acquisition negotiations have been completed in 13 locations, contracts have been received for an additional ten locations and suitable sites have been identified in a further 15 locations. Negotiations to acquire have either commenced or are close to commencement in these locations.

Agreement has been reached on most of the human resource and industrial relations issues and has enabled progress on transfer to staff promotions. Discussions are ongoing in other areas. Movement of staff between Departments and offices is well under way and 1,500 people have already signed up for Departments. All the Departments and offices have produced implementation plans setting out the detailed arrangements they are putting in place for the relocation. The various negotiations with the unions are progressing. In the Civil Service they are far more advanced but there have been difficulties in the agencies. There are some difficulties on the professional side as well.

The point I made in the House last week that we had extended the timescale was made last year

at the launch of the implementation report and was written about in many newspapers. What I said a few days ago was that we will not get all this done. It will not be possible to build all the buildings and get everything finished by Christmas. That was my great announcement and I thought it was stating the obvious——

Mr. J. O’Keeffe: Which year was the Taoiseach talking about?

The Taoiseach: ——but I am sorry if I upset Deputy Rabbitte’s weekend and that he thought I would get it finished by Christmas when I replied to him last week. That was not my intention when I replied to him.

The original timescale set for the programme when it was announced was very ambitious. It was to be done within three years, requiring the full and active co-operation of all the parties involved. It has become clear that some issues which surfaced will take a considerable period to resolve. However, setting ambitious targets was the best way to drive the programme forward. If we did not do that, we would not have made so much progress.

All the civil servants in the various areas are moving. We have made some changes along the way. The implementation group has produced a number of reports. Last week it announced that the probation officers would not be decentralised to Navan but that other sections of the Department will be decentralised. There has been a number of such instances. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has proposed that in addition to the headquarters of the probation and welfare service, a number of other organisations will move to Navan, such as the national property service regulatory authority, the coroners agency and a new human resources unit. We have made a number of such announcements where the original staff units have been switched to other units.

There is huge interest in the programme and we will continue to implement it as stated. There is no lack of interest on the part of civil servants but there is on the part of public servants. That is a difficulty we will have to deal with. We will, however, do it in conjunction with the Civil Service unions. I thank them for their patience and diligent work in which they have engaged with us on the programme. It will continue with the Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, the Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Deputy Parlon, and the rest of the Government.

Mr. Rabbitte: At the weekend, I saw the Taoiseach paying tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Haughey. If Mr. Haughey had uttered the misleading statements to the House that the Taoiseach habitually utters, people would have been marching on the streets. I wrote down what the Taoiseach just said. He said, “All the civil servants in the various areas are moving”. In what

kind of parallel universe is the Taoiseach living? The point is they are not moving. The only items dispersed around the country are electronic voting machines that do not work.

Mr. McGinley: Where are they now?

Mr. Rabbitte: I listened to a radio interview with the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Éamon Ó Cuív, in which he illustrated the success of the ADM Limited move to Clifden.

Mr. McCormack: The personnel were moved into a hotel.

Mr. Rabbitte: It turned out that no one from ADM Limited moved to Clifden but that they were new staff there. ADM Limited then issued a statement on the same radio programme, stating it is neither a public service nor Civil Service organisation but an independent board and it is none of the Government’s business from where it functions.

Éamon Ó Cuív: We will be correcting that this evening.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow Deputy Rabbitte without interruption.

Mr. Rabbitte: This is the kind of misleading nonsense that is going on.

I ask again, what is the timescale for the decentralisation that will go ahead? Will there be negotiations to ensure whatever transfers take place are voluntary? Last week the Taoiseach said that in an organisation with 100 staff and where 99 were moving, the fellow remaining could not expect to get promotion. Apart from the fact that it is the other way around, what does he mean by the fellow remaining behind cannot get promotion?

Has the Taoiseach put any halt to the gallop of the Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Deputy Parlon, who, no more than himself, would say anything? Is the Minister of State still going around the country, acquiring property in the uncertain climate that the Taoiseach has created for the programme? Will the Taoiseach agree the people who work in the service of the Government deserve to know what the future holds for them? Does he have any regard to the damage done to the coherence of Government by the unique difference in this package of decentralisation that proposes to transfer the policy-making functions of Departments from Dublin city? Has any cost benefit analysis been conducted on the programme? Will we ever see any of the figures involved?

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

Mr. Rabbitte: We will have a situation that has happened to those units already transferred where the specialist staff refuse to move and have to be retained in Dublin city while staff have to be employed. The Government has made commitments to so many towns and villages where there is a definite need to address regional imbalance. These towns do not know whether they will be the beneficiaries of the pledged relocations.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: A vote benefit analysis would be better.

The Taoiseach: We are not going to move civil servants down to offices that do not exist.

Mr. Durkan: That is the Taoiseach's leaf.

The Taoiseach: Civil servants are well-informed through staff negotiations. I appreciate the work that has gone on for the last two and a half years on these issues. The Civil Service unions have been deeply involved in the discussions. Agreement has been reached on a large number of issues, including human resources. It has enabled progress to be made on a range of issues, including mobility, promotions and discussions of transfers to other areas. As I have already stated, building and site acquisition negotiations have been completed in 13 locations. Contracts have been received for another ten locations. Suitable sites have been identified in a further 15 locations and negotiations to acquire sites have either commenced or are close to commencement.

Mr. McCormack: What about Clifden?

The Taoiseach: Those civil servants who wish to transfer have made their applications on the central applications facility. Some difficulties have arisen about professional grades, as there were during the last decentralisation round. We will not duplicate the positions but we must negotiate a way through this. It was done before and will have to be done again.

It is not a charge to get civil servants out of Dublin and into caravans. When the sites are available, they will move. It will not be finished by Christmas, but some hundreds of civil servants will have moved by then to the 13 locations.

Difficulties have arisen with the State agencies which have no history of decentralisation and where small numbers of people are involved. I referred to the argument put forward by some outside the House that if some State workers opt to stay in Dublin, they should be automatically promoted. That cannot happen as they must be treated equally. That is the understood position with the Civil Service unions. Where there are difficulties, we will negotiate through them.

I see no difficulty with policy-making units being here, there or anywhere. Some of the largest multinational companies in the world operate

in Ireland. With their bases in different parts of the world, they have policy and business meetings through televised conferences. I have addressed some of these meetings. Personnel in these companies can deal with policy in Latin America and the US. To say that because someone is in Nenagh or Sligo, the whole Civil Service system will stop functioning is a statement from the 1930s.

Éamon Ó Cuív: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: There are no difficulties with this issue. Thankfully, Ireland is one of the world's largest exporters of information and communications technology. To believe that in a small island we cannot communicate on policy issues is nonsense.

Ms McManus: Would the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children like to comment on this?

Mr. J. Higgins: Over the last few days, we have the tragic and unsettling event of a group of Afghan refugees, in desperation at the uncertainty of their situation, mounting a hunger and thirst strike in St. Patrick's Cathedral. Deputy Cowley and I, along with other Opposition Deputies, visited them today. Happily, they are now taking liquids, a great relief to them and to all who wish them well. Dehydration was having a dramatic and extremely rapid deteriorating effect on their health. This afternoon, there was a meeting with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the outcome of which we do not know yet.

Only two months ago the Taoiseach was in the US. He pleaded with the President of the US to allow, on grounds of compassion, 40,000 to 60,000 — we are not sure of the exact figure — Irish citizens in the US without official permission to remain and make their lives there. Every Member, be they on the right or the left, strongly supports that view.

Mr. F. McGrath: Hear, hear.

Dr. Cowley: Hear, hear.

Mr. J. Higgins: By implication, that means supporting the view that up to 12,000 migrant workers and their families without official sanction should also be given permission to remain and make their lives in the US. We do not single out the Irish as being special and that they alone must receive compassion.

Will the Government extend this to a few dozen people seeking the compassion of the Irish people for refuge and a new life? Seven of the group are under 18 years of age, studying for their leaving certificate examinations. Their classmates are concerned and supportive. Six have been taken to hospital, one described as being in a serious condition. Will the same humanitarian

concerns for immigrants in the US, particularly for our fellow countrymen and women, be applied by the Government in the case of those coming from a tragic, troubled and dangerous country?

The Taoiseach: On Sunday last, 14 May, some 34 Afghan nationals entered St. Patrick's Cathedral and commenced a hunger strike which they stated would not end until they were granted asylum in Ireland or leave to remain. At present, approximately 40 Afghans remain in the cathedral. The exact number is still imprecise as some additional people were admitted to the cathedral on Monday morning and some have been admitted to hospital today.

According to the information available to me, which is based on the individual names available to the Department at present, all the individuals concerned are in either the asylum or the leave to remain processes. At present, none of the individuals concerned has been issued with a deportation order as the process has not yet concluded in any case.

Applications for asylum are assessed as part of an independent process under the Refugee Act 1996. Case assessments are made on the basis of information provided by the applicant, as well as the detailed country of origin. An applicant who is found to have no grounds for refugee status is invited to make representations to the Minister under section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 stating why he or she should not be deported from the State. In addition, the safety of a returning person, or *refoulement*, is fully considered in all cases.

As Deputy Joe Higgins is aware, the asylum process in this State is comprehensive and compares well with those of any of our EU partners. This was recently acknowledged by the former UNHCR representative in Ireland who was quoted as stating that Ireland is now a model for the new member states of the European Union and that it has a system which in many respects is one of the best in Europe.

I understand the present position to be that the individuals concerned have asked to meet officials of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to discuss their situation. The Department has agreed to meet a small representative group in its offices at Burgh Quay. The purpose of the meeting is to hear the exact reasons for their protests, as well as to explain the nature of the asylum and leave to remain processes and that the Minister is bound by law to deal with their cases within the present framework. No negotiations will take place at the meeting. It is a question of explaining the position to the protestors. As Deputy Joe Higgins has noted, there are eight minors among the group.

To be clear, people of more than 100 nationalities participate in the asylum process at present and conceding to any demands from the protestors would have major negative consequences

for the asylum system which has been built up in the past decade. Undoubtedly, concessions would lead to similar protests and a major inflow of additional applicants in the hope of benefitting from similar actions. At present, 20 churches in Belgium contain asylum seekers. I wish to be straight in this respect. We will not go down that road. We have a system which people may follow if they wish. However, we will not give way to threats.

Mr. J. Higgins: The Taoiseach should not consider this to be a threat when people are so desperate and insecure for their future that they put their health and lives at risk. People come here seeking refuge and compassion because they are under threat in the places from which they have come. Many Members who deal and have dealt with individual cases of people in grave difficulties and human situations have reacted compassionately.

Interference by the major powers for more than two decades has plunged Afghanistan into being one of the most violent and disturbed countries on Earth. First the Russians and then the CIA and Saudi Arabia and the rest intervened with their national interests in mind. Latterly, the CIA and Saudi Arabia called both the jihad and the horrific Taliban, which has been a major source of the instability and violence, into existence.

Does the Taoiseach not agree it is a gross misrepresentation of the truth to portray or attempt to portray Afghanistan as a peaceful and democratic society? Does he not agree it is one of the most disturbed and violent places on Earth? Some of the Afghans who seek refuge here carry healed wounds from that conflict, unlike our Irish compatriots in the United States.

I noticed the Taoiseach did not refer to my equation of their seeking humanity and compassion in Ireland with the position of the tens of thousands of our fellow countrymen and women. Can he not see that in many ways, it is a similar situation? Irish representatives, both here and in the United States, who call for compassion on the part of the United States Government do no more than do Members in respect of these people and others who seek refuge. Will the Taoiseach to speak to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform? On the grounds of compassion, humanity and the humanity of the people, as well as the respect for human rights cherished by the people, I ask that these people be allowed the refuge they need to have some future in society.

Mr. F. McGrath: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I will not argue with any of Deputy Joe Higgins's observations regarding Afghanistan or its difficulties. However, people of more than 100 nationalities have lodged applications in our present system.

Mr. J. Higgins: It is the same in the United States.

The Taoiseach: We are discussing Ireland. We have a very fair process. It is recognised as such within the European Union, in the United Nations—

Mr. Costello: Not all aspects of it.

The Taoiseach: —and by the UNHCR. While 1% of the population was non-Irish a decade ago, that figure reached 9% before the recent census was taken. We have been very fair and tolerant. None of the individuals concerned has completed the process or been served with a deportation order.

Neither St. Patrick's Cathedral nor any church is an office in which to deal with our legislation. We will be unable to have a process if we give into this action and I will not countenance that prospect. The individuals concerned should talk to the officials and follow the process. While I do not wish to be hard in this respect, there is no other way to deal with the process. They would be best advised to listen to the officials and to understand the system. This also applies to everyone else.

Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 31.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before coming to the Order of Business I propose to deal with a number of notices under Standing Order 31.

Mr. F. McGrath: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the enormous structural damage to people's homes above the route of the Dublin Port tunnel, which has now risen to 254 damaged properties; the urgent need to assist all families affected; that priority be given to the other 115 complaints to ensure that all residents of Marino, Drumcondra, Fairview and Santry are compensated properly; and to give them the maximum support and assistance.

Ms Harkin: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the need for an adequate cancer service in Donegal in order that people living there will not be treated as second class citizens because of their geographic location; and the necessity of providing a satellite radiation unit in the north west.

Mr. Connolly: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the difficulties arising from the outbreak of the vancomycin resistant enterococcus, VRE, hospital superbug at Cavan General Hospital which have resulted in the closure to new patients of the special care unit at the hospital and the unavailability of beds elsewhere

in the Health Service Executive north-eastern area; the fact that clinically discharged patients in both Monaghan General Hospital and Cavan General Hospital continue to occupy bed spaces; and consequently to urge the HSE to consider exploring the possibility of using available bed spaces at St. Davnet's Hospital, Monaghan for patients remaining in both Monaghan and Cavan general hospitals who are clinically discharged, thereby expediting their discharge and freeing up a considerable number of beds; and to examine further methods of fast-tracking nursing home subvention. There are solutions we must actively pursue.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not appropriate to go beyond the notice submitted.

Ms Shortall: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the need for the Minister for Transport to outline the steps he intends to take to secure an end to the industrial dispute at Iarnród Éireann that has resulted in the huge disruption and inconvenience as a result of the withdrawal of rail services for tens of thousands of commuters.

Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the emerging crisis in respect of the Afghans in St. Patrick's Cathedral seeking refugee status and who have now engaged in a thirst as well as a hunger strike; the unacceptable and draconian manner in which asylum applications are processed in this State; the shameful failure of the State to introduce complementary protections for those individuals who fall outside the narrow convention criteria for refugee status but who may be in grave danger should they be forced to return to their country of origin; and the need for the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to intervene immediately to prevent this crisis turning into a tragedy.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the failure of the Government to implement the measures needed to end the crisis in accident and emergency units in our hospitals, as set out in the Government's health strategy in 2001, including the provision of the additional 3,000 hospital beds required, a new consultants' contract which prioritises the public system and the roll-out of an efficient and equitable primary care network; and the need for the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children to make herself fully accountable to the Dáil for these failures, including the dire situation in hospitals in the north east region where accident and emergency units are overcrowded, where intensive care beds are not available and where cuts in services have resulted in deaths of patients, including that of the late Pat Joe Walsh.

Dr. Cowley: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the need for the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to extend the same humanitarian concern and compassion he showed the tens of thousands of Irish people seeking residency in the US to the Afghan hunger strikers in St. Patrick's Cathedral, one of whom has diabetes and is in a critical condition.

Mr. Ferris: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the request by the families of the fishermen lost on the *Maggie B* to have the vessel lifted from the seabed to ascertain what caused it to sink and to help to bring some closure to the families' grief.

Mr. Crowe: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the urgent need for the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children to take measures to reduce the number of patients on trolleys in this State, which currently stands at 209 people. A total of 12 patients are lying on trolleys today in Tallaght Hospital in my constituency. In a wealthy country, the fact that a single patient must endure hours and sometimes days on a trolley is unacceptable, not to mention that a few hundred patients must do so. I again call on the Tánaiste to deliver on her promises after 18 months in office.

Mr. Morgan: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the need for the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to explain why, despite his commitment that the labour inspectorate would urgently investigate the conditions of 56 Serbians working on the ESB's €3 billion networks renewal scheme, seven weeks later, the inspectorate has not yet submitted its report to the Labour Relations Commission; why workers are still awaiting substantial arrears due to them; and what actions will be taken against the employer, Energo, which, according to evidence produced by the TEEU, was paying workers a mere €3.21 an hour in breach of the National Minimum Wage Act 2000, the registered employment agreement and a number of other pieces of employment law.

Mr. Crawford: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the crisis in the farming industry resulting from the collapse in dairy farmers' returns, the difficulties in the poultry industry resulting from the adverse publicity regarding avian influenza and the ongoing difficulties and disappearance of the mushroom industry; and the need for Government action at home and at European level before further serious damage is done.

Mr. Cuffe: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the plight of 41 asylum seekers from Afghanistan who are on hunger strike in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, many of whose applications for refugee status have been turned down by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal; the veil of secrecy under which the tribunal operates; and the lack of transparency surrounding the decision-making process.

Ms O. Mitchell: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the increasing number of incidents involving mechanical and other failures in the school bus fleet, including apparently spontaneous fires; and the need for an end to the system of annual in-house bus testing by Bus Éireann and for a switch to an objective, independent and rigorous testing system to ensure the safety of schoolgoing children.

Mr. Costello: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the need for the intervention on a humanitarian basis to secure an end to the hunger and thirst strike involving a number of Afghans seeking asylum in this country having regard to the fact that the group includes a number of minors and that other individuals have been taken to hospital today.

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

Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 17, the Health (Repayment Scheme) Bill 2006 — Second Stage (resumed); and No. 2, Institutes of Technology Bill 2006 — Order for Second Stage and Second Stage. Private Members' business shall be No. 51, motion re primary education: school places and class sizes.

Mr. Kenny: Today, different Deputies submitted between 12 and 15 requests to move the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31. Could the Taoiseach indicate when the Government Chief Whip and Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach, Deputy Kitt, will introduce proposals for Dáil reform as they have not yet been produced?

Could the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children tell us when the pharmacy (No. 1) Bill will be introduced and when it is proposed to appoint a chief pharmacist because this matter has dragged on for a very long time?

The Taoiseach: The heads of the pharmacy (No. 1) Bill, which provides for fitness to practice regulations for pharmacists, were approved two weeks ago. The Bill has gone for drafting and should be available later this year.

Mr. Rabbitte: The Dalton report accompanied the leaks which took place over the weekend, the medical consultancy report to pre-empt the programme and the Taoiseach's climbdown on decentralisation. I raised this issue in the House several times and was informed by the Taoiseach and the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, who appears to regard the issue as risible, that it was not possible to publish the Dalton report on the advice of the Attorney General. The report was circulated to the parties to give them prior sight of it. The chairman of Bord na gCon, Paschal Taggart, stated on the radio yesterday that he had not received a copy of the report.

An Ceann Comhairle: Does Deputy Rabbitte have a brief question appropriate to the Order of Business?

Mr. Rabbitte: I would be sitting down by now if the Ceann Comhairle had allowed me to finish. Mr. Taggart stated that he had not received a copy of the report. When will the report be placed in the Oireachtas Library? How is it that journalists can be given this report by agents of the Minister while Members of this House cannot obtain it? Can the Taoiseach explain why the report was supposedly referred to the parties affected but not to the chairman of Bord na gCon? When will we get to see the report?

The Taoiseach: As I stated last week, the sections of the report which were relevant to individuals named in it were given to those individuals on the basis of legal advice to ensure that fairness and due process were adhered to. They were given a period of 15 days in which they had to respond. These issues would have to be taken into account through an amendment or annexe to a report. One would need to examine what they stated, as some may have objected or disputed something. That is what happened. The named individuals in the report received the part relevant to them.

While parts of the report have been leaked, it is still the advice to the Government that we must follow due process and give the individuals a chance. They are entitled to state their position on comments made in respect of them, critical or otherwise, if they wish. This would be taken into account before the Minister reported back to the Government to determine when the report will be published.

Mr. Sargent: After last night's "Prime Time Investigates" programme, I thought promised legislation might be available to address some of the problems highlighted, but I do not see a "put back the beds" Bill in light of the 18,000 to 12,000 cut since the 1980s. Will the health Bill result in any alleviation of the problems highlighted in the accident and emergency services? It might give us an opportunity—

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question on legislation?

Mr. Sargent: That is it. Will the public transport commission Bill, previously the transport reform Bill, result in a reform of the Minister for Transport. Six months has passed since those carriages were delivered.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is labouring the point.

Mr. Sargent: The Minister might need to be more interventionist in ensuring heads are knocked together to prevent an escalation of a dispute that is starving people of public transport.

The Taoiseach: Which Bills?

Mr. Sargent: The health Bill and the public transport commission Bill, both of which are topical.

The Taoiseach: Work is under way on the draft heads of the public transport commission Bill but it is unlikely that legislation will be ready this year. The heads of the health Bill have been approved. The consultation process is under way. Once this is finished, the revised proposals will be submitted to the Government. The process, however, will take longer than initially anticipated and the Bill is expected to be published later in the year.

Mr. Crawford: The Taoiseach has told the House several times that he withdrew the alcohol products (control of advertising, sponsorship and marketing practices/sales promotions) Bill to allow the private system to work. Has he reconsidered that position in light of road deaths in particular and will the Bill be reintroduced?

In light of the promising Northern Ireland talks, will the British-Irish Agreement (amendment) Bill be introduced to allow the House to discuss it?

The Taoiseach: There is no change in the position on the alcohol products Bill. A period will be allowed to pass before there is any change. The British-Irish Agreement (amendment) Bill will be published this year.

Ms Shortall: Only one Bill is promised from the Department of Transport for this session, that is, the road traffic Bill. The House has been told it will contain a number of road safety measures, which are very much needed, given our road fatality rate. Will the Taoiseach give an undertaking that the Bill will be published in time for its debate and enactment before the summer recess?

The Taoiseach: That is the intention. It got priority approval for drafting. We do not have a date but we hope to have the Bill as soon as pos-

sible and take all stages. I am aware that we must try to get the legislation out in time.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On 26 April, I asked the Taoiseach: "What is the explanation for the further deferment of the eligibility for health and personal social services Bill?" He responded: "Deputy Ó Caoláin is always asking me to publish the heads of Bills to allow for more meaningful discussion. The reason for the delay in this case is because we published the heads of the Bill to allow for more meaningful discussion." He took some joy in giving me that reply.

However, I checked with the Department of Health and Children on 4 May. It told me that the heads of the Bill have not been published. I wonder if they have even been agreed. To correct the response the Taoiseach threw back at me on that occasion, will he set the record of the House straight? Have the heads been agreed and when will they be published? Is the Government examining the implications—

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot discuss the content of legislation.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: —for this legislation of the European Court of Justice judgment in respect of the British National Health Service and the elderly woman who must be reimbursed for having—

An Ceann Comhairle: We cannot discuss the content of the legislation. The Deputy must speak on the Bill itself.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It would suggest that the European Court of Justice's recent decision may impinge on the preparations.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should resume his seat and allow the Taoiseach to answer his question.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It is a reasonable question. Will the judgment impact on the deliberations on this Bill and when will it be published?

An Ceann Comhairle: The matter does not arise on the Order of Business. I suggest the Deputy submit a question to the Minister.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I will do that.

The Taoiseach: There are a number of health Bills. Today, the Health (Repayment Scheme) Bill 2006 is before the House. There is a nursing home Bill and, of course, the health Bill. In my previous reply to the Deputy, I should have talked about the health Bill because it was that Bill that was published. I was incorrect if I said the eligibility for health and personal social services Bill, which will clarify and update the present provisions relating to eligibility for health and personal social services. That Bill is unlikely

to be available until next year. Obviously, the Deputy has quoted me correctly, but the Bill that has gone for consultation and the heads of which were approved in March is the health Bill.

Mr. Durkan: Is the Government aware of the implications for the national electricity grid, particularly continuity of supply, in the event of the closure of any further station due to the failure of materials or construction work?

An Ceann Comhairle: To what legislation does the Deputy's question pertain?

Mr. Durkan: The single electricity market Bill would be a suitable vehicle.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy asked his question last Thursday and received an answer.

Mr. Durkan: As long as it is a threat to the security of supply, it would be a good idea to ask my question on Wednesday and Thursday of next week. Will the Taoiseach address the question in this context?

The Taoiseach: The Bill will be introduced this session.

Mr. Durkan: Excellent.

Mr. Howlin: On secondary legislation arising from our obligations under the Amsterdam Treaty's Title IV Article 63, namely, the transposition into Irish law of the qualification directive, which we are required to do by October of this year. I do not expect the Taoiseach to know exactly what the article is. It is a directive that will afford protection in the short term to persons who do not strictly qualify for refugee status here. Since we are required to have legal protection for such individuals by October at the latest, can the sense of that be used to address the issue of the asylum seekers in St. Patrick's Cathedral? Will the Taoiseach join me in asking the people directly affected to desist from their hunger strike in order for the normal processes of the State to listen sympathetically to their case?

The Taoiseach: I will check the provision and see where we are in respect of it. I agree fully with what the Deputy said. These people were going through the process but did not reach its end. In the interests of their health, they would do best to follow the process.

Mr. Boyle: Will the Taoiseach give further clarification in respect of the proposed childcare (amendment) Bill, which can be found in section A of the Government's legislative programme for this session? Does this mean the Bill will be published before the House rises in July instead of before it returns in October? Will the House have an opportunity to discuss it on Second Stage before July?

The Taoiseach: It is listed for this session but I do not know the exact date. The Deputy knows that this session goes up to the date of the start of the next session. I do not know when the Bill will be ready.

Mr. Boyle: There is a need for a sense of urgency with this legislation.

Mr. Gilmore: The Select Committee on Environment and Local Government has been asked to schedule the Committee Stage debate on the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Bill for 13 June, but that Bill has not been before this House for the Second Stage debate. When will Second Stage begin and how many days will be set aside for it?

The Taoiseach: I understand the Bill is before the Seanad today and if it is finished there, I presume it can be taken in this House next week, but that is a matter for the party Whips.

Mr. Gilmore: If the Taoiseach does not know when the debate will start and how long it will take, how does the Minister know —

An Ceann Comhairle: The first problem for this House is that if the Bill is in the other House, we do not know when it will finish there.

Ms Lynch: That is the point.

Mr. Gilmore: Exactly, but how does the Minister know that it will be finished in both Houses by 13 June?

The Taoiseach: Tuesday, 13 June is a long time away. I am glad to see that the committees are scheduling their time because the problem with them is that they are usually all over the place.

Ms Lynch: That is not true.

Mr. Rabbitte: That is a terrible slight on the 19 committee Chairmen from the Taoiseach's party.

Mr. Gilmore: The Taoiseach should withdraw that remark, not least because the committees are chaired, controlled and run by Deputies from his own backbenches.

Mr. S. Ryan: Whom he appointed.

The Taoiseach: I could talk for some time about the difficulties in getting legislation through.

Mr. Howlin: The Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights is looking for slots to get the Criminal Justice Bill through. It cannot sit on Thursday—

Mr. Rabbitte: The Taoiseach will have to remove some of the dead wood and promote

some people, otherwise they will obstruct him. I know what they are like.

Ms McManus: The only difficulty for the Committee on Health and Children is that it is often dependent on the Opposition to achieve a quorum because the Members from the Government side do not turn up.

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question appropriate to the Order of Business?

Ms McManus: There are two items I wish to raise—

(Interruptions).

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McManus, without interruption, please. I ask Deputies on both sides of the House to allow Deputy McManus to continue.

Ms McManus: No community has suffered more than the haemophiliac community. It is still waiting for justice. It is seven years since the hepatitis C and HIV compensation—

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question on legislation?

Ms McManus: —tribunal (amendment) Bill was to be published. I ask the Taoiseach to ensure that the Bill is delivered before the House rises for the summer, in the interest of those who have suffered.

Last month the Government received the report on Leas Cross nursing home. When can we expect that report to be published?

The Taoiseach: I agree with Deputy McManus's first point and it is our intention to get the Bill through, but it is not ready yet. It will be another two weeks before it comes before the Government, but it is important and, if possible, we will try to get it through before the summer recess.

The Government has not yet received the report on Leas Cross. The HSE, I understand, has the report.

Mr. S. Ryan: I seek clarification from the Taoiseach on an authority that is considered to be an essential element of the reorganisation of the health services, namely, the health and equality authority. What is the current status regarding that legislation? Have the heads of the Bill been drawn up yet?

The Taoiseach: As I mentioned earlier, the heads of that Bill will be published for consultation later this year, but it is unlikely that the Bill will be through this year.

Health (Repayment Scheme) Bill 2006: Second Stage (Resumed).

Question again proposed: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

Mr. S. Ryan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Health (Repayment Scheme) Bill 2006. This is the second occasion in two weeks that I have spoken on legislation relating to older people, which represents progress. For too long, the needs of the elderly have been neglected and have been dealt with on a piecemeal basis, usually through secondary legislation, some of which has been found to be faulty and illegal. The best way to deal with the needs of the elderly is through primary legislation.

While I welcome this Bill, it is disgraceful that it has taken so long to introduce the legislation necessary to refund the illegal charges paid by people in nursing homes. No other group would be left waiting for almost a year and a half to have their money refunded to them.

The bottom line in respect of the nursing home payments is that the State broke the law over a long period. During that time various Ministers and Ministers of State at the Department of Health and Children knew there was a problem and either kept quiet or simply forgot about it. Deputy Perry should be complimented on his initiative in raising this issue. How long would the unlawful action of the State have continued were it not for Deputy Perry's intervention? That is a valid question.

When the unlawful payments were eventually highlighted, the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, with the full support of the Government, introduced legislation with the specific purpose of denying the most frail and vulnerable people in our society the money due to them in retrospective payments. During the debate on that Bill, I and my Labour Party colleagues, as well as other Opposition Deputies, warned the Minister that she was taking a grave risk in introducing that type of legislation and that, in all probability, the Bill would be found to be unconstitutional. In effect, that is what happened — the Supreme Court found that the Bill was unconstitutional. The rights of the elderly were vindicated by the courts, not by this House. The Government failed to vindicate the rights and entitlements of the elderly in our society.

Another fundamental question which must be addressed in legislation and which could have been dealt with in this Bill is what happens to older people who need care and cannot get it in their own home setting, and for whom a public nursing home bed is not available? In theory, our laws provide that everyone is entitled to long-stay care but we all know that in reality, the situation is very different. We do not have sufficient long-stay places for the people who need them. The majority of older people want to stay in their own home environment but approximately 4% or 5%

of them will require long-term care in nursing homes. In that context, the age profile of the country means additional long-term nursing home beds in the public sector will be required.

At present, an abundance of money is available to the Government. However, as far as I can see, it is used for the pet projects of Ministers whose sole objective is to identify projects in their constituencies to promote get themselves re-elected. They were elected to this House to look after everyone.

A commitment was given that this Government would provide 2,000 extra long-term public nursing home beds. Regrettably, that was reneged upon. That the Government has failed to build on its commitment and provide long-term care needs in public nursing homes will be a major scandal in the future.

I received representations, as have Members of all parties, from medical card holders whose spouses need long-term care. Unfortunately, that care was not available within the community. Those older people could no longer look after their spouses at home and public nursing home beds were not available. To provide the care for their spouses, these people, elderly themselves, were obliged to secure a loan from a credit union to augment a social welfare payment and a subvention to meet the weekly repayments of approximately €800 in a private nursing home.

I asked the Tánaiste whether medical card holders are also entitled to a refund under this scheme. She has turned her back on this group of people. Notwithstanding this, will the Minister of State address this issue when he responds at the end of this debate? Are medical card holders who are unable to gain access to a public nursing home and who must enter a private nursing home and pay for it themselves through loans entitled to a refund? If not, why not? As I stated, the Tánaiste has turned her back on this category of people. However, given that people are entitled to long-term care, the courts once again may intervene on behalf of older people.

Last night's RTE "Prime Time Investigates" programme on accident and emergency departments highlights the lack of commitment by the State to older people. Most of the people in accident and emergency departments are elderly. I have given much consideration to the fact that the Government will only respond when a scandal or potential scandal is highlighted by the media, especially on television. The same approach was taken after the Leas Cross scandal. When issues are raised in this House by Members of the Opposition or questions are asked why legislation has not been enacted or certain steps have not been taken, we are pawned off by the same standard reply that legislation is proceeding. Years afterwards, particularly in the context of the elderly, promises made have still not been enacted.

Last week we dealt with the Health (Nursing Homes)(Amendment) Bill 2006 and the need for the Legislature to regulate. Care within public

[Mr. S. Ryan.]

long-stay settings is not subject to regulation. The private and voluntary nursing home sectors are subject to certain regulations. However, they are completely inadequate. They emanate from 1993 regulations and the Health (Nursing Homes) Act 1990.

Ten years ago report after report demanded the introduction of statutory regulations governing nursing homes. We still await them. I mentioned it last Thursday and I ask again when that will legislation see the light of day. The time constraints between now and the next general election mean it is unlikely that the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Power, will be in a position to bring it through the Dáil. Well before the Leas Cross scandal was raised in this House, the inadequacies of the regulation structures and the fact they were introduced on a piecemeal basis were outlined in various reports since 1999. That is unacceptable.

I compliment the National Council on Ageing and Older People on the publication of its most recent report on improving the quality of life for older people in long-stay care settings. Having read the report, I plead with the Minister of State and his officials to take on board many of the recommendations contained therein. Unfortunately, during recent years, other bodies, at a cost of resources and time to those involved, brought forward similar reports which were overlooked. They were ignored and were left to gather dust on a shelf in the Minister's office. If some of these recommendations had been implemented, many of the scandals of recent years could have been avoided.

I wish to refer to some recommendations contained in this report, but before that we must acknowledge that we have a major problem in considering how to deal with the care of older people in future years. I read a population labour force report which shows that in 2006, the elderly, or those aged 65 and over, number 463,000. It is projected that in 2036 they will number 1.1 million. If a substantial service is to be provided between now and then, we must ensure that the needs of the elderly are deemed a priority and that hard decisions must be taken by everybody, irrespective of who is in government.

A plan to finance the needs of the elderly well into this century must be formulated. On the basis of various reports and what we know with regard to nursing homes and lack of services etc., much care and many services will need to be provided. The matter must be examined.

In the context of a report from the National Council on Ageing and Older People, some basic issues must be outlined very clearly. With regard to the direction we will take in future, some points should also be made clear. For example, there are no national standards of care, with existing regulations confined to nursing homes and voluntary homes. It is difficult to prosecute nursing homes which violate existing regulations. There is no published analysis of the inspection

report on private facilities. We have known this and referred to it time and again. There is no common standardised approach to nursing home inspections. Even if people wished to go to the Ombudsman with regard to private nursing homes, its powers only extend to public long-stay care facilities.

This relates to the issue of the physical environment, and I referred to what was a negative and wrong decision taken by the Government not to proceed, notwithstanding promises, with long-term public nursing homes. Currently, even the inadequate inspectorate system we have does not cover public nursing homes.

Mr. S. Power: We will cover them.

Mr. S. Ryan: Many would say that a reason there was no coverage in the past related to what may have been found.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy has one minute remaining.

Mr. S. Ryan: In that minute I welcome this Bill as at long last it endeavours to deal with outstanding payments to older people. There is much to be done and I ask the Minister of State, in this context, to ensure that we have full consultation with the people and bodies involved. We must ensure the necessary legislation is put in place to guarantee that the most vulnerable people in our society are cared for in the best of conditions.

Many of the conditions in which they must live are out of character with those that would apply in their own home environment. A priority must be that where people must go into long-term care, we should have a caring home-type environment. The services must be provided. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak and I look forward to further debate on Committee Stage.

Mr. McGuinness: I welcome the Bill and I hope that it receives a speedy passage through this House. Much money, totalling approximately €1 billion, is pending on this Bill and the assessments must be made so that people who are out of pocket, or covered by this Bill, can receive their payments promptly. I am glad to see Deputy Perry here for the Opposition as it was during his chairmanship of the Committee of Public Accounts Committee that some of these questions were first asked. Since then the matter has been debated publicly throughout the country and identified as a serious problem.

It is no harm to reflect on prior events during the course of this debate. The issue was mentioned a number of times at health board meetings. While the procedure was questioned, the questions were never answered. They may not have been pursued strongly enough to obtain an answer and thereby uncover the process which was going on within the health boards. This shows the value of a committee system, where infor-

mation is received from the public. I received some of that information as a member of the Committee of Public Accounts. This facilitates investigation and teasing out whether complaints are legitimate. In this case the complaints were found to be legitimate.

It is no harm to reflect on the fact that management of the former health boards proved to be wholly inadequate. It lacked the cutting edge which is required to administer a health system. As a result, these charges were administered willy-nilly, depending on the health board. This showed a lack of consistency throughout the country and there was very poor scrutiny or transparency in the system through the health boards.

It was for this reason and other associated issues within the old health board system that I fully supported the change from that health board structure to the current system, the Health Service Executive. Given the commitment expressed last night by Professor Brendan Drumm, supported by the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, on "Questions and Answers", I commend both of them on the manner in which they proactively dealt with issues relating to accident and emergency departments, among others in health services.

I hope that in the context of their work within the HSE, the necessary reform, not only in accident and emergency departments but with many other issues relating to the delivery of services to those who need it within the health system, is delivered speedily, accurately and in a focused way for the benefit of the patient. That is what I saw from the debate last night and from exchanges with people like Professor Drumm at meetings of the Committee of Public Accounts.

My only difficulty is with the speed of that system. It is still very bureaucratic and it needs to be trimmed so that an appropriate management system is put in place and there are appropriately qualified people to manage the system. This takes time, which I acknowledge, but we need to see continued funding and commitment until a proper management structure is delivered within the Health Service Executive. We can then accurately point to where system failures continue to occur, from management level to the various hospitals in the country. Until that happens, we will not have the efficiency of service that is demanded by the public.

The proper approach is being taken with regard to this Bill and the patients covered by it. The Health Service Executive has established that up to 10,000 people must be repaid. I welcome the fact that a second company will oversee those repayments and that there has been some involvement on the part of Health Service Executive staff. The decision to outsource the process is correct because it enables the health service, as it undergoes restructuring, to focus exclusively on staff management and redeployment rather than be burdened with such a complex issue as these

repayments. A system failure in the old health boards caused this problem.

I also welcome the fact that the Tánaiste is considering how patients' private property accounts are managed. I have had the opportunity to raise this issue at the Committee of Public Accounts and I do not believe there is adequate transparency in the system. In the old health boards there was little or no transparency and a number of whistleblowers employed by health boards have highlighted the inadequacies of the system. They have made complaints but in some cases have been identified and are being bullied and harassed in the workplace. That is not a position that can be tolerated by the HSE.

A national oversight committee has been appointed. It is representative of service users, including Age Action Ireland and the Irish Senior Citizen's Parliament, and provides an independent input into the design of the repayment scheme. I encourage that group to study not only what led to this scheme but also the patients' private property accounts, how they were administered by the health boards and whether money might need to be repaid to patients in that context. It might also examine the whereabouts of funds, property and other possessions of patients while they were under the care of the old health boards, as well as how they were transferred from the health boards to the HSE. A national audit should take place, overseen by the national oversight committee, so that we can create new books of accounts in which the balance of the affected patients' accounts, audited by an independent group or committee, is brought forward.

It is necessary to protect not only patients' rights but the integrity of employees. A protocol should be drawn up in every HSE area stating how the affected patients' accounts should be handled and accounted for and how the patients or their representatives should be informed of the balances and the activities on their accounts. There was a very poor accountancy system in the old health boards.

I have in my hand a patients' money book given to me by a psychiatric nurse who has made a complaint to the Department of Health and Children, a complaint which has not been responded to adequately. It raises serious questions. It dates back to 2003 and earlier and relates to the management of several patients' money. While that complaint awaits a response, it does no justice to the men and women who manage such accounts in the health system. It raises questions that have yet to be answered. It is a poor system that does not take such a complaint seriously and fails to respond. On more than one occasion the person to whom I refer was questioned by the Garda Síochána. I know of another complaint that has been under investigation by the Garda in Waterford for quite some time. The HSE and the Department owe it to staff and patients to investigate complaints vigorously and respond to them effectively to protect the system

[Mr. McGuinness.]

and those who work in it as well as those who are cared by it.

I urge the Minister of State to pursue those aspects of the Bill that seek to ensure that complaints awaiting response in the Department are dealt with and to ensure that those being investigated by gardaí are also made the subject of internal investigations. The protocol to which I referred should then be put in place to be followed by everyone concerned. It should be transparent and acceptable to all. Until that happens there will continue to be doubts over the system. We have the opportunity in this Bill to ensure that an audit takes place under the scrutiny of the oversight committee. A balance needs to be brought forward and the amount calculated as owed repaid.

I defend any whistleblower who raised a complaint and call on the HSE to offer appropriate protection to people in their employment who express their view on what is happening in the interests of better service. Any complaint should be investigated and both patient and employee be protected.

Deputy Seán Ryan dealt with subventions and issues arising from the television programme last night. I was impressed by the contribution of Dr. Gary Courtney on the subject of St. Luke's Hospital in Kilkenny. That hospital represents an example of best practice. It showed how a patient could be brought into a medical assessment unit and looked after properly. The patient could then be sent to the appropriate section of the hospital and thereafter cared for in the appropriate bed. If necessary, he or she would be discharged to the pre-discharge unit. I know from my work with that unit that a home liaison officer then ensures the appropriate care and support is made available in a patient's home within the community so that he or she receives the best quality care according to his or her needs.

St. Luke's Hospital is a model that can easily be replicated. There may be different emphases in terms of the type of beds needed. They may be needed in a medical assessment unit, in the hospital itself or in the pre-discharge unit, but that is the job of a bed manager. The Minister of State visited St. Luke's and will know that everybody, from the consultants to the person who sweeps the floor, participates in the management and delivery of the service in that hospital. The hospital also maintains strong links with general practitioners in Carlow and Kilkenny to ensure the best possible delivery of health care to the patient.

I encourage the Tánaiste to adopt a suggestion on "Questions and Answers". Hospitals such as St. Luke's which have recently been funded to the tune of €6.2 million for one particular service and €1.5 million for another but which set an example to others by innovating should be rewarded by the Department of Health and Children, through the HSE. As best practice replicated and rolled

out in other hospitals, the hospital in which an initiative originated should be financially rewarded for its achievement. Such awards should be directed towards delivering frontline patient care, improving the image of the hospital, developing innovative approaches in other areas or providing care for the elderly.

Elderly people assessed in pre-discharge units are directed towards the appropriate care facility, either in the community or at home. There is no reason, therefore, that subvention payments made to private nursing homes should not be relabelled and paid directly to those caring for patients in their homes. The Department, with the support of the Health Service Executive, should introduce this innovation which would support families who wish to care for elderly family members at home.

On the issue of subvention payments, with so few public beds available in Kilkenny city, I encourage the Tánaiste to expedite plans to provide a 30-bed unit on the campus of St. Luke's Hospital in order that public beds become available for the care of the elderly and some balance is introduced in a market in which the cost of private beds is spiralling. When the nursing home subvention scheme commenced, a private nursing home bed cost approximately €300 per week but the figure has since increased to €700 to €800 per week, with additional payment required for every extra service needed by those in care. Given the gap between charges and the value of the subvention and the person in care's pension, families must make a substantial contribution towards the costs of care. The State has an obligation to bridge this gap.

The provision of public beds for care of the elderly would also create competition with the private sector. Allowing this market to be run exclusively by the private sector will result in the State being scourged in terms of price. As the population grows older, this issue will become more urgent and will need to be addressed through a mix of public and private beds.

Home care packages, a welcome, new initiative providing for an assessment and costing of people's care needs in the home, need to be promoted much more. The Health Service Executive should identify families which would benefit from home care packages and encourage them to support family members at home. The lack of public beds for providing care for the elderly is the reason for current problems with subventions and charges. Active retired groups in every constituency are campaigning to ensure that appropriate funding is made available for nursing home care in order that the accumulated assets of families, especially family homes, are not placed in jeopardy. Efforts should also be made to have people who normally live alone but are currently accommodated in public hospital beds cared for at home.

I note the company responsible for making the repayments under the new scheme was to have

been appointed at the end of April with payments likely to commence in June. Clearly a decision is close on which entity will oversee the process. I hope the work the Health Service Executive has done in identifying patients who were wrongly charged and are still alive — I understand from the Tánaiste's note that almost 10,000 payments have been calculated — will be verified by the company and made immediately thereafter.

Where the person in care has passed away, I encourage the potential beneficiaries to consider donating the reimbursed moneys for use in front-line services. This is a wealthy country and some potential beneficiaries could be encouraged to donate repayments owing to them. They should, therefore, be informed of this provision and the areas on which their moneys would be spent. For example, people could be encouraged to donate money if it is earmarked for use in the region in which they live. While many people are decent enough to consider such an appeal, it is essential that they are informed about the provision. I commend the Bill to the House.

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): I thank Deputies for their contributions to the debate and welcome the broad support from all parties for the introduction of this legislation. I propose to respond to some of the issues raised during the debate.

The enactment of the Bill will be a key milestone in ensuring that repayments will be made as promptly as possible to all those who were wrongly charged for publicly funded long-stay care. As previously noted, the legislation will provide a framework to enable repayments to be made to all those affected who are alive and the estates of those who died since 9 December 1998. Those affected will have all charges levied up to 9 December 2004, the date on which charging ceased, repaid in full.

The scheme incorporates many features designed to make it a more attractive option than litigation. Repayments to those who are alive or their living spouse will not be subject to income tax. Those in receipt of repayments will retain their current social welfare pensions or allowances and their full eligibility entitlement or medical card status. Repayments under the scheme will not be considered when assessing entitlements to subvention.

Ensuring that the Bill contains the significant benefits I have outlined required extensive consultations with many agencies over an extended period, as did the provisions ensuring appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the financial affairs of vulnerable people. A number of Deputies mentioned the delay in bringing the Bill before the Oireachtas. As I noted, it was necessary to contact a number of the individuals concerned to ensure proper safeguards were in place. While all Members would have preferred to have the legislation before the House at an earlier date, the Bill needed to contain the maximum

degree of protection for the vulnerable people affected by this issue. While I acknowledge that the process has been longer than expected, this has been due in the main to the complex and sensitive nature of the issues involved and the need to obtain detailed legal opinion.

In recognition of the special needs of those in long-stay residential care, the Bill will introduce appropriate safeguards to protect those who may not have the functional capacity to manage their own financial affairs without having to resort to wardship or the use of widespread psychiatric assessments, which could substantially delay repayments being made. The scheme will apply to fully eligible people, that is, medical card holders and those aged over 70 years, with effect from July 2001. To ensure repayments are made in an equitable manner, those not having a medical card on admission to long-stay care but who fall within the income-means threshold for a medical card will be regarded as having full eligibility for the purpose of this scheme. This will include those in publicly funded long-stay care, patients in public contracted beds in private nursing homes and patients in receipt of inpatient services in community-based facilities.

An outside company with experience in handling mass claims will be appointed by the Health Service Executive to administer the scheme. This company will provide an independent assessment of the amount of repayment due to each applicant and will help to reassure the public that the scheme is being operated in the most equitable and effective way possible.

Following consideration of all the issues, the initial procurement process was terminated in December 2005 as the HSE considered the tenders were unsuitable for a number of reasons, including value for money. The current public tendering process is at an advanced stage and it is expected that a decision on the appointment of a preferred service provider will be made when the board of the HSE meets on 1 June. A number of Deputies referred to the delay in appointing an outside company and some people questioned why it was being appointed. In fairness, however, it is important to have an independent assessment available. While the Department was very much involved in charging those involved, it is important to have an independent body to reassure people that everything is above board. In view of what happened, the HSE has taken the right decision and I am sure we are getting value for money. Hopefully the decision will be taken on 1 June.

Consideration was given by the HSE to the involvement of public sector staff to assist in administering the repayments scheme. However, the time constraints of the procurement process and the potential for significant logistical difficulties and protracted delays, with consequent implications for the commencement of the repayment scheme, did not allow for this option to be progressed. The HSE has also informed the

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Department of Health and Children that the operation of a repayment scheme of this nature is not one of its core functions and that it would not be in a position to administer a repayment scheme of this magnitude within existing resources without having to divert staff from their normal functions in the delivery of health services.

Shortly after the Supreme Court made its ruling, we announced we would establish this process to refund money. There has been no reason for delaying the process other than to put in place the simplest and most transparent refund system. While it is estimated that in total the scheme will cost close to €1 billion, we have included €400 million in the Estimates for this year.

The application process will be as simple as possible. January 2008 is the deadline for submitting applications, not for making repayments. Some speakers felt the deadline for repayments was 2008 but we are giving people until January 2008 to submit their applications. Valid applications will be paid until all have been dealt with. Fully eligible persons currently in care and those who have left care recently will be readily identifiable by records held by the institution. The HSE will ensure that applications are submitted on behalf of those in the care of the HSE who are unable to make the application themselves due to a physical or mental disability or ill health.

The application process will identify the personal representative in the case of estates and will provide the necessary documentation to help protect the State against fraudulent claims. In her earlier contribution, Deputy McManus referred to legal advice she had received concerning the recovery of money obtained through fraud. The Attorney General has advised that section 17 is not constitutionally questionable because it is, ultimately, the courts which would determine whether the ground exists for the HSE's claim of fraud, and they would never accept a mere assertion by the HSE that it is "satisfied" that the claim exists.

To ensure that those eligible for repayments are aware of their entitlements, an extensive communications process will be developed around the scheme. This will include TV, national and local radio, and newspaper advertisements.

Applicants will be repaid the moneys that are due to them in full, adjusted using the consumer price index to reflect the current value in today's monetary terms. The consumer price index is a widely accepted tool for monetary calculation over an extended period of time. It is used, for example, by the Department of Social and Family Affairs in dealing with underpayments of social welfare entitlements. A precedent also exists whereby in social welfare payments made as a result of the European Court of Justice's equal treatment ruling, amounts were adjusted by reference to the CPI to maintain their value.

The scheme contains a provision to enable those due repayments under the scheme to donate all or part of the repayment, specifically for one-off improvements in public health services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities. It is the intention that the wishes of those donating money will be considered when making allocations from the fund, subject to legal and practical constraints. The HSE is considering how best this can be achieved.

The scheme includes an independent, transparent and user-friendly appeals process. The Tánaiste will appoint suitably qualified independent appeals officers to consider appeals. Regular reports on the operation of the appeals process will be laid before the Oireachtas. All applicants will be advised of their right to appeal and how to make an appeal. Applicants will also be informed of their right to bring a complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman.

The overall costs arising from the long-stay charges repayment scheme have been estimated at approximately €1 billion. An appropriate allocation of €400 million for 2006 will be made when the legislation is passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas and the balance will be required in 2007 and 2008.

While debating this Bill a number of Deputies have referred to the preference of older people in need of care to remain in their own homes. In this regard, an additional €150 million was allocated in last December's budget towards improving services for older people and palliative care. This is the largest ever annual increase in funding for services for older people. Reflecting the new emphasis on home and day care, almost three quarters of that figure — €109 million of the full year costs — are being committed to services in the community.

The investment package is focused on caring for people at home in accordance with their expressed wishes, with additional funding for a number of new and existing community and home-based initiatives, including home care packages, the home help service, day and respite centres, meals on wheels and sheltered housing. Additional funding of €20 million was made available in the 2006 budget for the subvention scheme.

The Department is preparing legislation to update and clarify the present overall system of eligibility for health and personal social services to establish a fair and transparent framework in keeping with a modern health service. The aim is to publish a Bill by the end of this year.

Deputies Twomey and Seán Ryan referred to the proposed establishment of the health information and quality authority, HIQA. Preparation of legislation to provide for the establishment of the health information and quality authority and the office of the chief inspector of social services within the HIQA is well under way. The office will inspect residential services for older people as well as those for people with disability and

children at risk. The office will register these homes and will inspect them against standards set by the authority. This process will cover both public and private facilities for the first time. The office will be independent of the HSE. Public consultation on the legislative proposals in the draft heads of the Bill has begun. The closing date for receipt of submissions is Friday, 26 May.

Deputy McGuinness raised the matter of patient private property accounts and he specifically mentioned a complaint that was made to the Department. As is the normal procedure, that complaint was referred to the HSE and will be dealt with by that executive. In view of what Deputy McGuinness said, however, we will make contact with the HSE and ask it to make direct contact with the Deputy and with those who made the complaint. Complaints should be dealt with as quickly as possible through any complaints procedure. If further details are required, we will get them from the Deputy.

Deputy McGuinness also referred to St. Luke's, an establishment I have had the pleasure of visiting on a few occasions. It is an example of how a team should work together.

Mr. S. Ryan: Which St. Luke's is that?

Mr. S. Power: I am referring to St. Luke's Hospital in Kilkenny. The hospital staff accept their role and play very much as a team in performing their duties in an exemplary fashion. As they would say, it is not all about resources, it is more to do with attitude than resources. They have achieved much within the available resources. We can often be critical of things when they go wrong, and it is only when things go wrong that they attract publicity. St. Luke's is one hospital that has risen to the challenge. It is a great example to other hospitals of how to make the most of the resources they are given.

Mr. S. Ryan: The Leas-Cheann Comhairle is aware of that.

Mr. S. Power: The statutory scheme being established by the enactment of the Bill will ensure that the repayment process will be as simple and user-friendly as possible given the age and vulnerability of many of those living persons to whom repayments are due. It is intended that it will operate in a non-adversarial, flexible, open and transparent manner and will cause the minimum of inconvenience or legal costs to the people concerned, their families, representatives or estates.

I thank Deputies for their contributions. I look forward to the further Stages of the Bill, at which time the views put forward will be considered in detail. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Health (Repayment Scheme) Bill 2006: Referral to Select Committee.

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on Health and Children, in accordance with Standing Order 120(1) and paragraph 1(a)(i) of the Orders of Reference of that committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Estimates for Public Services 2006: Message from Select Committee.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Communications, Marine and Natural Resources has completed its consideration of the following Estimates for public services for the service of the year ending on 31 December 2006 — Vote 30.

Institutes of Technology Bill 2006: Order for Second Stage.

Bill entitled an Act to amend the Regional Technical Colleges Acts 1992 to 2001, to amend the Dublin Institute of Technology Acts 1992 to 2001, to amend the Higher Education Authority Act 1971, to amend the Universities Act 1997, to amend the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, to repeal sections 19, 37 and 38 of the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001, and to provide for related matters.

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I move: "That Second Stage be taken now."

Question put and agreed to.

Institutes of Technology Bill 2006: Second Stage.

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I am delighted to bring the Bill to the House. It is a highly significant development for the future of Ireland's education system, the higher education system in particular. It is an explicit recognition of the importance and value of the institutes of technology to our citizens and to our overall education system.

The Bill is introduced at a time of significant importance for higher education in Ireland. The Government has identified the development of a high performance higher education system as a key strategic priority in supporting our wider social and economic goals in this knowledge age. In maximising the contribution of higher education to the social and economic progress of our nation, it is essential that our institutes of technology are supported in achieving the full potential of their roles. The Bill provides for greater

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autonomy for the institutes to fulfil their missions and, by bringing them within the remit of the Higher Education Authority, will support an integrated and cohesive strategic approach to the development of higher education in line with national priorities.

Our institutes of technology are a true success story. They have grown and matured over recent decades to become an essential and dynamic part of the education system. Notwithstanding their remarkable progress, it is worth remembering that they are a relatively recent feature of the educational landscape, having really only emerged in their current statutory form since the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 and the Dublin Institute of Technology Act 1992. While each institute has its unique history, the DIT is distinct in both its genesis and in the fact that it is governed by specific legislation.

The history of the institutes of technology is instructive in that it illustrates just how far they have come and helps us to understand where they are positioned within higher education. The first regional technical colleges opened their doors to students in 1970. The establishment of the regional technical colleges was a Government response to a number of appraisals of Irish education carried out in the 1960s. Two of these appraisals, a 1964 OECD report entitled Technician Training in Ireland and the Investment in Education report of 1965, concluded that urgent attention was required in the area of advanced technical education to produce technically qualified people against a backdrop of new planning for industrial development.

The Minister of the day, having announced that eight regional technical colleges would be established, set up a steering committee on technical education to advise him on the role of these new educational establishments. The committee reported in 1967 and, in its report, considered that the brief for these new institutions should be to educate “for trade and industry over a broad spectrum of occupations ranging from craft to professional level, notably in engineering and science, but also in commercial, linguistic and other specialties”.

At the time of enactment of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, there were 11 regional technical colleges and that number has since increased to 13. The Dublin Institute of Technology was established by the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee in 1977 and represented the consolidation into a single entity of six colleges located across the city. These colleges focused on applied education and training in a wide range of occupations, trades and skills and were, up to the 1970s, almost the sole provider of technician and technological training and education. Much of the provision in the early days was at second level but, gradually, an increased third level provision evolved.

Uniquely among the institutes of technology, the DIT has statutory power to make its own academic awards. The other institutes have made significant recent strides in terms of awarding their own degrees under delegated authority from HETAC. The majority of institutes can now make awards up to masters level — level 9 on the national framework of qualifications — while four institutes have authority to make awards at doctoral level — level 10. This is indicative of the progress the institutes have made and is a clear validated statement of the excellent academic standards in the sector. I am sure the House will join me in commending the institutes on these achievements.

One characteristic that is a particular feature of the institutes is their regional remit. It is evident in the original title — regional technical college — that this focus was central to their mission, and it is important to note that it has been retained through the significant developments that have taken place in the sector. This regional focus is enshrined in, for example, the local representation provisions of the existing legislation, and this is carried through into the Bill now before the House. The institutes have forged strong community and commercial links in their regions and this has been singularly successful. There are many excellent examples of collaborative activities with industry based in an institute’s region. Such collaborations support the institutes in developing core strengths that are quite often unique.

Third level education in Ireland has been characterised by what we know as the binary system — a university sector and an institute of technology sector. It has long been the policy of successive Governments to maintain the system, recognising the importance of the distinctive role, mission and provision in both sectors. In more recent times, it has become apparent that, while preserving and valuing the differences, there is a need to better integrate the two components. Under existing arrangements, the strategic management of both sectors is different in that the Higher Education Authority operates as the funding and overseeing agency for the universities while the Department of Education and Science has substantial statutory functions relating to the operation of the institutes of technology.

The House will be aware that the OECD completed a review of higher education in Ireland in 2004. A central purpose of the review was to support Ireland’s strategic ambition of placing its higher education system at the front rank of the OECD in the context of the wider national objective of developing a world-leading knowledge economy and society. A key recommendation in the resulting report was that we should retain the differentiation in mission of the university and institute of technology sectors but that they be brought under the remit of a single authority for the purpose of achieving a unified higher edu-

cation strategy. The report also recommended that the extent of external regulation of the institutes of technology be lightened, giving them greater managerial freedom in responding to the opportunities and challenges of supporting regional and national social and economic development. These recommendations have been endorsed by the Government. The Bill is the mechanism that will provide for this greater integration and cohesion in the system of higher education.

It is important to emphasise that the Bill is just one of a number of elements of the Government's approach to supporting the development of our higher education system. We all recognise that the primary purpose of education is to help people to reach their full potential as individuals. Without doubt, education also contributes to, and can be considered to be an indicator of, national well-being. G.K. Chesterton was right when he described education as "the soul of a nation as it passes from one generation to another". As we strive to broaden and deepen all aspects of our education, especially within marginalised groups, we can enhance human development and the well-being of our nation.

We also recognise that education has a significant contribution to make to the economic progress of the country. The OECD review summarised this importance when it stated: "Ireland was one of the first European countries to grasp the economic importance of education and economists suggest that this upskilling of the economy accounts for almost 1% of additional national output over the last decade or so." To acknowledge that fact is not, as some would represent it, to advocate a utilitarian approach to education. Rather, I see it as clear evidence of the impact of investment in education. The growth that it helps to generate enables us to invest even more and, in the process, enhance lives and empower people. With greater numbers progressing into higher education, our national skills levels are rising and highly qualified graduates are entering the workforce in large numbers. This high quality labour resource serves to attract and retain high quality, high skills employments. As we develop further into a high technology, knowledge-based economy, these high skills levels will be in increasing demand.

The rate of participation in higher education has increased consistently over the past 20 years. The most recent participation study confirms the continuing trend. It shows that the national admission rate was 55% in 2004 — up from 44% in 1998. The Government has recognised that, collectively, our higher education institutions now represent a hugely valuable national resource. To realise the full potential of that resource and to build world class strength in Irish higher education, we need to ensure the component parts work together on a system-wide basis.

As the €1.2 billion multi-annual investment package announced in the previous budget testif-

ies, the Government has committed itself to investing in the quality of that system. During the next five years a total of almost €8 billion will be spent on the higher education system. The importance of quality is manifold. Ultimately, the outcomes are highly qualified graduates with the required skill sets to contribute in a complete way to societal and economic development. In acknowledging what has been achieved throughout our higher education system, we need to push forward and seek continual improvements in the quality of teaching, learning, innovation and research at third level and fourth level.

It is against this backdrop that, with the agreement of my Government colleagues, I announced the establishment of a strategic innovation fund for higher education. It is intended that the fund will drive transformation of the sector by promoting collaboration and change in pursuit of system-wide excellence. The objectives of the fund are to incentivise and reward internal restructuring and reform efforts; promote teaching and learning reforms, including enhanced teaching methods; programme restructuring at third and fourth level, modularisation and e-learning; support quality improvement initiatives aimed at excellence; promote access, transfer and progression and incentivise stronger inter-institutional collaboration in the development and delivery of programmes; provide for improved performance management systems and meet staff training and support requirements associated with the reform of structures and the implementation of new processes; and implement improved management information systems.

The fund is a five-year resourcing commitment of €300 million that will allow meaningful and far-reaching proposals for change to be brought forward by higher education institutions. A major emphasis under the fund is on promoting inter-institutional collaboration in building world class strength within the Irish system. The quality of higher education in Ireland must be measured against the highest standards across the world.

The strategic innovation fund is an important mechanism to enhance the quality of the system. The promotion of and support for research, while an educational and economic imperative in its own right, is also a key mechanism to enhance quality in the system. The quality of research feeds into the quality of teaching and learning, which feeds into the quality of graduate and researcher in turn. It is a virtuous circle in business school parlance. My Department's support for research at third level has been increasing significantly since the late 1990s when we commenced the programme for research in third level institutions, PRTLTI, introduced a funding line for technological sector research and established the two national research councils. Congruent with this is the support of the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment through Science Foundation Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, and other research activities supported

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by other Departments, including Health and Children and Agriculture and Food.

It is stating the obvious that higher education institutions are intrinsic to these developments. Notwithstanding the massive progress made on research over recent years, we need to move this agenda to a new level. A national research plan is in the advanced stages of preparation. This plan will integrate research activities across the relevant Departments and the various institutions and agencies, educational and otherwise, involved in research. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance have indicated that investment in our intellectual capital through higher education will be a central objective of the new national development plan.

In investing in the development of third and fourth level education to support wider social and economic goals, a central government objective is to ensure that all citizens have a fair and equal opportunity to share in the considerable personal benefits of participation at these levels. Improving access for societal groups that, for one reason or another, have not traditionally participated in higher education is one of our key objectives. The institute of technology sector has a strong record of opening up opportunity and I want to build on that throughout the higher education system.

Recent surveys indicate significant improvements in participation rates from young people in the lower socio-economic groups and from areas that traditionally have been under-represented. This is the result of a number of key targeted programmes and interventions. The goal of first, second and third level educational disadvantage and community education programmes funded by my Department over the past decade and more has been to achieve tangible improvements in participation, progression and successful completion among younger and older age cohorts from disadvantaged groups.

The Action Plan 2005-2007, published in December 2004 by the national office for equity of access to higher education, identifies a number of practical goals which will help to achieve further progress. Support for these innovative measures will be an important priority. Increasing numbers of students are also being encouraged and supported in making the choice to participate in higher education by improvements in the higher education grant scheme, with priority for funding being given to students eligible for the top-up grants.

In moving forward on these various fronts, the Government is taking a system-wide approach to the development of higher education. The various elements are interlinked and interrelated. The strategic innovation fund addresses modernisation in terms of system-wide practice, organisation and structure. It incentivises the teaching and learning improvements that are key to supporting progress on the action plan for access. It stresses quality improvements aimed at excel-

lence. The various research strands provide the knowledge and skills for national innovation on which future economic and social progress will rely. I emphasise again that research feeds into improvements in teaching and learning and thereby into the quality of graduates and future researchers. These elements are being addressed in tandem with change in the governance of institutions and with increased resources for the development of institutional infrastructure on the capital side.

Essentially, the point is that higher education is a system of institutions, programmes, initiatives and supports. In a country of our size, to produce maximum gain for society and the economy, the focus must be on aligning the various elements to achieve the system-wide quality improvement that will support our wider national goals.

The changes introduced by this Bill are an essential element of this approach. The development of the institutes of technology has been governed by the various regional technical colleges and Dublin Institute of Technology statutes since 1992. Prior to that, vocational education committees statutes applied. These provided for a tight prescription of what the institutes could and could not do and required the close involvement of the Department of Education and Science and the VECs in institutes' activities. It is fair to say that the legislation governing the institutes was of its time and appropriate. However, the evolution of the institutes as providers of third and, in some instances, fourth level education means that they have outgrown these rules. To develop them further and to allow them to contribute to their full potential, new rules are needed.

While the Bill is a technical one primarily amending previous legislation, its effects are far-reaching. When enacted, it will have a significant impact on the system of higher education in Ireland. Many of the amendments concern replacing the respective roles of the Department and the VEC with the Higher Education Authority and there are improved governance provisions which will support the institutes in developing within the ambit of the HEA.

I wish to outline some of the important features of the new Bill. I shall mention these grouped by the roles of the different players as provided for. Parts 2 and 3 contain similar provisions relating to the institutes of technology governed by the RTC Acts and the DIT respectively. The Bill provides for the designation of the institutes of technology as institutes of higher education under the HEA by amending the HEA Act 1971. This designation and the amendments to the RTC Acts and the DIT Acts in the Bill mean that, in practice, the HEA and the institutes will engage and relate in a way very similar to the way the HEA and the universities engage.

There are a number of areas where the current operation of the institutes will alter as a consequence of the role of the HEA. One of the main areas where the Bill will impact is on

budgets and finances. To date, the practice has been that the institutes' proposed budgets were submitted through the relevant vocational education committee to the Department. The Department then determined a provisional allocation following examination and subsequently, taking any appeals into account, a final allocation.

The Bill provides for new arrangements whereby the HEA, rather than the VEC and the Department, will approve an institute's budget and allocate money to the institute from the overall allocation made by the Department. The HEA will therefore determine an institute's budget. This is in line with the funding relationship between the HEA and the universities. The HEA will also assume a role in establishing formal arrangements to permit institutes to borrow or underwrite borrowings, again in a manner similar to that prevailing in the university sector. This is an important managerial freedom in achieving a greater level of institutional flexibility and responsiveness. The authority will approve the format of accounts maintained by the institutes. This removes the Department and the VEC from their existing roles but the provisions relating to the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the laying of the accounts before the Houses of the Oireachtas remain.

The Department's role in the approval of research, consultancy or development work or the acquisition of land will devolve to the HEA. With regard to the director of an institute and president of the DIT, the HEA will now determine the procedures to be used for selection of a new director or president when the post falls to be filled. It will consult the governing body where a temporary appointment is to be made. The net effect of these provisions will be to loosen the restrictive statutory controls under which the institutes currently operate. The new arrangements will provide for a more autonomous and strategic relationship with Government through the HEA, reflecting the dynamic and competitive nature of the environment in which the institutes now operate.

In terms of internal institutional governance and management, the Bill clarifies the respective functions of the governing body and director or president. It includes a specific provision requiring the institutes to contribute to the promotion of the economic, cultural and social development of the State and to respect the diversity of values, beliefs and traditions in society.

The governing body will be empowered to require the director to prepare a strategic plan for the college, to approve this plan and to provide a copy of it to the HEA and the Minister. It will also require the director to prepare a statement of the policies of the college with regard to access for under-represented, disadvantaged and disabled persons and equality, including gender equality. The governing body will be required to approve this statement of policies. The governing body will also be obliged to establish written pro-

cedures for dispute resolution, other than industrial relations disputes which would fall to be dealt with under existing structures, following consultation with staff and student representative groups.

The director will manage and direct the academic, administrative, financial, personnel and other activities of the college. This will be carried out subject to the policies determined by the governing body and the director will be answerable to the governing body for the efficient and effective management of the college and his or her performance. The Bill designates the director, appointed by the governing body, as the accountable person. This means the director is the person who, when required, will give evidence to the Committee of Public Accounts of the regularity and propriety of college accounts, of the economy and efficiency of the college in using its resources, of the systems and procedures in place for evaluating the effectiveness of its operations and of other matters. Overall, these elements of the Bill provide for improved institutional governance at governing body level and give greater clarity to the respective oversight role of the governing body and management role of the director and president.

The Institutes of Technology Bill 2006 is about modernising our approach to the governance and the strategic management of higher education. It represents new challenges and opportunities for the institutes of technology and for the HEA. As we chart a new course for higher education, I acknowledge the massive contribution made by past and present students, staff, management and governing body members to bringing the institutes to this stage in their development. They have done the sector and the nation proud.

This legislation is a major milestone for the sector and for the development of higher education in Ireland. By bringing the institutes of technology and universities together under the remit of the HEA, we can achieve a more cohesive strategic approach that draws on the diverse strengths of all our higher education institutions. The new managerial freedoms and supports provided for under this Bill will allow the institutes of technology to make their full contribution in that next stage of development. I trust the House will agree with me regarding the very positive benefits of this Bill. Beidh mé ag súil le bheith ag éisteacht agus ag plé na nithe atá ann le Baill an Tí. Molaim an Bille don Teach.

Ms Enright: I welcome the Bill. It is long-awaited legislation, the aim of which is to transfer the responsibility for the management of Ireland's institutes of technology from the Department of Education and Science to the Higher Education Authority. Along with the Minister I congratulate all involved in the institutes of technology and, previously, the regional technical colleges in how far they have brought them. I welcome the fact that this legis-

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lation can bring them that step further and give them greater autonomy.

In transferring the responsibility to the HEA, the scope of this legislation entails the amendment of a large amount of existing legislation. The Institutes of Technology Bill 2006 seeks to amend the Regional Technical College Acts, the Dublin Institute of Technology Acts, the Higher Education Act, the Universities Act, the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act and the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act. The need for this legislation has been flagged for some time and should bring with it a positive implication for our institutes of technology and for the crucial role that they play in Ireland's educational and economic development.

Placing the institutes of technology under the control of the Higher Education Authority, and removing them from the Department of Education and Science, is recognition of the true and important role of our ITs. It is also a clear indication of the importance of the IT sector for Ireland's future development and is a further recognition of the distance that the institutes of technology have travelled in educational terms since the first regional technical colleges at Athlone, Carlow, Dundalk, Sligo and Waterford opened their doors in 1970. Since their inception, the network of institutes has been extended throughout the country, with the latest institute of technology opening in Blanchardstown, County Dublin, in 2000.

Our institutes of technology are a vital part of the higher education sector in Ireland. The institutes have diversified in terms of course choice and now offer courses in everything, be it engineering, science, business studies, industrial design, music, art, aircraft systems, law, taxation, tourism, software development, general nursing, agriculture, video or film. No doubt I have left some courses out. Now, with the Dublin Institute of Technology planning a move to a new unified campus at Grangegorman, which I greatly welcome, further growth and development in the sector should be supported.

It is perhaps inevitable that the focus of the Department of Education and Science will be most frequently directed at primary and secondary education. Given the challenges that face the Department in these areas, such as providing the best possible education for the children of all families, the challenge of meeting the needs of those with special educational requirements and the pressing need to stem the rising problems in terms of discipline and early school leaving, the institutes of technology can be overlooked. This is not appropriate or acceptable, and I welcome the Institutes of Technology Bill 2006 because it allows for greater autonomy and development of our ITs.

In 2004, the OECD published its review of higher education in Ireland, which, in addition to the wide-ranging finding across the education

spectrum, made a number of precise recommendations for our institutes of technology. The OECD review of the Irish third level education system stressed the need for a unified approach to tertiary education. The key recommendation was that while Ireland should retain a differentiated tertiary education system, steps should be taken to integrate the components better than at present.

The OECD committee also noted there was a fragmentation of policy and policy implementation which had stifled development of the sector, and this was reinforced by the division of management between the Department of Education and Science and the Higher Education Authority. Such a fragmentation of policy should not be allowed to continue, and the legislation being debated today must be effective in closing off this problem. It is important that under this legislation, in section 15, the institutes will now submit their reports to the HEA and not to the VECs as was the case up to this, and that financial arrangements will also be a matter for the HEA. The OECD report noted that even between institutions with a record of co-operation, the current situation was clearly unsatisfactory, commenting: "Even in the case of Cork, where collaborative arrangements over degree programmes work well, an attempt by the two institutions to develop a joint marine/nautical research and teaching centre was frustrated by an inability to arrange complementary funding from national sources within a workable timeframe."

It is clearly not in the interest of our educational institutions to allow the situation to continue as it is, and one of the key recommendations made by the OECD in 2004 was to bring the institutes of technology and the universities under a single funding authority. In making this recommendation, the OECD report also firmly stated that the new arrangements should contain a mechanism to prevent so-called mission drift in either direction. It is important that the role and work of our educational institutions are not unnecessarily duplicated. The review group also noted that transferring the funding of the institutes of technology to a single funding authority would remove a range of managerial constraints that the institutes believe disadvantage them in comparison with universities and hinder them from reacting quickly to pressures and opportunities in their regions. The legislation addresses this.

I welcome the fact that the roles of the governing body and of the director are clearly defined in the Bill and that the governing body will now decide on the policy direction of the institutes while the director will be responsible for the implementation of that policy. This removes the potential for conflict that existed in the system and which has caused difficulty.

Has the Minister thought of changing the title of director to that of president? It is not a huge issue but it merits debate. From an international

perspective, the title of president is more clearly acknowledged and understood, while that of director might be taken to mean, perhaps, a director of a department or a member of the board. Internationally, the title of director now often applies to heads of research as well. Perhaps the Minister might consider this on Committee Stage. Dublin Institute of Technology has a president as its head and consideration should be given to extending this title to all other institutes.

Perhaps the Minister will clarify the bodies or people who will be entitled under section 20 to report to the Minister on the operation of the college, including giving them access to all records. In the interests of clarity it would be better if these bodies or persons were clearly defined in the legislation. It is not quite clear at present who or what those bodies can be.

In dealing with the duties of the governing body under section 21A, the Bill states that the governing body should require the director to prepare statements of the policies of the college with regard to access. I will now focus on the issue of access for disabled persons to our institutes. The Minister will no doubt be aware of a survey carried out by AHEAD, published last year, entitled Participation of and Services for Students with Disabilities in Institutes of Technology 2004-2005. A total of 14 of the 15 institutes responded to this survey.

Some of the results make for sobering reading. Of the 14 institutes, there were 1,366 undergraduates with a disability, representing 2.76% of the undergraduate population in the institutes. The best participation rate was 5.5% in Tralee while the lowest was in Cork at 0.52%. I am not sure what the reasons were for the differences in each institute. The participation rate has only increased at a marginal level since 1993-94, from 0.53% to the current 2.76%. This is an issue for the management of the institutes. Only four of the respondents said that full consideration is given to students with disability in the future planning of their institutes. Only three institutes employ a disability officer, one of whom is part-time. Six of the institutes have carried out an access audit and one of the eight who had not was beginning the process. All faculty buildings in five of the institutes are accessible to students with disabilities; they are not in the other nine institutes.

The HEA's action group on access to third level education in 2001 recommended that each university and institute of technology have a minimum of one full-time permanent post of disability officer, but this has not been implemented throughout the institutes. It would be easy to lay responsibility for this at the door of the institutes. However, as the HEA pointed out in 2005, universities have, on average, between €500,000 and €1million of ring-fenced funding available for disability initiatives but institutes of technology have an average of approximately €50,000 available.

I welcome the fact that under this Bill the institutes will have to outline their policy in the area of disability. It is clear that much more must be done to ensure greater access for these students and to ensure a fairer system of funding is in place to cater for students with disabilities.

I am concerned at paragraph 9 of the amending Schedule relating to the director giving evidence to the Committee of Public Accounts. It states that a director "shall not question or express an opinion on the merits of any policy of the Government or a Minister of the Government or on the merits of the objectives of such a policy". This type of provision sneaks into most legislation but I dislike the stranglehold and silencing it inspires.

An institute of technology can have a major impact on the area in which it is located. Athlone IT, for example, serves Westmeath, Offaly, Roscommon, Longford and further afield, while Carlow IT serves Carlow, Laois, Kilkenny, Wicklow, Wexford and wider areas. They have an immensely important job not only in educating their students but also in helping to attract industry to their regions and providing the skill sets needed for those industries. In doing this they contribute a great deal to trying to achieve the Government's supposed policy of balanced regional development, which are often buzzwords rather than reality.

It is ludicrous to stop the head of an institute of technology from expressing his or her opinions and views on how Government policy is affecting his or her institute and its aims and objectives. Will the Minister reconsider this point and not be afraid of real debate? Perhaps many of the opinions they will offer will be positive. Either way, we should be delighted to get these expert views, not hide in fear of them.

Section 27A states that VEC recommendations for appointments to the governing body by the Minister cannot include staff members of a college or DIT. Will this will also apply to the chairperson of the governing body? Has the Minister any concerns about the feasibility of a staff member becoming chairperson of the governing body when, effectively, the director or president is that staff member's boss? This could lead to difficulties and I ask the Minister to give some consideration to the potential difficulties that could arise.

Paragraph 7 of the amending Schedule states that the term of office of the director shall be ten years. No such rule is being applied to the office of the chairperson. Why is this the case? There have been instances in the past where chairs have been in place for over 20 years.

Ms Hanafin: Not any more.

Ms Enright: This is too long, a view supported in the OECD report. Life in the institutes of technology moves quickly and they must be responsive to change. That pace will only increase as

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our industry links and research and development capabilities increase, as I hope they will. There is a need for flexibility to be able to cope with these changes and to ensure we have people with the skills and talents to respond to them. The chairs of the governing bodies should be the best people available at the time. I urge the Minister to consider this point.

I also ask her to consider relinquishing the power of the Minister for Education and Science to appoint the chair of the governing body and to allow the body to carry out this function in the same manner as the universities. Surely at this stage we can trust them to make the right decisions. It would be no harm either to remove this position from the politicisation that has occurred in the past. The Bill presents a unique opportunity to do this.

Ms O'Sullivan: I have little time to speak on the legislation but I welcome the Bill on behalf of the Labour Party. It is long overdue. Directors, governing bodies, staff and students of institutes of technology are anxious that this change take place. It will give the institutes more autonomy in decision making and in responding to local needs, especially economic needs. They have been doing this already but it will allow them to collaborate more effectively with other third level institutions, especially universities.

In welcoming the Bill, like the Minister and Deputy Enright, we should pay tribute to those who have made the institutes of technology what they are and who have managed and driven change over the years. The institutes have developed in an organic way in response to local needs and have fulfilled an important niche in our communities, particularly in offering the opportunity of third level education to a cohort of students who might not necessarily have had that chance otherwise. Tribute must also be paid to the vocational education committees that developed the concept of the regional technical colleges.

Debate adjourned.

Private Members' Business.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio: Motion.

Ms O'Sullivan: I move:

That Dáil Éireann, recognising:

- the right to primary education enshrined in Article 42 of the Constitution;
- the failure to adequately plan for population growth in certain parts of the country;

- the uncertainty regarding the availability of school places for hundreds of children next September;
- the thousands of children who are taught in prefabricated classrooms; and
- the failure of the Government to fulfil the commitment contained in An Agreed Programme for Government to reduce class sizes for children under 9 to below best international best practice of 20:1;

calls on the Government to:

- ensure that a place is provided for all children old enough to go to primary school next September;
- establish a proactive, forward planning role for the Department of Education and Science in the provision of schools and school extensions so that adequate provision is in place when needed;
- establish a primary school database; and
- set out a timetable for the implementation of their commitment to reduce class size to international best practice guidelines.

I wish to share time with Deputies Enright, Twomey and Burton.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Ms O'Sullivan: This is a joint motion with the Fine Gael Party. Thousands of families do not know if their children will have a school place to go to next September. Thousands of other families worry their child will go into a class with 30 or more and will not be able to cope. Hundreds of thousands of small children serve their time in prefabs or other make-shift temporary school buildings, hopelessly inadequate to their needs despite living in a modern successful economy.

Like the horrendous and inhumane treatment seen on last night's "Prime Time Investigates" programme on accident and emergency departments in hospitals, this is a failure of the Government to do what it was elected to do — to plan and manage basic services for the people. The Government takes in enough taxes. Its amendment to the motion simply lists the amounts being spent on educational services. I acknowledge as more money comes into the coffers of the Minister for Finance, more will be spent on education. The percentage, however, of our income spent on education has fallen from 5.4% of GDP in 1994 to 4.6% in 2006. There should be less self congratulation on the Government's part. The amendment shows its distance from the reality of the situation.

The Government's job is to spend revenue appropriately, which is hardly rocket science. Other countries manage it with relative ease. They know where population growth will occur and plan ahead for roads, schools, hospitals, leisure facilities etc. that people moving into newly developed homes will need. There is an order and competence about service provision and governments take responsibility for it. Not so in Ireland. The two most likely options for junior infants in rapidly growing communities are a pre-fab or a temporary building. It can be anything from a scout hall to a disused factory unit, from a rugby club to a marching band room, as is the case in one school in the Limerick East constituency.

It is fortunate if a real purpose built classroom is available before a child reaches sixth class. If a child is born into a family living in part of County Kildare, there will be no room until he or she is nearly six years of age. A child living in one of the burgeoning estates in west Dublin will not know if he or she can go to school in September. If the child does get a place, most likely it will be in a class with more than 30 others. Children attending St. Michael's in Inchicore know the school will close but do not know if any other school will take them on. Although it is well for the Minister for Education and Science to admonish the Christian Brothers for closing the school, in effect she did little apart from requesting the order to keep the school open.

Ms Hanafin: I got it to remain open for another year.

Ms O'Sullivan: She may have, but the Minister must have a more proactive role rather than simply depending on others to ensure children receive an education.

It is time to change this situation because our children deserve better. Not only do they deserve better, they have a right to it under Article 42 of the Constitution. The Minister for Education and Science and her Department must play a proactive rather than a reactive role. Forward planning is urgently needed. Based on correct data, in conjunction with local authorities, local communities and parents, it will remove the anxiety faced by so many families. Parents can then be secure in the knowledge that their child can take his or her first momentous step into school life with others of the same age in the neighbourhood, in a well-designed classroom with numbers small enough for the teacher to be able to treat them all as the unique individuals they are. It is unacceptable that Ireland has the second highest class sizes in the EU. Despite the promises in the programme for Government, little has been done to address the issue of class size.

Large demographic and societal changes have taken place. In the past, when population growth was slow, local parishes established and managed primary schools. Now we have large amorphous

communities where people do not have time to get to know their neighbours. Many want, as is their right, interdenominational or Irish language schools. To their enormous credit, groups of parents have put in long hours establishing schools themselves. Most parents will go to huge efforts to provide what they believe is best for their children. It is, however, extraordinarily demanding and haphazard. All Members know of the experiences of these parents who have established Educate Together schools and Gaelscoileanna. They face enormous challenges with fundraising, finding temporary buildings and getting school approval which can drag on for years. That is the Minister's responsibility not the parents'.

No database of pupils exists despite an announcement in 1998 by the then Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Martin, that one would be established. Without such a database, the basic facts and figures are not available to properly plan for education provision. It is not known how many children are in school, will be in school next year or in five or ten years' time. I recently tabled a parliamentary question asking the number of children in classes of over 20, 30 and 40 pupils this year. The Department could not give me an answer because it still does not have that information at this late stage in the school year. Last year when we received that information, it was discovered that over 100,000 children are in classes of 30 or more pupils. How can one plan for the educational needs of children when the basic number of children in the system is not known? It is not rocket science as it is known how many children are born in the State.

The body with statutory duty to ensure children go to school, the National Education Welfare Board, has not been given the resources to compile this data. It also has been denied the resources to employ a full cohort of welfare officers to look after educational needs. It has been refused permission to hire extra staff for the past 18 months. For example, every year 84,000 children miss more than 20 days schooling while 30,000 miss 40 days. The board, which has the statutory duty to ensure school attendance, has not been given the resources needed to do its job.

An Agreed Programme for Government promised to reduce class size to 20 pupils for every teacher for under nines. However, the Minister told us in response to recent oral parliamentary questions that there is no way the system can deliver anything close to that. Why was it promised in the programme for Government? Was the number just plucked from the air? Either there was never any intention of fulfilling the promise or there was no plan or strategy.

The issue of class size is particularly important for children with learning difficulties. How can the needs of such a child be addressed by a teacher in a class of 30 or more pupils? There is a better way to provide for the education of our children. If we plan and take responsibility, well-

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designed schools and manageable classes close to where people live can be provided.

The Minister is quoted in today's newspapers as stating, in respect of the problems within Deputy Burton's constituency: "I am taking the exceptional measure of recognising a new school". Why is it exceptional to recognise a new school from its first day? Why are new schools not recognised wherever required by the population? For example, four Gaelscoileanna are housed in temporary premises in my constituency. Two have been in temporary and totally unsuitable accommodation for more than 20 years and 16 years respectively. One of the schools in question is partially located in the band room to which I referred and partially in a building constructed in the middle of the 18th century, in 1769. This building was considered to be inappropriate and unsafe as a school building in the 1960s when the Christian Brothers attempted to use it to establish a school. Nevertheless, it is still occupied by a Gaelscoil.

Why does such a situation exist? Why is it not possible to address the problem in a more holistic, proper and comprehensive fashion? Although the new school accommodation body has been established, it will operate with its hands tied behind its back while the present situation obtains.

Moreover, the recommendations of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution regarding the provision of land for buildings such as schools have not been implemented even though the committee, of which I am a member, stated there was no necessity to change the Constitution to address some of these issues. Although the Taoiseach stated he would do something about this matter, absolutely nothing has been done. The Minister's Department is obliged to pay enormous sums of money to developers to acquire basic requirements, namely, schools, in growing communities. Houses are being built and money is being made from them. However, basic facilities such as schools are not put in place in time.

Why are parents in an area not consulted about the type of school they want? The recent census could easily have asked that question and garnered that information. Consequently, such information would have been available for any local area in which a need existed. One would have known the wishes of the parents, whether it was for a Catholic school, a Church of Ireland school, a Gaelscoil or an Educate Together school. Instead, parents must establish the type of school they want. Eventually, as I have described, such schools are given recognition and subsequently receive a building. However, by then the first cohort of students have already passed through the school.

Why does the Department wait until a patron comes forward before providing a new school? Given the present situation, the Department must

display some new and more proactive thinking in respect of such issues. For example, the VECs recently suggested they might become patrons of primary schools as well as post-primary schools. The Minister is the patron of a small number of schools, namely, the model schools. Ireland is unique in Europe in that the Minister for Education and Science and the Department of Education and Science wait to provide a school until someone in the local community can put the resources and numbers together to so do.

Forward planning is required. A significant problem exists, particularly in the commuter belt surrounding Dublin and our other cities. There is a high level of anger and frustration among parents, teachers and the entire school community in such areas. Such schools face a dilemma in that they can increase class sizes and place children in classes of more than 30 pupils. This has happened in many cases. Alternatively, they can seek a new school or can turn children away. Currently, however, they must either opt for large classes or turn children away, because new schools are not provided when needed.

There are many new ways to approach these issues, some of which I have outlined this evening. My colleagues will also raise issues from their own constituencies, as well as highlighting some of the existing solutions. This is not rocket science and has been done in other countries. While it can be achieved with proper planning, this will not be done for as long as the Government, as it has done in respect of many other matters, stands aside to consider the situation, rather than attempting to solve it. There must be a life after prefabs. A system must be put in place whereby schools are provided for children when required. This current situation cannot continue and will worsen without more proactive planning from the Department.

The amendment tabled by the Minister constitutes little more than a congratulation of the Government. This is not good enough, given the problems that exist in our communities. In the interests of our children and the children who will come to the fore in future, Members must see a proper response. Hence, I hope the Minister will take note of the points made in the debate and I look forward to hearing the contributions from other Members.

Ms Enright: I thank my colleague, Deputy O'Sullivan, and all the Labour Party and Fine Gael Party Members, for tabling this joint motion.

Members are constantly told that Ireland is one of the most successful countries in the world today. They are informed that it has outperformed the vast majority of our neighbours within the European Union. Day after day, the Government asserts that our State is the economic wonder of the western world, a beacon which many other countries wish to follow and emulate. Undoubtedly, some of our recent success is

notable and the amount of funding available to the Government is unparalleled in Ireland's history. However, considering the state of many of our primary and secondary schools, the evidence of Ireland's recent success can be extremely hard to see. Put simply, the conditions in many schools are still seriously deficient. In a successful and modern country, it is little short of scandalous that many of our children continue to be taught in such classroom conditions.

Part of the Government's response has been to allocate prefabricated accommodation to schools. As Deputy O'Sullivan has noted, the Government has tabled a self-congratulatory amendment regarding the amount of money spent. However, I remind the House that from 2000 to 2004, almost €75 million was spent on the provision of prefabricated buildings at primary and post-primary levels. This money should have been spent on the bricks and mortar needed to build permanent classrooms, playgrounds and physical education facilities. Although prefabs do not take the place of proper school buildings, schools are all too frequently forced to use such temporary structures for years and even for decades.

When one also considers the considerable degree of overcrowding in our classrooms, one begins to form a more complete picture of the Government's commitment to primary and secondary education. Figures released to me in response to parliamentary questions demonstrate the extent to which our primary classrooms have become overcrowded. In the most recent academic year, more than 99,000 children were in classes of between 30 and 34 pupils and a further 9,000 children attended even larger classes.

In 2002, Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats made a commitment to reduce primary class sizes in their programme for Government. However, on taking office, the Minister downgraded this promise to the status of a noble aspiration. Members will be aware that as promises have little value as far as this Administration is concerned, noble aspirations have absolutely no currency.

The overall maximum class size guideline for primary school of 29 pupils is already far too high. However, this is exceeded in schools throughout the country. When questioned on this problem, the Minister is quick to blame individual schools for the larger classroom sizes. She has responded to my parliamentary questions with the explanation that where classes exceed 29 pupils, it is because schools have taken the decision to reduce class sizes elsewhere. This is not always the case and is a cop-out on the Government's part. If schools allocate teachers to reduce class sizes at junior level at a cost to pupils in senior classes, it is because the Government has not delivered on its promise in the programme for Government.

Parents in many parts of Ireland have realised there is a worse prospect than having one's child sandwiched into a class of 35 or 40 other pupils, namely, the possibility there may be no room for

them in the classroom. For example, Members should consider the recent case in Swords, County Dublin, in which parents queued for days to gain a place for their daughters. The school in question, Loreto College, Swords, already operates above capacity. Although it was designed to serve 500 to 550 pupils when it was built, its current enrolment is 630 pupils. It is nothing short of scandalous that parents should have no option but to queue for days and nights to enrol their child at a local school.

Ms Hanafin: That was their own choice.

Ms Enright: They do not have a choice. There is nowhere else to go.

Ms Hanafin: There is plenty of choice in Swords.

Ms Enright: They do not have a choice. What choice have people in Dublin 15? Some 8,000 new homes have been built in the past nine years. The parents of 200 children, who are due to begin junior infants classes next September, have been told there is no place available at the local primary schools. Such schools have been on departmental building and expansion lists for years. Even a small amount of forward planning could have provided a far greater school capacity for the children of this rapidly growing area and could have provided them with a school, not to mention a choice.

However, as with all aspects of the Government's forward planning, the Administration has again been found to be seriously wanting. These capacity problems are replicated in many commuter belt towns around Dublin, in counties Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Wexford and in my constituency, as well as around our other large cities. I wish to focus on that issue. I assume every Member, or most Members, recently completed census forms and returned them to census enumerators. In the run up to the census, we were bombarded with advertisements in the media informing us that the information to be returned was critical for the future planning of essential services. However, many people question why this Government has apparently ignored the growing need for school places in areas of considerable population growth. They want to know why, when sanction was given for enormous housing estates on the perimeter of Dublin city, consideration was not given to the availability of school places. It is clear that many of those now living in commuter belt housing estates are young people who are gaining their first foothold on the property ladder and people who are beginning families. I cannot understand why a clear and realistic assessment of school places was not made at the time planning permission for new housing estates was granted.

Our current problems also result from the fact that decisions regarding new school building and

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investment are often made according to political, rather than educational, needs. The former Minister for Education and Science, Deputy Noel Dempsey, attempted to introduce a greater degree of transparency into the school building programme by making information available on the Department's website. However, the situation has now changed and there is a lack of transparency and clarity about the working of the school building programme.

Radical change is now needed. Many schools are in very poor physical condition; overcrowding is endemic, particularly in schools in commuter areas; and hundreds of children are denied a place at their local school. I agree with Deputy O'Sullivan that the structure of the school building programme must be changed. The application procedure for new building and refurbishment works is labyrinthine. Schools languish for years on building lists, with no work being sanctioned. With reform of the programme, schools would better understand how to apply for assistance and how long it would take for their application to be assessed and rated according to real priority.

In addition, every school, once its application has been assessed, should know its place on the programme and the timescale for its improvement works. Some schools have been forced to wait for improvement works for many years and have received little or no clarification from the Department as to when they can expect funding. This arrangement is not good enough and must be changed.

It is clear that we must reform the procedures for establishing new schools. Deputy O'Sullivan noted that the Department has traditionally taken a very hands-off approach to the provision of new schools, relying on motivated parents and members of the public to band together and begin a new school, which may, at some later date, gain recognition from the Department. The system is not working.

We do not have time to allow school developments to continue at the traditional slow and unsteady pace in areas like the outskirts of Dublin and other major cities which have experienced a considerable and relatively sudden increase in population. The Department must become proactive when planning the development of schools and the provision of places. In particular, we should evaluate the schools needs of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway, focusing on the demand for school places within the commuter belts.

The commission on school accommodation established by the Department should assume the responsibility for assessing demographic change, the age profile of residents in these urban areas and the number of children of school going age to a far greater degree. Much of this information is available through the census but it must be applied in a proactive fashion and used to provide new school places.

The commission should then advise on the provision of new multi-denominational schools in areas of growing demand for school places. This would mean the issue of school places could be addressed proactively, rather than reactively, as is currently the case. It would also permit a greater degree of flow into multi-denominational schools and so create additional space in existing schools. This work could be carried out by the commission but it would need to work at a much faster pace and requires adequate resources and reform to do so.

Action must be taken on foot of commission reports to the Department. The Murray report on school accommodation in my constituency in County Laois reported that Scoil Iosaif Naofa and Scoil Phádraig Naofa in Mountmellick required two additional classes and lacked proper indoor recreational facilities. These schools have been forced to slice sections of corridors to provide additional classroom spaces. Children with special educational needs are still being taught in school corridors, not even in sectioned off places. Scoil Phádraig Naofa has been forced to turn away children from junior infants this year but this is only prolonging the problem. A total of 900 new houses have been built in Mountmellick in the past five years, while 700 more are in the pipeline. The situation is at crisis point.

We should consider the choice facing parents of these children. It is not an exaggeration to say that every school in the area is full. Children in Portlaoise, which is six miles from Mountmellick, are in the same boat. I know of children who must travel 16 miles to primary school in Clonaghadoo in County Offaly because they cannot obtain places at schools within that radius in County Laois. However, schools in north Offaly, where Clonaghadoo is located, are in the same boat. Edenderry, which is the first stop-off for commuters, has grown phenomenally in the past five years. When the census is published, the town's population is expected to be in the region of 9,000. It is one of the fastest growing towns in the country but last week, the Department described an application for the establishment of a new co-educational school as premature. Our motion attempts to address this type of attitude. We must plan ahead. I am not talking about planning for ten years into the future; I am talking about planning for next year.

Schools in Edenderry are full. Father Walsh, who drew up the application for the new school, was supported by all local organisations and groups and the GAA facilitated the school by offering a temporary site. This is what we should look for. Tullamore, which is 22 miles down the road, is in the same position. In the past two years, two post-primary schools there have been forced to turn away students. The situation was eventually resolved but the schools are still operating at over-capacity.

Ms Hanafin: The other one is thriving.

Ms Enright: The other school is waiting for sanction for funding after it burnt down in a fire. This money has not been made available to it.

Ms Hanafin: The school misused its money.

Ms Enright: Staff are operating in prefabs. Is this what the Minister considers a policy?

Ms Hanafin: It used its insurance money to buy prefabs.

Ms Enright: It had no alternative; it had nowhere else to go.

Ms Hanafin: It did.

Ms Enright: What was it supposed to do?

Ms Hanafin: It used all of its insurance money.

Ms Enright: The Minister's attitude to Tullamore college is quite serious. The Minister must realise that schools in Tullamore have no choice but to use prefabs. These issues must be addressed.

Dr. Twomey: As the health service has demonstrated, spending money is a very poor benchmark of a Government's performance. It is crazy for the Government to use the amount of money it has spent on the health service to prove a point. The way in which Ministers tour the country reminds me of minor celebrities. They are certainly not acting like competent CEOs of Departments. The Government is forcing children with special needs to go through the courts and failing to make any impact on the school building programme throughout the country.

Ms Hanafin: Rubbish.

Dr. Twomey: I met the Minister on numerous occasions and she has not made any meaningful contribution to schools we have asked her to examine. In the same way as the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform must take action, it is time for the Minister to take action on these issues and do what she is expected to do as the CEO of a Department. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform would not consider himself a minor celebrity. He regards himself as a major celebrity in the world of politics because he cannot keep his mouth closed.

Mr. Durkan: King Kong.

Dr. Twomey: These Ministers must face up to their responsibilities. Those of us whose children attend school can see that boards of management, parents and teachers do an excellent job. Our children come home and try to use Irish words they have learned in school. These teachers do more to help the Irish language than the Minister

for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and his legislation requiring every piece of local authority documentation to be published in Irish. If this money was redirected into schools, it would make a major contribution to education. In the same way, children recognise recycling symbols and know what can and cannot be recycled because they are learning about life in our schools. We should promote and foster this.

It is time for this Government to have a greater vision of what it intends to do for the future, particularly in respect of education. The Minister's response to this motion is another example of the tripe the Government constantly produces, which focuses solely on the amount of money it has spent. There is no sense of balance, whether good accountancy practices have been used or whether value for money has been achieved. The Government simply throws out figures and thinks it can get by but that day is long gone. The Government has wasted the resources given to it over the past nine years, a state of affairs which will come back to haunt it. The Government should show it has a vision for the future of schools and stop forcing children with special needs to go to court to get anything out of it. I receive numerous letters complaining about the Government's unhelpful attitude to children with special needs and how it does practically nothing for them.

It is time for the Government to face up to its responsibilities, rather than give soft-focus interviews when new school extensions are opened. Ministers should do what they are charged by the electorate to do, namely, act as competent managers of Departments, show vision for the future and look after children who will only spend a very short time in our schools. I hope the Minister takes this message away from this debate and refrains from cat calling across the House in respect of comments made about individual schools or policy. The Government should acknowledge it has failed to achieve certain things and has fallen way behind in certain areas. It should give us a vision for the future or, at least, one that will suffice until next year, when we can possibly provide one for it.

Ms Burton: I am glad the Minister is here. If she could take the time to meet parents in Harts-town, Ongar, Littlepace, Diswellstown and various other rapidly growing parts of Dublin 15, she would learn more in one hour from the frustration, anger and bewilderment of parents about why their children cannot get into schools than from all the population change statistics that her Department can issue.

The Taoiseach and his various Ministers for Education and Science in the past nine years had the audacity to promise class sizes of 20 or fewer pupils under nine years of age. In other words, they promised that no child in junior or senior infants, first, second or third class would have more than 20 pupils in his or her class. It has not

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happened. Those who made the promise knew they could not deliver on it nationally or in the developing areas which I have the honour and responsibility to represent. It was a crude, headline, vote-buying promise. How could there be classes of 20 or fewer pupils in schools of 1,000 pupils but 32 classrooms, which is the Minister's model for what the children of Dublin 15 will have? The Taoiseach should apologise for his failure and deception of parents.

Dublin 15 schools are faced with another growing challenge, that is, catering for significant numbers of students for whom English is not their first language or their home language. Throughout primary schools in Dublin West, enrolment rates of international children have soared, so that in the junior classes of a number of schools, international children account for more than 50% of those attending. Currently, the Minister allows two, and in extreme cases a maximum of three, support teachers for two years, but educational research carried out by principals in my constituency shows that two years is inadequate, particularly in an environment where parents do not speak English in the home.

The pressure of class sizes is not just about numbers. It is also about the diverse and particular needs of the children in the new communities in places such as Dublin 15. As the Minister represents the area of south Dublin where there are problems of empty classes, I can understand why she does not understand what is happening in the expanding areas. She has not taken the opportunity to go out and see what parents, children and teachers are going through.

Working in classes of more than 30 pupils, teachers are expected to use the new curriculum, which involves children moving around, interacting and so on. They are also meant to cater for special needs children in the context of integration, which we all support. In Dublin 15, there are many classes of 30 pupils with ten or more international children whose English is weak. The teachers, principals, boards of management, patrons, Church patrons, Educate Together and the Gaelscoileanna are making extraordinary efforts to give children the best education, but the Minister's unstated policy is that large class sizes will continue in Dublin 15 for at least the next eight years. She is creating a strain with which the system cannot cope.

What has happened in Dublin 15 during the nine years of this Government is a shame. These areas were specifically chosen by the Government as development zones and permission was granted and pushed for by Fianna Fáil and the PDs for thousands of new homes. Since the first house was built, local community councils and public representatives have urged the Government to pay attention to future educational needs, but the Department and successive Fianna Fáil Ministers have ignored these messages and

allowed one annual crisis after another to build up.

Recently, the Minister's colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Brian Lenihan, confessed that the Government was caught on the hop. It did not expect that people coming to this country would bring their children with them to be educated here or would have children during their early adult years here. The Government did not understand that when houses were built, there might be the pitter patter of little feet five years later, and that those children of the nation would one day expect to get seats in primary schools as per the Constitution and the Proclamation of Independence. What imagination would be required to convince the Government it is important to deliver education, which is one of the rocks on which we have built our economic success, to children in new communities?

Several weeks ago, the crisis for the Minister was in Littlepace. This week, it is in Hartstown. I spent 1.5 hours on Saturday morning with baffled and bewildered parents. They already had children in the local parish school, which has fantastic teachers and a wonderful principal. However, they received a note in May that due to the pressure of places, the school would only take children who were four years of age before 31 December 2005. In other words, they would need to be four and three quarter years of age before they got school places in September. Can the Minister imagine what this requirement has done to pre-schools in the area? Parents gave up places on the understanding their four and a half year olds could get places in Irish schools, as would be traditionally expected.

The only solution the Government offers is the crude pressure on schools to add prefabs and-or additional streams to accommodate extra demands. Three weeks ago, the Minister belatedly made a rushed announcement about an extra school that will come on stream but we do not know the exact site. I want to know this and the precise amount of land that will be devoted to the welcome school. As I understand it, up to 2,000 children in two primary schools will be taught on a 4.5 acre site. How will the Minister do this because I fail to understand how she will cope?

This is Ireland at its most prosperous. The accident and emergency situation properly gets attention as the most blatant case of public squalor amid private affluence in the world's fourth richest country. However, the overcrowded primary schools and failure to guarantee places to all children in an area is no less of a scandal. In prosperous Ireland, we have super-sized classes and schools built on sites that are much too small to offer adequate play space. Land is sold to the State by unscrupulous developers at grossly inflated prices because they know how careless and negligent Fianna Fáil Ministers have been since 1997 in planning ahead. These are the developers who feature so prominently at the var-

ious fundraising functions of the Fianna Fáil Party. Who is coddling whom?

What are the Minister's plans for Dublin 15? What will she do about the current crisis in Harts-town? Crisis meetings are taking place but parents want an answer. As well as the current situation experienced in the areas highlighted, there is the continuing position of the super-sized classes. According to the Minister's answer to my question last week, comparing the year on year situation in many schools, there are 89 classes of 30 pupils or more in the Dublin 15 area. Unless the Minister can suggest a worse area, this probably means Dublin 15 has the greatest concentration of large-sized classes. This is like a league of shame on her part in terms of her failure to deliver for our children, who are our future.

All of the schools in Dublin 15 are experiencing greatly increased numbers but are receiving very little extra assistance from the Minister. The school principals, various teaching organisations, the INTO and numerous researchers have told the Minister what she needs to do with regard to international children. I read the amendment tabled by Fianna Fáil. I do not know if it was drafted by the Minister, but it congratulates her for what she has failed to do for children who do not speak English as their first language. It demonstrates political brass neck and brazen cheek of a kind that I would not normally associate with the Minister for Education and Science.

I have not had time to deal with the issue of second level places but as surely as little children go to primary school, eight years later they end up at the door of a secondary school. The Government promised, seven years ago, an additional secondary school in Ongar, where 8,000 extra houses have been built and occupied, but has now deferred the provision of that school for another two years. Once again, parents will be out with banners trying to make the Minister pay attention to their plight.

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after Dáil Eireann and to substitute the following:

- “— commends the Government for investing record levels of Exchequer funding in education since 1997 by more than doubling the budget from €3.1 billion to €7.9 billion currently;
- supports the historic decision to provide capital investment funding on a multi-annual basis to the value of €3.9 billion over the next five years;
- commends the Minister for Education and Science on her management of the school building programme which will deliver 1,100 projects over the next 18 months and which has delivered 6,287 projects since 2000;

- notes the initiatives that her Department has taken to ensure that schools are provided as quickly as possible through innovations in the design process and the improvements that have been made in forward planning through greater co-operation with local authorities and the publication of area development plans;
- welcomes the fact that next September there will be 4,000 more teachers in our primary schools than there were in 2002 and notes that these teachers have made an immeasurable difference to the lives of children with special needs, those from disadvantaged areas and those whose first language is not English; and
- further welcomes the allocation of more mainstream classroom teachers for our primary schools for September 2006 and September 2007.”

The amendment refers to planning, buildings and numbers of teachers because the motion refers to those issues. My amendment would have dealt with special needs, international children, the curriculum, teacher training, in-service training and all the supports in place for schools, vision and the future but the motion does not refer to any of those areas.

Ms O'Sullivan: The motion refers to what is relevant for our children.

Ms Hanafin: The amendment directly refers to the motion tabled by the Opposition parties and affords me the opportunity to discuss the Government's record on investing in education. In moving this amendment, I may share my time with Deputy Peter Power.

The budget for my Department has more than doubled in recent years to just under €8 billion in 2006. This Government has also provided for the largest increase in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education and has put an unprecedented level of investment into school buildings. These are actions of which the Government is proud.

There are approximately 4,000 schools in the country and before this Government came into office, expenditure was completely inadequate, forward planning was virtually non-existent and—

Ms Enright: Fianna Fáil was in power for many years before this current Government.

Ms Hanafin: —the level of micro-management at central level was limiting the amount of progress that could be made. This meant that an enormous number of schools were badly in need of modernisation.

[Ms Hanafin.]

This year, not only are we spending five times what was provided for school buildings in 1997, the innovations that have been made in the design and delivery processes for schools building projects are also helping to achieve an ever greater amount of progress. Before outlining the positive impact that innovations such as the development of standard designs and the devolution of more work to local level have made, I would like to speak about investment in education.

This Government is determined to ensure that every child is educated in a suitable and comfortable environment. Its commitment to this goal can be judged by the investment of more than €2 billion on school buildings during the period 2000 to 2005, with a further €500 million being invested in 2006. In the previous budget, the Minister for Finance provided €3.9 billion in capital funding for the education sector as a whole over the next five years. While the challenge before us in reversing decades of under-investment in school buildings and in responding to emerging needs in new population areas is great, we are making enormous progress.

To date in 2006 I have announced the first tranches of a programme which will see building projects carried out at more than 1,100 schools. I have also announced my plans to provide 23 new post-primary schools and four new primary schools under a major expansion of the Government's public private partnership programme from 2006 to 2009. The new schools building programme, as announced, means we can ensure that we have a rolling system of building, planning, architectural planning, design teams and of going to tender to ensure that everything does not happen at the beginning of the year. In this way, expenditure by the Department is rolled out through the year, thus ensuring we get best value for money.

The Government's achievements in the period 2000 to 2005 speak for themselves. At primary level, €1 billion was spent allowing the completion of 63 new schools of up to 16 classrooms in size, 246 large-scale refurbishment and extensions at existing schools, 63 small primary schools modernised under the small schools scheme, 55 schools provided with permanent extensions *in lieu* of prefabs under the permanent accommodation scheme and 4,351 smaller-scale refurbishment projects largely delivered under the summer works scheme. At post-primary level, with spending of €1 billion, we have provided 19 new schools, 129 large-scale refurbishment and extensions at existing schools and 1,361 smaller-scale refurbishment projects were completed.

Not only have all these projects been delivered in a relatively short space of time, many more are in train as we speak. My Department is delivering more than 160 large-scale primary schools building projects which are either already at construction or authorised to proceed to tender and con-

struction. A further 225 primary schools are being modernised through the small schools scheme. At post-primary level, my Department is delivering more than 60 large-scale school building projects which are either already at construction or authorised to proceed to tender and construction.

Many schools have also been refurbished through the annual summer works scheme and almost 800 will have summer works projects done this year. This innovative scheme, which allows schools to get small projects done over the summer holidays, did not exist when this Government came into office and schools were waiting for many years for improvements such as rewiring, new roofs or windows. Now when the school gates close for the summer, the builders move in and the students come back to an improved environment just a few months later.

The level of work being done under the schools building programme is at an all-time high. While increased investment has been a central reason for this, changes in how projects are managed have also made a major difference. This Government has put a particular emphasis on devolving the delivery of many school building projects to a local school management level and since the start of 2004, where possible, all small-scale projects are now delivered in this manner.

My Department has also reduced the red tape for schools for large-scale projects by keeping its interaction with schools to the initial stages in setting the parameters for the projects and then devolving the delivery of the projects through the planning permission process, tendering and construction to school management authorities. In setting the parameters for large-scale projects in the initial stages of design, my Department has recently started evaluating these designs at meetings with schools and their design teams, rather than the traditional method of correspondence. Already this approach is receiving very positive feedback and is speeding up the design phase of the projects.

In addition and in accordance with best practice standards, my Department has developed a standard school design for eight and 16 classroom schools that can be repeated in locations throughout the country. This will result in speedier delivery of projects, savings in design fees and land use savings arising from the use of the two-storey design. Two of these projects have been completed, construction is under way on another and a further 19 are scheduled for delivery as part of the current schools building programme. Among these are two new 16-classroom schools in Dublin 15 which are scheduled to be built for September 2007. These projects were advertised last week and will be using the GRD design with quick build methodologies to achieve the projected completion date.

Another innovation has been the introduction of design and build contracts. Traditionally, separate procurement processes were used first to design and then to build new school buildings.

These two processes can be combined into one under a design and build contract. This was the approach used by my Department to provide a new 16-classroom school on a greenfield site in Griffeen Valley in Lucan within a 13-month time-scale. The school was delivered on time and within budget through a combination of traditional and modern system-build technologies executed on a fast-track, five-month building programme. A similar approach was used last year to deliver a new 24-classroom school in Diswellstown which was completed earlier this year. My Department is moving forward with this approach for the provision of new primary schools in Adamstown and a new post-primary school in Phibblestown.

Ms Burton: When?

Ms Hanafin: I would also like to highlight specifically—

Ms Burton: When will the post-primary school be built? In two more years?

Ms Hanafin: —the introduction of the permanent accommodation scheme since the Opposition motion—

Ms Burton: Two more years. It is eight years late.

Ms Hanafin: —refers to prefabs.

Ms Burton: The Minister should give us some information. When will we get the school in Phibblestown?

Ms Hanafin: In recent years my Department has moved away from the traditional culture of purchasing prefabs for the provision of additional accommodation in schools.

Ms Burton: It is eight years late. Is that a good performance?

Ms Hanafin: Instead, where possible, grants are provided to schools under my Department's permanent accommodation scheme which enables schools deliver a permanent solution to their accommodation requirements. More than 140 schools are being dealt with in this way. It is impossible to eradicate the need for prefabs, as schools often come to my Department with only a few months notice of the need for extra accommodation for the next school year. Prefabs can be the only option in some cases. Nonetheless, the amount spent on prefabs by my Department is kept to an absolute minimum. Over the past five years, expenditure on temporary accommodation represented approximately 4% of the total capital expenditure on school buildings. Last year, it was less than 1.5%.

We do all we can to provide extra permanent accommodation rather than prefabs where pos-

sible. Where schools are in prefabs because they opened with temporary accommodation in that environment, we work hard to meet their accommodation needs in a permanent way as soon as possible after they have proven their viability and received permanent recognition as a school.

Ms O'Sullivan: It took 15 years for one school in my constituency.

Ms Hanafin: We also do our best to enable new schools in developing areas to open in high quality permanent accommodation from the start. The new primary school in Griffeen Valley in Dublin was provided in this way, as will the new school in Adamstown.

Another development which has made a major positive difference in developing areas has been the abolition of the local contribution to the building costs for State-owned school buildings, which previously cost up to €63,000 per school. An active programme of site acquisition also enables sites for schools to be provided by the State.

Ms Burton: It is a joke.

Ms Hanafin: Some local authorities are extremely good about meeting their responsibilities. However, others do not designate sites for schools and do not provide from them when planning for housing. Members of local authorities who actively oppose the zoning of areas which might be suitable for schools have caused further difficulty in areas.

Ms Burton: The Minister's Department will not buy the sites. The local authorities do their jobs.

Ms Hanafin: A further innovation in recent years has been the introduction of a new model for public private partnerships in school provision. In parallel to the conventional approach on the delivery of major capital works in schools, my Department procured five post-primary schools through the PPP arrangements envisaged in the national development plan.

Similar to design and build contracts, the main benefit of PPP projects is the better transfer of risks regarding time or cost overruns to the private sector rather than leaving the Exchequer open to the potential for additional costs on projects. In addition, the financing element of PPPs means the capital and operation costs of the project are spread over a period of approximately 25 years.

Drawing on the experience gained from the first pilot education PPP in Ireland, I announced plans last year to provide 23 new post-primary schools and four new primary schools under a major expansion of the Government's PPP programme from 2006 to 2009. Under a new initiative, a number of primary school building projects are to be delivered using that model in a campus-

[Ms Hanafin.]

sharing context with a new post-primary school. The first school bundle under this programme will commence shortly.

As I detailed, a great many improvements in how we deliver school building projects have taken place in recent years. Together with unprecedented investment, these innovations have enabled an unprecedented level of progress to be made in modernising our school buildings. Naturally, as I stated at the outset, modernising the facilities in all our 3,200 primary schools and approximately 750 second level schools is no easy task, given the historical legacy of under-investment in this area. However, most schools in the country recognise we are getting there.

I mentioned earlier that when we came into office, forward planning for school provision was virtually non-existent. I would like to set out how much that too has changed over the past few years. My Department recently adopted an area based approach to school planning where, through a public consultation process involving all interested parties, a blueprint for schools' development in an area for a timeframe of approximately ten years is set out. The areas covered in the pilot phase of this new approach to school planning include the rapidly developing areas of north Dublin, south Louth, east Meath and the N4-M4 corridor running from Leixlip to Kilbeggan, including all rapidly developing towns and villages in that belt.

This approach is on top of the normal planning procedures undertaken in my Department. The process of assessing the need for new or additional educational facilities at primary or post-primary level in any given area entails consideration of all relevant factors, including enrolment, demographic trends, housing developments and the capacity of existing schools to meet the demand for places.

Liaison with existing schools is an important part of the process also, as the school authorities usually alert my Department where, in their view, the need for additional accommodation is anticipated. In this way, every effort is made to ensure there is adequate existing provision, or that timely arrangements are made to extend capacity or provide new infrastructure where necessary.

However, a new pattern of development should also be noted where, unlike as Deputy Burton stated, a five year gap exists before—

Ms Burton: It is a nine year gap under this Government.

Ms Hanafin: —students come. Ready-made families move out of the city or move to the periphery of the city, for example to Kildare or Meath. It is not only young new couples who might seek a school in five years' time. The requirement for provision is also immediate.

Mr. English: They do not all come in one day.

Ms Enright: We knew they existed.

Ms Hanafin: It has also been the case, as Deputies will recognise, with the number of international families who have come to the county with their children—

Ms Burton: The Minister was surprised when they came. She stated the Government was caught on the hop.

Ms Hanafin: A number of them have gone to live together in various areas around the city and have put pressure for the provision of places, which is why—

Ms Burton: The Government invited them in.

Ms Hanafin: —even though we have a tried and tested system of recognising new schools, it was necessary to bypass that system to speed up the recognition of a school for September.

In addition, under the provisions of the strategic development zones, it is generally the position that sites must be reserved for schools and that the schools must be developed commensurate with housing and other developments such as community facilities. These zones anticipate that local authorities will measure up to their responsibilities.

Over and above the statutory consultation provisions on draft area development plans where my Department causes sites to be reserved for school provision, in recent years we have worked to strengthen contacts with local authorities to enable informed decisions to be made in planning future educational provision. For example, a specific forum, the Dublin school planning committee, chaired by officials of my Department, interacts with Dublin local authorities.

This forum comprises representatives of the local authorities in Dublin, together with representatives of the patron bodies of primary schools, and it works proactively in monitoring demographic changes and their likely impact. Taken in combination, I am confident the measures outlined improve the speed and effectiveness of the response to emerging needs in all areas including those which are rapidly developing.

I will turn to the issue of teaching resources. I am glad of this opportunity to spell out once and for all the unprecedented increase in the number of teachers in our schools in recent years and the extra support now provided for children with special needs, those from disadvantaged areas and those who need help with their English, to ensure they can reach their full potential at school.

The incredible progress made in this area in recent years is evident from the fact that next September no less than 4,000 extra teachers will be in our primary schools, compared with 2002. Not only is the average class size in our primary

schools down to 24, but there is now one teacher for 17 pupils at primary level, including resource teachers. The majority of the extra teachers hired in recent years have rightly been targeted at providing support for children with special needs, those from disadvantaged areas, and those with English language needs. They have made an immeasurable difference to the lives of those children, while also providing vital backup for mainstream classroom teachers.

Each of these areas is, and must be, a major priority for me and this Government, even if the scale of the resources needed to support these children could not have been predicted a few years ago. If we had put all these extra teachers into mainstream classrooms instead of targeting them at these priority areas, they would have done a lot to reduce class size in our schools even further. That number of teachers would have met the Government commitment.

Ms Burton: We do not have the classrooms.

Ms Hanafin: Instead, we decided to put those resources where they were badly needed, in special education, areas of disadvantage and language support and ensure those pupils had the teachers to support them. I am proud of the choice we made in this regard and I challenge any Member to state in good conscience he or she would not have prioritised those same people and would have done it differently. In doing that we addressed those priority areas and will continue to address them. We are also taking action on class size, by providing the extra teachers this year and next year—

Ms Burton: What about the promise?

Ms Hanafin: —to reduce the staffing schedule by a point in each of the next two school years.

Ms Burton: The Government made a promise which it broke.

Ms Hanafin: We did not promise that 5,000 of the 25,000 teachers would deal with special needs education.

Ms Burton: The Government promised that children under nine years of age would not be in classes bigger than 20. That is in the programme for Government.

Ms Hanafin: We did not promise that 800 teachers would teach English as a foreign language.

Ms Burton: The Government broke its promise.

Ms Hanafin: We did not promise we would target disadvantage.

Ms Burton: It is in the programme for Government.

Ms Hanafin: What we did was meet each of those priorities, which any Government would be proud to stand over, and I am proud we made those our priorities. They are the children who needed our support most. If Deputy Burton would have done any differently, I would love to hear it.

I accept some schools have particularly large class sizes. That is not indicative of every school in every county around the country. The national average class is 24 and the staffing is on a general rule of at least one classroom teacher for every 29 children. Some schools, such as smaller schools, have a much more generous allocation.

It is important to remember that there are a number of different reasons that a school may have large classes in a given year. These include a significant fluctuation in enrolments from year to year or a decision by the school principal not to have multi-grade classes in some cases. Regardless of the reason there is a large class in a particular school one year, it should be noted that in the majority of cases, this is not repeated in the following year. In the main, the same schools do not have large classes year after year and so the same children are not in large classes year after year.

I previously mentioned that schools are staffed on the basis of a general rule of one teacher for every 29 pupils. A scenario where some classes in a school have class sizes of greater than 29 may arise because of a decision to use the teaching resources to have smaller classes at other levels. Indeed one can often see that if a particular school had a class of 35 in a grade, which no school should have because staff numbers are there, the answer would be that there is another class in the same school with a much lower than average number of pupils in it.

I accept that splitting classes may not always be an option in every school as there might be a large group in junior infants and a small group in sixth class and so on. Where it is possible, principals should consider the benefits of having smaller multi-grade classes as against having large differences in class sizes at different levels in the school.

Acting Chairman (Dr. Cowley): The Minister's time is concluded.

Ms Hanafin: By agreement I will use my full allocation of 30 minutes. I have agreed this with Deputy Peter Power.

Mr. English: The Minister is a nice person all the same.

Ms Hanafin: Deputy Peter Power will get his time tomorrow.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Ms Burton: If the Deputy is nice to her, the Minister might give him some extra teachers.

Mr. O'Dowd: The Deputy should come over to this side and we will give him five minutes to speak.

Ms Burton: The Deputy is thinking of the schools in Limerick.

Ms Hanafin: It has come to my attention that some schools are not using all their teacher allocation for mainstream classes. I could name schools where a teacher is allocated full-time to do art and another may teach technology full time. Another teacher may be used as a non-teaching deputy principal. These teachers are allocated for mainstream classroom teaching and they should be used in this fashion.

There are a number of factors relating to class size, but it is important that we have secured funding and I have already begun, through the issuing of the schedule, to allocate more teachers for mainstream classes to reduce class size this September. I have a commitment from the Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, to reduce class size the following year.

Ms O'Sullivan: By one.

Ms Hanafin: It will ensure that by the school year of 2007-08, the general rule will be a classroom teacher for 27 children. It should be stated that in two-teacher schools, it is possible to have a second teacher for only 12 children.

Ms Burton: It was promised that there would be a teacher for every 20 students generally.

Mr. P. Power: The number went up on the Labour Party's watch and has gone down on this Government's watch.

Ms Hanafin: There will be an extra 500 teachers in place in September, tackling the major priorities in our schools.

(Interruptions).

Ms Hanafin: The public can see that not only are we continuing to tackle our own major priorities, but we are doing it for the children with special needs, disadvantaged learning difficulties and the mainstream class. I have consistently stated our priorities and we have delivered very strongly not just in the area of special needs, but also in the areas of disadvantage. With regard to the DEIS report, last year I announced extra resources for our most disadvantaged schools.

Some 640 primary schools — 320 in urban or town areas and 320 in rural areas — and 200 second level schools have been identified to benefit from the new plan. Key measures to be

implemented under the action plan include targeted early childhood education provision for 180 urban or town school communities, extended availability of home-school-community liaison and school completion programme services and the 180 urban and town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage will be targeted to benefit from maximum class sizes not only of 20:1 in junior classes but 24:1 in senior classes.

Measures will be implemented to enhance student attendance, educational progression, retention and attainment. Measures will be put in place to support the recruitment and retention of principals and teaching staff in schools serving disadvantaged communities. Central to the success of the action plan will be an increased emphasis on planning, target-setting and measurement of progress and outcomes to ensure that the increased investment is matched by an improvement in educational outcomes for the children and young people concerned.

Another group of young people that need extra support to enable them to make the most of their time at school are those with special needs. It is the progress that the Government has made in this area of which I am most proud. There are now more than 5,000 teachers in our primary schools working directly with children with special needs, including those requiring learning support. This compares to less than 1,500 in 1998.

One out of every five primary school teachers is now working specifically with children with special needs. In addition, there are more than 1,000 teachers in special schools and in the region of 600 teachers in special classes attached to mainstream primary schools. There are also more than 7,100 special needs assistants, up from almost zero less than ten years ago. My Department spends over €30 million on school transport for special needs pupils. Over €3 million is now allocated towards specialised equipment and materials for pupils with special educational needs. This is up from €800,000 in 1998. These are children which need even more support.

The level of resources being made available by the Department to support students with special educational needs in the second level system has also grown significantly not only at primary level but also at second level. At this stage approximately 1,650 whole-time equivalent teachers and 1,100 special needs assistant posts have been allocated to second level schools and VECs to cater for the special educational needs of students at second level.

Another area of significant growth in recent years is support for children whose first language is not English. In the current school year, 562 whole-time equivalent language support teachers are in place at primary level and 262 whole-time equivalent teachers are in place at second level to support such pupils, representing an investment of €47.5 million. There are therefore more than 800 teachers teaching English only to inter-

national children who have come into our schools. That could not have been anticipated even five years ago. It is a significant and important investment, which allows those children to be integrated into the schools.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I remind the Minister that she indicated she would share her time.

Ms Hanafin: I later indicated that I was not going to share time and it was agreed.

Mr. Crawford: She did a turn.

Ms Hanafin: What I had to say was so valuable that Deputy Peter Power agreed to make his contribution tomorrow.

Mr. Durkan: If he ever gets to make it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Minister has four minutes remaining.

Ms Hanafin: I recognise that these more than 800 language support teachers are only one part of the equation. Having met principals in the schools which have such large numbers of international children, I recognise that further help is required, particularly with the parents of these children with regard to issues such as cultural differences. These families may not have English, which could put pressure on the children. I am working on a local level and on national policy to address needs associated with this.

There is no escaping the reality that since coming into office, we have placed the highest priority on improving educational provision. We have consistently and substantially increased investment throughout the sector and we remain absolutely committed to our planned programme of continued improvement. This continued improvement is to be seen in the provision of appropriate accommodation and in ensuring that the children who need most get the most. These are children with special needs, children from disadvantaged areas and children with English language needs. We are ensuring that extra teachers are going into the schools, with 4,000 to be put in place in primary schools alone.

We are ensuring that by supporting those teachers through in-service training and investment, we are not just discussing numbers of teachers or buildings, we are ensuring that the top quality education provided within our primary schools continues. That is a priority for Government. I am happy to move the amendment setting out our achievements to date.

Mr. English: I wish to share time with Deputies Durkan, Crawford and O'Dowd.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. English: I am glad to have a chance to say a few words on the education sector, mainly dealing with class facilities and sizes. The Minister mentioned that the issue was not about school buildings or numbers of teachers, but also the quality of education.

Correct me if I am wrong but discipline is a major problem in schools. The handbook recently published and handed out to new teachers gives no guidance on how to control a class, so could some tips be added to it to give new teachers a chance as they try to teach in the big bad world?

Although it is not related to education I must mention what happened near Delvin today where another bus caught fire, although I do not blame the Minister. We are told the bus was 16 years of age. I compliment the bus driver on her quick action to ensure nobody was injured. I also compliment the pupil who raised the alarm. There must be change. How many more times are we to have accidents involving buses? I do not blame any one person but I call on those who have the power to stamp it out to do so once and for all. I ask the Minister to use her office, along with her colleague, the Minister for Transport, to devote extra effort to this cause. The people who own buses, be they private or public, such as Bus Éireann, must go the extra step to ensure their buses are safe.

There may be other reasons for what happened this week but most buses are not fit to be on the roads. We must question the process of testing buses for suitability. The system whereby they are given certificates of roadworthiness needs to be reviewed and higher standards demanded. I urge those who operate buses to forget about profits and costs and to think about people's lives, especially young people's lives. In a few days' time it will be the anniversary of the tragic crash in which five young girls lost their lives. The pain those families are going through is immense. Their school, Loreto, has launched a campaign entitled Life is Precious to try to raise awareness of the dangers of buses and other forms of transport and of the fact that life is a gift. I ask those who operate buses to listen to the young girls from Loreto and the parents of those who lost their lives last year. The message must go out loud and clear that we cannot take chances or short cuts and we should come down like a ton of bricks on any operator who takes a short cut by putting an unworthy bus on the road, or even one that is too old.

The Minister said that prefabs were not meant to be a long-term solution and that there was no reason they should last forever. When I was in high infants at Bohermeen national school, I remember two prefabs arriving on a crane. That was more than 20 years ago. Last week the same two prefabs were replaced by two new prefabs so the school is into its 21st year with prefabs. They may not be meant for the long term but that is what they become.

[Mr. English.]

Modern prefabs are not too bad but the older ones were terrible, too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. They were uncomfortable and cramped and unsuitable for people to learn in. We try to teach our young people to have respect for people and property but we force them into prefabs and other run-down buildings to be educated. That must stop because it sets a very bad example. The Minister talks about the billions being spent. We have more taxpayers' money to spend now so it is nothing for the Government to be proud of. However, it presents an opportunity to get things right but many schools do not have the facilities they need to teach their young people properly and where those young people can learn respect. The Minister's offices are always kept in good condition and our children deserve the same.

Some county councils, such as my own in Meath, are doing a good job trying to reserve sites but a problem is created over who buys a parcel of land while we wait for the Department of Education and Science to wake up and realise that a school needs to be built. Some councils, my own included, buy a site to hold on to until the Department of Education and Science decides it wants it. Councils cannot afford to do that and it is not their job. Will the Minister go a step further and buy sites? If they are not required for schools, they can be sold again.

The Department of Education and Science should be proactive and have them ready for schools. The Minister said Navan was an example of a growing town with many new families but they did not arrive over one week. They have been arriving over ten years. In Johnstown more than 200 new families have moved in but that has happened since 1996. We have had years to realise it and build a school but St. Stephen's is still in temporary accommodation. Two other schools, Naomh Eoin and Navan Educate Together are also in temporary accommodation. That represents a lack of planning on the part of the Department of Education and Science and councils but when land was zoned as far back as 1997, it should have been recognised that houses would be built and a school would be necessary.

I am delighted the devolved grant scheme for building schools was introduced because it was my idea and was proposed in one of my first speeches in late 2002. I made the suggestion to the then Minister, Deputy Noel Dempsey, and he took it on board. The scheme, however, was meant to provide enough money to get the job done. It was not meant to leave schools €150,000 or €200,000 short and having to spend their summers holding golf classic tournaments or tea parties to raise funds. There is still a gap which the Minister should review. She should consider providing that little bit extra to get the extra facilities built so that our children can have the chance of a proper education.

Mr. Crawford: I record my thanks to the Minister for providing an increase in devolved grants to No. 1 school in Cavan, which is a listed building. Nobody would deny there has been progress but I cannot help thinking that in the mid-1980s, my party leader, as Minister of State at the then Department of Education, opened the school in Latnamard in the parish of Aghabog where I live. Work was being done even when money was very scarce and, while there has been continual progress, much remains to be done.

I will talk about overcrowding in some schools. It is not so long since we held a meeting in Urbalshanny national school in north Monaghan. It is an excellent, quite recently reconstructed school that many people want to attend. However, the fact that class sizes are as high as 40 is not acceptable. It is important that the Minister makes every effort to reduce that figure, not just from the point of view of the pupils but for the sanity of the teachers.

I wish to concentrate on the small village of Rockcorry, three miles from my home in County Monaghan. There are four full-time teachers and two remedial at Scoil Mhuire. It has two classrooms and two prefabs, one of which is 15 years old, although the other was replaced last year. It includes a classroom and an area for a remedial teacher and the office is a wooden hut. I appreciate that Scoil Mhuire has had problems getting agreement with planning officials from the county council on a site near Rockcorry village but several housing estates have been built since and there were no problems obtaining planning permission for those. One wonders what the planning regulations are and how realistic they are. A school has been sought for at least 15 years from even before I came into this House. There are 90 pupils in the school and they deserve better. I hope in the next year we can effect a constructive conclusion on that matter.

In the same village there is a Church of Ireland school and I appreciate the help it has received in the past. Again, however, it is growing in numbers. There are 34 pupils and two full-time teachers, one part-time and one remedial. There are 17 junior pupils in one small room in the downstairs part of what is a two-storey building. According to any regulations it is totally inadequate.

The real reason for my raising it at this moment is the problem it has with remedial teachers. I have raised it a number of times in the House and written to the Minister's Department on many occasions. A young boy with learning difficulties has attended the school for two years and he needs more one-to-one tuition than he receives. The fact that he does not receive it is causing problems in the school. The psychologist recommended he get one-to-one teaching for two and a half hours per week from a resource teacher but the Department did not grant that. It is a serious situation and he has had to be kept back for a year. The parents are very annoyed and I ask the

Minister to review the situation. The answer I received from the Department was that because it was a relatively small school, there should be no need for a direct remedial teacher.

For what do we pay psychologists? We should ensure action is taken on foot of their reports. I urge the Minister to ensure that the needs of schools are met regardless of the number of pupils they may have. A school may have a significant number of children with special needs because parents are attracted by its small size or excellent teachers. I urge the Minister to address this issue as a matter of urgency.

I appreciate the allocation of €47.5 million towards the teaching of non-nationals, a vital function. This type of tuition is needed in virtually every school in County Monaghan, not only its larger schools, because many foreign families have moved to the area to work in the poultry, mushroom and other industries. I support the measures introduced by the Minister in this area. The money has been well spent. Immigrants have made this country a great deal richer and have justified the expenditure of these funds of their own right.

Mr. Durkan: I do not seek to criticise this Minister but every time a Minister addresses the House, he or she informs us that more money is being spent than at any time in the past, as if this was a major achievement. I cannot envisage circumstances in which a Minister could expect to get away with spending less than in the past. After all, house prices have increased tenfold in the past decade. My response on hearing that more money is being spent than at any time in our history is to declare: "so what".

County Kildare is a microcosm of the national position in terms of the school building programme. It may not have been the Minister's fault but someone is to blame for the current problems in my county because population changes were clearly projected a decade ago when the census figures and county development plan were made available to the Department. To take the Naas-Kildare-Sallins triangle as an example, we have been scurrying around for 12 months in search of a site for a school for Kill when it was well known ten years ago that the area would be a building site a few years hence. Despite the obvious health and safety problems, we managed to get a site at the last minute but much work remains to be done. It is even more serious that despite the Department being aware that the population of the area would increase, we have had a prolonged fight in every case. With most schools overflowing, we also have a daft case where a school will not reach a full complement of students because of the various criteria that apply. The Minister must take steps to address this.

Another school in County Kildare has too few teachers because the number of teachers available to schools is calculated on the basis of enrolment in the September of the previous year. The

influx of population in the locality resulted in such a large increase in pupils that the only way to provide supervision was to close one room and bundle pupils into another room.

Ms Hanafin: The Deputy is referring to the developing schools criteria.

Mr. Durkan: Yes, the question in these circumstances is whether one leaves children out in the cold or changes the rules. I have written to the Minister on this issue calling for the rules to be changed.

Ms Hanafin: The rules are being changed for developing schools.

Mr. Durkan: I have sent the Minister a ream of letters and tabled a number of parliamentary questions on this issue.

Recently, I learned of a case of children at risk, a serious issue. The Departments of Education and Science, Health and Children and Justice, Equality and Law Reform share responsibility for these cases. When I raised the matter, all three Departments took cover by arguing that they had no responsibility in the matter. I have tabled parliamentary questions on the same case five times and held an on-site meeting with the individuals concerned. To be fair to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the juvenile liaison service eventually took action in the case. What does this say about the Educational Welfare Board which also has responsibilities in this area? How is it structured? How many staff does it have? In County Kildare, for instance, one member of staff is responsible for roughly 35,000 children. Have we gone daft? We are placing children at risk because it is impossible for the National Educational Welfare Board to succeed in such circumstances.

We hear much talk about Scoileanna lán-Ghaelacha, and the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Ó Cuív, regularly features on the news talking of his love of the Irish language. All the scoileanna lán-Ghaelacha in my constituency are located in prefabricated buildings and will soon enrol a second generation of children. Rather than boasting about the money being spent on this area or how well matters are progressing, the Minister should set new standards by indicating that we will do much better than heretofore.

Mr. O'Dowd: I welcome the constructive points made by Deputies and propose to make several points which reinforce the sentiments expressed by my colleague, Deputy Durkan, and shared by Deputies from constituencies experiencing rapid, massive increases in population.

On the issue of planning, which the Minister discussed, as areas on the east coast rapidly develop and planning permissions are granted, it sometimes takes local authorities some time to

[Mr. O'Dowd.]

draw up their action area plans. Trigger mechanisms agreed among the Departments of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Education and Science and local authorities should be put in place, particularly as we already know the areas in which growth will take place. Once planning permission has been granted for a certain number of houses, these two Departments and local authorities and residents should immediately get together to sort out the issue. Schools should be planned as houses are being built.

A silly argument is taking place in County Louth about the views of the Department of Education and Science versus those of the county manager. The whole issue should have been agreed earlier and should not have entered the public domain. If the triggers I propose were in place, action would be taken and a resolution found almost as soon as houses are built.

On the one hand, the Minister lectures the local authorities about their obligations while, on the other, the local authorities lecture her about her obligations to provide money for school sites. The issue needs to be resolved between the Departments of Education and Science and the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and funding must be secured for schools. I am astonished that, with the exception of development charges, developers who make millions of euro from building houses on development land make no real contribution to necessary infrastructure, particularly in education. This needs to change.

As our population changes, particularly as the numbers of new immigrants increase, primary and secondary schools have an important role to play in integrating different communities, religions and races. Ireland is fast becoming a multicultural society. I laud the commitment of teachers to make this change a constructive and positive one, but this may not always be the case. I am concerned that with immigrants tending to earn less and work in poorly paid jobs, a greater proportion of them will live in social housing than in affordable or other types of housing. A plan must be drawn up to ensure our new communities are integrated in society and the education sector must lead the process of change.

Molaim an díospóireacht seo. Measaim go bhfuil sé an-thábhachtach. Beidh mé ag caint arís amárach faoi.

Debate adjourned.

Estimates for Public Services 2006: Message from Select Committee.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs has completed its consideration of the following Estimates for Public Services, for the service of the year ending on 31 December 2006: Votes 28 and 29.

Adjournment Debate.

Health Service Projects.

Mr. Ring: Approximately six years ago, the old convent property in Louisburgh, County Mayo, was purchased by the Western Health Board for £265,000. In November 2000, I was advised that the services to be provided at the convent would include psychiatric services, occupational therapy and physiotherapy services. Other services were also to be provided in that building. In October 2001, I was advised that the development of a day-care centre would be included in the Western Health Board's service plan for 2002. Consideration was also to be given to the provision of a respite facility.

When the initial costing of the property was being submitted it was expected that this would serve elderly members of the community within a 12-mile radius, including Inishturk Island, Clare Island and the areas surrounding Louisburgh. Currently, one room is being used for the rural social scheme, another room is used for physiotherapy, while a third is used as a tea-room for the elderly on Fridays.

Last night the "Prime Time Investigates" programme on hospital services was transmitted, which showed that step-down beds are needed. The Health Service Executive owns this property in County Mayo, having bought it at a reasonable cost. It provides an opportunity which should be availed of. At the time, the nuns sold it practically for nothing, yet six years on nothing has happened. Former Ministers in the Department of Health and Children, Deputy Martin, Deputy Callely, and the former Deputy, Dr. Moffatt, all came to County Mayo to make announcements. Those announcements were made before the local and general elections but to date nothing has happened.

One floor of the building has been developed but the rest has been left. I want to see all three floors of this property being developed to include a day-care centre. The HSE should put funding in place to provide the necessary facilities. The most important issue facing the country concerns our elderly population who wish to remain at home. In this case, the HSE owns a property which will not cost much to develop. If these facilities are put in place, such people need not unnecessarily occupy hospital beds. I ask the Minister of State to advance the project by providing the necessary funding. These facilities are badly wanted in Louisburgh. The building is already there and the local community will play its part in this regard. The Minister of State should urge the Health Service Executive to put this facility in place.

A day-care centre is badly needed along with respite care and other facilities for the elderly. There are two islands concerned, Inishturk and

Clare Island, as well as Louisburgh and its surrounding areas. The HSE has the building which cost very little. Will the Minister of State push this matter forward? He should meet a delegation from the Louisburgh area to discuss their needs, what they want done and how we can progress this matter. Will he put that request for a meeting to his Department, whether it is dealt with by the Minister or her Ministers of State? The request is a reasonable one and the delegation would not mind coming to Dublin for such a meeting. Alternatively, if the Minister of State was in the west the delegation would be delighted to welcome him to County Mayo where he will be treated with courtesy and respect. The people concerned want to see action.

The Minister of State should ensure that this matter is advanced within the Department. The necessary funding should be put in place to try to develop this worthy project. The HSE already has the property whose ground floor has been developed. I would now like to see the remaining two floors being developed to bring in the required step-down beds that are so badly needed in the county.

I was in Mayo General Hospital in Castlebar on Sunday to visit someone who was ill and I saw people on trolleys. It is a shame to see people on trolleys in the corridors. I compliment the nurses for working so hard under pressure in difficult conditions. We are told that people are taking up hospital beds who could be dealt with in day-care facilities or in step-down beds. The project to which I have referred deserves support because it would relieve pressure on our hospital services. I ask the Minister of State to push this matter in his Department.

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): I thank Deputy Ring for raising this matter. This Government has made services for older people a priority and is fully committed to the development of a comprehensive health service capable of responding quickly, fully and effectively to the health service needs of older people.

Additional funding for services for older people and palliative care amounting to €150 million has been allocated by the Government following the 2006 budget: an additional €110 million for 2006 and an additional €40 million for 2007. Approximately two thirds of this money is allocated to community support for older people. This is in line with the focus on keeping people in their own homes, in independence and dignity, with a well funded and viable alternative to residential care with proper health and social support systems in place in the form of, among other supports, home care packages. This serves to demonstrate the Government's ongoing commitment to improving services for our older population.

Significant capital funding for the health sector has been provided since the commencement of the NDP in 2000. A day care centre is recognised

as an important service in the continuum of care necessary to support older people from an area to remain living at home, and their carers. It provides older people in the area with a facility where they can meet new friends and enjoy recreational activities, promoting social contact among older people with the intention of preventing loneliness. It also provides a break for carers and social and physical stimulation in a safe environment for the older members of the local community.

Older people deserve first-class facilities and recent years have seen dramatic changes in both the concept and practice of providing services for older people. Enormous strides have been made and continue to be made in developing a comprehensive, community-based service that is integrated with other health services. The shift in the delivery of services from predominantly hospital-based care has been extremely successful and undoubtedly the quality of care for older people has been enhanced by this development. I assure the Deputy that the issues surrounding older people and their welfare are being given priority by this Government.

The Health Act 2004 provided for the Health Service Executive, which was established on 1 January 2005. Under the Act, the executive has responsibility to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services, including its capital programme. The progression of the proposed five-day day-care centre at the old convent property, Louisburgh, is therefore a matter for the HSE.

My Department has made inquiries of the Health Service Executive and has been informed that the old convent property in Louisburgh was purchased by the HSE in 2001 and refurbishment of the ground floor was completed in 2004. Currently, the Louisburgh social service group provides day care one day per week from the centre. The HSE provides funding to the group for this service.

The HSE has also informed my Department that the estimated cost of providing a five-day, day-care facility is approximately €328,000. I also understand that the HSE has plans for the further development phase of the existing health centre at the convent facilities in Louisburgh to provide integrated community services.

The prioritisation of all health capital developments is a matter for the HSE under the Health Act 2004. The capital plan, which includes the proposed refurbishment of facilities at Louisburgh, has been approved by the HSE board and was submitted to the Tánaiste for consideration. The Tánaiste will revert to the HSE in the near future concerning this plan.

Health Services.

Mr. Ferris: For the past decade there has been a campaign by senior citizens in the Tralee area, supported politically by all parties, councillors

[Mr. Ferris.]

and the community in general, to try to achieve the construction of a community hospital for the Tralee catchment area. Many of those involved in that campaign have unfortunately passed away but the campaign continues.

To give the example of a case I dealt with personally, an elderly man had a stroke and was treated in Tralee General Hospital in recent weeks. He was 82 and his wife was 79. Due to the shortage of beds, he needed to be transferred to a community hospital or a nursing home and so was transferred to St. Columbanus' Home in Killarney. His family contacted me and, eventually, he got a bed in a nursing home near Tralee where he passed away last week. During his illness, his wife had to get members of her family to help her travel daily to Killarney to be with her dying husband.

That is the stark reality. This is happening to hundreds of people in the Tralee catchment area, where people must go either to Listowel community hospital or St. Columbanus' Home in Killarney, or go to health board beds in private nursing homes.

On 21 March last, I raised in the House the delay in the construction of Tralee community hospital. The Minister of State who replied stated the capital plan for Tralee community hospital had been approved by the HSE and had recently been submitted to the Tánaiste for consideration. He stated this consideration was in conjunction with consideration of Dingle community hospital. I am glad the funding has been made available for Dingle community hospital in the past number of days. As yet, we do not have any word regarding Tralee community hospital but I hope the Minister will announce funding for it in the weeks ahead.

Part of Kerry cannot be considered in isolation. I have never seen morale as low as that in the health care system in Kerry. I will give an example that was raised in Kerry County Council and will no doubt be raised with the Minister. Last week an ambulance was not available to take an ill woman to Cork. Her family had to put her in a Hiace van and take her by road to Cork. Due to the intervention of a Minister, an ambulance collected her in Macroom. That is how bad the situation is in the provision of health services in Kerry.

I appeal to the Tánaiste to end the guessing game and to give a definitive answer regarding funding for Tralee community hospital. Over 160 people attended a public meeting in Tralee last Thursday in support of the senior citizens and the community hospital — unfortunately, I could not attend as I was delayed in Dublin. They were angry and it was a difficult meeting for the councillors of the Government parties present. They got a rough time, although it is not their fault. The fault lies with the Minister. It is up to her, with the Minister for Finance, to make funding available for the hospital.

How many more public meetings must be held? How many more pickets will we see? We have had pickets on the streets on a monthly basis. How many more times will I and other Deputies from the area have to raise the issue of funding? More importantly, how many more of our elderly people will die before funding is made available to build a community hospital to which they are entitled? They have given their lives in the service of the State yet find themselves without the dignity of being able to die in their own area.

That is how serious the issue is. I appeal to the Minister. I know a decision is due. Let that decision be positive and let it be forthcoming as soon as possible.

Mr. T. O'Malley: I am delighted to have the opportunity to answer on behalf of my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney. It is the Department's policy to maintain older people in dignity and independence at home in accordance with their wishes and at the same time to provide high quality residential care for older people when living at home is no longer possible.

The Government's commitment to the development of a comprehensive range of services for older people has been clearly demonstrated by the significantly increased resources made available in recent years. From 1997 to 2005, inclusive, additional spending on services for older people was in excess of €302 million. In the budget package announced for 2006, additional revenue funding of €150 million in full year costs was allocated — €110 million in 2006 and a further €40 million in 2007 — for services for older people and palliative care.

The proposed development in Tralee is a 50-bed unit to be built on a green field site to be located off the Killerisk Road, Tralee. The facility will comprise two modules of 25 beds each plus ancillary facilities providing continuing care, respite care and convalescent care to dependent older people. The prioritisation of all health capital developments is a matter for the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. The capital plan, which includes the proposed development of Tralee community hospital, has been approved by the HSE board and was submitted to the Tánaiste for consideration. The Tánaiste will revert to the HSE in the near future in regard to the plan.

Schools Recognition.

Mr. Ó Fearghail: Gaelscoil Chill Dara, established by a group of highly motivated and enthusiastic parents in the mid-1990s, has gone from strength to strength in the intervening period, not least since the school moved to take up occupation of the former Sundai school, which was purchased by the Department of Education and Science during the tenure of Deputy Woods as Minister. Sundai, a purpose built private school

on the outskirts of Newbridge, had provided an educational service to Japanese citizens from across Europe, but with the decline in the Japanese economy demand for places had dramatically reduced by the early part of this decade.

The acquisition of the site by the Department of Education and Science was both prudent and far-seeing, and it was envisaged from the outset that the site could accommodate two educational facilities. The intention was to provide for the needs of the rapidly growing local Gaelscoil and to perhaps also provide special needs opportunities in the dormitory buildings onsite.

The growth of Gaelscoil Chill Dara has been sustained and the current policy of the board of management is to enrol two classes per year to meet the demand that exists in the catchment area. There are currently six Gaelscoileanna in County Kildare at Leixlip, Kilcock and Maynooth in the north county area, and in Naas, Newbridge and Athy in the more southerly part of the county. It is readily understandable, therefore, that parents who have made a very determined effort to have their children educated through the medium of Irish at primary level, would give consideration to continuing with that approach through the secondary system.

To that end a group of County Kildare parents met with representatives of County Kildare VEC in 2003 to discuss the question of second level provision and whether a Gaelcholáiste might be established under the aegis of the VEC. Regrettably, agreement was not reached with the VEC on that occasion and consequently the parents proceeded to establish a Gaelcholáiste under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta.

In 2003 the Gaelcholáiste opened its doors in rented property in Newbridge, adjacent to the Gaelscoil, with a highly committed principal and a small corps of dedicated staff. Provisional recognition was given to the school in 2004, and the campaign for permanent recognition and permanent accommodation has continued since then. The Gaelcholáiste has 48 students on its roll and will enrol more than 20 students in September 2006, with an anticipated enrolment in 2007 of 24. Thereafter, its primary feeder school, the local Gaelscoil, Gaelscoil Chill Dara, will produce two sixth class groups per year, with the consequential increase in enrolment for the Gaelcholáiste. In addition, the Gaelcholáiste can reasonably expect to enrol students from the growing Gaelscoileanna in Naas, Blessington, Athy and even Portlaoise, all of which are within reasonable distance.

A target figure of 400 students, therefore, for the Gaelcholáiste does not seem overly ambitious. Given the excellence of the staff, and the commitment of the parents, which is without parallel, this is something that can be achieved if practical assistance is forthcoming from the Department of Education and Science, as I am sure it will be. The first requirement, therefore, is that the Department would give the Gaelcholáiste

the permanent recognition it needs and deserves.

Those involved in this valuable educational exercise know that, as sure as night follows day, this school will grow and develop. It is vital it receives the proactive support of the Department so that it can be seen that the school moves forward with the Department of Education and Science rather than despite it, as some cynics might suggest.

The school's second requirement is for a permanent home. It is in this context that the Irish language campus has come forward. With the Gaelscoil firmly established on the Sundai site and with the dormitory buildings on the same site lying idle for the past few years, the view was that a campus could be developed involving the primary and second level schools and provide a broadly based Irish language and cultural resource for the greater part of County Kildare. The campus concept has strong support in the county and represents an opportunity that both the Minister and the Department should be loath to lose.

Recently the Department has decided to accommodate the South Kildare Educate Together school in the Sundai dormitories which are to be modified to meet the school's needs. This decision was met with amazement by those involved with the Gaelcholáiste and by understandable delight on the part of those involved with Educate Together. I acknowledge the enormity of the contribution being made by Educate Together to primary provision in this part of County Kildare, and I readily accept that the Department of Education and Science must make accommodation available to this growing school, which has full departmental recognition.

I respectfully suggest to the Minister, who has done so much for schools in County Kildare, that her Department must address a number of serious issues in respect of these schools, and the issues are as follows. Is the Sundai school the appropriate permanent location for the South Kildare Educate Together school? Will the Department of Education and Science acquire additional greenfield accommodation for the Gaelcholáiste adjacent to the Gaelscoil to allow the campus concept to be developed if Educate Together is to remain on site? Pending permanent recognition for the Gaelcholáiste, would it be reasonable to accommodate Educate Together at Sundai on a temporary basis prior to moving it to a purpose-built school on one of the sites identified for educational purposes in the Newbridge development plan? It is incumbent on the Department to engage with the interested parties to ensure the best possible educational facilities for all our children, whichever school they attend, and so that the real possibility of developing an Irish language education campus is not lost to Kildare.

Mr. T. O'Malley: I thank Deputy Ó Fearghail for raising this matter and for giving me the opportunity to outline the position regarding the Sundai school campus in Newbridge, County Kildare.

A school previously used to educate Japanese nationals is owned by the Department of Education and Science. The school, with its associated facilities, was acquired with a view to housing a nearby special school and a Gaelscoil. While the Gaelscoil transferred satisfactorily to the campus, the accommodation proved to be unsuitable for the special school. Accordingly, a stand-alone portion of the accommodation was not utilised and remains so as of now.

In 2003, Gaelcholáiste Chill Dara commenced operation in Newbridge without recognition from the Department of Education and Science. It had an enrolment of eight pupils at that time. An application for State recognition as a voluntary secondary school under the patronage of An Foras Patrúnachta subsequently ensued and temporary recognition was granted for three years with effect from 1 September 2004.

Central to the decision to grant temporary recognition was the apparent demand for all-Irish post-primary education in the area. In this regard, the Department of Education and Science was satisfied that the school had the potential to develop into a school of circa 200 pupils over a period. Its enrolment as of 30 September 2005 was 47 pupils.

At the time temporary recognition was granted, the patron body was notified, in writing, of the terms and conditions underpinning recognition. In this regard, the patron has sole responsibility for the critically important matter of accommodation. It was made clear that the accommodation sourced by the patron would be required to meet the needs of the school as it developed and that schools in temporary recognition mode do not qualify for capital funding. In the event of permanent recognition being granted, interim accommodation would remain the patron's responsibility until the Department was in a position to provide permanent accommodation.

In subsequent correspondence the patron was also informed that the vacant buildings on the Sundai site had been earmarked for other educational purposes, specifically for a school which has secured permanent recognition and is, therefore, qualified to attract capital funding. This remains the position and the Department of Education and Science is completely satisfied that there can be no misunderstanding on the patron's behalf in this matter.

On 13 January 2006, the Minister for Education and Science announced details of 62 large-scale building projects which have been approved to start architectural planning. Included in these projects is the refurbishment of the unused part of the Sundai campus to facilitate Newbridge Educate Together national school. This school

received permanent recognition in 2004, thereby qualifying it for capital funding.

Plans for the delivery of this project are well under way in the Department. Consistent with the protocols for schools with temporary recognition, Newbridge Educate Together national school sourced its own temporary accommodation until it received permanent recognition and it will continue to do so until its new building has been delivered. With regard to schools of differing ethos sharing a site, I take this opportunity to point out that such arrangements will form an unequivocal feature of the educational landscape into the future to the extent that it will not be unusual to find a more significant range of school types on one site. It is intended, however, that while individual schools will be arranged so that certain facilities can be shared to avoid duplication, schools will otherwise be structured to enable them to operate independently of one another to protect their individual ethos.

I thank the Deputy for providing this opportunity to me to outline unequivocally the plans of the Department of Education and Science for the Sundai school campus. This is important to remove any uncertainty which the patron, board of management, teachers, parents and pupils of the Newbridge Educate Together school might feel over this issue. The Department's plans to develop the school on the Sundai campus are well on track. The issue of permanent accommodation for Gaelcholáiste Chill Dara will be considered by officials in the Department of Education and Science when it has permanent recognition.

Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Mr. Gormley: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for allowing me to speak on this important issue which has been raised continually by my constituents. I thank also the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Noel Ahern, for being present to take this matter.

The Minister of State will agree that our constituents have heard much about the tenant purchase scheme and have also been promised by the local authority and the Government that this issue would be dealt with quickly. They have had promises also in regard to the continuing problem of anti-social behaviour. My constituents would like answers to the many questions they have raised. They would like clarity on these issues and, above all else, they would like some degree of certainty about their future.

The original tenant purchase scheme for flats was introduced in 1988 but was withdrawn in 1992 by the then Department of the Environment. This move, which was supported by Dublin City Council, led to a great deal of dissatisfaction among local authority tenants. Many who planned to buy their dwelling found they could not do so.

When I was Lord Mayor, some of my constituents contacted me and asked if it was possible to mount a court challenge. Subsequently, they contacted a Cork solicitor, David Guilfoyle, and legal action was threatened. This may have led to the change in attitude of the Government and the local authorities. What we know is that the housing position has changed considerably since 1992. According to Mr. Brendan Kenny of Dublin City Council, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has recently indicated that a national scheme for the sale of flats would be introduced from January 2007. While addressing Dublin City Council, Mr. Kenny urged councillors to support the proposal and called on them to lobby in the coming months to influence the make-up of the scheme. He emphasised, however, that ultimately this was a matter for the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

I wish to alert the Minister of State to a number of concerns which have been raised by my constituents. If these flats are sold at market prices, many living in Dublin City Council flat complexes will not be able to afford them. It should be clear to most at this stage that the housing market has spiralled out of control. A small cottage in Ringsend can be sold for €450,000, an outlandish price, and way beyond the means of many local people. A three-bedroom flat will soon cost in the region of €500,000. How can my constituents afford that amount of money?

It has been suggested that the price of the properties should be based on the value set in 1988. The Minister of State met the residents' committee of O'Rahilly House on 22 February 2006. When they put forward the proposal that they should purchase at the 1988 prices, the Minister of State dismissed that idea. I ask him to reconsider the issue because, clearly, my constituents cannot afford those prices.

A good suggestion has been made — though I do not know if it would be possible — that some assistance has to be given to tenants if they are to afford these flats. The funds raised from the sale of the scheme should be ring-fenced for local housing and amenities. Before any such scheme is initiated, a detailed audit of all the necessary remedial works should be carried out. We need to look at the financial implications. What happens if certain tenant purchasers cannot keep up with payments or pay the new service charges? These and other concerns have been raised by tenants and local councillors who are aware of the problems on the ground.

There are other concerns surrounding flat complexes. Many of them were built in an era when they did not have the value they have nowadays. The scarcity of space in the city has resulted in inflated prices being paid for properties not far from flat complexes. One can instance, for example, the incredible price paid recently for the Berkeley Court Hotel site. Only high-rise, high-

density dwellings will be sufficient to recoup that investment. Similarly, many private investors could buy the local authority complexes thinking that a killing can be made on the available space. One builds between the blocks and one builds up. This could result in some fine developments with good facilities for our tenants. It could very well be a win-win situation, but naturally local authority tenants want to know what is involved. That is why I am calling on the Minister for State to consult first the local authorities and in this instance Dublin City Council. It is essential that the council fully consults its tenants to establish what is in their best interests.

The entire focus must be on the best interests of our tenants and not on what is in the best interests of the speculators. For example, consultation on design could help deal with some of the anti-social problems now evident in our flat complexes. The promised legislation on the programme for Government states it will deal with this problem. To find a solution to the problems of anti-social behaviour, one needs to talk to the tenants and the councillors who deal with it first hand.

Many of our tenants have been model tenants, paying for years, and I ask the Minister of State to treat them with dignity and fairness.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. I will outline to the House the plans we have to amend and update existing housing legislation as part of a programme to reform the social housing sector.

My Department is drafting the heads of a housing miscellaneous provisions Bill to give effect to the policy initiatives set out in Housing Policy Framework — Building Sustainable Communities, which was published before Christmas. This policy document builds on recent progress in providing social and affordable housing by setting out the fundamentals of the Government's vision for housing policy over the coming years. The document will be followed up by a policy statement that will provide more detail on the principles of policy and set out an agenda for implementation. The Bill is being prepared in tandem with this policy statement.

The Bill seeks to support the creation of a flexible and graduated system of housing supports for those in need of housing, to improve customer choice to meet changing requirements over a person's lifetime, to streamline, and in key areas strengthen, the powers of housing authorities while at the same time making clearer their responsibilities as social landlords and regulators of social housing generally. To these ends, the Bill will provide the legislative basis for the new rental accommodation scheme, a revised tenant purchase scheme, including the sale of local authority flats to their tenants, and strengthen the

[Mr. N. Ahern.]

powers for local authorities to combat anti-social behaviour.

Referring specifically to the provisions relating to tenant purchase, the Bill will allow local authority flats to be sold to their tenants under certain conditions. Previous efforts to sell local authority flats were thwarted by the difficulties associated with the management of flat complexes, insurance, the cost of maintenance and the transfer of legal title. Taking full account of proposals put forward by local authorities, we are devising arrangements that will address these issues and for which new legislation is needed.

The Bill will also strengthen the powers of housing authorities relating to anti-social behaviour. There will be an improved process for dealing with individual cases. There will be an improved process for dealing with individual cases of anti-social behaviour, stronger powers to exclude and evict persons engaged in it and a wider definition of what constitutes such behaviour. The responsibilities of housing authorities will dovetail with the new powers relating to anti-social behaviour being conferred on the Garda and the courts by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Deputies will agree that this will be major legislation, and it is essential that we get it right. This means going through a necessary preparatory process, including consultation with housing authorities and other key stakeholders, detailed drafting and discussions with Government colleagues. The work in preparing the Bill is well advanced but any attempt to rush it could result in corners being cut, with consequent problems arising down the line. We are avoiding this by taking the time to formulate workable legislation that will make a

major contribution to meeting the Government's plans for reforming the social housing sector.

I heard what Deputy Gormley said. It is the intention to bring in some of the amendments by next January. We hope to have the heads of the Bill through Cabinet possibly by the summer. Drafting them and introducing them to the House could take six or nine months but presumably that would not stop us announcing the scheme, though it might stop us finalising a sale. We hope later in the year to announce the broad details of what we are talking about.

I met the people of whom Deputy Gormley spoke and I hope I did not dismiss them, though I might have dismissed their idea.

Mr. Gormley: Yes, the idea.

Mr. N. Ahern: It would be wrong to give encouragement that the flat prices involved will be at 1988 or 1998 prices. We have a tenant purchase scheme which is under consideration in the wider manner, but we are talking of taxpayer money and though we would like to give things away, we cannot do so. The fundamentals of the scheme would involve prices very near open market value. It is a case of how one handles this and what schemes one starts with. A lot of money has been spent by the city council and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in recent years in refurbishing many of these flats so questions would arise. Should one sell the refurbished flats first or the ones which have not been refurbished? There are many issues to be worked out. We hope to have the heads of the Bill to the Cabinet by the summer and then to work on the legislation, which might take six or eight months. We expect to announce the broad framework during the year.

The Dáil adjourned at 9.10 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 17 May 2006.

Written Answers.

The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received from the Departments [unrevised].

Questions Nos. 1 to 5, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 6 to 62 resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 63 to 69 answered orally.

Youth Services.

70. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the details of the new round of funding allocated for 43 youth and drugs projects here; the type of facilities and service this money will be used to fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18119/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I take it that the Deputy is referring to my recent announcements of allocations totalling over €4m for projects and initiatives under the Emerging Needs and Young People's Facilities and Services Funds.

The Emerging Needs Fund was devised to provide a flexible and timely response to evolving needs in regard to drug misuse in Local Drugs Task Force areas. My recent announcement involved approval of €2.27m to 39 projects, bringing the total approved to date from this Fund to just over €3.1m.

The Young People's Facilities and Services Fund was established in 1998 to assist the development of youth facilities (including sport and recreational facilities) and services in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists, or has the potential to develop. I recently announced the approval of almost €2m for the provision of four new youth facilities in Carlow and Waterford. These allocations, which

bring the total commitment from the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund to almost €101m since its establishment, represent huge advances in relation to youth facilities in these two centres. Following are two Press Releases, giving details of all 43 projects, for the information of the Deputy.

Press Release 3 April 2006

EMBARGO: Monday 03-04-06

Ahern announces additional funding of €2.27m for Drugs Projects

Mr Noel Ahern T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has today (3rd April 2006) announced a further allocation of €2.27 million from the Emerging Needs Fund to projects in Local Drugs Task Force Areas. These current allocations are in addition to the €850,000 already provided from the Fund.

The Emerging Needs Fund was devised to provide a flexible and timely response to evolving needs in regard to drug misuse in Local Drugs Task Force areas.

The Minister stated that he was delighted to allocate this funding to these very worthwhile projects. He added that this announcement showed the continuing emphasis and priority that the Government places on tackling the drugs issue.

Details of the funding allocation are as follows:

Issued by the Press & Information Office of the Dept. of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

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[Mr. N. Ahern.]

EMBARGO: Monday 03-04-06

LDTF	Project	Amount	Summary of Project Proposal
		€	
Ballyfermot	Hepatitis C Awareness Week	50,000	Information sessions and packs, including design and distribution of DVDs, posters, etc.
	The Base, Ballyfermot Youth Centre and Childcare Facility	65,000	To employ a dedicated Drug Youth outreach Worker to work with at risk/recreational drug using young people given the very high percentage of under 24s in the Ballyfermot area.
	Familiscope URBAN	113,437	Psychological Support Service for children; training for 185 front-line adults per annum.
Ballymun	Treatment & Rehabilitation Fund	60,000	A fund for a rapid support response to meet local Treatment/Rehab needs
	Local Drug Prevalence Study	47,100	Study to examine current nature, extent and context of drug use in Ballymun
Blanchardstown	Blanchardstown Harm Reduction/ Drug Education Worker	60,000	Implementation of a cohesive Harm Reduction Strategy
	Rehabilitation Research Programme	10,000	Research cohesion of services/gaps in Treatment and Rehabilitation services in Dublin 15
	The Tolka River Project	30,000	Funding to support the therapeutic needs of clients in this ring fenced programme in conjunction with FAS/HSE
	Equal Initiative	10,000	Contribution to inter agency training to build good practice in Interagency Working
	Blanchardstown LDTF Treatment and Rehabilitation Protocol	34,000	Implementation of inter-agency protocols between HSE Northern Area and the Community Drug Teams in Blanchardstown.
Canal Communities	Bluebell Addiction Advisory Group	80,000	To establish 3 priority programmes: a men's group, a women's group and an aftercare group, focusing on Harm Reduction, Peer Support and Aftercare. The proposal will employ a worker to undertake direct client work with a particular focus on poly-drug users\especially cocaine use and family support work.
	Health Promotion/ Harm Reduction Programme	45,000	To facilitate the provision of a mid-week evening programme (after working hours) for cocaine/poly-drug users
	Drug Worker to work with poly-drug users, Rialto CDT	60,000	To fund a worker to work with clients who are poly-drug users in the Canal Communities area.
	Turas Minibuses	73,810	To support this rehabilitation project in reducing significant expenditure on contracting transport. To be available for use by other community based projects.
Cork	Traveller Visibility Group (TVG)	66,592	Identify and make contact with young Travellers who are abusing drugs/other substances. Research life patterns consistent with drug and substance abuse.
Dublin NE	Labour Market Inclusion Programme (LIP)	53,000	An intensive and comprehensive one-to-one rehabilitation programme to prepare and progress recovered drug addicts into the labour market.
	Edenmore Youth and Family Support	79,500	Funding for a Project Worker to work with at risk 15-21 year olds and their parents (primarily problematic youth with serious behavioural issues).

LDTF	Project	Amount	Summary of Project Proposal
		€	
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown	The Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Outreach Project Ltd.	75,000	Development of a community based Cocaine evening programme three evenings a week 5-8pm to deal with people with problematic cocaine and/or polydrug use.
Finglas/Cabra	Cocaine Booklet	10,000	Publication of a booklet to highlight information to individuals not in contact with opiate or drug treatment services.
	Cabra Resource Centre 'Football Focus'	10,250	This proposal is an activity based motivational skills programme to attract drug misusers who are stable and wish to move on into more healthy pursuits.
Dublin North Inner City	Belong To Youth Project	51,738	To address the needs/deliver preventative programmes concerning problematic drug misuse among lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals.
	The Deora Project	56,608	To provide an increase of 124 counselling hrs per month. The project aims to develop an outreach service.
	ACET Ireland (HIV positive and HepC)	83,537	To support new/dynamic youth initiatives, including an innovative filmmaking project; intensive one-to-one and group/family support — increasing the service to 12 more youths per annum.
Dublin South Inner City	RUHAMA	61,442	To enable an increase of 17 females per month to the Ruhama service
	Recovery Through Art and Drama (RADE)	60,000	The employment of a dedicated worker to support the individual needs of clients on this ring fenced CE programme, targeted at poly-drug/cocaine users between 21 and 60 years old. This project supports a very difficult target group.
	Female Traveller Education/Out-reach Worker Exchange House	44,063	An extension to the existing project to work specifically with Traveller women.
	Poolbeg Training Ltd. Rinn Voyager	100,000	This project was launched in 2002 and is aimed at recovering drug users and those at risk to experience a unique team building challenge. This proposal is to fund a f/t skipper, mate and p/t administrator to be operated as a shared service for all LDTFs.
	South Inner City Outreach Team (MQI)	65,000	To support the development of an Outreach Mobile Service — to employ a Community Outreach worker as an initial step to initiate this service.
	Community Awareness of Drugs (CAD): Parental Programmes	100,000	To support the appointment of 2 p/t tutors and a subsidy towards a Dev. Officers Post due to the significant increase in demand for this service which provides courses for parents on drug education. Expansion of this programme will support the delivery of actions 34b, 35, 37, 42, and 95 of NDS.
	Fountain Resource Group: Positive Parenting	10,000	Positive Parenting Courses to enhance a new counselling service as a pilot Education Prevention Initiative.
	Teen Challenge	20,700	This proposal will allow the employment of an additional p/t Project Worker to meet the increased demand to enter the Residential Centre in Kildare. This service supports the rehabilitation of young women.

[Mr. N. Ahern.]

LDTF	Project	Amount	Summary of Project Proposal
Tallaght	CARP Slanu Young Person's Rehab Programme	€ 61,611	This rehabilitation programme has been designed for 18-25 year olds on methadone treatment in Tallaght. Treating 12-15 people per month, it will also act as a direct feeder to St Dominic's Rehabilitation project for relevant cases.
	Tallaght Rehabilitation Project	100,000	To support the therapeutic needs of clients in this ring fenced CE programme and allow for its expansion from 15 places to 30 places.
Cross Task Force (CTF)	Travellers Development Group (Clondalkin and Tallaght)	82,814	This initiative will include direct outreach work with Traveller peer workers, referral systems, prevention programmes and information seminars. Through the provision of a dedicated worker in the Clondalkin area.
	CC/D12 Initiative on Health Promotion	65,000	This cross task force project will facilitate information dissemination, referral, advocacy and needle exchange. The funding recommended will facilitate the planning and negotiating of the services including locations for needle exchange
	Irish Bishops Drug Initiative	101,100	Utilising the resources and structures of 10 dioceses (5 Rural & 5 Dublin), this proposal seeks funding to train clergy and lay persons in prevention measures in accordance with the National Drugs Strategy. It has the support of the SE, NE, NW & NA RDTFs and a number of LDTFs.
	Professional Development Training Programme	12,000	Development of an National College of Ireland (NCI) accredited programme in Managing Community and Voluntary Organisations for 12 managers, which will be adapted to include modules of support specific to the needs of local drug project managers.
	Coolmine Lodge Residential Rehab. (Men)	130,000	Coolmine Lodge is a residential rehabilitation facility for men. This proposal seeks to expand programmes and security services to cover evening and night shifts and to provide children the opportunity to stay overnight with fathers.
	Ashleigh House Residential Rehab. (Women)	30,000	Ashleigh House is a residential rehabilitation facility for women, accepting nationwide referrals, age ranging from 18-60. This additional allocation will ensure full evening/night shift cover in this residential service, and provide childcare on a needs basis for women to retain them on the programme.

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Press Release

3 April 2006

EMBARGO: Monday 03-04-06

Additional funding of almost €2million for drug prevention projects in Carlow and Waterford

Noel Ahern T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht

Affairs with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy today announced additional funding of almost €2 million from the Young Peoples Facilities & Services Fund for the provision of four major new youth facilities in Carlow and Waterford.

The Young Persons' Facilities and Services Fund was established in 1998 as part of the Government's overall policy to tackle drug misuse, particularly amongst young people. The aim of the Fund is to attract "at risk" young people in disadvantaged areas into facilities, programmes and activities that will divert them away from the dangers of drug misuse.

Speaking today, Minister Ahern said that he was delighted to be in a position to allocate another significant tranche of funding towards the development of high-quality youth facilities, particularly in Carlow and Waterford.

"This allocation will bring the total commitment from the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund to almost €101m since it was established in 1997 and will allow for the development of outstanding youth facilities for the target group of the fund in Carlow and Waterford," he said. Minister Ahern added that this announcement showed a continuing commitment on behalf of the Government to tackle the drugs issue on an ongoing basis.

Details of the projects are as follows:

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Young Persons' Facilities and Services Fund

Carlow

€1.3m for the purchase and fit out of a premises on Burrin Street for use as a Youth Facility

Waterford

€553,000 for the construction and fit-out of a Youth and Community Resource Centre in the Outer Ring Road area of Waterford City in order to service the needs of the YPFSF target group in the area

€100,000 for the development of floodlighting of 2 football pitches at Ferrybank Football Club.

€27,000 to carry out remedial works and improvements to their sports facility and play court for Children's Group Link which is a long established group in Waterford, whose aims are to provide recreational, educational, counselling and sporting facilities and services for the young people of Waterford.

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Offshore Islands.

71. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he or his Department officials have had contact with the Department of Finance relating to the proposal by the chairman of the Mayo Islands Committee (details supplied), that tax free status be given to the 11 non-Gaeltacht islands to encourage industrial development and stem population decline. [18166/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): The Deputy will be aware that responsibility in regard to tax free status designation rests with my colleague, the Minister for Finance, and is subject to European Commission regulations governing the granting of State Aid in EU Member States.

While I am aware of the proposal referred to by the Deputy, no request has been received by my Department to date from either the Mayo Islands Committee or Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann — the umbrella body for the islands — for tax free status to be granted to our offshore islands. Accordingly, neither my officials nor I have had discussions on the issue with either the Minister for Finance or his Department.

I would, however, like to draw the Deputy's attention to the new Enterprise Scheme for non-Gaeltacht islands, which I introduced recently. The purpose of this scheme, which is being operated in co-operation with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and relevant County Enterprise Boards, is to stimulate the establishment and development of a varied range of enterprise activities, thereby promoting the long-term sustainable development of the non-Gaeltacht islands.

Rural Development.

72. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the position in relation to future EU regional funding will be announced; the way in which he envisages that such funding should be allocated on the ground; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18152/06]

109. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the formulation of a joint national strategy for rural development; if representatives from his Department are engaging with the European Commission on this issue in advance of publication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18128/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 109 together.

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, together with the Department of Agriculture and Food are currently engaged in

[Éamon Ó Cuív.]

preparing a national strategy for rural development as required by the EU framework on rural development. This strategy will form the basis for a national programme containing detailed support measures for the period 2007 — 2013. The programme, which will require EU Commission approval, will provide support to promote three broad rural objectives:

Improve the competitiveness of the agriculture and food sector; Improve and protect the environment and countryside; and Enhance the quality of life in rural areas and diversify the rural economy.

Measures under this third objective, directed towards improving the economic and social well-being of rural communities will focus on actions such as: Promoting economic activity locally, including, for example, the development of indigenous rural resources in artisan food, forestry, marine, rural/agri tourism and cultural heritage; Developing local initiatives essential to community well-being, with particular focus on the availability of local culture and leisure facilities; Village and countryside enhancement; and environmentally friendly initiatives and conservation of areas of high natural and cultural value.

An indicative amount of EU funding for rural development programming was agreed at the December 2005 European Council. While the distribution of EU funds between Member States will have to be formally agreed at an upcoming meeting of the EU Council of Agriculture Ministers, Ireland's allocation will include a specific amount of €500 million already agreed at the European Council.

The allocation of the funding for the next rural programme, to individual measures, will reflect the essential balance between the priorities of continuing to support current successful measures such as those targeting a sustainable agri-environment while, at the same time, acknowledging and supporting the key contribution being made to rural areas by the wider rural economy.

National Drugs Strategy.

73. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the latest expected date for publication of the report of the rehabilitation working group established as the fifth pillar of the National Drugs Strategy; if he has met with members of the group to discuss the main findings of their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18124/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): The Working Group on Rehabilitation was established in September 2005 and includes representatives from a range of Government Departments and Agencies involved in delivering rehabilitation services, as well as representatives from the National Drugs Strategy Team (NDST),

the National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD) and the Community and Voluntary sectors. The terms of reference of the Group include examining the current provision of rehabilitation services in Ireland and recommending actions to develop an integrated rehabilitation service for the future.

The Working Group has held a number of meetings, as well as consultations with interested parties. It is envisaged that their recommendations will be finalised by mid-year and that they will report to the Inter-departmental Group on Drugs and to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion at that stage. Pending completion of their work I have not met with the Working Group.

74. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the breakdown of the amount of funding which has been allocated by his Department regarding the provision of residential places for female only addicts or for female addicts with children; and if he has had discussions with the Department of Health and Children or the Health Service Executive in relation to the provision of such places. [18048/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): Under the Health Act, 2004, the management and delivery of health and personal social services is the responsibility of the Health Services Executive.

My Department has overall responsibility for the co-ordination of the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008. The National Drugs Strategy Team is a cross-departmental Team involving Departments (including the Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive), Agencies and representation from the community and voluntary sectors. All aspects of drug policy and implementation are discussed by these parties on an ongoing basis. This structure oversees the work of the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces and through this mechanism the following funding has been provided to Ashleigh House, which provides residential rehabilitation facilities for female drug users: €210,000 in 2004 from the Premises Initiative Fund to upgrade the accommodation; €256,457 in the current year through the Local Drugs Task Force structure for the ongoing employment of a full time service manager, two full time workers and a half-time van driver; and €130,000 in the current year from the Emerging Needs Fund to facilitate the expansion of programmes and security services and the provision of full evening/night shift cover as well as childcare on a needs basis.

The funding provided by my Department represents targeted interventions to address particular needs. The Probation and Welfare Service

and the Health Services Executive provide the main current funding for the project.

Energy Resources.

75. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the advice he had received from the Western Development Commission, that development of gas processing at Rosspoint, County Mayo would mean many towns in the west, particularly in Mayo, would be connected to the gas network. [18170/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I have not received any specific advice regarding development of gas processing at Rosspoint, County Mayo from the Western Development Commission (WDC). Furthermore, the Deputy will appreciate that this policy area is a matter for my colleague, Noel Dempsey T.D., Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

As part of their overall brief, the WDC have, however, carried out research in this general area. They have looked at the issue of access by towns to the gas network generally which is run by Bord Gáis (BG), as the then Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) policy applied to towns all over Ireland and not just in the western counties.

The WDC's concerns about the then CER policy, the potential significance of the Corrib Gas find for towns in the West and fact that the BG Galway-Mayo pipeline is already under construction prompted them to co-fund a study undertaken by Enercomm International Energy Consultants for Ballina Chamber of Commerce. This study established the current energy demands in and around Ballina and estimated the potential demand for natural gas under different scenarios.

The study looked at the feasibility of Ballina acquiring a gas distribution supply using the current CER policy for the connection of new towns and also recommended changes to that policy which would give a fairer appraisal of feasibility and could lead to the connection of many towns in Mayo. I am arranging to have a copy of the study forwarded to the Deputy for his information.

In addition, the Deputy may wish to note that the CER recently approved Bord Gáis' (BG) new Connection Policy applicable to both the transmission and distribution networks. It is BG's intention to undertake a study to examine potential connections on foot of this new policy. It is planned to carry out this study in three phases over the next nine to twelve months, and a timetable and terms of reference are currently being drawn up. The bringing of gas to Mayo and the West of Ireland will be dependent on the outcome of this study.

Furthermore, the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources has commissioned a consultancy to determine the techni-

cal and economic feasibility of bringing gas from the Mayo-Galway pipeline to Donegal Town through Sligo, which shall include consideration of the following three alternative corridors: Via Ballina, Via Castlebar, Claremorris and Knock (Industrial Estate), or via Claremorris, Ballyhaunis and Ballaghaderreen.

Drug Seizures.

76. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the spate of recent cannabis and cocaine seizures by the Gardaí in Cork and Dublin; his further views on the prevalence and frequency of these large seizures, especially as a much larger quantity of these drugs actually avoids detection by authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18117/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): The Gardaí confirm that there has been a growth in the amount of cocaine and cannabis seized so far this year. I congratulate the Gardaí on their success in that regard, including recent seizures in Cork and Dublin, and on their significant on-going contribution to disrupting the sale of illegal drugs in this State.

Supply reduction is one of the cornerstones of the National Drugs Strategy and An Garda Síochána play a huge role in this respect. In 2005 a total of 3,545 people in the Dublin metropolitan region, and 1,166 in Co. Cork, were prosecuted for drug offences. This is a significant increase on the numbers (2,296 and 867 respectively) prosecuted in 2004.

While recent cannabis and cocaine seizures, and drugs seizures generally, are often interpreted as indicating a growth in the presence of those drugs, there is no definite evidence to illustrate the degree to which this may be true. Furthermore, I would caution against using drug seizures in a particular area as a direct indication of the level of supply and use of drugs in that area. The particular geographical area where drugs are seized may not indicate their final planned destination. In that regard, Dublin and Cork have international airports and sea ports and are therefore more likely to be entry points for illegal drugs into this State. Indeed, some drugs may ultimately be destined for markets beyond these shores.

However, I accept that sizable increases in seizures, though welcome in themselves, do raise fears regarding the amount of illegal drugs getting into the country. Through the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy, and the co-operation of the various Government Departments and agencies, as well as the community and voluntary sectors, I am confident that we will continue to tackle the misuse of drugs in the most effective way possible.

Community Development.

77. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the reasoning for the extension of the CLÁR programme, which is an average drop in population of 35 per cent per each county between 1926 and 2002, is not a worrying trend in relation to depopulation of rural areas here. [18167/06]

85. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on whether the CLÁR programme will require additional funding for 2006 and subsequent years in view of the recent decision to expand the geographical area which can claim CLÁR funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18154/06]

89. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the recent changes he has made to the CLÁR programme; the basis on which he has decided to expand the programme in most CLÁR areas and to introduce the scheme in a further five counties; the budget for CLÁR for 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18121/06]

93. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the process of evaluating and considering the findings of the review of the CLÁR areas is complete; if changes to the CLÁR areas are being made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18129/06]

344. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his plans to extend or expand the CLÁR programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18393/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77, 85, 89, 93 and 344 together.

I agree with the Deputy that the population decline in CLÁR areas is a worrying trend and that was one of the main reasons why I introduced the CLÁR Programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) back in late 2001. The Programme provides funding to Government Departments, State Agencies and Local Authorities to accelerate investment in selected priority developments. These investments support physical, community and social infrastructure across a variety of measures. The measures introduced under the Programme reflect the priorities identified by the communities in the selected areas.

In late 2005, I commissioned the National Institute of Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) in NUI Maynooth to carry out a further review of population data on which the Programme is based. NIRSA analysed the 2002 population census data to identify new areas for

inclusion on the basis of average population loss in each county of not less than 35% between 1926 and 2002.

In early April, following the completion of their work, I announced an expansion of the Programme in the existing CLÁR areas and an extension into parts of five new counties (Wicklow, Carlow, Laois, Kilkenny and Offaly). This brings the total number of counties covered by the Programme to 23.

The Programme was expanded on the following basis: Areas now included are those areas in counties with an average drop of population of 35% per county between 1926 and 2002; In all counties, towns of 3,000 and over and their peri-urban areas have been excluded, irrespective of county decline in population; Contiguous CLÁR Electoral Districts (EDs), including those across county boundaries, have a minimum population of 1,000; and As a result the number of EDs included in the Programme has increased by 729 to 1,614 and that total population covered is now 726,724 — roughly a doubling of the existing level.

As the Deputies will appreciate, an expansion of the Programme of this magnitude requires a significant increase in funding. Accordingly, I am very pleased to tell the Deputies that I secured an increase in CLÁR funding of approximately €9m for 2006, bringing the overall level of funding available this year to €22.95m.

I feel that this consistent process of funding small community and rural projects — many of which might otherwise not be funded — is having a major impact on the lives of people living in these CLÁR areas. Furthermore, I have no doubt that the people living in the new CLÁR areas will soon feel the very real benefits of inclusion in the Programme.

Rural Social Scheme.

78. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if, in view of the decision to expand the eligibility criteria for those who can participate in the rural social scheme, the number of places and the amount of funding available will be extended as a consequence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18149/06]

81. **Mr. Sherlock** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his proposals to use the rural social scheme to develop and maintain walkways; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18135/06]

96. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the recent changes announced to the rural social scheme; the reason for the changes in the categories of people eligible to participate in the scheme; the type of work carried out by those participating in the

scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18120/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78, 81 and 96 together.

The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) was established to provide income support for low income farmers and fisher persons who are in receipt of long-term social welfare payments and to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. The Scheme is delivered at a local level by the LEADER groups and, in the Gaeltacht, by the LEADER groups in conjunction with Údarás na Gaeltachta. Participants on the Scheme work 19.5 hours per week.

Following a review of the Scheme in 2005, I recently announced major changes to its operation which will come into effect from 22 May 2006. As part of the changes, the categories of people eligible to participate in the Scheme have been extended and now include: children/siblings of qualifying herd owners; recipients of One-Parent and Widow(ers) payments with a herd number; and adult dependents of non-contributory old age pensioners, who themselves are under 66, and have a herd number.

The tapering of adult dependent payments in respect of qualified adults has also been removed and a full adult dependent payment will now be made where the earnings are below the upper threshold of €250 p.w. In addition, participants on the Scheme are no longer prohibited from undertaking any other form of paid work.

The work to be undertaken by participants on the Scheme falls into the following broad categories: Projects relating to maintenance and enhancement of waymarked ways, agreed walks, bog roads etc.; Village and countryside enhancement projects; Environmental maintenance work — maintenance and caretaking of community and sporting facilities; Projects relating to not for profit cultural and heritage centres: Energy conservation work for elderly and less well off; and Social care and care of the elderly, community after-school groups and community pre-schooling groups.

The Scheme provides the personnel and capital for projects relating to the maintenance and enhancement of waymarked ways, agreed walks, bog roads etc. In general, this work involves (i) erecting and maintaining walkway furniture such as fencing, footpaths, stiles, footbridges, drainage channels, signs, benches and facilities for disposal of litter etc; and (ii) carrying out path repair and upgrading. Participants on the RSS are provided with the materials and equipment necessary to carry out this work.

There are currently 2,233 participants on the Scheme out of a total number of 2,500. Funding of €43.322m has been provided in my Department's Estimates for the Programme in the current year which represents an increase of 70%

over 2005 expenditure. Going forward, I can assure the Deputies that I will continue to closely monitor the number of participants on the Scheme and its funding requirements.

Community Grants.

79. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his proposals to implement the recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee that a proper control and accountability framework should be developed for the administration of community grants above a specific level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18140/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): The Programme of Grants for Locally-Based Community and Voluntary Organisations consists of three schemes, the first of which makes funds available for small scale refurbishments of the premises of locally-based Community and Voluntary Organisations. This is complemented by a second scheme to provide for the purchase of essential equipment including I.T. equipment. The third scheme provides for education, training and research grants. The maximum grant under the refurbishment scheme is €40,000 and the maximum grant under the other schemes is €10,000.

Up to and including 2004, payments under this Programme were made in full and in advance on the basis of subsequent provision of vouched expenditure. My Department has since taken account of the issues raised by the Public Accounts Committee. As a result my Department pays only grants in advance where the amount is €5,000 or less. Groups must fully account for expenditure of these grants subsequently.

For larger grants, an initial "up front" payment of €5,000 is made. Grantees must fully account for expenditure of these grants subsequently in order to draw down a second payment of up to €5,000. Any further payments arising are made retrospectively on the basis of vouched expenditure.

National Drugs Strategy.

80. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the necessary funding will be released to ensure that the successful cocaine pilot project in Tallaght, Dublin 24 remains open. [18052/06]

87. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when he intends to introduce a mainstream programme to deal specifically with cocaine abuse; the reason pilot cocaine treatment programmes are currently only in place; if he has satisfied himself regarding this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18156/06]

104. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the evaluation report will be published and made available regarding the successful cocaine pilot project run by CARP in conjunction with St. Dominics in Tallaght, Dublin 24. [18051/06]

112. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the work of the four pilot cocaine treatment projects to examine different methods of treatment for cocaine use that he launched in 2005; when the evaluation of these pilot projects will be complete; when a report will be published; his views on extending these projects, including on a national basis, in view of the widespread use of cocaine here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18127/06]

122. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he has satisfied himself regarding the amount of time it takes to produce an evaluation report in relation to pilot cocaine projects. [18049/06]

125. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the action he intends to take to ensure that the closure of Tallaght's successful cocaine pilot project will be avoided. [18050/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Aherne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 80, 87, 104, 112, 122 and 125 together.

A sub group of the National Drugs Strategy Team was established in 2004 to make proposals in relation to combating cocaine abuse. As part of its recommendations the subgroup proposed funding to support four pilot treatment projects. The four projects deal with the following cohorts of cocaine users: intravenous cocaine users; poly-drug users using cocaine; problematic intranasal cocaine users; and problematic female cocaine users.

One of the pilot projects is a community-based pilot involving a partnership approach by two existing projects, St Dominic's and Community Addiction Response Programme (CARP) Killinarden. The sub group envisaged that this shared pilot would develop best practice models of co-operation, which should result in improved levels of service for client groups.

The target group of this pilot is cocaine only users who have developed problematic levels of usage from an initial level of mild usage described as "snorting usually at weekends".

The objectives of the pilot are to record the social, health and personal changes of cocaine only users through the duration of the project. This is achieved by outreaching to users in their places of entertainment, recreation and work in order to devise a response to their drug use. The

pilot aims to identify and utilise the knowledge and skills that already exist in the area with the objective of engaging with cocaine only users who are already in contact with the statutory and voluntary services in the area, while encouraging others into the service.

At the outset it was envisaged that the project would be run for a period of six months under the joint management of CARP and St Dominic's. The total cost of the six month run was to have been €87,160. As it transpired, the project began operating in February 2005 and has been in operation since then.

In March of this year my Department, through the NDST, received an application for additional funding to enable the project to continue in operation for a further period. Notwithstanding the fact that it was established on a pilot basis, and that the evaluation of the project is not yet complete, I am glad to be able to inform Deputies that additional funding has been allocated to facilitate its continuation in operation until the report on the evaluation of the project is received and considered in my Department. The additional funds are being channelled through the Health Services Executive and I understand that a payment in that regard will issue to the project in the near future.

While the evaluation process of the cocaine pilot initiatives commenced in August 2005, it cannot be completed until the projects are sufficiently advanced to facilitate analysis of their effectiveness. Specifically in relation to the CARP/St Dominic's project, I am advised that the evaluators are awaiting further information in relation to numbers attending before the report can be finalised. However, I trust that these details will be provided and that the evaluation report can be completed and submitted to me soon.

With regard to the production of the evaluation reports generally, it stands to reason that the evaluators would not be in a position to finalise their reports until the pilot projects had run for a sufficient period and provided all the necessary information. Such information is still being collected while in the case of one of the pilot projects, it will not be available until later in the year when more progress has been made. Overall I am satisfied with the methodology being used to produce the evaluation reports and I have to accept that it will take time to complete them.

The main thrust of the evaluations will be to analyse, in a systematic manner, what is being achieved by the projects and to report on the lessons to be learned as a result. It is hoped that the results of the evaluation process will aid the formulation of effective actions aimed at tackling cocaine misuse. If any or all of the projects prove to have been effective, consideration will be given to rolling out similar projects on a wider basis.

Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 78.

Drug Use Prevalence.

82. **Mr. S. Ryan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the arrangements that have been made in regard to the commencement of the fieldwork for the second drug prevalence study; if expressions of interest from potential tenderers have been received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18133/06]

84. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the significance of the findings of the Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland: 2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey; Health Board (Ireland) and Health & Social Services Board (Northern Ireland) Results (Revised) published by the National Advisory committee on Drugs. [18168/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 84 together.

The National Advisory Committee on Drugs and the Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit (Northern Ireland) commissioned the first Drug Prevalence Survey, the purpose of which was to establish the population prevalence of drug use on the island of Ireland, in 2002/2003. This study surveyed over 8,000 people aged 15-64 in Ireland and Northern Ireland between October 2002 and April 2003 and examined the prevalence of a number of drugs. That work provided us for the first time with robust statistical information on the prevalence of drug use in the general population. It covered any lifetime use of drugs by respondents, as well as more recent use in the previous year and month.

Expressions of interest from potential tenderers were sought for the second Drug Prevalence Survey and tender documentation was subsequently issued to the interested parties. Tenders for the survey are due towards the end of June.

Especially with the baseline information in place from the first survey, the findings of the forthcoming project will prove very informative, giving valuable information on trends which can feed into drugs policy formulation. It is intended that the Drug Prevalence Study fieldwork will be carried out from late 2006 to mid 2007. Preliminary analysis will be done in the months following, with a first report of national prevalence figures and trends expected in late 2007.

Interpretative Centre.

83. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the recent

contact he has had with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government regarding progressing the promised Pádraic Pearse Commemorative Centre at Rosmuc, County Galway. [18172/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Discussions between the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and my own Department concerning the proposed Interpretative Centre to be located at Teach an Phiarsaigh, Rosmuc, Co Galway, are ongoing.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 82.

Question No. 85 answered with Question No. 77.

Countryside Recreation Strategy.

86. **Mr. Boyle** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the national countryside recreation strategy will be published by Comhairle na Tuaithe. [18161/06]

102. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress made to date in developing a national countryside recreation strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18157/06]

130. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when he expects to receive the national countryside recreation strategy from Comhairle na Tuaithe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18136/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86, 102 and 130 together.

Comhairle na Tuaithe is currently working on the development of a National Countryside Recreation Strategy. The first phase in the development of the strategy involved consultation with interested parties. 190 submissions were received in answer to a call in national and provincial papers and by letter to stakeholder organisations.

The work of drafting the countryside recreation strategy is proceeding following Comhairle na Tuaithe's examination of the submissions received.

I look forward to receiving the draft strategy from Comhairle na Tuaithe when it has completed its consideration of the issues arising. It is expected that this work will be completed shortly. The question of publication will be considered when I receive the draft strategy.

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 80.

Post Office Network.

88. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the president of the Irish Postmasters' Union's recent claim that the commercial viability for post offices in some remote communities is practically impossible and that this needs to be recognised by the Government and practically addressed by way of the introduction of public service obligation. [18165/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): The Government is committed to a viable and sustainable rural post office network providing a range of services to meet customer needs as set out in the Programme for Government. The network is geared towards customer demand in both urban and rural locations and must be adaptable to changing circumstances and trends but the core objective of the Government continues to be the retention of access to post office services in as many locations as possible.

The Deputy will appreciate, however, that I have no statutory responsibility for postal services and that the question of the commercial viability of post offices is a matter for my colleague, Noel Dempsey, T.D., Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 77.

Decentralisation Programme.

90. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position in relation to decentralisation and Foras na Gaeilge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18158/06]

120. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress which has been made since 6 March 2006 in regard to the 30 Foras na Gaeilge staff members to be located in Gaoth Dobhair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18132/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 90 and 120 together.

I would draw the Deputies' attention to my reply to Questions Nos. 107 and 121 of 21 March 2006. As indicated in that reply, Mr David Hanson, MP, the then Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, and I agreed in principle at our meeting in Belfast on 6 March 2006 that 30 Foras na Gaeilge staff posts should be located in Gaoth Dobhair. The agreement was subject to completion of the formal North/South Ministerial

Council approval process and that process is now complete.

The Board of Foras na Gaeilge has been asked to bring forward firm proposals in relation to the phases of locating such a staff complement in Gaoth Dobhair, as well as the precise sections and functions to be located there. I understand that this is in hands and will be available shortly.

Dormant Accounts Fund.

91. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will reconsider his decision not to accept funding applications for the Dormant Accounts Funds from representatives of emigrant groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18150/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my replies to Question Numbers 60 and 68 of 21st March 2006 and to Question Number 913 of 25th January 2006. I have no plans to change the position as outlined in those replies.

Departmental Schemes.

92. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of Irish language schemes approved by him since 21 March 2006 under the Official Languages Act 2003; the number of schemes commenced under the Act since that date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18115/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Since 21 March 2006, one additional Irish language scheme has been approved by me under the Official Languages Act 2003 and published. A total of 23 schemes prepared by public bodies have now been confirmed by me and published.

My Department is in discussion with in excess of 70 additional public bodies in relation to completion or commencement of the process of drafting a scheme. I expect to be in a position to approve a number of additional draft schemes in the near future.

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 77.

Languages Programme.

94. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the nature and content of the discussions he had with the Maori Language Commission during his recent visit to New Zealand; the parallels which can be drawn from the New Zealand experience in encouraging the use of native languages and the development of the Irish language; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18130/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): The discussions I had with the Maori Language Commission covered a number of issues relevant to the development of the Irish language. Much of the meeting centred on the parallel issues of encouraging the Maori and Gaeltacht youth to fully engage with the language. The legislative framework underpinning the languages in the respective jurisdictions was also discussed. The Maori Language Commission also made me aware of their method of ‘proficiency exams’ and of the work they are doing on ‘banking the language’ through a monolingual dictionary which lists all the attributes of a word, divided by fields so that all sports terms, all medical terms etc. are listed in blocks.

Community Development.

95. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his proposals to implement the recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee that consideration should be given on a local authority basis to having a single group managing both Leader and partnership programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18141/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I refer the Deputy to earlier questions on this topic, in particular, my reply to Question No. 98 and 100 of 21st March 2006, and my reply to Questions No. 393 and allied questions on 7th March 2006.

The Public Accounts Committee recommendation referred to by the Deputy is being implemented in the context of the ongoing cohesion process. To date, I have been able to support a number of proposals for integration of Leader and Partnership companies. Further proposals are being developed by the relevant agencies. I will be considering these proposals in due course.

Question No. 96 answered with Question No. 78.

An Teanga Gaeilge.

97. D’fhiafraigh **Mr. Gilmore** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cén t-agallamh a bhí aige leis an gComisinéir Teanga i leith na 415 chás nua a cuireadh i láthair Oifig an Choimisinéara in 2005; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina leith. [18148/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Foilsíodh Tuarascáil Bhliantúil an Choimisinéir Teanga do 2005 i mí Mhárta na bliana seo. Fáiltím go mór roimh an dTuarascáil agus, mar atá ráite agam cheana, táim ag tnúth go mór leis an dtoradh a thiofadh ó shaothar Oifig an Choimisinéara maidir le monatóireacht a dhéanamh agus comhairle a chur ar

fáil faoi fheidhmiú Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003.

An méid sin ráite, mar is eol don Teachta, tá An Coimisinéir Teanga neamhspleách i gcomhlíonadh a chuid feidhmeanna faoi Chuid 4 den Acht sin agus bheadh sé mícheart domsa ceisteanna maidir le cásanna nó gearáin ar leith a phlé leis.

Dormant Accounts Fund.

98. **Mr. Sherlock** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the discussions he has had with the Department of Finance to seek to establish the number of dormant accounts belonging to Irish exiles which are included in those made over to the Dormant Accounts Fund; the value of these accounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18134/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question Number 148 of 9th March 2006 relating to ownership of dormant accounts and to my earlier reply to Question Number 913 of 25th January 2006 concerning funding for vulnerable Irish communities abroad.

Under the Dormant Accounts Acts 2001-2005 information regarding those who opened accounts that have been deemed dormant accounts is maintained by the relevant financial institutions so that funds can be repatriated to these persons or their successors where possible.

The legislation does not require financial institutions to make available the address or status of the original account holders. Accordingly no estimate of the number and value of accounts referred to by the Deputy has been made and there are no plans at present to do so. In this regard, I can confirm that I have not had discussions on the matter with the Minister for Finance.

Drugs Awareness Programme.

99. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he has had discussions with the Department of Education and Science or teachers organisations regarding the distribution of a book to five to 12 year olds which gives detailed information on heroin, cocaine and ecstasy; if his attention has been drawn to the concerns that have been raised by teachers and parents regarding the distribution of this book; if his Department distributes such information to primary school children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18118/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): My Department was not consulted or involved in any way in relation to the booklet to

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which the Deputy refers. Furthermore, no funding was allocated by my Department for its production or distribution.

I understand that the booklet in question was produced on a private basis, with local businesses being invited to sponsor its distribution in local schools in return for an acknowledgement in the publication.

Under the Substance Misuse Prevention Programme, the Department of Education and Science administers the 'Walk Tall' programme of substance abuse awareness classes tailored for primary school children as part of the Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum.

Foclóir Béarla-Gaeilge.

100. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. M. Higgins** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cathain a thosóidh Céim a Dó de thionscadal an fhoclóra Béarla Gaeilge; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina leith. [18145/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Mar a thug mé le fios sa fhreagra ar Cheist Uimh 133 den 8 Feabhra 2006, tá Céim a hAon den tionscadal seo curtha i gcrích.

Tá sé i gceist ag Foras na Gaeilge Bainisteoir Tionscadail agus Eagarthóir Foclóireachta a fhostú le Céim a Dó den tionscadal a bhogadh ar aghaidh. Is céim chasta í an chéad chéim eile, is é sin, tiomsú agus scríobh an fhoclóra, idir leagan leictreonach agus an leagan clóite de. Meastar gur obair thrí nó ceithre bliana a bheidh i gceist chun Céim a Dó a chríochnú. Ina dhiaidh sin, beidh an dá leagan den fhoclóir críochnaithe le táirgeadh agus meastar go dtógfaidh an próiseas sin suas le bliain.

Ní mór dul trí nósanna imeachta ar leith sa chomhthéacs Thuaidh/Theas chun Bainisteoir Tionscadail agus Eagarthóir Foclóireachta a fhostú do Chéim a Dó agus tá an próiseas sin idir lámha faoi láthair.

Drugs Awareness Programme.

101. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if his Department co-operates with the Department of Education and Science in relation to drugs education in the education system here as recommended by the National Drugs Strategy; if so, the programmes which are in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18160/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): The actions outlined in the National Drugs Strategy pertaining to the education system have been progressed with the significant input of the Department of Education and Science. Officials of the Minister for Education

and Science sit on the Regional and Local Drug Task Forces, the National Drugs Strategy Team and the Inter-Departmental Group on Drugs, illustrating the degree of co-operation and co-ordination between our Departments under the National Drugs Strategy.

The main focus of the Strategy in respect of the Education Sector is on preventative strategies targeting the primary and secondary levels, as well as the informal education sector including youth services. Arising from this, all schools now have substance misuse prevention programmes included on their curricula. A consequence of this policy is that we have equipped all students with knowledge about the dangers of drug misuse.

The Strategy also includes a National Awareness Campaign, managed by the Department of Health and Children, and aimed at promoting greater awareness and understanding of the causes and consequences of drug misuse throughout society. Aspects of this campaign were specifically targeted at the young adult population.

Question No. 102 answered with Question No. 86.

An Teanga Gaeilge.

103. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. Costello** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cathain a fhoilseoidh an Rialtas an ráiteas atá geallta aige ar an nGaeilge; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina leith. [18144/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Mar a mhínigh mé don Teach mar fhreagra ar roinnt ceisteanna faoin ábhar seo cheana, iarradh tuairimí ó chomhaltaí Fhóram na Gaeilge sa bhliain 2005, i gcomhthéacs an ról chomhairleoireachta a tugadh don ghrúpa, maidir le plean straitéiseach 20 bliain a fhorbairt don Ghaeilge mar aon le tosaíochtaí gaolmhara gearr-théarmacha, agus tá obair ar na ceisteanna sin idir lámha.

Tá an cheist maidir le ráiteas soiléir ón Rialtas i ndáil le ról agus tábhacht na Gaeilge tagtha chun cinn mar ábhar tosaíochta sa chomhthéacs sin. Tá dul chun cinn suntasach bainte amach faoin ábhar seo agus tá súil agam a bheith in ann tuilleadh a rá faoi seo go luath.

Question No. 104 answered with Question No. 80.

Community Development.

105. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount awarded by him or his Department to urban or rural community groups from the dormant accounts fund in the year 2005 and to date in 2006; the extent to which he has outstanding applications on hand; the extent to which he

expects to respond to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18173/06]

342. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount spent to date from the dormant accounts fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18391/06]

343. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the amount expected eventually to accrue to the State from the dormant accounts fund, including insurance accounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18392/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 105, 342 and 343 together.

Decisions on the disbursements of funds from dormant accounts under the initial round of funding were a matter for the Dormant Accounts Fund Disbursements Board, an independent body established under the Dormant Accounts Acts. Under this round, the Board approved 521 projects for funding totalling over €60 million; 101 of these projects involving a total in excess of €21 million were approved during 2005. The Board completed all decisions on applications under the initial round of funding by July 2005. To date approximately €19 million of the €60 million approved has been paid over to groups, of which €7 million was paid during 2006 to date. It is anticipated that during the remainder of 2006, further significant amounts will be drawn down by those groups approved for funding.

The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) was launched in 2004 to provide an income supplement to small farmers and part-time fishermen while at the same time harnessing their skills for the benefit of rural communities. With the approval of Government and following consultation with the Dormant Accounts Fund Disbursements Board, a total of €16.4 million was allocated from the Dormant Accounts Fund up to the end of 2005 to part finance the RSS.

Following the enactment of the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2005 the Government approved the allocation of €60 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund in 2006. In this regard, €24 million will be allocated towards projects tackling economic and social disadvantage; €18 million towards projects tackling educational disadvantage and €18 million towards projects assisting persons with a disability.

On 4th January 2006, following Government approval, I announced details of the allocation of €24 million for the purpose of supporting programmes and projects tackling economic and social disadvantage. The rollout of these programmes is well underway and invitations have issued seeking applications for a number of funding

measures. Almost 200 applications were received from RAPID Area Implementation Teams, seeking funding for priority projects in each RAPID area. The closing date for receipt of applications under this measure was 31st March 2006.

The measure providing supports for projects tackling suicide prevention was publicly advertised on 10th March 2006 and 120 applications were received before the closing date of 5th May 2006.

Applications have also recently been invited for measures providing supports for (a) older people; (b) vulnerable immigrants; and (c) prisoners/ex-prisoners. The number of applications under these measures will become known when the closing dates are reached later in May and during June.

Applications received under the measures detailed above are being assessed against the published criteria and the results of the assessments will be reported to the Minister for Community Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs. In accordance with the legislation requirements, the Minister will in turn submit to Government for approval a list of the applications recommended for funding.

Regarding the amount expected eventually to accrue to the State from the Dormant Accounts Fund, the Deputy will be aware that the legislation provides for an annual transfer by financial institutions and insurance undertakings of monies in dormant accounts into the Dormant Accounts Fund. Since the establishment of the Fund in May 2003 to the end of March 2006, a total of €293 million has been transferred, of which €71 million has been reclaimed. The National Treasury Management Agency is currently compiling details in relation to 2006 transfers to the Fund and this information should be available very shortly.

An Teanga Gaeilge.

106. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. Gilmore** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cad iad na deacrachtaí is mó dar leis i leith chur i bhfeidhm Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina leith. [18147/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Dírim aird an Teachta ar an dtuarascáil tionscnaimh maidir le cur i bhfeidhm Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla don tréimhse Iúil 2003-31 Nollaig 2004 atá leagtha ós comhair gach Teach den Oireachtas agam i gcomhréir le halt 5 den Acht céanna. Mar atá leagtha amach sa tuarascáil sin, agus go deimhin mar atá ráite agam go minic sa Teach seo, tá dul chun cinn suntasach déanta maidir le cur i bhfeidhm fhorálacha an Achta ar bhonn chéimiúil.

É sin ráite, ní miste dom pointe a dhéanamh, ar eagla aon mhí-thuisctint, maidir le hábhar na scéimeanna teanga atá curtha faoi mo bhráid le daingniú ag comhlachtaí poiblí. Tuigtear go

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forleathan go bhfuil cumas agus acmhainn teoranta ag roinnt eagraíochtaí san earnáil phoiblí faoi láthair ó thaobh soláthar sheirbhísí trí Ghaeilge de. Sa chomhthéacs sin, thuigfí go mbeadh a gcuid scéimeanna bunaithe dá réir ar leibhéal seirbhísí a bheidh íseal go leor. Ní mór an cumas agus acmhainn teoranta sin a chur san áireamh nuair a bheidh measúnú á dhéanamh ar scéimeanna a aontófar amach anseo. Mar atá ráite agam go minic, is togra fadtéarmach é cur i bhfeidhm an Achta agus, cé go bhfuilim muiníneach go mbeidh torthaí fiúntacha ar an gcéad bhabhta scéimeanna, beidh gá tógáil orthu sa mheán-thréimhse tríd an bpróiseas athnuachana a tharlóidh gach trí bhliain.

Departmental Expenditure.

107. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the way in which the €4,836,927 awarded to his Department in respect of cohesion initiatives during 2005, including €1,463,400 for the promotion of volunteering, was allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18131/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): The allocation of €4,836,927 in 2005 for cohesion and volunteering measures is shown in

the following tabular statement. Included in this sum is €566,100 in respect of cohesion projects relating to the 2004 round of funding and €1,463,400 in respect of volunteering measures.

In furtherance of the cohesion process commenced in 2004, in line with the Government decision on the review of local and community development structures, city and county development boards and Údaras na Gaeltachta were invited to submit proposals during 2005 aimed at achieving full county/city coverage by local development agencies and involving, in rural areas, the integration of Leader and Partnership groups. Proposals developed by local development agencies and approved by city/county development boards were received in November 2005 and assessed by an independent external consultant engaged by the Department. To date, I have been able to support a number of proposals for integration of Leader and Partnership companies.

The cohesion process is ongoing during 2006. In this regard, further proposals were submitted to my Department at the end of April which are being examined with a view to funding where possible. Discussions are continuing with the relevant CDBs in circumstances where the local development agencies have not yet achieved agreed proposals. To date in 2006, I have approved a further €1,590,600 for cohesion measures and €76,600 for volunteering.

Organisation	Cohesion 2005	Volunteering 2005
Cavan County Council	99,950	50,000
Clare County Council	412,500	80,000
Cork City Council	377,600	92,000
Cork County Council	280,000	100,000
Donegal County Council	21,600	96,000
Dublin City Council	381,000	
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	77,500	36,900
Fingal County Council	217,500	41,000
Galway City Council	20,000	50,000
Galway County Council		100,000
Kildare County Council		50,000
Kilkenny County Council		51,000
Limerick City Council		75,000
Limerick County Development Board	125,500	50,000
Longford County Council	74,000	
Louth County Council		36,500
Mayo County Council		60,000
Meath County Council	500,000	
Monaghan County Council		22,000
Offaly County Council		29,000
Roscommon County Council	124,550	
Sligo County Council		50,000
South Dublin County Council		50,000
Waterford City Council	242,000	75,000
Waterford County Council	193,827	50,000

Organisation	Cohesion 2005	Volunteering 2005
Wexford County Council		50,000
Wicklow County Council		50,000
Westmeath County Council	55,000	50,000
Údarás na Gaeltachta	171,000	69,000
Totals	3,373,527	1,463,400

RAPID Programme.

108. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the specific finding of the Public Accounts Committee that a recurring difficulty regarding the RAPID programme since its launch in 2001 is the different levels of expectation as to what the programme should produce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18142/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I have already dealt with this in priority question 67.

Question No. 109 answered with Question No. 72.

National Drugs Strategy.

110. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the discussions he has had with the National Drugs Strategy team regarding drug use among undergraduate students in full-time third level education; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18139/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): While I am in regular contact with the National Drugs Strategy Team, I have not had specific discussions with them on drug use among undergraduate students in full-time third level education. However, I can assure the Deputy that I am in on-going contact with all those involved in efforts to disrupt the distribution and consumption of illegal drugs throughout society.

The primary focus of the 108 actions of the National Drugs Strategy is on the illegal drugs that do the most harm and on the most vulnerable drug misusers, as well as their families and communities. The main focus of the Strategy with respect to the Education Sector is on preventative strategies targeting the primary and secondary levels, and the informal education sector including youth services. Arising from this, all such schools now having substance misuse prevention programmes included on their curricula. A consequence of this strategy should be to arm undergraduate students with knowledge about the dangers of drug misuse before they enter college.

The Strategy also includes a National Awareness Campaign, managed by the Department of

Health and Children and aimed at promoting greater awareness and understanding of the causes and consequences of drug misuse throughout society. Aspects of this campaign were specifically targeted at the young adult population.

It is very difficult to quantify drug use by socio-economic group. The Drug Prevalence Survey carried out for the National Advisory Committee on Drugs and the Drug & Alcohol Information and Research Unit (Northern Ireland), which is recognised as the most comprehensive baseline data we have for prevalence rates in this country, identified usage in the past 12 months by young adults (15-34 years) as 8.6% for cannabis and 2.3% for ecstasy. Overall that survey covered 8,442 people, aged between 15 and 64, on the island of Ireland.

The College Lifestyle and Attitudinal National (CLAN) Survey, which was jointly carried out by the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health & Children and NUI Galway in the academic year 2002/2003, dealt with a sample of 3,259 students from Universities and other third level institutions across Ireland. Drug use was one of many areas under review. The focus and methodology and of the survey differed from the 2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey, as did the age profile of those surveyed. Therefore, the results of the two surveys are not directly comparable and they do not throw up the same figures. However, the findings are nonetheless valuable in improving our understanding of drug misuse by university students in Ireland.

Established research suggests that this cohort is more likely to experiment with drug use than are other sections of society and the CLAN survey reflected this. In the CLAN Survey 37% reported having used cannabis, and 8% indicated that they had used ecstasy, in the previous 12 months. It would be expected that these figures would include many who experimented once, or very few times, rather than reflecting more problematic long-term or regular use which is the main focus of the National Drugs Strategy.

National Drugs Strategy.

111. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the recent launch of the first ever non-Garda telephone line aimed at tackling drug dealing by the Blanchardstown local drugs taskforce; his views on the develop-

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ment of such telephone services elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18116/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I am aware that Blanchardstown Local Drugs Task Force, with funding provided by my Department through the National Drugs Strategy, has recently launched a confidential anti-drug dealing telephone help-line.

I understand that the local response to this initiative has been positive and I will await with interest the outcome of the evaluation of the service.

Question No. 112 answered with Question No. 80.

Road Network.

113. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will expand on his recent comments that there has been a sustained increase in national roads investment in the Border Midland Western region over the second half of the National Development Plan; the major roads projects that are currently outstanding in the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18123/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I have arranged for a copy of the press release I issued to be sent to the Deputy. I feel that it is self-explanatory.

National Drugs Strategy.

114. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he has had further discussions with Garda representatives regarding the prevalence of crack cocaine here; if the latest information available to him confirms that crack cocaine remains generally specific to one geographic area in inner city Dublin; if there are signs that the drug is spreading out from this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18125/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I can assure the Deputy that my officials have on-going contact with representatives of An Garda Síochána, through the implementation structures of the National Drugs Strategy, and the prevalence of crack cocaine in the country is discussed periodically. Furthermore, I met with representatives of the Gardaí at the last meeting of the Interdepartmental Group on Drugs in April.

The Gardaí are satisfied that the use of crack cocaine is largely confined to a small geographical area in inner city Dublin. Furthermore, they have had considerable recent success in targeting the supply and use of this drug in that area. A

number of people face charges of possession of crack cocaine for sale or supply in the inner city area in March and April last. The charges arose from investigations into the sale of the drug under “Operation Plaza”.

I am confident that, through the implementation of the actions in the National Drugs Strategy, the projects and initiatives operated through the Local & Regional Drugs Task Forces and the operations of an Garda Síochána, the problem of crack cocaine use can be addressed. Each of the Drugs Task Forces has an action plan in place to tackle drug use in their area, based on their own identified priorities and they continue to have ongoing contact with their local communities.

However, I fully accept that a potential danger exists that the use of crack cocaine could spread rapidly and I assure the Deputy that I will continue to monitor the situation and that I will ensure that any necessary steps are taken to address increased threats, should they arise.

Irish Language.

115. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the need for a strategy for the Irish language to guide its long-term development; if so, when such a strategy will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18153/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): As I have already indicated in response to similar Questions in this House, the matter of the advisability of a 20-year strategic plan for the Irish language has been amongst the issues considered in general terms by Fóram na Gaeilge in its deliberations thus far.

In that context, the need for the development of a clear statement on the part of the Government in relation to the Irish language and its importance as a whole has emerged as a key issue and considerable work is in hand in relation to this matter. I hope to be able to advance the matter further in the near future.

Notwithstanding the issue of the development of such a strategy, it should be noted that very significant and meaningful progress continues to be made in fostering and further underpinning the language since the publication of the Gaeltacht Commission’s Report in 2002. The Official Languages Act, as the Deputy will be aware, continues to generate real and significant benefits for the language and the Irish language community. Substantial advances have also been achieved regarding the status of Irish in the European Union. A number of new initiatives have been introduced in Gaeltacht areas, including the development of public awareness measures aimed at the Gaeltacht community in particular, the language planning initiative, the scheme for language assistants, and the expansion and development of the summer camps scheme. All of these

practical measures will assist in consolidating the viability of the language. The Deputy will also appreciate that significant resources continue to be made available to support the work of Foras na Gaeilge in promoting Irish on an all-island basis.

Community Development.

116. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will expand on remarks he recently made at the presentation in Carrick-on-Shannon of the Western Development Commission John Healy Awards for Journalism. [18171/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I have arranged for a copy of the presentation I made to be sent to the Deputy. I have nothing further to add.

National Drugs Strategy.

117. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress which has been made in each regional drug task force area over the past year; the concrete measures which have been enacted on the ground; the impact such measures have had; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18155/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): Ten Regional Drugs Task Forces (RDTFs) have been established in areas not covered by Local Drugs Task Forces. Thus all parts of the country are now serviced by a Drugs Task Force.

The overall role of the RDTFs is to prepare and implement regional Actions Plans which identify existing and emerging gaps in services in relation to education/prevention, curbing supply, treatment and rehabilitation. RDTFs provide a mechanism for the co-ordination of mainstream services in the regions, while at the same time allowing communities and voluntary organisations to participate in the planning, design and delivery of those services.

Membership of the RDTFs includes representatives of all the relevant agencies, such as the Health Service Executive, the Gardaí, the Probation and Welfare Service, the Department of Education and Science, the Local Authorities, the Youth Service and FÁS. The Task Forces also include representation from voluntary agencies, community representatives and elected public representatives.

Each Task Force has a voluntary chairperson and was assigned an interim co-ordinator. The recruitment of full-time co-ordinators is on-going and it is expected that all 10 will be in place by the middle of June. Each RDTF has an operational budget that facilitates the employment of

a project development worker and an administrative assistant.

Progress is now being made by the RDTFs, all of which have prepared Action Plans for their Regions. A sum of €5m has been allocated to the 10 RDTFs towards the implementation of those plans for 2006 and €322,000 of this has been drawn down to date. Funding will be increased on an incremental basis over the coming years to achieve the full roll out of the Action Plans, which are estimated to have a full cost in the region of €12.2m per annum. It is expected that the rate of progress being made by RDTFs will accelerate in the latter part of the year, especially in view of the employment of the full-time co-ordinators.

I am satisfied that the implementation of the range of activities and initiatives identified in the RDTF Action Plans over the coming years will represent a comprehensive response to the problems of drugs misuse in the various regions.

Translation Services.

118. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the panel accredited to provide translation services for both the public and private sectors is in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18137/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): As the Deputy will be aware, I have requested Foras na Gaeilge to develop an accreditation system for Irish language translators. This will be the first such accreditation system to be made available for Irish language translators.

It is intended that an accreditation certificate will be awarded to translators who reach a level of excellence. I understand that as a first step in testing this standard, an examination was held on 8 April 2006 and that it is intended to hold further examinations at regular intervals. A panel of accredited translators will be thus established, and I understand the panel will be available to the public and private sectors shortly.

The development of this accreditation system for translators by Foras na Gaeilge will be an ongoing process. Its aim is to ensure the availability of high-quality, professional Irish-language translation services.

Foghlaim na Gaeilge sna Scoileanna.

119. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. Costello** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an raibh aon agallamh aige leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta faoin moladh atá aige go ndéanfaí dhá ábhar den Ghaeilge san Ardteist; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina leith. [18143/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Dírim aird an Teachta

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ar an bhfreagra a thug mé ar Cheist Uimh 134 den 8 Feabhra 2006.

Faoi mar atá curtha in iúl agam, is ceist í seo go príomha don Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta. Tuigfidh an Teachta, ar ndóigh, go mbíonn plé rialta agam leis an Aire sin, agus le mo chomhghleacaithe eile sa Rialtas, maidir le saincheisteanna comónta de réir mar is gá.

Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 90.

An Teanga Gaeilge.

121. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. Sargent** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta an bhfógróidh sé níos forleithne na deiseanna fostaíochta cóir a bheith ann do chainteoirí Gaeilge sa Bhruiséil agus in Éirinn má tá Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla le cur i bhfeidhm i gceart. [18164/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Tuigfidh an Teachta nach bhfuil freagracht ormsa, mar Aire, deiseanna fostaíochta do chainteoirí Gaeilge sa Bhruiséil, ná in Éirinn fiú, seachas i mo Roinn féin b'fhéidir, a fhógairt.

Mar chabhair don Teachta, áfach, tá socraithe agam go gcuirfí chuige téacs an ráitis a d'eisigh EPSO, oifig earcaíochta an Aontais Eorpaigh, ar 5 Bealtaine seo caite maidir le 30 post atá fógraithe acu siúd d'aistritheoirí Gaeilge.

Question No. 122 answered with Question No. 80.

Proposed Legislation.

123. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the timetable for the Charities Regulation Bill 2006; if he still expects the Bill itself to be published during 2006; if he has received further feedback on the general scheme of the Bill from the charities sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18126/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Questions Nos. 66, 75 and 99 of 21 March 2006.

The position is that Government approval of the General Scheme for the Charities Regulation Bill 2006 has been secured and the Scheme has been published on my Department's website www.pobail.ie; priority drafting of the Bill is under way in the Office of the Attorney General; I would hope that this should facilitate publication of the Bill during 2006; and the feedback from the charities sector has continued to be favourable.

National Drugs Strategy.

124. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the funding he has provided in 2005 and to date in 2006 to groups involved in combating drug abuse; the extent to which this is in accord with the National Drugs Strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18174/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): My Department has overall responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008. This incorporates the work of the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces and the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund. Through these initiatives a broad range of community and voluntary groups are funded to tackle drug misuse.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that €43m has been allocated to my Department for the Drugs Initiative/Young People's Facilities and Services Fund in 2006. This represents an increase of 27% on the €33.97m expended in 2005. The draw down figure on the 2006 allocation to date is €16.1m.

The significant increase in funding for 2006 will allow us to consolidate and build on previous investment and continue to tackle the drug problem in a comprehensive way.

Question No. 125 answered with Question No. 80.

Energy Regulation.

126. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Irish Rural Link has called for the establishment of an Energy Commission that will examine the use of farm land as a means of meeting Ireland's renewable energy commitments; and if he intends to raise this issue with the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. [18169/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I am aware that Irish Rural Link has called for the establishment of an Energy Commission. However, I understand that an Energy Commission already exists. It is known as the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), and is an independent body under paragraph 9 in the Schedule to the Electricity Regulation Act 1999.

In this context, the Deputy will appreciate that matters relating to the production of renewable energy fall within the remit of my colleague, Noel Dempsey T.D., Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, while the use of farm land is within the remit of my colleague, Mary Coughlan T.D., Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Decentralisation Programme.

127. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the progress made regarding plans to decentralise his Department to County Sligo; the suitability of the temporary accommodation that will be used later in 2006 in Tubbercurry; when the full decentralisation of his Department to Knock will be complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18122/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): A site has been acquired at Knock Airport and the OPW are currently evaluating tenders for the construction there of the new headquarters of the Department. The Department is working to the original schedule of completion by the end of 2007.

Of the 140 posts due to transfer to Knock Airport, some 65 will transfer to temporary accommodation in Tubbercurry from mid-2006. When the new headquarters is ready for occupation, the Tubbercurry posts and those posts still remaining in Dublin at that stage will transfer to Knock Airport.

I understand that the temporary accommodation, the completion of which is being overseen by the Office of Public Works, is suitable, and will meet all of the required legislative standards in terms of health and safety, building regulations and planning.

National Drugs Strategy.

128. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he intends to advocate for an increase in the range and type of drug treatment programmes and places available to drug misusers under the National Drugs Strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18151/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): Under the Health Act, 2004, the management and delivery of health and personal social services is the responsibility of the Health Services Executive. My Department has overall responsibility for the co-ordination of the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008.

The Mid-Term Review of the National Drugs Strategy calls on the HSE to continue to prioritise increasing the availability and range of treatment options in the context of increased poly-drug use. The Strategy also set a target of a minimum number of opiate-related treatment places of 6,500 by the end of 2002. This target has been surpassed with end February 2006 figures standing at 7,992 treatment places.

Currently my Department is chairing a Working Group on Rehabilitation, on which the HSE and the Department of Health & Children are represented, and the adequacy of treatment

options is likely to be a consideration at that forum. Furthermore, I am informed that a HSE-led Expert Advisory Group on Residential Treatment is in the process of being established.

I am aware that the nature of drug use is constantly evolving and that new trends will continue to emerge and I appreciate the importance of developing services to meet the diverse range of problem drugs use.

An Teanga Gaeilge.

129. D'fhiafraigh **Mr. M. Higgins** den Aire Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta cad iad na cainteanna a bhí aige leis an Roinn Airgeadais faoi mharcanna breise a bhronnadh ar státseirbhísih i gcomórtais ansin; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina leith. [18146/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Dírím aird an Teachta ar an ráiteas a d'eisigh mo chomhghleacaí, an tAire Airgeadais, tar éis don Choimisinéir Teanga tagairt a dhéanamh don saincheist seo ina thuarascáil bhliantúil do 2005. Níl aon fhreagracht ormsa mar Aire maidir leis an gceist seo chomh fada agus a bhaineann sí le Ranna Stáit eile.

Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 86.

Industrial Disputes.

131. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Taoiseach the number of work days that were lost in both 2004 and 2005 due to industrial action. [18406/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt): Statistics on Industrial Disputes are compiled from details supplied by the Monitoring Unit of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and from information collected directly from other sources by the Central Statistics Office. In 2004 20,784 days were lost to industrial disputes and in 2005 there were 26,670 days lost to industrial disputes.

Northern Ireland Issues.

132. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Taoiseach if his attention has been drawn to recent information that approximately 15 per cent of the Ulster Defence Regiment were members of the loyalist paramilitaries particularly during the Thatcher era; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18177/06]

The Taoiseach: I am aware of recent media reports claiming that members of the Ulster Defence Regiment were members of loyalist paramilitary groups.

The Government's concerns regarding collusion are long-standing. The Government are also mindful of the reports of Judge Barron in

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which this issue is addressed in respect of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and other cases.

The cooperation of the British authorities is essential if concerns regarding collusion are to be successfully addressed. I have already raised this with Prime Minister Blair on a number of occasions. I will continue to seek the cooperation of the British Government on this matter.

EU Directives.

133. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Taoiseach the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18448/06]

The Taoiseach: There are no European Directives awaiting implementation by my Department.

Departmental Staff.

134. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Taoiseach the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18511/06]

The Taoiseach: I have not employed any Advisers, Assistants or other staff since January 2005.

Drugs Awareness Programme.

135. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the efforts which have been made to ensure that information on drug abuse is made available in a range of languages to cater for Ireland's multi-cultural society. [18060/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): To the end of 2005 information produced by the Health Promotion Unit on drug awareness has been in the English and Irish languages only.

Under the restructuring of the health services, from January 2006 the Health Services Executive has responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services, including awareness raising media campaigns and health information dissemination. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this issue considered by the relevant section within the Population Health Directorate of the HSE and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services.

136. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the Ombudsman for Chil-

dren has raised a number of concerns regarding child and adolescent mental health services, including the placing of Irish children in adult psychiatric units in a submission sent to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child; and the action he intends to take to address the issue. [18258/06]

201. **Ms Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that children and adolescents are being placed in adult psychiatric wards; her views on whether this is the correct location for the treatment of children; the steps she intends to take to end the placement of children in adult wards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18490/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 201 together.

I am aware of concerns expressed by the Ombudsman for Children regarding the placement of children and adolescents in adult psychiatric units. While there has been a significant decline in the numbers of children and adolescents being placed in adult facilities since 2000, I accept that the placement of any child or adolescent with mental health problems in an adult psychiatric facility is inappropriate.

The report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy, entitled "A Vision for Change", was launched in January this year. It has been accepted by the Government as the basis for the future development of the Mental Health Services. The report identified the lack of in-patient facilities for children and adolescents as a deficiency in service provision which requires attention as a matter of urgency. To address this problem it is intended to develop additional dedicated child and adolescent in-patient units as a matter of urgency. Multidisciplinary teams will also be provided for these units to ensure the highest standards of care are provided to children and adolescents requiring in-patient mental health services.

€3.25m has been allocated this year by the HSE for acute beds for children and adolescent psychiatry and the further enhancement of child and adolescent psychiatric services. The HSE has also established a working group on child and adolescent mental health which will map existing child and adolescent services; examine the needs of 16 and 17 year olds with mental illness; and examine the interface between children and adolescent and adult mental health services. This working group will report in June this year.

In addition to the steps being taken to increase the number of in-patient beds for children and adolescents with mental health difficulties, additional funding has been provided for the appointment of additional consultants in child and adolescent psychiatry, for the enhancement

of existing consultant-led multidisciplinary teams and the establishment of new teams. This has resulted in the funding of an extra 23 child and adolescent consultant psychiatrists, bringing the total number of such psychiatrists to 56.

Alzheimer's Disease Incidence.

137. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of persons here who suffer from dementia and Alzheimer's disease respectively; the breakdown by county on such figures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18414/06]

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.

Ambulance Service.

138. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she has discussed with local authorities the possibility of providing an air ambulance that would be of particular assistance in dealing with serious road traffic accidents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18439/06]

139. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will examine the feasibility of a helicopter emergency medical service in view of the fact that the two parts of this island are the only areas in Europe which do not have a service; if such a service could be shared between North and South it could instil confidence into our ability to work together; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18445/06]

194. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she plans to provide a helicopter air ambulance that would be of particular assistance in dealing with serious road traffic accidents. [18376/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138, 139 and 194 together.

A consultancy study jointly commissioned by my Department and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Belfast (DHSSPS) on the costs and benefits associated with the introduction of a dedicated Helicopter Emergency Medical Services (HEMS) for the island of Ireland was published in 2004 and is available on my Department's website. The study

concluded that the introduction of a dedicated inter-hospital air ambulance service would be appropriate in an all-island context.

In considering the report, the DHSSPS advised that its priority at present is the need for further investment to improve the ground ambulance service.

On foot of the report my Department had detailed discussions with the Department of Defence regarding the future provision of air ambulance services by the Air Corps. Arising from these discussions, a detailed Service Level Agreement has been prepared and signed. The signatories to the agreement are the Department of Defence, the Department of Health and Children, the Health Service Executive, the Defence Forces and the Air Corps.

The agreement sets out the range services to be provided by the Air Corps, specifically: Inter-hospital Transfer for spinal and serious injury and illness; Air Transport of Neonates requiring immediate medical intervention in Ireland; Air Transport of patients requiring emergency organ transplant in the UK; Air Transport of Organ Harvest Teams within Ireland; and Air Transport of patients from offshore islands to mainland hospitals where the Coast Guard service is not available.

A Steering Group comprising representation from each of the signatories to the Service Level Agreement has been established. The Group is monitoring the operation of the agreement and will amend, if necessary, the provisions of the agreement to take account of service developments, including the new fleet replacement programme currently being put in place by the Air Corps.

Drugs Payment Scheme.

140. **Mr. Ardagh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will examine the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 10 to ascertain if the substance Elemental 028 will be supplied on the GMS as required. [17843/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): There is a common list of reimbursable medicines for the General Medical Services and Drug Payment Schemes which is reviewed and amended monthly, as new products become available and deletions are notified. For an item to be included on the list, it must comply with published criteria, including authorisation status as appropriate, price and, in certain cases, the intended use of the product. In addition, the product should ordinarily be supplied to the public only by medical prescription and should not be advertised or promoted to the public. The Deputy will be pleased to know that Elemental 028 is included on the common list.

Hospitals Building Programme.

141. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if the board of the Health Service Executive has invited expressions of interest from private health companies to develop a private hospital on the site of Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown; the size of the proposed private site; the location of the proposed private hospital within the current hospital grounds; the expected cost of this development; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17848/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): On foot of a policy direction which I issued to the Health Service Executive (HSE) last summer, the Board will shortly be inviting expressions of interest for the development of private hospital facilities on public hospital sites. As of yet, the HSE has not invited expressions of interest in respect of any of the hospital sites under its control, although it has received a number of unsolicited proposals.

Proposed Legislation.

142. **Mr. S. Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason she has not implemented her promise given to the Irish Haemophilia Society to introduce the necessary legislation to provide an insurance scheme for persons infected with HIV or Hepatitis C, through provision of contaminated blood or blood products by the State; if the heads of the Bill have come before the Government; and when the Bill will be published and brought to Dáil Éireann or Seanad Éireann for Second Stage debate. [17854/06]

152. **Mr. Costello** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will provide a statutory insurance scheme for persons infected by contaminated blood products due to State negligence; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17929/06]

154. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason there is a nine year delay on implementation of an insurance scheme for persons infected with HIV or Hepatitis C through provision of contaminated blood or blood products by the State. [17942/06]

161. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children when a scheme will be put in place to enable persons infected with HIV or Hepatitis C through the provision of contaminated blood or blood products to take out insurance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18025/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 142, 152, 154 and 161 together.

I wish to assure the Deputies that I am committed to ensuring that an insurance scheme for persons infected with Hepatitis C and HIV through the administration of blood and blood products within the State is established on a statutory basis as soon as possible. The legislation is included as a priority in the Government's Legislative Programme for the current session and it is my firm intention that the enabling legislation will be enacted before the Summer recess.

The process of drafting the legislation, which is both complex and innovative, is almost complete. As soon as I receive the final agreed text from my legal advisors I will submit it to the Government for approval and will publish it as soon as Government approval is received.

Health Services.

143. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; the supports and services they are receiving; if the maximum support and advice will be given in finding a long-term care package; and if she will work with their family on this matter. [17860/06]

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.

Hospital Services.

144. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the steps she will take to have a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath admitted to the Meath Hospital for an urgent procedure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17862/06]

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.

Health Services.

145. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Mini-

ster for Health and Children her views on whether it is demoralising for carers to have to fight for minimal respite opportunities for their loved ones in view of the fact that people suffering from chronic conditions are looked after at home by carers; the way in which greater certainty can be given to carers in order that they can obtain respite care; the assurances which can be given that respite care is available; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17867/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Additional funding for day and respite care centres has been provided to the Health Service Executive. A total of €9 million over 2006 and 2007 has been provided to allow for an additional 1,325 places per week in these centres. The investment of €9 million will allow for additional programmes for specific needs such as activity therapy. It will also mean that many day care centres can open for five or seven days a week, rather than two or three days as is often the case at present.

Responsibility for Carers Allowance, Carers Benefit and the annual Respite Care Grant rests with the Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

The Health Act 2004 provided for the Health Service Executive (HSE), which was established in 1st January 2005. Under the Act, the Executive has the responsibility to manager and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services including respite care. 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.

Hospitals Building Programme.

146. **Dr. Upton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if a decision has been made in relation to the location of a new children's hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17896/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): On 3rd February last, the Health Service Executive published a report which was prepared by McKinsey & Co., on the delivery of tertiary paediatric services in this country. This report was commissioned by the HSE following my request to it to arrange a review of those services.

The report recommends that best outcomes for children would be obtained by developing one national tertiary paediatric centre, which would also provide all secondary paediatric services for the greater Dublin area. The report also recommends that ideally the new facility should be located on the site of, or adjacent to, a major adult teaching hospital in order to achieve the maximum service benefit for children.

Arising from the report's recommendations, a joint HSE/Department of Health and Children

Task Group was established to progress matters and to advise on the optimal location for the new facility. In the course of the Group's deliberations a number of important issues arose that were not included in its original remit. In particular, the importance of co-location with a Maternity Unit has been identified as an issue of significance. In addition, a number of proposals have been received from the private sector in relation to the building of the new facility.

The Task Group's remit has, accordingly, been extended to allow the Group to examine the issues which have arisen, as a consequence of which the Group is now expected to report in or around the end of May.

Health Services.

147. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the position in relation a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if in view of the circumstances this decision will be re-examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17902/06]

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.

Hospital Services.

148. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if the funding required has been given to St. James Hospital to purchase the necessary equipment to carry out a procedure entailing bone anchoring of hearing aids; and when the patients awaiting this operation in the hospital for over a year will see these operations carried out. [17920/06]

149. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if the hospital plan 2006 submitted by St. James Hospital included details of the funding required to purchase the necessary equipment to carry out a procedure entailing bone anchoring of hearing aids. [17921/06]

150. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason beds in St. James Hospital, Dublin were booked for patients requiring bone anchoring of hearing aids despite the fact that the hospital did not have the equipment required for the medical procedure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17922/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 148, 149 and 150 together.

The Deputy's questions relate 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 Services.

151. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be facilitated with home help; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17928/06]

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.

Question No. 152 answered with Question No. 142.

153. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 can receive a full free eye test and a pair of reading glasses under their medical card; and if they will be given the maximum support on this matter. [17941/06]

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.

Question No. 154 answered with Question No. 142.

155. **Mr. Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if the home care package that was announced has been suspended; if the funding has been used; if more funding will be made available to same; the position regarding the home care package; the number of people who have been successful in receiving the home care package; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17961/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): As the Deputy is aware an investment package of an additional €150m has been put in place for Services for Older People and Palliative Care for 2006 and 2007, of which €55m was allocated to Home Care Packages. This is a full year cost, €30m of which is for 2006, during which an additional 2,000 packages will be provided by the Health Service Executive across the country. The provision of home care packages has not been suspended.

With regard to the Deputy's specific question regarding the delivery of this service, 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.

Hospital Staff.

156. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason there are not sufficient vascular neurosurgeons here; the further reason no extra neurosurgeons have been provided in nearly thirty years, despite the increase in population here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17966/06]

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.

Hospital Services.

157. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason citizens of this State, if they cannot receive appropriate medical treatment here, cannot be funded for this treatment to be carried out in another EU Member State if they have private health insurance, although this facility is available to public patients; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17967/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Where a person requires specific necessary treatment which is not available in Ireland, the Health Service Executive may make arrangements to send the patient to another EU member state for treatment in the public system

of that State. In such cases a form E112 is issued by the Executive.

E112 arrangements operate under Regulation 1408/71, which deals with the coordination of social security schemes, including healthcare, among Member States. The guidelines for E112 referrals require that the application must be assessed before the patient goes abroad. A Consultant must certify that the treatment is not available in Ireland, that there is an urgent medical necessity for it, and that the treatment is regarded as a proven form of medical treatment. In addition, the hospital must be prepared to accept an E112 form, which involves treating the patient as a public patient.

In normal circumstances, it is a matter for the HSE to determine if such treatment is to be authorised. The issue of the E112 form involves a commitment by the Executive to pay the cost of treatment. Persons with full or limited eligibility may avail of E112 arrangements to seek treatment abroad in the public system. Persons with private health insurance are entitled to apply for treatment under the scheme, but any treatment they receive in another EU state upon approval of their application must be provided by the public health system of that State if it is to qualify under the E112 system.

Arrangements which are made privately for the treatment of a patient in any country abroad must be regarded as outside the terms of the EU Regulations. The HSE has no obligation to meet any part of the cost involved.

If the Deputy has a particular case in mind, I would be happy to arrange to have it investigated by the Health Service Executive.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

158. **Mr. Grealish** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of people who are on a waiting list for neurosurgery in Beaumont Hospital from the west of Ireland; the average waiting time; the number of people from the west who travelled to Dublin for neurosurgery in the past two years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17978/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Responsibility for the collection and reporting of waiting lists and waiting times for in-patient hospital treatment falls within the remit of the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). My Department has, therefore, asked the Chief Executive of the National Treatment Purchase Fund to reply directly to the Deputy in relation to the information requested on the waiting list for neurosurgery at Beaumont Hospital.

In relation to the number of people from the west who travelled to Dublin for neurosurgery in the past two years, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Health Service Executive to arrange to have this matter

investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

159. **Mr. Perry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the advice which is given to the Health Service Executive in relation to assistance with charges in relation to provision of a CPAP device (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18009/06]

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 have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

160. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason an Alzheimer's unit (details supplied) in County Donegal has not been opened and staffed in view of the fact that the building is complete and there was an understanding it would receive its first patients in the early part of 2006; and if she will make a statement on whether moneys had been approved in 2005 and 2006 for staffing of this unit. [18013/06]

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.

Question No. 161 answered with Question No. 142.

Nursing Home Subventions.

162. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of subvention payments per month in each county since 2004; the levels at which payments were made; the number of patients in receipt of top-up subvention payments in this period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18088/06]

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

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have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

163. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will increase nursing home subvention payments to meet at least 80 percent of the cost of nursing homes; the cost of such an increase; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18090/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Nursing Home (Subvention) Regulations, 1993 are administered by the Health Service Executive. There are currently three rates of subvention payable, i.e. €114.30, €152.40 and €190.50 for the three levels of dependency which are medium, high and maximum. There are no plans to increase the subvention rates at present.

The HSE has discretion to pay more than the maximum rate of subvention relative to an individual's level of dependency in a case, for example, where personal funds are exhausted. The application of these provisions in an individual case is a matter for the HSE in the context of meeting increasing demands for subvention, subject to the provisions of the Health Act, 2004. The average rate of subvention paid by the HSE generally exceeds the current approved basic rates. The supports paid by the HSE vary from person to person and region to region, depending on prices for example. Accordingly, the Department is not in a position to estimate the costs of increasing subventions to meet 80% of the cost of nursing home care.

I wish to advise the Deputy that additional funding of €20 million was provided for the administration of the Nursing Home Subvention Scheme in 2006, bringing the total available budget to €161 million. The €20 million is to support more basic nursing home subventions and reduce waiting lists for enhanced subventions: it is also to bring more consistency to subventions support throughout the country.

The Deputy will be aware that the Tánaiste and Minister Séamus Brennan established a Working Group to identify the policy options for a financially sustainable system of long-term care, including residential care. The report of that Working Group on the Future Financing of Long-Term Care has been presented to Government and is currently being considered by Cabinet.

Health Services.

164. **Mr. Neville** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the public physiotherapy rehabilitation services available in a clinical setting in Newcastle West, County Limerick; and if she will request the Health Service Executive to respond to correspondence (details supplied) in relation to same. [18091/06]

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.

165. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if her Department has a protocol for dealing with cases where the assets of a person who is a ward of court become exhausted but the person has continuing need for nursing home care. [18092/06]

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.

166. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 2 was forcibly removed against their will, from St. James Hospital and misled into thinking they were going to another location within the hospital campus but instead was placed in an ambulance and transported to a nursing home in Lucan, County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18113/06]

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.

Tobacco-Related Diseases.

167. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the link between smoking and blindness is as robust as that between smoking and lung cancer; and her plans to raise awareness of same through anti-smoking advertising campaigns in the run up to world no tobacco day at the end of May 2006. [18175/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): While I am aware of the link between smoking and blindness, anti-smoking campaigns have, to date, focused on the general health risks of cigarettes such as the negative impact of smoking on the cardiovascular system and the increased risks of developing some cancers.

Under the restructuring of the health services, the Health Services Executive (HSE) has responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services, including awareness raising media campaigns and health information dissemination. The issue raised by the Deputy will be considered as part of the national framework on tobacco currently being developed by the HSE.

EU Directives.

168. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if craft butchers will be exempted from hygiene two; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18176/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Hygiene 1 — Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs — applies to all food business operators, including retail butchers, and requires that essential hygiene controls appropriate to retail enterprises, are implemented. Hygiene 2 — Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin — applies to all food business operators involved in the supply of food of animal origin to outlets other than the final consumer and requires that more rigorous food safety controls, appropriate to wholesale activity, are implemented. In practice, most 'retail' butchers in Ireland have some element of wholesale activity and thus would be categorised as Hygiene 2 premises. However, the regulation gives Member States the discretion to extend or limit the application of the requirements of Hygiene 2 under national law, if they consider that the requirements of Hygiene 1 are sufficient to achieve food safety objectives and when the wholesale supply of food of animal origin is a marginal, localised and restricted activity.

I have had extensive discussions with the Minister for Agriculture and Food, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and the Associated Craft Butchers of Ireland in this regard and I am satisfied that the requirements of Hygiene 1 are sufficient to achieve food safety objectives in most butcher premises. I therefore intend to avail of the discretion provided for in Hygiene 2 and will shortly bring forward regulations to define the terms marginal, localised and restricted

Hospitals Building Programme.

169. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Mini-

ster for Health and Children if the planned capital funding of €4.4 million for a day hospital facility in Beaumont Hospital remains committed to this project; the facilities which will be provided and if she will ensure that this commitment to older people is not diluted to accommodate other projects as has been recently suggested (details supplied). [18236/06]

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. This includes responsibility for considering new capital proposals or progressing those in the health capital programme.

Accordingly, my Department is requesting 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.

170. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children further to a previous a parliamentary question if she will expedite a response from the Health Service Executive regarding the provision of a long stay bed for a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18237/06]

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. The Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive has informed my Department that they are at present compiling a draft response for the Deputy which they hope to issue within the next few days.

171. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 305 of 25 January 2006 regarding the appropriate assessment and treatment needed in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow, she will request an earlier date than 18 September 2006 for an appointment; if she will further request the hospital network manager to engage with the consultants in this case rather than refer the patient to their general practitioner; and if she will expedite a response. [18238/06]

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

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the Executive to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

172. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will fund two places at the Irish Institute of Naturopathic Medicine, County Wicklow, for persons (details supplied) in County Carlow; if the Health Service Executive south east will proactively engage with the persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18239/06]

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.

Cancer Screening Programme.

173. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if the plan for the roll-out of BreastCheck to the south and west are proceeding according to the expected time-frame; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18240/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I have 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. I have made additional revenue funding of €2.3 million available to BreastCheck this year to provide among other things for the early recruitment and training of staff. BreastCheck is confident that the target date of next year for the commencement of roll out to the Southern and Western regions will be met.

Approval has been given for an additional 69 posts for the roll-out of the programme. BreastCheck recently interviewed for Clinical Directors for both regions and has commenced the recruitment process for other essential staff. The notice for the procurement of the construction company for the new clinical units at the South Infirmarary/Victoria Hospital, Cork and University College Hospital Galway has been published in the EU Journal and the Design Team is now in the process of short listing applicants. Following the selection of the contractor, construction of the units can commence. On full roll out of the programme, all women in the target

age group in every county will have access to breast screening and follow up treatment where appropriate.

Medical Cards.

174. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if in accordance with an EU agreement persons in receipt of UK social welfare pensions are entitled to medical cards here if they are resident and that these cards are awarded without a means test; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18241/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Regulation (EC) 1408/71 deals with the coordination of social security schemes, including healthcare, for those moving within the European Union. Under its provisions, persons who are affiliated to the healthcare system of Member State A and who are residing in Member State B can receive healthcare in Member State B's public system on behalf of and at the cost of Member State A, as though they were affiliated to its healthcare system. Furthermore, persons who are affiliated to the healthcare system of Member State A and on a temporary stay in Member State B can receive healthcare in Member State B's public system that becomes necessary during their stay, taking into account the nature of the care and the expected length of stay.

Individuals covered by Regulation (EC) 1408/71 residing or staying in Ireland receive a medical card (or are treated as though they have one in the case of visitors), in accordance with Annex VI of the Regulation (text relating to Ireland). This states that such persons, when residing or staying in Ireland, "are entitled free of charge to all medical treatment provided for by Irish legislation where the cost of this treatment is payable by the institution of a Member State other than Ireland."

Persons covered by the Regulations include social security pensioners and their dependants residing in a country other than the country of affiliation (country paying the pension) who are not also social security pensioners of the country of residence or employed in the country of residence. A social security pensioner of another member state, therefore, residing in Ireland would in general be entitled to receive a medical card if s/he is not also employed in Ireland or an Irish social security pensioner. The dependants residing in Ireland of such a person would also be entitled to a medical card.

Others who receive medical cards under Regulation (EC) 1408/71 include those employed in another member state but residing in Ireland, and their dependants, as well as the dependants residing in Ireland of a person employed in and residing in another member state. Temporary visitors in possession of the appropriate documentation (European Health Insurance Card or equivalent)

who become ill or injured while staying in Ireland may receive necessary healthcare, as described above, free of charge, i.e. as though they have a medical card.

Irish citizenship is not a factor in determining eligibility for health services or for a medical card under Regulation (EC) 1408/71.

Eligibility for health services in Ireland under national legislation is primarily based on residency and means. The determination of eligibility for a medical card is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive. Other than for persons aged 70 years and over who are automatically entitled to a medical card, medical cards are issued to persons who, in the opinion of the HSE, are unable to provide general practitioner medical and surgical services for themselves and their dependants without undue hardship.

Health Service Staff.

175. **Ms McManus** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of EMTs who are currently employed in 2006; the number employed in the years 2004 and 2005 and when the cap on staffing of ambulances will be listed. [18277/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): There is no embargo on recruitment to the ambulance service or elsewhere in the public health service. It is a matter for the Health Service Executive, as part of its responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services, to determine the appropriate staffing mix required to deliver services including ambulance services.

With regard to the detailed information sought by the Deputy 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.

176. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children to justify her claim that 60 per cent of the health budget goes on wages and salaries within the health service; the breakdown of the difference in terms of salary and wages costs between administrative staff and clinical staff within the health service in that context; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18278/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Revised Estimates for Public Services 2006 provides €6.85 billion (or 58% of the Vote total) for gross Exchequer Pay and Pensions for the Health Service Executive (HSE). In addition, when account is taken of pay costs of approximately €1.3 billion associated with grants paid to voluntary bodies from the HSE Vote, the total pay costs amount to €8.143 billion or 69% of the total current provision of €11.814 billion for the HSE.

In relation to the breakdown between administrative and clinical staff, the Deputy may wish to note that I have repeatedly stressed the need for safeguarding and indeed enhancing the delivery of front line services and achieving an appropriate balance between clinical and non-clinical employment levels in the health service. This has been underlined by my Department in direct discussions with the HSE's senior management team and in the context of the finalisation of the Executive's National Service Plan for 2006. I believe that there is a general consensus that the organisation of human resources is critical to good service delivery. The proper management of employment levels and skill mix together with the prioritisation of front line services is of course central to the organisation of human resources and is the most effective mechanism for ensuring the best use of resources overall within the health service. Indeed it has previously been estimated by the Directors of Human Resources of the former Health Boards that as far as the balance between frontline and administrative staff is concerned, almost two-thirds of health services personnel nominally classified as "management/administrative" are involved in direct service provision to the public.

Health Services.

177. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo who was approved for orthodontic treatment in the UK before their family relocated here was approved by the principal dentist in Mayo and was subsequently refused treatment three years ago; the options which are available to this person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18279/06]

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.

178. **Ms McManus** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the amount which was spent for the hire of private ambulances in the mid west Health Service Executive region for 2004, 2005 and to date in 2006. [18280/06]

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

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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 Services.

179. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children her role in dealing with complaints against private hospitals and that of the Health Service Executive. [18281/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Part 9 of the Health Act 2004 provides for the establishment of a statutory complaints framework which will apply to the Health Service Executive (HSE) or to service providers providing services on behalf of the HSE. The framework provides for initial resolution of complaints at local level. It also provides for access to independent review if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint. Access to the Office of the Ombudsman or the Office of the Ombudsman for Children is also provided for in the event that the complainant remains dissatisfied following the outcome of a review. Under the legislation, neither I nor my Department will have any role in the processing of complaints.

The arrangements that I have outlined will apply to a private hospital which is providing services on behalf of the HSE but not otherwise.

Health Services.

180. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if a complaint by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3 will be investigated. [18282/06]

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.

Insurance Industry.

181. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she or the Health Service Executive has a role in monitoring BUPA and their patients especially in relation to overcharging or making mistakes with payments. [18283/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): My position is that, as Minister for Health and Children, I do not have either a statutory or administrative role in commercial

arrangements between insurers and their subscribers where health insurance contracts comply with the provisions of the Health Insurance Acts and related regulations.

The Deputy may wish to note that BUPA Ireland take part in the Financial Services Ombudsman Scheme. The principal function of the Financial Services Ombudsman is to deal with eligible complaints by mediation and, where necessary, investigation and adjudication. This means that if an individual has a dispute about a health insurance issue with their insurer, he or she can ask the Financial Services Ombudsman Council to decide on the matter, and this decision is binding on the insurer.

The contact details are as follows: The Financial Services Ombudsman, 32 Upper Merrion Street, Dublin 2.

Health Services.

182. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9 was charged an extra €10 for chiropodist service in July 2005; and if this person will be given the maximum advice and support. [18284/06]

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.

There is no statutory obligation on the Health Service Executive (HSE) to provide chiropody services to GMS patients; however in practice arrangements are made to provide these services. Before the establishment of the HSE the nature of the arrangements for chiropody and the level of service provided was a matter for individual health boards and so a degree of variation in practice developed over time. Priority is usually given to certain groups of people, including people who are medical card holders aged 65 years and over. In several regions the service is provided by private chiropodists by arrangement with the HSE.

I consider that it is inappropriate for private chiropodists who are providing services on behalf of the HSE to charge patients a top-up fee, and I have conveyed this view formally to the HSE. My Department requested the HSE to initiate a review of the fee arrangements in place for the provision of chiropody services, with a view to ensuring that such additional fees will no longer be levied on persons in receipt of this service; and this review is underway.

Services for People with Disabilities.

183. **Mr. G. Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the way in which she reconciles her statements to Dáil Éireann that there are no cutbacks and no lack of resources for home support and respite with the Health Service Executive assertion that cut backs are necessary in both home support hours and respite care in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [18285/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): Significant funding has been made available for the development and enhancement of services for people with physical and sensory disabilities in 2006. The Multi-Annual Investment Programme 2006 to 2009 includes 80 new residential places for persons with significant disabilities who are currently placed in inappropriate settings and 250,000 extra hours of home support and personal assistance for 2006.

Also in 2006 additional funding of €22.5m is being provided to enhance the multi-disciplinary support services for people with disabilities in line with the Government's commitment to build capacity within the health services to deliver on the various legislative provisions contained in the National Disability Strategy.

The Health Service Executive has, at my request, already examined the individual circumstances of the person referred to in the Deputy's question and the Executive has replied to the Deputy directly.

Nursing Home Subventions.

184. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if an increase in nursing home subvention will be offered to a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18286/06]

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.

185. **Mr. Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the average waiting time in the accident and emergency department of Naas General Hospital; the number of patients attending the accident and emergency department over the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18348/06]

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.

Health Service Staff.

186. **Mr. Wall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number of dentists employed within the health service in the Kildare region; the number of dentists employed at each health centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18349/06]

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.

Hospital Services.

187. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if, in view of the issue of the Tribal Secta Report on accident and emergency units in six hospitals to a national newspaper under a Freedom of Information request she will arrange to lay these reports in the Houses of the Oireachtas library in order that Members can learn from their important findings. [18351/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The National Hospitals Office of the Health Service Executive commissioned Tribal Secta to undertake a process mapping exercise across 10 acute hospitals. The project focussed on the maximum utilisation of existing acute capacity and in particular, the blockages, causes and potential solutions in the patient's journey from the decision to admit to discharge. The 10 hospitals examined included the major Dublin academic teaching hospitals.

The HSE has published the Overview Tribal Secta Report on its website at www.hse.ie. The Executive has advised that copies of the reports on individual hospitals can be obtained from the HSE on request.

Health Services.

188. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if alternative accommodation will be provided for a person (details

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supplied) in County Louth; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18352/06]

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 Waiting Lists.

189. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if assistance will be given to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3 who is on a waiting list for surgery; if the maximum support will be given; and if he will make this a priority issue. [18353/06]

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.

Health Services.

190. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway is not entitled to free dentures on their medical card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18372/06]

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.

Hospital Services.

191. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children when a full time urology department will be established at Mayo General Hospital; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is an eight year waiting list in County Mayo for initial referrals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18373/06]

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.

192. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children when a rheumatology department will be established at Mayo General Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18374/06]

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.

Ambulance Service.

193. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children when an ambulance base will be established in the Mulranny, Achill and Ballycroy areas of County Mayo in view of the proven need as prioritised by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18375/06]

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. This includes responsibility for considering new capital proposals or progressing those in the health capital programme.

Accordingly, my Department is requesting the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 194 answered with Question No. 138.

195. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children her plans to provide defibrillators in all ambulances; if she will ensure that staff are fully trained in their use; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18377/06]

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. This includes responsibility for the provision of ambulance services.

The Executive has advised that all of its ambulances are equipped with defibrillators and that the Emergency Medical Technicians who operate them are appropriately trained in their use.

Nursing Home Subventions.

196. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the percentage increase in funding allocated to the Health Service Executive southern area for the provision of enhanced nursing home subvention; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18378/06]

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.

I wish to advise the Deputy that as part of the €150m Budget Day package, additional funding of €20 million was provided for the administration of the Nursing Home Subvention Scheme in 2006, bringing the total available budget to €161 million.

This funding was provided to support more basic nursing home subventions and reduce waiting lists for enhanced subventions; it is also intended to bring more consistency to subventions support throughout the country.

Medical Education.

197. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children when the decision was taken by her Department to locate the proposed school of podiatry in a large centre of population; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18412/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Responsibility for the establishment of a school of podiatry, including its location, will be a matter, in the final instance, for the Department of Education and Science. However, as the Deputy may be aware the delivery of clinical training, which is a significant core component of the course, has been the subject of discussions between officials of my Department and the Department of Education and Science in terms of how best it could be facilitated in an integrated fashion with Health Service Executive (HSE) services.

I understand that the HSE is of the view that the school of podiatry would be best located in a

large centre of population, one that is associated with a multi-disciplinary health professional environment and which is linked to a major teaching hospital. I also understand that the HSE has prepared its draft report to be submitted to my Department shortly following an internal circulation to its National Hospital's Office and Primary, Community and Continuing Care Directorates. My Department is currently awaiting this report from the HSE.

Services for People with Disabilities.

198. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the number and location of PCCC's which do not have either a dementia or Alzheimer's unit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18413/06]

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.

Freedom of Information.

199. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 339 of 21 March 2006, if assurance will be offered by her that the outstanding information will be provided by the hospital at this late stage; and if an explanation will be offered by the hospital as to the reason this information has not been forthcoming despite many requests in this regard. [18415/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy is referring to a previous Parliamentary Question tabled in March, 2006 and answered by my colleague the Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen. The request for access to information in this case used the provisions set out in the Freedom of Information Act, 1997.

Where a request has been submitted under The Freedom of Information Act, 1997 and the requester is not satisfied with the response, the Act provides an appropriate appeals mechanism, ultimately to the Office of the Information Commissioner. A party to a review, or any other person affected by a decision of the Information Commissioner following a review, may appeal to the High Court on a point of law arising from the decision.

Ready access to relevant information is central to patient care and there is a duty of care on health agencies and health care professionals in the processing and management of sensitive per-

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sonal information. As the hospital in question is a public body in its own right, the management and any appeals pertaining to the request is the responsibility of the hospital in the first instance. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on any aspect of this specific case.

EU Directives.

200. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the European Directives that have to be implemented by her Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation;

Directive	Date Adopted	Date due for Transposition	Comments
Directive 2003/33/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States relating to the advertising and sponsorship of tobacco products	26 May 2003	31 July 2005	The Tobacco Advertising Directive (2003/33/EC) was transposed into Irish law by means of the Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) Act 2004. This Act, which was enacted in March 2004, is being challenged by the international tobacco industry in the Irish Courts and as a result of this legal challenge Ireland is not in a position to commence all sections of the Act. A comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising and sponsorship has been in place in Ireland since July 2000. This legislation includes the requirements of Directive 2003/33/EC and also prohibits tobacco advertising in cinemas, on billboards and tobacco sponsorship at national events which are not included in the Directive.
Directive 2004/24/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, amending, as regards traditional herbal medicinal products, Directive 2001/83/EC on the Community Code relating to medicinal products for human use.	31 March 2004	30 October 2005	The SI for this Directive is at an advanced stage of preparation, and will be signed as soon as possible after the commencement of the Irish Medicines Board (Amendment) Act, 2006.
Directive 2004/27/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 31 March 2004 amending, as regards traditional herbal medicinal products, Directive 2001/83/EC on the Community Code relating to medicinal products for human use.	31 March 2004	30 October 2005	The SI for this Directive is at an advanced stage of preparation, and will be signed as soon as possible after the commencement of the Irish Medicines Board (Amendment) Act, 2006.
Commission Directive 2005/28/EC laying down principles and detailed guidelines for good clinical practice as regards investigational medicinal products for human use, as well as the requirements for authorisation of the manufacturing or importation of such products	8 April 2005	29 January 2006	This Directive has been partially transposed. My Department is striving to ensure that the Directive is fully transposed by the end of the year.

Question No. 201 answered with Question No. 136.

Departmental Expenditure.

202. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the funding available to enable her to carry out her various functions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18491/06]

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18449/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy will find the latest position on Directives awaiting transposition by the Department of Health and Children set out in the following table. I, and my colleagues in Government, are very conscious of the need to ensure Ireland's Treaty commitments are met by transposing EU legislation as required. In this context, the Department of Health and Children continues to make every effort, within its available resources, to ensure that relevant EU measures are transposed into Irish law in a timely manner.

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Revised Estimates Volume was published in February of this year and outlines the estimated funding of each Government Department/Office for the current year. The Health Group is covered by three Votes, one each for my Department, the Health Service Executive and the Office of the Minister for Children. The following table outlines the estimated

current and capital figures under each of these Votes for 2006. The amounts contained in Vote 39 for the Department of Health and Children relate directly to my functions as Minister for Health & Children. The figures indicated for

Vote	Gross Current	Capital	Gross Total	Appropriations in Aid	Net Total
	€000	€000	€000	€000	€000
Dept. of Health & Children (39)	371,994	20,444	392,438	380	392,058
Health Service Executive (40)	11,814,101	574,556	12,388,657	2,371,804	10,016,853
Office of the Minister for Children	316,148	49,573	365,721	13,481	352,240

These figures represent a 9% headline increase and a 12% underlying increase in the total funding available, across the Health Group, for the delivery of health services, over the Revised Estimate 2005.

Hospital Services.

203. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children her plans to house the Desca scan unit at St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny; the timeframe involved to have the service fully operational; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18492/06]

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 have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

204. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if she will expedite an application under the housing aid for the elderly scheme in the name of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if she will ensure that the occupational therapist report is completed; and if permission to commence the work will be granted while the grant is being processed. [18493/06]

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. This includes responsibility for the provision of the Housing Aid Scheme for the Elderly, on behalf of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Accordingly, the Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter

Vote 40 relate to the salaries and expenses of the Health Service Executive in its delivery of health and personal social services to the population. The figures for Vote 41 relate to the functions of the Office of the Minister for Children.

investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

205. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children if a grant for a hearing aid will be awarded to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18494/06]

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.

Departmental Staff.

206. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by her since January 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18512/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Set out in the following table are details of the Special Advisers, Personal Assistants, Personal Secretary and Press Officer employed in my Office in the Department of Health and Children since January 2005.

Name	Title	Date of Appointment
John O'Brien	Special Adviser	30/09/2004
Oliver O'Connor	Special Adviser	30/09/2004
Patricia Ryan	Special Adviser	30/09/2004
Tom Kelly	Special Adviser	11/04/2005
Catherine Dardis	Personal Assistant	30/09/2004
Alan McGaughey	Personal Assistant	30/09/2004
Nuala Talbot	Personal Secretary	30/09/2004
Derek Cunningham	Press Officer	24/01/2005

[Ms Harney.]

I refer the Deputy further to PQ 12356/05 of 20/04/05 in relation to Mr. Tom Kelly's previous status. Mr. Kelly is now a Special Adviser to my Department under Government Order.

Special Advisers perform duties as set out in Section 11 of the Public Service Management Act, 1997 which include providing advice to me and monitoring, facilitating and securing the achievement of Government objectives that relate to the Department of Health and Children. Personal Assistants and the Personal Secretary perform duties assigned to them by me. The Press Officer performs the normal range of duties appropriate to the post.

Disabled Drivers.

207. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the position in relation to the qualification criteria for primary medical certificates; if, in view of the number of people with serious injuries who are being refused certs due to the difficulties in qualifying, she will change the qualifying rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17901/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I presume the Deputy is referring to the Primary Medical Certificate required to qualify for the The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme, which scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT (up to certain limit) on the purchase of a car adapted for the transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, as well as relief from excise on the fuel used in the car up to a certain limit.

The disability criteria for eligibility for the tax concessions under this scheme are set out in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994. To get the Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be severely and permanently disabled and satisfy one of the following conditions: a) be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs; b) be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs; c) be without both hands or without both arms; d) be without one or both legs; e) be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg; and f) have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The scheme has been in operation in some form since 1968. As regards changes to the medical/disability criteria: only criterion (a) was in place up to 1989, when they were expanded by the addition of (b), (c), (d) and (f); and in 1994, the final criterion at (e) was added.

The Senior Medical Officer (SMO) for the relevant Health Service Executive area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an

individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the SMO to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual.

A special Interdepartmental Review Group reviewed the operation of the Disabled Drivers Scheme. The terms of reference of the Group were to examine the operation of the existing scheme, including the difficulties experienced by the various groups and individuals involved with it, and to consider the feasibility of alternative schemes, with a view to assisting the Minister for Finance in determining the future direction of the scheme.

The Group's Report, published on my Department's website in July 2004, sets out in detail the genesis and development of the scheme. It examines the current benefits, the qualifying medical criteria, the Exchequer costs, relationship with other schemes and similar schemes in other countries. The Report also makes a number of recommendations, both immediate and long-term, referring respectively to the operation of the appeals process and options for the future development of the scheme.

In respect of the long-term recommendations, which included the qualifying disability criteria, I should say that given the scale and scope of the scheme, further changes can only be made after very careful consideration. For this reason, the Government decided in June 2004 that the Minister for Finance would consider the recommendations contained in the Report of the Interdepartmental Review Group in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to the existing and prospective cost of the scheme.

The best way of addressing the transport needs of people with disabilities including the effectiveness, suitability or otherwise of the Disabled Drivers Scheme in that regard will be progressed in consultation with the other Departments who have responsibility in this area. In any event, a car tax concession scheme can obviously play only a partial role in dealing with the broader issue of transport needs or difficulties experienced by persons with various disabilities.

Health and Safety Regulations.

208. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Finance if the main stairwell of the National Gallery of Ireland, Millennium Wing, is compliant with all relevant building and health and safety requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17932/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The National Gallery of Ireland, Millennium Wing was officially opened on the 21st January 2001.

The contracting authority for the project was the National Gallery of Ireland and upon com-

pletion the building became a State owned property.

Following completion, the Gallery's architects, Benson & Forsyth certified that the building was in compliance with Building Regulations and Planning Permission. In relation to the main stairwell, they have also certified it to be in compliance with the building regulations, i.e. Part K (T.G.D. Stairways, Ladders, Ramps and Guards) Part 1.2.4.

However, as concerns have been raised, I have asked the Commissioners of Public Works to assess the main stairwell of the National Gallery and if necessary, take any action to ensure not only compliance with all relevant regulations but "best practice".

Motor Vehicle Registration.

209. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance if cars brought in from other countries and driven on roads here must be registered in Ireland; if so the timeframe within which it must be registered; the number of such registrations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17955/06]

214. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the penalties in place for failure by a non national to register an imported car by close of business on the day following importation; if there is a monitoring mechanism in place to confirm compliance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18332/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 and 214 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that as a general rule all vehicles imported permanently into the State must register for VRT purposes within one working day of arrival. This rule applies equally to vehicles imported by EU and non EU persons. In practice, Revenue allows latitude of a maximum of seven days for registration.

Where a vehicle is imported permanently into the State, Irish registration plates bearing the index mark (registration number) issued by the Revenue Commissioners on registration must be displayed on such vehicles at all times.

In 2005, 224,282 new vehicles and 68,660 used vehicles were registered in the State. Those registrations were sought by motor dealers, distributors and private individuals (Irish residents, citizens of other Member States and non-EU individuals — residing in the State).

During 2005, 6,149 vehicles were registered, but were exempt from VRT under section 134 of the 1992 Finance Act, as the personal property of private individuals transferring their residence into Ireland.

Section 135 (a) of the Finance Act 1992 permits a European or other foreign registered vehicle which is temporarily brought into the State by a person established outside the State to be exempted from the requirement to register for

VRT purposes for a period normally not exceeding 12 months from the date upon which the vehicle concerned was brought into the State.

These provisions are in line with Article 39 of the EU Treaty which provides for the free movement of workers between Member States. The Deputies may wish to note that a reciprocal arrangement is in place for our own State residents in fellow Member States.

There is no requirement for vehicles imported under temporary exemption provisions to be presented to the Revenue Commissioners to avail of the relief. Documents relating to ownership, registration and the importation of the vehicle into the State must be kept with the vehicle when it is in use in the State. When such vehicles fail to meet the conditions for temporary exemption they must be permanently removed from the State or presented for registration. Details of such vehicles are therefore not normally captured or held in the Vehicle Registration System.

Revenue mobile units and the Garda Síochána monitor both Irish and foreign registered vehicles on the State's roads. In this regard Revenue mobile units challenged 11,876 vehicles in the State in 2005. Of these, 9,093 satisfied Revenue officials that the registration status was in order at that particular time and no further action was taken. However, 1,405 vehicles were registered for VRT purposes as a direct consequence of these investigations. Prosecutions, seizures, granting of temporary exemptions/transfers of residence, vehicle exportations and scrappages also took place on foot of Revenue enforcement activity.

210. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance the number of foreign cars registered here each year from 2002 to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17972/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the information available in this regard refers to the number of cars (new and used) imported into Ireland and registered within the Vehicle Registration Tax System. I attach a schedule giving details of gross registrations for cars together with the total number of exemptions from VRT of new and used cars for the full calendar years 2002 to 2005 together with the data in respect of the first 4 months of 2006. Those registrations were sought by motor dealers, distributors and private individuals (Irish residents, citizens of other Member States and non-EU individuals — residing in the State).

As a general rule all vehicles imported permanently into the State must register for VRT purposes within 24 hours of arrival. This rule applies equally to vehicles imported by EU and non-EU persons. However, section 135(a) of the Finance Act 1992 permits a European or other foreign registered vehicle which is temporarily brought into the State by a person established outside the

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State to be exempted from the requirement to register for VRT purposes for a period normally not exceeding 12 months from the date upon which the vehicle concerned was brought into the State.

There is no requirement for vehicles imported under the temporary exemption provisions to be presented to the Revenue Commissioners in order to avail of the exemption. Documents relating to ownership, registration or bringing into the State of the vehicle must be kept with the vehicle when it is in use in the State. When such vehicles fail to meet the conditions for temporary exemption they must be permanently removed from the State or presented for registration. The details of such vehicles are therefore not normally captured or held in the Vehicle Registration System.

The temporary exemption rules are in accordance with Article 39 of the EC Treaty, which provides for the free movement of its workers within Member States. The Deputy may wish to note that a reciprocal arrangement is also in place for residents of Ireland who bring cars temporarily to other Member States.

Departmental Properties.

211. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Finance his plans for the future use of the old AIB building in Blanchardstown Village. [17982/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): This building has been allocated to the Department of Transport for use as a Driving Test Centre to service the Dublin 15 area. Preparations are under way for the submission of a planning application to the Local Authority.

Garda Stations.

212. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if he intends to take action regarding the unsatisfactory conditions of Garda stations in Ballincollig, Ballinhassig, Ballymun, Buncrana, Doon, Dunmanway, Easkey, Finglas, Tralee and Wexford; the timetable for the repair or replacement of those stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18255/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The Commissioners of Public Works operate the Garda accommodation programme from a prioritised list provided by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Garda Authority. Not all of the stations referred to in the Question are allocated the highest priority on the programme. The stations having a priority are being advanced accordingly.

Ballincollig Garda Station, Co. Cork (No. 36 on the Major List): The Commissioners of Public Works are currently finalising the purchase of a site to allow for the construction of a new station. When legal formalities have been finalised work can commence.

Ballinhassig Garda Station, Co. Cork (No. 25 on the Basic List): A site was acquired in 1984 for development. The local Gardaí have been operating from a prefabricated structure for many years now. The Commissioners of Public Works have yet to receive a brief for a new station from the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform.

Ballymun Garda Station, Co. Dublin: Tenders for the construction of a new station in Ballymun are to be invited in June 2006.

Bunrana Garda Station, Co. Donegal: The Commissioners of Public Works are urgently examining a number of options regarding replacement of the present station.

Doon Garda Station, Co. Limerick (No. 23 on the Basic List): This station has been identified as one of the stations to be included in the equity swap program. The Commissioners of Public Works and the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform are now reviewing this programme in the light of the poor response to the public advertisement last year.

Dunmanway Garda Station, Co. Cork: The Commissioners of Public Works have agreed terms for the acquisition of additional land, which is vital to the proposed development at this station. Development will proceed when the terms of the legal agreement have been finalised.

Easkey Garda Station, Co. Sligo: A contract has been placed and works have commenced to provide temporary accommodation for the Garda Síochána in Easkey. A Revised brief was received from the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform on 2nd May for the permanent accommodation provision. The Commissioners of Public Works are now proceeding with a sketch scheme for a new station.

Finglas Garda Station, Co. Dublin: Tender documents will be completed following the Part 9 Planning Consultation, which has been submitted to the local council. It is expected that tenders for the construction of the new station will be invited in September 2006, with construction commencing on-site by the end of the year.

Tralee Garda Station, Co. Kerry: The Commissioners of Public Works are currently examining a proposal for a replacement station.

Wexford Garda Station, Co. Wexford: The Commissioners of Public Works are agreeing terms for the acquisition of a site for a new station. Development will proceed when the legal agreement has been finalised. The Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform has to issue a brief.

Tax Code.

213. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance to apply the Business Expansion Scheme to wind farms; to increase the BES limit from €1 million to €5 million; to increase personal BES contributions to €100,000; to ensure the extension of the BES to 2010; and to ensure tax free rental income for the landowners in relation to wind

farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18322/06]

246. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if he has received correspondence from a person (details supplied) in County Wexford setting out consideration with regard to improvement in REFIT price and the grant aid of 20 per cent of the capital cost and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18322/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 213 and 246 together.

The Business Expansion Scheme is currently being reviewed. Any decisions on the scheme's remit will be taken in the light of the objectives of assisting risk investments, the cost of the scheme, the benefits gained and the equity of the reliefs involved. Any proposals in this regard are a matter for the next Budget.

Question No. 214 answered with Question No. 209.

215. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he intends to introduce a tax exemption for the 150,000 pensioners due to pay a total of €75 million in tax on their SSIA accounts due to the fact that they will not receive the normal tax exemption on savings by the elderly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17839/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The SSIA's were introduced in the 2001 Finance Act and give a credit to all SSIA investors of 25%. The aim of the SSIA scheme was to encourage savings. This aim has been successfully achieved with 1.1 million persons availing of the special scheme.

It is widely acknowledged that one of the reasons for the success of the SSIA scheme was its simplicity. It was clearly stated from the very outset that the SSIA investment returns would be subject to a 23% exit tax at maturity with no exemptions for anyone. I have no plans to change this.

Although all SSIA accounts are subject to an exit tax, it should be noted that the SSIA scheme represented a very good deal for all of those taking it up, whether aged 65 and over or not. For example, a person who will have saved €254 per month over 5 years, into their SSIA account, will receive a credit of €3,800 from the Exchequer even before any interest is taken into account.

It should be noted that DIRT on deposit interest was introduced in 1986 and only two reliefs apply, i.e. for those aged 65 or over and for the physically or mentally incapacitated, where the DIRT is deducted by the financial institution on the deposit interest and is refunded if the person claiming the refund is not otherwise liable to income tax on their total income. Thus, it is not a total tax exemption for all those aged 65 or over, or for the incapacitated.

Child Care Provision.

216. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will respond to the issues raised in correspondence (details supplied) on taxation and childcare; and if he will take these ideas on board. [17861/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Government introduced a suite of measures relating to childcare in Budget 2006, along with increased Child Benefit payments, which include the Early Childcare Supplement of €1,000 in a full year for each child up to his or her sixth birthday, a new National Childcare Investment Programme which aims to fund an additional 50,000 childcare places over the next five years, as well as extended paid and unpaid maternity leave. In addition, the Government introduced a new childminding tax exemption, whereby if an individual minds up to three children, who are not their own, in the minder's own home, no tax is payable on the earnings received where the amount received is €10,000 or less.

As regards Child Benefit, from April of this year, Child Benefit payments increased to €150 per month for the first and second children and €185 for the third and subsequent children. These Child Benefit payments represent a 294% increase in the rate for first and second children over the rate prevailing in 1997 and a 274% increase in the rate for third and subsequent children. By comparison, during this period the increase in the consumer price index is estimated to be 34%.

In total, over €2.5 billion extra will be invested in the area of childcare over the next five years, which is evidence of the Government's continuing commitment to parents, particularly those with young children.

Tax Code.

217. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the findings of a report (details supplied) which shows that households here in the lower decile spend almost 21 per cent of their income on indirect taxes while the households in the top decile spend under 10 per cent of their income on indirect taxes; the measures he intends to take to address this inequity caused by high VAT rates and stealth taxes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17900/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I reject entirely the Deputies allegations about the role and equity of the indirect tax system. A simple look at the facts will show that the conclusions in the report she refers to are misdirected.

Firstly, there is no VAT on the main low income items such as food, oral medicines, childrens' shoes and clothing.

Secondly, most excise revenue (60%) comes from excises on petrol, diesel and cars. These are not items that low income groups spend most on.

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As far as the remaining 40% of excise revenue, this comes from duties on tobacco and alcohol where there are solid health grounds for using the tax system to discourage consumption.

Thirdly, there are special reliefs in the VAT and Excise system for medical and other equipment for the disabled. There is no VAT on public transport and diesel used in buses and trains is subject to reduced rates of excise. Most public services are not liable to VAT.

Furthermore the report referred to is simply wrong when it claims that we are relying more on indirect taxation now than in the past as the following table will show.

	1964/5	1975	1985	1995	2005
	%	%	%	%	%
VAT ¹	7	19	25	26	31
Customs and Excise	53	36	25	21	14
Income Tax	26	36	38	36	29
Corporation Tax	5	3	4	10	14
Capital Taxes	4	3	3	4	13
Other ²	5	3	5	4	—

1. Turnover Tax in 1965.

2. Includes Road tax (from 1964/5), Agricultural levies (from 1975), Income/Youth employment levy (1985), Employment and Training Levy (1995).

In fact, we are relying far less on indirect taxation than before, with the gap being made up by greater revenue yield from company tax and taxes on capital and property.

The Report, in my view misses many of the big issues in indirect taxation. In fact, every effort is made, as far as EU law will permit, to reduce the incidence of VAT and Excise on low incomes, but, by their nature, such taxes are not direct taxes on income (this is why they are called indirect taxes) and cannot be easily related to one ability to pay, however good one's intent.

Public Transport.

218. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Finance if the results of his request to the Office of Public Works confirmed that Dublin Bus can use the route between the Phoenix Park and the Blanchardstown area and therefore facilitate public transport travellers to Huntstown, Harts-town, Inglewood, Clonsilla and Ongar and reduce journey time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17918/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The position remains unchanged from that outlined in my reply of 14 February 2006 to Parliamentary Question No. 339.

In summary, the issue of a bus route through the Phoenix Park to service the areas in question, is being considered in the context of a comprehensive traffic management study of the Phoenix Park commissioned by my Office.

Special Savings Incentive Scheme.

219. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance the details with regard to the payment of tax by pensioners on their SSIA account; if he intends to exempt pensioners in a similar way to their exemption from deposit interest retention tax; the cost to the State of allowing such an exemption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17953/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The SSIA's were introduced in the 2001 Finance Act and give a credit to all SSIA investors of 25%. The aim of the SSIA scheme was to encourage savings. This aim has been successfully achieved with 1.1 million persons availing of the special scheme.

It is widely acknowledged that one of the reasons for the success of the SSIA scheme was its simplicity. It was clearly stated from the very outset that the SSIA investment returns would be subject to a 23% exit tax at maturity with no exemptions for anyone. I have no plans to change this.

Although all SSIA accounts are subject to an exit tax, it should be noted that the SSIA scheme represented a very good deal for all of those taking it up, whether aged 65 and over or not. For example, a person who will have saved €254 per month over 5 years, into their SSIA account, will receive a credit of €3,800 from the Exchequer even before any interest is taken into account.

It should be noted that DIRT on deposit interest was introduced in 1986 and only two reliefs apply, i.e. for those aged 65 or over and for the physically or mentally incapacitated, where the DIRT is deducted by the financial institution on the deposit interest and is refunded if the person claiming the refund is not otherwise liable to income tax on their total income. Thus, it is not a total tax exemption for all those aged 65 or over, or for the incapacitated.

It is not possible to give an accurate cost to the State of an exemption similar to that applying on DIRT as this is dependent on the investment returns on each relevant SSIA account where the account holder is not otherwise liable to income tax on their total income.

220. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the distress caused to people who are widowed during the period of their SSIA account whereby the account holder passes away and the spouse is no longer allowed to continue contributing despite the fact that the payment was made from a joint account; if he will re-examine this matter; and if he will examine the case of a person (details supplied) in County Waterford. [17954/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The SSIA scheme commenced on 1 May 2001 and is administered by Qualifying Savings Managers in accordance with legislation and guidelines issued

by the Revenue Commissioners. Individuals aged 18 and over who were resident in the State could open an SSIA account and in the case of a married couple, both spouses could open their own accounts.

There are specific provisions in general law in relation to the administration of an estate of a deceased person, and these must be followed before the assets of the estate can be distributed. The funds in the SSIA account constitute an asset of the estate of the deceased person. The net assets of the estate are distributed to the beneficiaries by the executors or administrators following grant of probate or of letters of administration.

On the death of an individual, his/her SSIA account is treated as maturing.

In the case of an SSIA that was a deposit account from which no withdrawals had been made up until date of death, the capital invested by the SSIA account holder, together with the Government contribution, remains the property of the deceased individual's estate and are not taxed. Tax is charged (at 23%) only on the interest portion.

The holding of an SSIA account by an individual, whose spouse has died, is not affected by the other spouse's death.

Road Network.

221. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Finance the plans of the Office of Public Works with regard to the road network in the Phoenix Park with particular reference to the provision of a car park for the zoo, traffic movements at Mountjoy Cross and proposals for new pinch points within the park; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17981/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): A comprehensive traffic management study, by an independent firm of consultants, commissioned by my Office is well underway and as part of the brief, current initiatives will be assessed.

The principal traffic management initiatives currently are as follows — A comprehensive scheme for renewal of Chesterfield Avenue (the main road through the Park). As part of this scheme it is planned to construct a roundabout at Mountjoy Cross in order to ease traffic flow and improve safety. As an interim measure, a temporary roundabout was recently installed at this congested and hazardous junction. The scheme also provides for the provision of pinch points to control traffic speeds, especially in the vicinity of Dublin Zoo. In addition, it is proposed to eliminate commuter parking particularly at the Parkgate Street end.

A planning application has been lodged for the provision of a carpark off the Lord's Walk which will help to alleviate traffic congestion in the vicinity of Dublin Zoo.

The introduction of a one-way system at the Ashtown and Cabra Gates to resolve traffic hazards at these gates.

The provision of a one-way system at Laurel Lawn (adjacent to Dublin Zoo) to resolve traffic hazards in this area.

In addition progress is being made with an ongoing programme of repairs to the network of minor roads and footpaths in the Park together with the extension of the network of cycle lanes.

Departmental Properties.

222. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Finance if he will make a deed of waiver in favour of Fingal County Council with regard to a derelict site between Pinebrook Vale and the Hartstown Distributor Road, Dublin 15. [18000/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland have contacted Fingal County Council regarding the property in question. Correspondence submitted by that body on 24th April 2006 appears to have been lost in transit. On receipt of a copy of same, the matter will be processed in the normal manner.

223. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Finance if the derelict site between Peck's Lane and the Pines, Castleknock, Dublin 15 is in his ownership. [18001/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): There is no record of the property in question being in the ownership of the Minister for Finance, or the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland.

Tax Code.

224. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11 is entitled to a tax rebate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18084/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they have no information either from the person or his employer to suggest that he is entitled to a tax rebate. If he considers that he may be entitled to a tax rebate he should forward his Form P60 (Details of Pay and Tax) for 2005 and other relevant information to North City Revenue District, 14/15 Upper O'Connell Street, Dublin 1 and request a review of his liability.

Mobile Telephony.

225. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the mobile telephony transceivers at Ardee House, Dublin 6; the outcome of discussions with the operators of these devices since his reply to Parliamentary Question No. 176 of 15 December 2005; if the hold on granting of further

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installation licences implemented by Office of Public Works in sensitive areas is still in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18085/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The two mobile phone operators, who have equipment installed on Ardee House, have not complied with the Commissioner's of Public Works request to deactivate their equipment.

The Commissioners requested the companies to deactivate their equipment on Ardee House pending the report on the Interdepartmental 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 be deactivated.

The companies have not been granted any further licences in respect of State owned buildings since December 2005.

Tax Code.

226. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance the threshold at which the 9 percent rate of stamp duty on non-residential property comes into effect; the value of this threshold as it applied in 1995, in the year 2000 and to date in 2006; and his views on whether, further to the significant moves in property values, there is a need to review the threshold at which stamp duty becomes applicable to business premises in view of the considerable obstacles it presents to new business establishment and expansion. [18086/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): At present a 9 percent rate of Stamp Duty applies on non-residential property exceeding €150,000. A 6 percent rate applies on non-residential property exceeding €80,000 and not exceeding €100,000.

The maximum rate of duty in 1995 and 2000 was 6% and applied to properties exceeding €76,200 (£60,000).

The approximate current equivalent value of these thresholds adjusted for CPI at Budget Day 2006 is: 1995 — €93,020; and 2000 — €105,444.

Amendments to the existing stamp duty regime must be approached with caution as even minor amendments may alter the dynamics of the property market. The matter is kept under review and where changes are needed, they will be dealt with appropriately.

Revenue Offices.

227. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance

if his attention has been drawn to the continuing complaints of long delays in tax offices, no reply on freephone numbers and continuing high level of errors in the tax allowance forms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18234/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am aware that some of Revenue's customer service areas have been under a lot of pressure in recent months, particularly those areas dealing with PAYE taxpayers.

The first quarter of each year is always exceptionally busy for Revenue's PAYE call centres, walk-in offices and staff dealing with correspondence. For example, in February, Revenue issued 2.2 million tax credit certificates for the 2006 tax year and this "bulk issue" naturally generated a very large volume of contacts. The first quarter is also the time most people request a balancing statement or lodge a rebate claim for the previous year. This year, the pressures were exacerbated by difficulties arising from a changeover to an entirely new computer system for PAYE taxpayers. This, unfortunately, gave rise to some errors in tax credit certificates.

In order to cope with this exceptionally busy period, Revenue assigned the greatest number of staff feasible to dealing with PAYE contacts. In addition they took on over 60 temporary staff. I am informed that, because of the large volumes of correspondence on hands, Revenue temporarily restricted their PAYE 1890 phone service hours to morning only — so as to clear correspondence backlogs in the afternoons. However, I understand that this temporary restriction did not, in fact, significantly reduce the overall number of PAYE phone queries being dealt with on a daily basis.

The work volume situation in Revenue offices is now returning to more manageable levels and full-day telephone service has been resumed. Queuing times in walk-in offices have also been reduced. For example, during the month of April, 80% of callers to the Dublin Central Revenue Inquiry Office were seen within 10 minutes.

I am informed that Revenue is planning a major expansion of PAYE self-service facilities this year. Later this month Revenue will start to roll out a range of both internet and telephony-based interactive self-service channels enabling PAYE taxpayers, for example, to make tax rebate claims online and make amendments to tax credits on a 24/7 basis. I am assured that these initiatives should significantly improve service to PAYE taxpayers.

Tax Code.

228. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Finance the reason he excluded SSIA's which have been put into interest bearing deposits from the opportunity to get a refund of deposit interest retention

tax; and if investors were informed of this. [18235/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The SSIA's were introduced in the 2001 Finance Act and give a credit to all SSIA investors of 25%. The aim of the SSIA scheme was to encourage savings. This aim has been successfully achieved with 1.1 million persons availing of the special scheme.

It is widely acknowledged that one of the reasons for the success of the SSIA scheme was its simplicity. It was clearly stated from the very outset that the SSIA investment returns would be subject to a 23% exit tax at maturity with no exemptions for anyone. The information leaflets that were published at that time reflected this position.

Although all SSIA accounts are subject to an exit tax, it should be noted that the SSIA scheme represented a very good deal for all of those taking it up, whether aged 65 and over or not. For example, a person who will have saved €254 per month over 5 years, into their SSIA account, will receive a credit of €3,800 from the Exchequer even before any interest is taken into account.

It should be noted that DIRT on deposit interest was introduced in 1986 and only two reliefs apply, i.e. for those aged 65 or over and for the physically or mentally incapacitated, where the DIRT is deducted by the financial institution on the deposit interest and is refunded if the person claiming the refund is not otherwise liable to income tax on their total income. Thus, it is not a total tax exemption for all those aged 65 or over, or for the incapacitated.

Disabled Drivers Scheme.

229. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties regarding the disabled drivers tax concession scheme in view of the exceptionally restrictive categories of disability included; if his further attention has been drawn to the fact that many people with severe disabilities are excluded from this scheme in spite of their doctors supporting their applications; his plans to update and widen the list of categories covered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18304/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT (up to certain limit) on the purchase of a car adapted for the transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, as well as relief from excise on the fuel used in the car up to a certain limit.

The disability criteria for eligibility for the tax concessions under this scheme are set out in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994. A person must be severely and permanently disabled and satisfy

one of the following conditions: a) be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs; b) be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs; c) be without both hands or without both arms; d) be without one or both legs; e) be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg; and f) have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The scheme has been in operation in some form since 1968. As regards changes to the medical/disability criteria: only criterion (a) was in place up to 1989, when they were expanded by the addition of (b), (c), (d) and (f); and in 1994, the final criterion at (e) was added.

The Senior Medical Officer (SMO) for the relevant Health Service Executive area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the SMO to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual.

A special Interdepartmental Review Group reviewed the operation of the Disabled Drivers Scheme. The terms of reference of the Group were to examine the operation of the existing scheme, including the difficulties experienced by the various groups and individuals involved with it, and to consider the feasibility of alternative schemes, with a view to assisting the Minister for Finance in determining the future direction of the scheme.

The Group's Report, published on my Department's website in July 2004, sets out in detail the genesis and development of the scheme. It examines the current benefits, the qualifying medical criteria, the Exchequer costs, relationship with other schemes and similar schemes in other countries. The Report also makes a number of recommendations, both immediate and long-term, referring respectively to the operation of the appeals process and options for the future development of the scheme.

In respect of the long-term recommendations, which included the qualifying disability criteria, I should say that given the scale and scope of the scheme, further changes can only be made after very careful consideration. For this reason, the Government decided in June 2004 that the Minister for Finance would consider the recommendations contained in the Report of the Interdepartmental Review Group in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to the existing and prospective cost of the scheme.

The best way of addressing the transport needs of people with disabilities including the effectiveness, suitability or otherwise of the Disabled Drivers Scheme in that regard will be progressed in consultation with the other Departments who

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have responsibility in this area. In any event, a car tax concession scheme can obviously play only a partial role in dealing with the broader issue of transport needs or difficulties experienced by persons with various disabilities.

Tax Clearance Certificates.

230. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cases in 2005 and each of the previous five years in which a person seeking to obtain a C2 certificate of authorisation have been found by the Revenue Commissioners to have supplied false information in regard to any of the specified requirements which must be fulfilled in order to qualify for receipt of a certificate. [18324/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that when a person applies for a C2 certificate Revenue examines the Form RCT5 as part of the application process. Certificates may be refused until certain conditions are met, refused ultimately or withdrawn after issue if this is deemed appropriate in the circumstances.

I am further advised by Revenue that they do not record the number of cases where a C2 certificate is either refused or withdrawn including cases where false information has been supplied in the application process. Consequently the information required by the Deputy can not be supplied.

Tax Repayments.

231. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Finance if fuel rebate payments were made to Bus

Éireann prior to 1997 under SI 307 of 1975; if rebate payment made related to work which was subcontracted Bus Éireann to private operators. [18446/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The issue of tax repayments made to a specific taxpayer is a matter for the taxpayer and the Revenue Commissioners. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the information requested by the Deputy is confidential to the taxpayer concerned and accordingly they are not in a position to disclose it.

EU Directives.

232. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18450/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): There are seven EU Directives awaiting transposition into Irish law by my Department at the current time. Four of these (2004/17/EC, 2004/18/EC, 2005/51/EC and 2005/75/EC) updating and consolidating existing public procurement Directives, have passed their transposition deadline. Draft regulations are being finalised and these Directives will be transposed on completion of the current Social Partnership talks. The remaining three Directives all have transposition deadlines in 2007 and 2008 and are expected to be transposed on time. Further details are in the table below.

Every effort is made in my Department, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General, to ensure that Directives are transposed on time.

Directive Title and Ref. Number	Date 1st Issued	Transposition Deadline	Timeframe for Implementation
Revised Utilities Sector Procurement Directive 2004/17/EC	30/04/04	30 January 2006	June 2006
Revised Public Sector Procurement Directive 2004/18/EC	30/04/04	30 January 2006	June 2006
Internal Market & Services Commission Directive amending Directive 2004/17/EC and Directive 2004/18/EC 2005/51/EC	01/10/05	31 January 2006	June 2006
Internal Market & Services Directive amending Directive 2004/18/EC 2005/75/EC	09/12/05	31 January 2006	June 2006
Markets in Financial Instruments Directive 2004/39/EC	27/04/04 (original) 14/06/05 (amended)	31 January 2007	Late 2006
Money Laundering Directive 2005/60/EC	11/05/05	December 2007	December 2007
Reinsurance Directive 2005/68/EC	09/12/05	December 2008	June 2006

Ministerial Staff.

233. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18513/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): There have been no new advisers, assistants or other staff employed by me since January 2005. I have, however, continued to retain the services of the following personal staff: Gerry Steadman, Special Advisor (seconded civil servant); Sinead Dooley,

Personal Assistant; and Elaine Hogan, Personal Secretary.

Tax Code.

234. **Mr. G. Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if all back tax will be awarded to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [18530/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The review of a person's tax liability is in the first instance a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. I am advised by Revenue that a repayment of tax is due to the person concerned and that a repayment cheque will issue very shortly.

Water Pollution.

235. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Finance if he will make arrangements to have invasive weed cleared from Lough Larragh and Bilberry Lough, Castlebar, County Mayo in view of its seriously detrimental impact on local angling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18531/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The Commissioners of Public Works have no responsibility for the maintenance of these lakes.

Channels for which the Commissioners have maintenance responsibility flow into Lough Lannagh and the Commissioners have in the past cut reeds in the lake to maintain outfall channels and at the request of local anglers and the Regional Fisheries Board in return for co-operation with channel maintenance works. This practise has been discontinued in recent years because OPW equipment is not ideally suited to the task and because of concerns regarding possible environmental impacts. OPW has no plans at present to clear weed in the lakes.

Child Care Services.

236. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications to date for the €10,000 income disregard recently announced as part of the Government's child care package; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18532/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that statistics are not available at this time which would enable the information requested by the Deputy to be provided. Section 13 of the Finance Act 2006 introduced the child-minding tax exemption. To avail of the scheme, the care provider must be self-employed (not an employee) and include the gross income in their annual return of income to the Revenue Commissioners. The claim for tax exemption is made in this return. An individual must 'elect' to claim the

exemption by notice in writing to the inspector on or before the specified return date for the chargeable period. The specified return date for the 2006 Return is 31 October 2007. However, even with the information contained in these Returns, it will be some time after that before comprehensive statistics are available.

Flood Relief.

237. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Finance the stage at which the application for flood relief works at Arklow, County Wicklow, made by the Arklow Town Council is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18544/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): Consultants have been appointed by Arklow Town Council, with funding from OPW, to produce an Engineering Feasibility Report and OPW is in the process of appointing a consultant to produce an Environmental Impact Assessment. It is expected that these reports, which will establish whether an economically and environmentally acceptable scheme is possible, will be completed early in 2007.

Coastal Erosion.

238. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the allocation which will be provided to Sligo County Council to carry out work on coastal erosion in the county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18309/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. Browne): Responsibility for coast protection rests with the property owner whether it be local authority or a private individual. Sligo County Council submitted a number of proposals to the Department for consideration under the 2006 Coastal Protection Programme. The Council's first priority project was for works at Ardnaglass river outfall at Dunmorán Strand at a total cost of €450,000. The Exchequer allocation for this year's Coastal Protection Programme is €3 million for the entire country. The allocation of the funding available this year will be announced shortly.

Telecommunications Services.

239. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources when the roll-out of broadband to Drumsna, County Leitrim is likely; and if he will make a statement on the roll-out of broadband to rural areas of County Leitrim. [17856/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The provision of telecommunications services, including

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broadband, is a matter in the first instance for the private sector companies operating in a fully liberalised market, regulated by the independent Commission for Communications Regulation.

Technological advances have brought broadband to the forefront of communications in just a few years but the service providers have not risen to the challenge to deliver the service in all areas. Market forces, and the availability of suitable infrastructure and backhaul, will determine whether a company offers broadband in any area.

My Department administers a group broadband scheme which delivers broadband to many under-served areas. Under this Scheme, broadband projects have been approved for Kiltyclogher, Ballinamore, Arigna, Drumshambo, Manorhamilton and Glenfarne in Co. Leitrim. The most recent call for proposals has now closed and I will be launching a further call shortly.

My Department's website *www.broadband.gov.ie* gives full details of broadband availability in all areas, including ADSL, cable, fibre, satellite and fixed wireless. The website also lists prices of the various service levels on offer and contact details for each service provider.

Broadcasting Legislation.

240. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the reason churches had to stop broadcasting to parishioners pending a review of the radio mass service in communities here. [17904/06]

241. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the issues that exist in relation to the broadcasting of mass or other religious services to existing parishioners in view of the fact that the broadcasts are clearly not by radio stations, pirate or otherwise; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that thousands of housebound people rely on this service; the steps which are being put in place to ensure that mass can once again be heard over the airwaves by parishioners; the timeframe for the reintroduction of the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17905/06]

243. **Mr. Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if he will enter discussions with Comreg regarding the transmission of religious services and allow the transmission to continue until such time as the required dedicated radio frequencies are in place in view of the importance of these services to the people of the parishes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18035/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 240, 241 and 243 together.

The primary issue here is one of safety. The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) is the statutory body responsible for the management of the radio spectrum in Ireland and are required to investigate any interference with services, particularly where critical safety issues are concerned.

To facilitate the Deputy, I requested information from ComReg. They indicated to me that they "had been contacted by the Irish Aviation Authority regarding frequency interference with Air Traffic Control systems and as a result of its inquiries ComReg has contacted three Church services". ComReg also stated that "based on the times and patterns of the interference, the Irish Aviation Authority said in its communication to ComReg of 23 April that "Air Traffic Control observed that this problem appears to be common in the morning and also raised the possibility that a local church service may be the source of the problem".

ComReg fully understands the importance of such local community services and intends to permit wireless public address systems to meet the needs of religious and other community organisations. Regulations permitting the transmission of such services are due to be in place later this year.

These Regulations will require my consent as Minister for Communications, under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1926 and both ComReg, who have expertise in the technical area of radio spectrum safety and I fully intend to fulfil our duties in relation to potential safety issues.

Decentralisation Programme.

242. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the sections of his Department which are due to transfer to Cavan; the intended timetable for such a move; the sections of his Department which are expected to remain in Dublin or to transfer to other locations; and the number of officials within his Department who have indicated their willingness to move to Cavan to date. [18014/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The Government's decentralisation programme provides for the relocation of the Department in its entirety. This involves the relocation of the Department's Headquarters to Cavan involving the broad sectoral areas of Communications, Broadcasting, Energy and Natural Resources. The Seafood and Coastal Zone Management functions will relocate to Clonakilty.

The Department's move to Cavan is currently scheduled to take place in 2009 as outlined by the Decentralisation Implementation Group (DIG). Arrangements to have staff in place and operational in line with that schedule will continue to be progressed.

I am pleased to confirm to the House that, having engaged with my department in examining a range of options, the Office of Public Works (OPW) completed the purchase of a prime site in Cavan on Tuesday last, 9 May 2006. We will shortly begin drawing up of detailed specifications for the planned facilities. In the meantime, plans to relocate a number of functions and staff in Cavan this year are well advanced.

Thirty-eight staff members of my Department have, to date, indicated their willingness to relocate to Cavan. In addition, eleven staff members from other Departments/Offices have accepted formal transfer offers to decentralise to Cavan.

Question No. 243 answered with Question No. 240.

Harbours and Piers.

244. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources when work on the entry slip at the quay in Bundoran, for which €114,000 has been allocated, will commence. [18059/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. Browne): In January this year the Department allocated grant aid of €78,375 to Donegal County Council towards the construction of a retaining wall at Bundoran Pier at a total cost of €104,500. It is a condition of the grant aid that

the works be carried out this year. It is a matter for the County Council to progress the works concerned.

Telecommunications Services.

245. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if he will invite Galway County Council to apply for a project (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18251/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I refer the Deputy to the reply to Question No. 5 of 6 April 2006.

Question No. 246 answered with Question No. 213.

EU Directives.

247. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18451/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The table sets out the position regarding EU Directives awaiting transposition by my Department.

Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources

EU Directives Awaiting Transposition

Title and date of origin	Deadline for transposition	Expected date of transposition
Directive 2002/91 of 16 December 2002 on the energy performance of buildings	04.01.06	Mid 2006
Directive 2003/55/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2003 concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas and repealing Directive 98/30/EC	01.07.07	Late 2006
Directive 2004/8/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 February 2004 on the promotion of cogeneration based on a useful heat demand in the internal energy market and amending Directive 92/42/EEC	21.02.06 part 01.08.06 part	Mid 2006
Directive 2004/67/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 April 2004 concerning measures to safeguard security of natural gas supply	19.05.06	May 2006
Directive 2005/89/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 January 2006 concerning measures to safeguard security of electricity supply and infrastructure investment	February 2008	February 2008

Inland Fisheries.

248. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources when he proposes to introduce the Inland Fisheries Authority Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18480/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. Browne): The Deputy will be aware that details of the Government's policy for the restructuring of the inland fisheries sector, which is based on the recommendations contained within the report by Farrell Grant Sparks follow-

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ing their review of the sector, were published last November. The Government has decided that a fundamental restructuring of the sector is required. It considered that this reform would result in a better model for the State's role in the sector, better resource management, more and better involvement of stakeholders, better corporate governance and value for money.

As the first step in the reform process, the Government has authorised the drafting of a Bill to establish a National Inland Fisheries Authority, which will subsume the executive functions of the Central and Regional Fisheries Boards. The current fisheries boards will be transformed into Regional Advisory Boards. These statutory bodies will focus on regional issues and will be widely consulted on the detailed implementation of the second phase in the restructuring process.

I hope to have the legislation necessary for the establishment of the National Inland Fisheries Authority and Regional Advisory Boards enacted by the end of this year. Naturally, this timeframe depends on the complexity of the legislation currently under development and competing priorities in the legislative calendar for 2006.

Fisheries Protection.

249. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the extent of roach population in Lough Corrib and Lough Mask; the consequence for trout population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18481/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. Browne): I am advised by the Central Regional Fisheries Board and Western Regional Fisheries Board that currently there is no more than a moderate stock of Roach in Lough Corrib and a smaller stock in Lough Mask. In the opinion of the Boards they are unlikely to have detrimental effects on the trout population. The Boards point out that the larger Ferox Trout in Lough Corrib are now feeding extensively on Roach.

Departmental Staff.

250. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18514/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): In April 2005 I appointed Ms Tanya Harrington as Policy Co-ordinator (Energy, Communications and Broadcasting) at my Department. Ms

Harrington's role is to perform any duties which may be assigned to her from time to time as appropriate to this position. These include providing advice to me and the Department on the ongoing formulation of appropriate policy responses in the areas of Energy, Communications and Broadcasting and monitoring, facilitating and securing the achievement of Government objectives in the aforementioned areas, as requested by me.

Environmental Policy.

251. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the extent of saturation by nutrients of the unique marl soil bed of Lough Carra, County Mayo; the stage of implementation of the preservation and development plan for Lough Carra under the Committee of Western District Management Group; the resources open to the group in view of its unique and sensitive ecological balance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18538/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. Browne): My colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has overall responsibility for Environmental Policy. I understand that Galway Co. Council is the lead local authority for the implementation of the Water Framework Directive in the Western River Basin District (WRBD) where Lough Carra is located. A management group, steering group and advisory group have been put in place. The North Western Regional Fisheries Board is represented on the WRBD project steering group and the Western Regional Fisheries Board is represented on the management committee. The Fishery Boards as relevant public authorities, as defined in the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 23003, are active partners within the Western River Basin District group and are also involved in a number of projects.

The Western Regional Fisheries Board has advised me that the lake risk assessment summary places Lough Carra in category 1a, — that is, at significant risk. The characterisation report is available at www.wrbd.ie. I am advised that a draft lakes monitoring programme is due for publication on the 22nd June 2006. I understand that this will be comprehensive programme and is due to start in January 2007.

State Property.

252. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the ownership of the waters of Lough Corrib, Lough Mask, Lough Conn and Lough Carra; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18540/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. Browne): I am advised by the Office of Public Works that Lough Corrib, Lough Mask, Lough Conn and Lough Carra are owned by the Minister for Finance.

Centenarian Bounty.

253. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if Irish citizens who reach their 100th birthday and living abroad are entitled to the special presidential bounty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18426/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): The Government has widened the eligibility criteria of the Centenarian Bounty scheme such that all Irish citizens born in the island of Ireland who have reached 100 years of age, wherever they may reside, are now eligible to apply for the Bounty. My Department will take the lead in processing applications from people resident outside the State and officials are already in contact with the families of a number of applicants resident in Northern Ireland, Britain and the USA.

State Airports.

254. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his permission was sought for a stop-over of Israeli war planes in Shannon Airport recently; if so, his views on same; if not, his views on the presence of such planes in an Irish civilian airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18505/06]

260. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Israeli warplanes recently stopped over in Shannon Airport; his views on such an event in the context of Irish neutrality and of the Government's position with regard to the occupation of Palestine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18411/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): I propose to answer Questions Nos. 254 and 260 together.

At the outset, I would point out to the House that the two aircraft in question — both Boeing 707s — are not warplanes. On 28 April 2006, the Department of Foreign Affairs having, in accordance with standard practice, consulted with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, gave permission for two Boeing 707 aircraft operated by the Israeli Air Force to land at Shannon Airport on 5 May. The landing permission for these two aircraft was granted subject to the normal conditions that apply to landings at Irish airports by foreign military aircraft; namely, that the aircraft would be unarmed, would carry

no arms, ammunition or explosives, would not engage in intelligence gathering, and that the flights in question would not form any part of military exercises or operations. The practice of permitting landings by foreign military aircraft at Irish airports, subject to such conditions, has been in place for more than fifty years, and has no bearing whatsoever on Ireland's policy of military neutrality.

The search for a lasting and peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been a central concern of Irish foreign policy, under successive Governments. The Government and its partners in the EU firmly believe that the only route to a just and lasting settlement is through the negotiation of a mutually acceptable two-state solution. This must lead to the coexistence of two viable, sovereign and independent states with agreed international borders. We will continue to work to promote an environment for negotiation, despite the obstacles which are so obvious at this point. We will also continue to raise directly with the Israeli Government our concerns on Israeli policies and activities in the Occupied Territories, which are contrary to international law and which threaten to undermine a viable two-State solution.

Northern Ireland Issues.

255. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that up to 15% of UDR members were members of loyalist paramilitaries; and the action he will take when he is dealing with justice matters and the British Government. [17845/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): I have noted with concern the contents of a document dated 14 August 1973, emanating from British Military Intelligence, extracts of which were recently printed in the *Irish News*. This document stated that the assessment at that time was that between 5% and 15% of the membership of the UDR were also simultaneously members of a number of loyalist paramilitary organisations. Following the publication of this document, we raised the matter with the British authorities and requested further information through the framework of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. We will continue to pursue the matter through that framework.

I understand also that the document in question has been forwarded to the Historical Enquiries Team of the PSNI, whose task it is to investigate all unsolved murders in Northern Ireland arising from the conflict there. The HET is staffed by senior police officers from outside Northern Ireland. The Government will continue to monitor the ongoing work of the HET in this regard.

[Mr. D. Ahern.]

The UDR was subsequently amalgamated with the Royal Irish Rangers to form the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR) in 1992. In August 2005, the British Government announced that the Northern-Ireland based Battalions of the RIR would be disbanded as part of the overall normalisation of security arrangements. The Government is closely monitoring the ongoing roll-out of this normalisation process which includes the closure of barracks and military installations, and a sizeable reduction in the overall number of British troops stationed in Northern Ireland.

Diplomatic Representation.

256. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs further to his response to Parliamentary Question No. 208 of 26 April 2006, the number and type of representations made by the Irish Embassy to prison authorities in the case of a person (details supplied); the dates these representations were made; and the responses received from the prison authorities. [17851/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): There have been five prison visits to the person concerned. There has also been direct personal contact with the Governor, the Deputy Governor and the Senior Charge Nurse, as well as written and telephone contact with the prison authorities, including on the medical concerns of the prisoner. The most recent contact with the prison authorities was on 10th April last.

During the contact on 10 April, which was by telephone to the Governor of Full Sutton, the Embassy was assured that the prisoner was receiving ongoing medical attention for his injuries, that the Governor would speak personally to him, and that he would be medically reassessed. An officer from the Embassy will again visit the person concerned on Wednesday, 17 May. The officer will raise with the prison authorities the current medical facilities being afforded to the prisoner, and any other appropriate issue that the prisoner may wish to have raised.

Foreign Conflicts.

257. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing military deployment against the ethnic Kurdish population of Turkey; if the Government have protested against abuse of human rights by the Turkish authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17855/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): I am aware of the disturbing reports of violence in Southeast Turkey, particularly in recent weeks. The security situation in the Southeast, which had gradually improved since 1999, has become increasingly difficult in recent months since the resumption of violence by the PKK, an organisation which appears on the EU list of terrorist

organisations. This has led to frequent clashes between the security forces and armed groups and has resulted, tragically, in a substantial number of casualties, including mortalities. Very regrettably, there have also been a number of civilian deaths.

The Government's concerns about the human rights situation in Turkey, including the situation of some 15 million people of Kurdish ethnic origin, are raised on a regular basis in our contacts with the Turkish Government and its representatives, and in co-operation with our partners in the EU. In recent years, Turkey has made significant progress in the adoption of wide-ranging political and legal reforms. Important human rights reforms have been introduced and legislation has been enacted aimed at strengthening the enforcement of fundamental rights. These reforms include enhancing the cultural rights of all citizens, including those of Kurdish origin. In this context I welcome developments currently underway to provide broadcasting in the Kurdish language.

Together with our EU partners, and through our Embassy in Ankara, we will continue to monitor the situation and to stress the importance of adherence to the standards enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Official Hospitality.

258. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will provide a full listing of the contents of his Department's wine cellar, including the vintages, quantity, dates acquired, prices paid and supplier; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in this regard. [18087/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): The Department of Foreign Affairs maintains a stock of wine for use in relation to State and Official hospitality. There is significant saving to the tax payer in this direct purchase approach, as against sourcing wines for individual events through a caterer and being subject to a mark-up in the price. The range of wines in stock also facilitates choices being made that are suitable for events at various levels.

Appendix A lists the names, vintages, quantity, date of most recent purchase and unit price at date of most recent purchase of wines purchased since 1 January 2002. In the period since 1 January 2002 the Department has purchased wines from a number of suppliers, including G. Elliott & Sons Ltd, Henry J. Archer & Sons Ltd, Kevin Parsons Wines Ltd, Mitchell & Son Wine Merchants, O'Briens Wine Off-Licence, Searsons Wine Merchants and The Wine Vaults.

Appendix B lists the names, vintages, quantity and unit price at date of most recent purchase of wines purchased prior to 1 January 2002. It was not possible, in the time available, to supply the date of most recent purchase or supplier of wines purchased prior to 1 January 2002.

Appendix A: Wines purchased since 1 January 2002

Name	Vintage	Quantity in stock	Date of Most Recent Purchase	Unit Price at date of Most Recent Purchase
Angoves, Chardonnay	2000	7	25/03/2002	9.59
Angroves CR Classic Reserve Shiraz	1998	10	25/03/2002	12.08
Anselmi San Vincenzo	2000	2	09/07/2003	12.29
Barola Riserva della Casa	1997	52	14/12/2005	49.95
Ca da bosio, Gavi di Gavi	2005	16	15/03/2006	12.94
Chablis Premier Cru “Brocard”	2004	48	15/12/2005	15.99
Chablis Premier Cru, Montmains	2003	30	30/03/2006	16.49
Château Chasse Spleen	2001	24	30/03/2006	32.95
Château Clarke	2001	6	30/03/2006	22.73
Château de Blagny, “Louis Latour”	2002	14	14/12/2005	37.95
Château de la Ligne	2003	24	16/12/2005	18.95
Château Fourcas Dupré, L istrace Médoc	1999	72	10/05/2004	16.52
Château Gaudrelle Vouvray	2000	2	26/03/2002	12.80
Château Kirwan Margaux	2000	48	31/05/2005	65.00
Château Leoville Barton	1998	108	31/05/2005	68.00
Château Lynch Bages, Grand Cru Classé	1998	96	15/12/2005	58.65
Château Peyros “Magenta” Madrian	1999	23	14/12/2005	15.95
Château Phelan Segur	2002	60	15/12/2005	28.04
Château Vignelaure	1997	30	26/03/2002	15.62
Chatelain Pouilly Fumé	2002	16	05/02/2004	10.49
Collio, Pinot Grigio, Collavini	2004	5	07/10/2005	10.95
Collio, Pinot Grigio, Collavini	2002	23	10/10/2005	10.95
Constantia Uitsig	2001	20	30/03/2006	21.95
Domaine Ardhu y Bourgogne	1998	18	27/03/2002	23.00
Domaine Bitouzet Prieur, Meursault	2003	24	30/03/2006	27.23
Domaine Brusset Venise Rouge	2001	23	16/12/2005	34.50
Domaine de le Madene Fleurie	2003	36	16/12/2005	15.95
Domaine Grand Veneur Châteauneuf de Pape	2002	36	16/12/2005	24.95
Domaine Jacqueson Rully Premier Cru	1997	22	16/05/2002	19.50
Duos Quintas, Vino Tinto Riserva	2000	21	06/07/2004	22.76
Finca Sobreno Riserva	1999	15	14/04/2004	16.84
Grand Feudo, Riserva	1998	20	09/06/2004	12.95
Guigal Côtes du Rhône	1999	33	03/03/2005	10.65
Höpler Zweigelt Barrique	2000	14	24/01/2004	15.95
Höpler Zweigelt Barrique	2002	6	24/01/2004	15.95
la Porte Caillou, Sancerre	2004	33	31/05/2005	14.40
Lager de Cervera, Albarino	2004	21	30/03/2006	17.95
Leeuwin Estate “Art Series” Cabernet Sauvignon	1997	34	27/03/2002	23.48
Leeuwin Estate “Art Series” Riesling	2002	19	04/07/2005	31.50
Lytton Springs, Zinfandel	1999	36	26/03/2002	31.88
Mahoney Estate, Pinot Noir	1999	25	26/03/2002	21.74
Marchesi di Barolo, Gavi de Gavi	2004	11	16/12/2005	20.95
Menetour-Salon Morogues	2000	8	26/03/2002	12.80
Napa Vista, Chardonnay	1999	3	29/01/2003	21.50
Napa Vista, Merlot	1998	5	29/01/2003	21.50
Naughton Flight, Shiraz	2003	12	16/12/2005	19.95
Nijinski Cabernet Sauvignon	1999	92	26/03/2002	8.72
Portal del Alto, Grand Reserva Carmenére	2001	12	08/11/2004	17.95
Pouilly Fuissé	2001	11	30/01/2004	12.74

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Name	Vintage	Quantity in stock	Date of Most Recent Purchase	Unit Price at date of Most Recent Purchase
Rocca delle Macie, Chianti Classico	2000	9	26/03/2002	12.61
Rockford Moppa Springs	1998	47	26/03/2002	21.96
Rockford Shiraz	1998	12	26/03/2002	33.28
Rockford, Riesling	1999	10	26/03/2002	18.63
Roero Ameis	2004	19	30/03/2006	16.49
Ruedo, Solar de Iriarte Sauvignon Blanc	2003	6	14/12/2005	12.50
Salice Salentino Riserva Leone de Catris	2002	35	14/12/2005	18.95
Santa Rita Merlot	2004	24	29/11/2005	11.00
Sierra Cantabria, Rioja	1999	17	03/03/2005	14.81
Simčić, Teodor Belo Reserva	2001	3	April 2004	21.36
Solar de Samaniego Reserva	1999	36	30/03/2006	18.97
Veuve Cliquot NV	Non Vintage	9	05/02/2004	38.50
Vina Ardenza la Rioja Alta Reserva	1998	17	14/12/2005	27.00
Wieninger, Blauburgunder	2000	24	24/01/2004	16.49
Zenato, Valpolicella	2003	11	15/03/2006	12.00
Zisola	2004	12	15/03/2006	11.50

Appendix B: Wines purchased prior to 1 January 2002

Name	Vintage	Quantity in stock	Unit Price at date of Most Recent Purchase
Angroves CR Classic Reserve Shiraz	1999	5	12.08
Argiano Brunello di Montalcino	1988	4	23.05
Château Brance Cantenac Margaux	1985	9	37.77
Château Talbot	1995	120	38.41
Château Yon-Figeac Grand Cru Classé	1993	18	21.20
Château du Tertre Margaux	1995	9	15.68
Château Leoville Barton Cru Classé	1995	2	72.38
Reservé de Barton Saint Julian	1998	60	21.82
Château Rausan Ségla Margaux	1982	2	28.82
CVNE Imperial Reserva Rioja	1988	9	16.39
CVNE Vina Real Rioja	1988	5	16.65
Domaine de L'arlot Premier Cru	1989	32	28.58
Don Melchor Cabernet Sauginon	1991	36	13.45
Kanonkop, Pinotage	2000	7	22.69
Peter Lehmann, Stonewell, Shiraz	1992	24	33.80
Pio Cesare, Barola	1991	17	22.92
Volnay les Caillerets	1992	36	25.53
Delheim, Shiraz	2000	8	12.18
Chanson beaujolais Villages	2000	8	10.10
Castell de Remei, Gotim Bru	1999	10	10.10
Allendorf, Riesling	2000	16	14.59
Louis Latour Charlemagne Grand Cru	1998	2	19.95
Tasman Bay, Chardonnay	1996	8	16.01
Delheim, Chardonnay	2000	9	10.58
Leeuwin Estate "Art Series" Chardonnay	1999	21	31.48
Luis Felipe Edwards, Chardonnay	2000	6	18.63
Moët & Chandon	Non Vintage	17	27.06

State Passports.

259. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of valid Irish passports currently in circulation; the number of passports issued in each year from 2002 to date in 2006; the number of these for each year that were replacements for passports lost or stolen; the cost to the State for each year from 2002 to date in 2006 for running the Passport Office; the number of passports issued from Embassies or Consulates overseas; the number of Embassies or Consulates with the necessary facilities to produce machine-readable passports; the number of diplomatic or official passports in circulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18183/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): It is not possible to be precise about the number of Irish passports in circulation at any one time. However, as passports normally have a ten year validity, a relevant statistic is that between 1996 and 2005 over 4,650,000 passports were issued. But as passports (a) for children under three have only a 3 year validity and (b) between the ages of three and seventeen have a 5 year validity, the above figure clearly over-estimates the situation. The number of passports issued in the years between 2002 and 2006 were as follows.

Year	Number
2002	537,000
2003	555,000
2004	607,000
2005	672,000
2006 [Jan-March]	136,000

The number of passports issued from 2002, on the basis that the previous passports were reported as lost, stolen or misplaced, were as follows.

Year	Number
2002	18,933
2003	21,815
2004	22,318
2005	25,680
2006 January-March	7,917

The number of passports issued by Embassies and Consulates abroad between 2002 and 2005 were as follows.

Year	Number
2002	88,000
2003	95,000
2004	100,000
2005	105,000

Since late 2005, when the vast majority of overseas Missions were connected directly to the Automated Passport system, passports are normally issued by the Passport Office in Dublin and returned to Missions for forwarding to applicants, rather than being issued locally as was the case previously.

There are currently 65 Missions which provide passport facilities to citizens abroad. 61 of these are now linked to the Automated Passport system and have the capacity to issue machine readable passports in emergency situations (that is, where there is insufficient time to await the regular passport being issued and returned by the Passport Office in Dublin). It is planned to roll out this facility to 2 more Missions in the coming month, leaving the last 2 Missions to be completed shortly thereafter.

Diplomatic passports are normally issued for a 5 year period. From January 2002 to April 2006 a total of 2,087 Diplomatic Passports were issued. During the same period, a total of 6,897 Official passports were issued, many of which were provided to members of the Defence Forces travelling abroad for peace keeping duties.

The total cost of running the Passport Service, including the four Passport Offices in Cork, Balbriggan, Molesworth Street and London, has been assessed at €30.5 million for 2005. In the time involved, it was not possible to collate precise figures for the previous years but these will be forwarded to the Deputy as quickly as possible.

As I have already announced publicly, I intend to bring forward comprehensive passport legislation later in the year.

Question No. 260 answered with Question No. 254.

EU Directives.

261. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18452/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): My Department, which has an overall coordinating role in relation to EU matters, does not as a rule implement legislation designed to transpose EU measures into Irish law. The Department is not currently dealing with any such legislation. The Government is strongly committed to meeting the deadlines for transposition. The Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee on European Union Affairs (ICCEUA), chaired by my colleague, Deputy Noel Treacy, Minister of State for European Affairs, provides a high-level forum for oversee-

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ing the transposition of EU legislation. In addition, last December the Department of the Taoiseach published Guidelines on Best Practice on Transposition of EU Directives. The Cabinet Committee on European Affairs keeps the issue of transposition under regular review.

Departmental Staff.

262. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the name and role of advisers,

Personal appointees employed on contract by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Name	Role/Title	Date of Appointment
Mr. Ciarán Ó Cuinn	Special Adviser (non-established)	30 September 2004
Mr. Richard Moore	Press Adviser (non-established)	30 September 2004
Ms Christine Maguire	Personal Assistant; former Dáil Secretary (non-established)	30 September 2004
Ms Myra Wall	Personal Secretary (non-established)	30 September 2004

Sports Capital Programme.

263. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to the success that a club (details supplied) in County Galway has in the provision of sport and recreation facilities; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that the provision of extra flood lighting on the grounds is vital to accommodate over 16 teams in the area; if his attention has further been drawn to the major plans the club has for future development; if his attention has further been drawn to the positive community spirit that is ingrained in this club; if he will take all those matters into account when deciding on a level of grant aid for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18363/06]

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 throughout the country. The programme is advertised on an annual basis.

Applications for funding under the 2006 programme were invited through advertisements in the Press on November 27th and 28th last. The closing date for receipt of applications was January 20th 2006. All applications received before the deadline, including one from the organisation in question, are currently 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.

264. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he will consider the

assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18515/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern):

The following table sets out the names and the roles of staff currently employed by me. These officers are employed on a full-time basis under terms and conditions of employment set by the Minister for Finance. The appointments will terminate no later than the date on which I cease to hold this office.

approval of grant aid under the sports capital grant to a club (details supplied) in County Galway; if his attention has been drawn to the significance this club has on the lives of many young people in the general area; if his attention has further been drawn to the ambitious plans this club has to make more facilities available to the young people of the town; if his attention has further been drawn to the great community backing the club has locally; if approval will be given of grant aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18364/06]

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 throughout the country. The programme is advertised on an annual basis.

Applications for funding under the 2006 programme were invited through advertisements in the Press on November 27th and 28th last. The closing date for receipt of applications was January 20th 2006. All applications received before the deadline, including one from the organisation in question, are currently 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.

265. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the capital allocation for arts projects in 2004 and 2005 per county; the projected sum for 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18390/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The main vehicle for capital funding through my Department is the Arts & Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS), under which almost €43 million was provided for arts and cultural facilities around the country. This scheme commenced in 2001 but many projects are still in the course of completion. The increase in the availability of facilities and the enhancement of their quality, as a result of the scheme, has greatly improved access to and participation in the arts for a great many people all around the country.

Allocations under ACCESS on a county-by-county basis are set out in the following table.

Allocations under ACCESS

County	Total Allocation
	€
Mayo	1,060,231
Louth	2,539,476
Limerick	1,046,265
Clare	4,059,353
Sligo	2,920,398
Monaghan	663,737
Cork	1,276,077
Leitrim	3,174,345
Kerry	1,000,731
Kilkenny	704,705
Waterford	825,330
Meath	3,021,977
Dublin	6,146,532
Tipperary	2,920,398
Wicklow	1,777,633
Galway	3,174,345
Wexford	421,553
Westmeath	215,855
Carlow	3,174,345
Donegal	2,634,706
Total Allocations	42,757,992

In addition my Department made the following allocations to other capital projects on a county-by-county basis in 2004 and 2005.

2004 Capital Allocations

County	Total Allocation
	€
Cork	20,000
Dublin	64,388
Kerry	1,171,185
Roscommon	22,000
Total Allocations	1,277,573

2005 Capital Allocations

County	Total Allocation
	€
Tipperary	1,847,657
Limerick	420,000
Waterford	140,000
Cork	30,000
Dublin	4,030,968
Kerry	2,070,000
Wexford	26,495,000
Total Allocations	35,033,625

To date in 2006 my Department has allocated €2 million in capital grants for arts and cultural projects. The details on a county-by-county basis are set out in the following table.

2006 Capital Allocations

County	Total Allocation
	€
Dublin	24,000,000

EU Directives.

266. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18453/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): There are no European Directives for which my Department has responsibility that are awaiting implementation.

Sports Grounds.

267. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if he has had discussions with the FAI in relation to the proposal to move St. Patrick's Athletic from Richmond Park, Inchicore; if he has met with other soccer clubs, including St. Patrick's Athletic on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18479/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The Genesis report on the eircom league highlighted the need for Dublin clubs to consider ground sharing as a means of securing the significant public investment required to provide modern city stadia necessary to attract higher attendances. St. Patrick's Athletic FC is one of the four main Dublin clubs with which FAI Ireland has sought to discuss this concept with a view to identifying the main issues for the clubs concerned. The FAI has kept me and my

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Department informed on this matter and advised me at our meeting earlier this year, that discussions are ongoing with the clubs involved. It is my understanding that St. Patrick's Athletic FC has agreed to explore a number of options including ground sharing at Tallaght. Any proposal involving St. Patrick's Athletic FC moving from Inchicore will be a matter for the club itself to decide.

Departmental Staff.

268. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18516/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): In June 2002 following the establishment of my Department I appointed a Special Adviser, Mr. Tony Cotter, a Personal Assistant, Mr. Colin Miller and a Secretarial Assistant, Ms Mary O'Connell. I am in the process of appointing a new Special Adviser to replace Mr. Cotter, who has recently transferred to another Department. These appointments were made in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Public Service Management Act 1997 and Department of Finance guidelines on such matters.

Competition Law.

269. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the position in relation to the Competition Authority who must take their proofs to the Courts, to the High Court in the case of a civil breach of the Act or to the Central Criminal Court via the Director of Public Prosecutions in the case of a criminal breach, as these instances must be proven to high standard and take up considerable resources in terms of staff allocation, time, legal fees, expert witnesses and so on as it takes approximately six officers two years to put together a file for the DPP on a significant cartel case; if in view of same he will consider allocating more resources in order that his staff can investigate all complaints from the public to the highest level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17866/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): I appreciate that investigations of breaches of competition law by the Competition Authority are difficult, complex, resource intensive and time consuming, as is the case with investigations of all white-collar type offences. I secured an increase in funding for the Authority in 2006 and 7 new posts were approved for its Cartel Investigation Division. A recruitment campaign for these posts is currently underway and it will result in a doubling of the Division's resources. The Authority expects that when the new posts have been filled it will be in

a position to build on its recent successes in the criminal courts where, in one cartel case alone, it has, through prosecutions brought by the DPP, secured 15 convictions to date with further trials pending. These are the first criminal convictions on indictment ever secured in Ireland or in the EU for competition law offences.

In relation to civil cases I understand that the Competition Authority is satisfied that its current resources are sufficient to properly investigate alleged breaches of the Competition Act and to initiate legal proceedings where appropriate. Frequently a solution acceptable to the Authority in such cases is reached following negotiations with the parties. The Authority may also settle cases without recourse to the courts where offending parties recognise and remedy their anti-competitive behaviour. Nonetheless I intend to keep the Authority's resources under review.

Employment Standards.

270. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he has had consultations with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to discuss the way in which both Departments, with the assistance of the Competition Authority, can investigate the practices of anti-competitive activity, tax evasion and black market avoidance of social and safety standards including obligations under the regulations of his Department with respect to minimum wages; if he has measured the scale of the black economy in the construction industry as a percentage of total output in consultation with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government; the action he proposes to take to deal with this problem in order to ensure the survival of small and medium sized enterprises who are endeavouring to remain compliant in an industry that is subject to enormous pressures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17919/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The Minister has had no specific consultations with the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in relation to the issues raised by the Deputy. As regards investigating anti-competitive activity, the Competition Authority is an independent statutory body responsible for the enforcement of competition law in the State. Accordingly, any allegations of anti-competitive activity should be referred to the Authority for investigation. The Authority also a competition advocacy role and its Advocacy Division is available to advise Ministers and their Departments in relation to competition matters.

The Health and Safety Authority is responsible for enforcement of Safety, Health and Welfare at Work legislation. In order to make best use of its resources, the Authority has prioritised a number of sectors for attention in its Programme of Work

for 2006 including the high-risk Construction Industry. With specific regard to the Construction Sector, the Authority plans to: conduct a major national road show which will visit a minimum of 5,000 construction workers; carry out a focused programme of 7,500 construction site inspections covering appointment of duty-holders and assignment of responsibilities, safety and health plans and safety statements, work at heights, reversing vehicle safety, welfare arrangements, and training arrangements; hold industry information briefings on the Construction Regulations targeting managers and designers and including vibration, noise, work at height, underground services, roof work, and the lifting equipment regulations; research the issues involved in the employment of non-English speaking workers; and prepare guidance on construction-specific aspects of work at a height and progress draft codes of practice on pre-cast construction, concrete anchors, and client best practice. Of particular note for small to medium enterprises in the sector, the Authority is preparing a Code of Practice on compliance with the legislation for those employing three or less.

The Minister has no information on the scale of the black economy in the construction industry. However, the Revenue Commissioners recently announced a targeted approach towards the Construction Industry/Property sector for 2006. This will involve up to 25% of Revenue's audit personnel concentrating specifically on this sector.

The wages and employment conditions of workers employed in the Construction Industry are governed and safeguarded by the Registered Employment Agreement (Construction Industry Wages and Conditions of Employment) Variation Order, which is enforced by the Labour Inspectorate of my Department. Labour Inspectors are empowered to seek compliance with payment of the statutory minimum rates of pay specified in the Agreement.

The enforcement of the provisions of a Registered Employment Agreement may also be effected under the Industrial Relations Acts. A trade union, an association of employers or an individual employer may complain to the Labour Court that a particular employer is not complying with a Registered Employment Agreement. If, after investigating a complaint, the Court is satisfied that the employer is in breach of a Registered Employment Agreement it may by order direct compliance with the agreement. Failure to comply with such an order is an offence punishable by a fine.

If the Deputy is aware of any breaches of the Registered Employment Agreement, he should please contact the Labour Inspectorate of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, which will investigate any allegations in this regard.

Health and Safety Regulations.

271. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for

Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of foreign workers who have suffered accidents during the course of their work on building sites. [18029/06]

272. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the health and safety measures which have been put in place on building sites to specifically target foreign workers who do not have English as a first language. [18030/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 272 together.

A lack of clear communication and of understanding in any workplace could potentially pose a risk to the health and safety of the workers therein. It is clear that in the construction sector there are many workers who do not have English as a first language and, accordingly, it is appropriate that employers and those who are in control of workplaces in this country put in place clear systems of communication to ensure that all safety critical information is conveyed clearly to all workers in the workplace.

Section 9 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 specifies that the information provided to workers must be in a form, manner and language that can be understood. It must include information on hazards, risks and measures taken as regards safety, health and welfare and the names of emergency staff and safety representatives. Furthermore, under section 20 of the 2005 Act, an employer is obliged to prepare a written safety statement, based on the identification of hazards and an assessment of risks. This statement, which sets out how the safety, health and welfare of the employees will be secured and managed, also must be in a form, manner and, as appropriate, language that can be understood.

In addition to the statutory obligations set out above, the Health and Safety Authority recognises the new challenges that the growth of non-English speaking people within the workforce brings. This is evidenced by the launch last year of a new Authority initiative, Safe System of Work Plan (SSWP), aimed at reducing injuries and deaths on construction sites. The initiative relies heavily on pictograms to explain and clarify hazards and controls, thereby creating a wordless document where safety can be communicated to all workers regardless of literacy or language skills. The Safe System of Work Plan aims to focus on those in the construction industry who are most at risk, allowing them to ensure that all necessary safety controls are in place prior to the commencement of planned work.

The number of foreign workers who have suffered accidents during the course of their work on building sites, as reported to the Health and Safety Authority, is contained in the following table.

[Mr. Killeen.]

Table 1

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 (to 12 May)
Reported injuries to foreign workers	73	143	140	166	263	490	191

273. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he has received new draft regulations from the health and safety authority to provide for improved safety conditions in the construction sector; if these new regulations have been approved by Government; when he expects same to come into operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18065/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The Health and Safety Authority began a consultation process with the Social Partners and key players in the construction industry on proposed new Construction Regulations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work legislation in 2003. The Authority undertook public consultation during a 6-week period towards the end of last year. A total of 46 submissions were received during this latter period.

The proposed new Regulations are designed to replace previous Regulations which are in force since 2001 and 2003, to fully implement European Directives relating to the construction sector and to give regulatory effect to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005. The regulations have also been examined as part of government commitments to introduce simplification in legislation. It is intended that the new regulations will be more easily readable to those working in the sector to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the intent and responsibilities laid out in the regulations.

The Regulations were passed to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel last month having been approved by the Board of the Health & Safety Authority. I expect that the Statutory Instrument will be ready for signing into law within a few months.

Social Partnership.

274. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the progress made to date with regard to his consultations regarding the possible establishment of a joint labour committee to protect the interests of domestic workers in the context of the social partnership talks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18066/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The Labour Relations Commission commissioned the University of Limerick to carry

out a review of the Joint Labour Committee system in 2005. Arising from this review and following bilateral consultations with the social partners and stakeholders, the Department prepared a paper as the basis for implementation of the review in further consultation with the social partners and stakeholders, in the context of the current partnership talks. Discussions with the social partners are ongoing regarding the appropriate measures to support the employment rights of domestic workers.

Legislative Programme.

275. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if it is his intention to introduce legislation to provide for the creation of a new offence of corporate manslaughter as suggested by the Law Reform Commission in October 2003 and recommended by the Commission in its recent report to which a draft Bill is appended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18067/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The Law Reform Commission published its report in October 2005. In it the Commission recommended that as the current law of corporate liability for manslaughter does not provide a clear basis for constructing liability, a new basis, in legislative form, is necessary. To this end the Commission included the draft of a short Bill in its report.

The Commission also recommended that there should be individual statutory liability for managers who were culpable in the causation of death. Section 80 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 provides for directors, managers or other similar officer of an undertaking to be held liable by the Courts for an offence that is attributable to connivance or neglect on their part.

While this is a considerable step forward in implementing the recommendations of the Commission, the Attorney General's Office was of the opinion at the time of the drafting of the Bill, which is now the 2005 Act, that there were much broader issues than safety, health and welfare at work relating to the overall criminal justice system which needed to be considered. Therefore it was decided that it was not appropriate to deal with the whole issue of corporate manslaughter in a Bill which was providing for the law and regulation of occupational safety, health and welfare. It should be noted for the record that the Commission accepted the Attorney General's

Office view that the scope of the 2005 Act was narrower than the proposed offence recommended by it in its report.

Further consideration of the recommendations in the report of the Law Reform Commission will now take place primarily at Government level by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in the context of his main responsibilities for the criminal law system.

Consumer Strategy Report.

276. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the progress made to date with regard to the implementation of the report of the Consumer Strategy Group; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[18068/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): As I advised the House previously the Consumer Strategy Group Report “Make Consumers Count” was published in May 2005, and to date considerable progress has been made in progressing the Report’s recommendations.

The Report’s core recommendation that a new National Consumer Agency, incorporating the existing Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs, be established was fully accepted by the Government. In this regard, I hope to publish the legislation establishing the new Agency later this year and to have the NCA up and running early in 2007.

In the interim until the new Agency is formally established, I appointed a Board to the NCA in June 2005 to act in an interim capacity. The Interim Board has been very active in advocating the consumer’s cause and raising the awareness of consumer rights. The Interim Board will continue and intensify its activities throughout the course of 2006. The Interim Board will also have a key role in preparing the way for the fully operational Agency itself.

The abolition of the Groceries Order, which was the other significant recommendation in the Consumer Strategy Group Report, was effectively implemented with the commencement of the Competition (Amendment) Act 2006 on 20 March 2006. The new Act in addition to abolishing the Groceries Order also strengthens the provisions of the 2002 Competition Act by specifically prohibiting the fixing of minimum retail prices by suppliers, unfair discrimination in the grocery trade and the payment of advertising allowances and “hello money”.

As regards the other recommendations of the CSG, and in particular those recommendations relating to my own Department, a number of these have already been implemented. The Investment Funds Companies and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2005 significantly increased the fines for breaching consumer protection laws as recommended by the CSG. In addition the Bill

establishing the National Consumer Agency will also update and amend a significant number of existing statutes within the existing framework of consumer law so as to meet the needs of the modern consumer, which was also recommended by the CSG.

In total the CSG Report contains over 30 separate recommendations which were directed at various Government Departments and Agencies whose activities directly impact upon the interests of consumers. A High Level Inter-Departmental Committee was established, with the approval of the Government, to examine and prepare a detailed plan for the implementation of the recommendations. The Committee’s Report, which was endorsed by the Government, was recently published on my Department’s website.

I am satisfied that in the twelve months since the publication of the CSG Report considerable progress has been made in progressing the Group’s recommendations. I am confident that this progress will continue and that the implementation of these recommendations will help to ensure that the deficits identified by the Consumer Strategy Group are addressed.

Job Losses.

277. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of persons who were made redundant during each year from 2002 to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18069/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The total number of employees made redundant from the 1st January 2002 to 30th April 2006 was 106,121. The annual break-down is as follows:

Year	
2002	24,432
2003	25,769
2004	25,041
2005	23,156
Sub Total	98,398
2006 January-April	7,723
Total	106,121

This figure shows the number of employees who actually qualified for statutory redundancy lump sum payments. It does not reflect those who lost their jobs with less than two years service in an employment.

Job Creation.

278. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created during each fiscal quarter from

[Mr. Quinn.]

quarter one of 2002 to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18070/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The tabular statement shows employment figures recorded by the Central Statistics Office from the beginning of 2002 to the end of 2005, which is the latest period for which figures are available. The figures show seasonal fluctuations but overall evince steady growth in employment during the period. Because of seasonal fluctuation, it is not appropriate to compare quarter to quarter.

While the strong performance of the economy, despite pressures affecting global markets during the period, is something that we can all be proud of, we must remain proactive in the context of maintaining and developing our competitive advantages. One of my Department's principal tasks is to ensure that Ireland continues to be attractive place to do business. In that regard, we have made significant efforts to maintain and enhance our framework competitive conditions, and to promote new areas of competitive advantage, such as by developing our R&D base. Our priority remains the creation of sustainable employment — driven by companies with higher profitability, that are more technologically advanced and prove a better fit with the competitive characteristics of our economy, and that are consequently less likely to move.

To assist the drive towards competitiveness and increased productivity the enterprise development agencies are working with companies: To provide mentoring and developmental supports, To enhance management capabilities and critical workforce skills, To support the creation and implementation of strategies for market entry, development and growth, To build productivity, and To provide support for innovation and for research and development.

We will also continue to pursue labour market policies to promote lifelong learning and up-skilling to enhance labour market flexibility and, where necessary, ensure that training supports are provided for workers in sectors that are no longer competitive, to help them find alternative employment. Moderation of the rate of growth in operating costs is also necessary to ensure that our costs remain in line with those of other developed economies and that cost increases do not negate or overshadow the competitiveness effect of productivity growth.

All Persons in Employment aged 15 years and over
(Thousand)

	Qtr1	Qtr2	Qtr3	Qtr4
2002	1,753.5	1,763.9	1,808.4	1,782.3
2003	1,783.6	1,793.4	1,836.4	1,828.9
2004	1,835.9	1,836.2	1,893.6	1,894.1
2005	1,908.3	1,929.2	1,989.8	1,980.6

Source: CSO Databank Direct.

279. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of new jobs which have been created at the Information Age Park, Ennis since it was opened in 2005; the number of these jobs which were transferred from existing enterprises at other locations in Ennis; and the number of new jobs which were created by the new enterprises at the IAPE. [18073/06]

280. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if he has satisfied himself regarding the level of job creation at the Information Age Park Ennis and the efforts by State agencies to attract new enterprise to the location. [18074/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 279 and 280 together.

Shannon Development's 30-acre Information Age Park in Ennis (IAPE), opened on 9th June 2005, is in the very early stages of a long-term development that will provide a High Potential Start Up base for Ennis and County Clare, and which can also accommodate appropriate Foreign Direct Investment companies brought to Ireland by IDA Ireland. When completed, the new Park has the potential to facilitate the creation of an estimated 3,500 high value jobs in over 700,000 square feet of high quality office accommodation.

Phase I of the project involves an investment of €11 million by Shannon Development, in land infrastructure and the provision of 45,000 square feet of technology incubation, large floor-plate and own door office accommodation in the new Innovation Works facility. An estimated €110 million will be invested between the public and private sectors in the new Park over the next fifteen years. The Park will offer a range of accommodation options that will ensure that the needs of all knowledge-age business (foreign direct investment, mobile Irish investment, and business incubation) are met, irrespective of size or development stage. The inclusion of an InnovationWorks incubation facility by Shannon Development is designed to fast track the development of Irish High Potential Start Up enterprise.

Prior to the opening of IAPE Shannon Development had 12 Irish Industry client companies in the Clare Business Centre. All 12 companies transferred to IAPE when it opened, as the Clare Business Centre was subsequently closed as part of Shannon Development's strategy of building a much more modern business friendly incubation centre. One of the 12 companies subsequently closed. In addition to the transferred companies, three new companies formed since the IAPE opened. The total employment in the client companies that originally transferred to IAPE was 17. The number of new jobs

created by those 11 transferred companies and the 3 new companies (since IAPE opened) was 20 bringing the total to 37. Shannon Development is confident that the early growth shown will continue to develop in the future.

To drive this, Shannon Development will continue to attract and help establish High Potential Start Ups in IAPE, through its Venture Development Process. This Process encapsulates the various stages of business development from idea generation, feasibility study stage, project development and market launch, and business expansion and offers an integrated package of business development programmes to achieve this.

At present, the total space let to enterprises is 5,000 sq ft and there is over 8,500 sq ft available for letting in three units of large floor office space suitable for second stage incubation projects.

In addition, Shannon Development is accommodating the Clare County Council, which is renting 20,000 sq ft of office space at the park before it moves to its new Headquarters next year. This is a short-term arrangement, and Shannon Development has held back sufficient space to accommodate any FDI space requirements should the IDA require.

Health and Safety Regulations.

281. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if, in order to broaden the knowledge and skills base of those working within the Health and Safety Inspectorate, he will introduce a fourth grade within the Health and Safety Inspectorate which would be open to those who have experience of acting as workers' safety representatives. [18076/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): It is already open to a safety representative who has the necessary qualifications and experience to apply for vacancies which are advertised by the Health & Safety Authority.

There is a staffing grade structure within the Authority which has been agreed by management with the staff unions.

I am not aware that the Authority or the staff unions have any proposals to specifically recruit safety representatives or to introduce a new staffing grade.

Employment Statistics.

282. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of workdays that were lost in both 2004 and 2005 due to work place injuries and ill-health. [18077/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is

responsible for compiling the number of workdays lost due to injuries and illhealth. Statistics are not yet available for 2004 and 2005. The latest figures are for 2003 and show that 1,374,813 days were lost.

Arms Trade.

283. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that secondary school pupils from a school (details supplied) in Co. Laois were able to set themselves up as arms dealers here and were able to broker an electro-stun gun and leg irons from their school as part of a school project; the steps he will take to bring in a system of regulation for the trade of arms and items of the nature described; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18185/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. M. Ahern): I am aware of the incident to which the Deputy refers.

Work is now underway in my Department to bring in a system of regulation for the trade of arms and items of the nature described. The Heads of the new Export Control Bill is now complete and consultations with other Government Departments are currently taking place. I expect this process to conclude shortly at which point I will be bringing it to Government for approval. Allowing for the formalities of drafting the legal texts, I hope to bring the new legislation before the Houses of the Oireachtas in the autumn.

The proposed legislation will update the existing Control of Exports Act, which dates from 1983 and will ensure that Ireland's export controls are in line with best international practise. In this regard, the new legislation will include, for the first time, provision for the regulation of arms brokering activities in Ireland and by Irish citizens abroad. This will enable Ireland to fulfil its obligation under the EU Common Position on Arms Brokering, which requires Member States to take all the necessary measures to control brokering activities on their territory.

Employment Support Services.

284. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the reason Clare LES has not been reinstated in any shape or form as promised and as recommended by a FÁS report. [18318/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): I am informed that FÁS has appointed an additional Employment Services Officer in Co. Clare to offer a dedicated service to the long-term unemployed and other target groups.

[Mr. Martin.]

This service is currently in operation and offering a service throughout the county.

Child Care Services.

285. **Mr. Haughey** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the assistance given by the Dublin City Enterprise Board to existing and new private childcare enterprises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18326/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The thirty-five County and City Enterprise Boards (CEBs) were established in 1993 to provide support to small businesses with 10 employees or fewer. Their function is to develop indigenous enterprise potential and to stimulate economic activity at local level. The CEBs support individuals, firms, community groups, provided that the projects have the capacity to achieve commercial viability. Priority must be given to manufacturing and internationally traded services companies which could develop into strong export entities.

While Dublin City Enterprise Board does not operate a specific childcare scheme, it is nevertheless ready to support, against their normal range of evaluation criteria, any viable business proposal coming forward for the establishment of a commercial childcare enterprise.

From its inception in 1993 to 31 December, 2005 Dublin City Enterprise Board has paid a total of €218,797 to 22 childcare enterprises yielding a job potential of 50 full-time and 15 part-time jobs. Such financial assistance forms part of the CEBs broader remit to support the development of commercially viable micro-enterprises throughout Dublin city.

Departmental Correspondence.

286. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if there has been communication between his Department and the Office of Corporate Enforcement in the context of management companies or management agents of housing units; if so, if concerns have been raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18407/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. M. Aherne): I have neither received nor initiated any communication with the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in the context of management companies or managements agents of housing units.

The Deputy will be aware that the Director of Corporate Enforcement is a statutory independent officer charged with the duty of encouraging compliance with and securing enforcement of the

Companies Acts. In undertaking this function the Director and his staff have a legal obligation to observe a strict code of confidentiality. It is not therefore the practice of the Director to report to me on any individual case or issue, which is the subject of examination by his Office.

I am however aware from the Director's Annual Reports for 2003 and 2004 that his Office has had cause from time to time to intervene on behalf of members of management companies to remedy failures by the companies to call annual general meetings and to disclose their latest financial statements.

Employment Appeals Tribunal.

287. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the waiting time for hearings before the Employment Appeals Tribunal in Wexford; his plans to improve this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18444/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The Employment Appeals Tribunal is an independent body bound to act judicially and was set up to provide a speedy, fair, inexpensive and informal means for individuals to seek remedies for alleged infringements of their statutory right. As an independent body, I have no function in relation to the day-to-day operation of the Tribunal.

I understand that three thousand, seven hundred and twenty seven (3,727) claims and appeals were referred to the Employment Appeals Tribunal in 2005, and to date in 2006, one thousand, two hundred and seventy five (1,275) claims and appeals have been received. There are thirty-one cases currently awaiting hearing in County Wexford, the earliest of which was referred to the Tribunal on 19 July 2005.

I am also aware that so far in 2006 the Tribunal set down hearings in County Wexford in weeks commencing 16 January and 6 March 2006 respectively, and that hearings are also due to take place in week commencing 29 May 2006. While the approximate current waiting period in County Wexford is forty-eight weeks from the date an individual claimant refers a claim, I understand that the Tribunal is making every effort to reduce this waiting period, including undertaking a concerted programme of targeting areas, such as County Wexford, where delays occur.

EU Directives.

288. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation;

and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[18454/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. M. Ahern): There are currently a total of twenty-nine Directives due to be transposed by this Department. Of these, as at end April 2006, 13 are overdue for transposition and are detailed in the table below.

From May 2006 to December 2006 another six Directives require to be transposed. A further ten

Directives require to be transposed in 2007 and subsequent years.

It is expected that of the Directives currently overdue, four will be transposed by the end of May 2006. Another Directive, (2002/14/EC), that is also currently overdue has been implemented in law but is awaiting a Commencement Order to complete formal transposition.

My Department continues to accord a high priority to the transposition of Directives and makes every effort to transpose Directives in time to meet the deadline given for transposition.

Overdue Directives as at end April 2006.

Description of Directive	Deadline for Transposition	Current position
Directive 2001/45/EC amending Council Directive 89/655/EEC concerning the minimum safety and health requirements for the use of work equipment by workers at work	19/7/2004	Drafting of Regulations almost complete. Draft is with Parliamentary Counsel. Expected date of transposition: End-June 2006. Reasoned Opinion issued by the Commission.
Council Directive 2001/86/EC supplementing the Statute for a European company with regard to the involvement of employees	8/10/2004	Draft Regulations are being finalised and it is intended to send them to Office of the Parliamentary Counsel shortly. Expected date of transposition: 31 July 2006. Reasoned Opinion issued by the Commission.
Directive 2002/14/EC establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees in the European Community	23/3/2005	The Employees (Provision of Information and Consultation) Bill 2005 was signed by President on 9 April 2006. Expected date of transposition: Awaiting commencement Order. Reasoned Opinion issued by the Commission.
Commission Directive 2004/111/EC of 9 December 2004 adapting for the fifth time to technical progress Council Directive 94/55/EC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States with regard to the transport of dangerous goods by road	1/7/2005	Commission Directives 2004/111/EC and 2004/112/EC are linked. The Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road Act 1998 was intended as a basis for implementing both of these Directives. Deficiencies in the 1998 Act have brought into question the legality of using this as a means of transposition of these two Directives. New draft Regulations were forwarded to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel on 28 March 2006. The expected date of transposition: End May 2006.
Directive 2002/44/EC of 25 June 2002 on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from physical agents (vibrations)	6/7/2005	Drafting of Regulations almost complete. Expected date of transposition: End June 2006. Letter of Formal Notice issued by the Commission.
Commission Directive 2004/112/EC of 13 December 2004 adapting to technical progress Council Directive 95/50/EC on uniform procedures for checks on the transport of dangerous goods by road	14/12/2005	Commission Directives 2004/111/EC and 2004/112/EC are linked. The Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road Act 1998 was intended as a basis for implementing both of these Directives. Deficiencies in the 1998 Act have brought into question the legality of using this as a means of transposition of these two Directives. New draft Regulations were forwarded to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel on 28 March 2006. Expected date of transposition: End May 2006. Letter of Formal Notice issued by Commission.

[Mr. M. Ahern.]

Description of Directive	Deadline for Transposition	Current position
Regulation 2006/2004/EC of 27 October 2004 on cooperation between national authorities responsible for the enforcement of consumer protection laws	29/12/2005	Final draft of SI has been cleared by the OPC. Expected date of transposition: End May 2006.
Directive 2005/88/EC of 14 December 2005 amending Directive 2000/14/EC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the noise emission in the environment by equipment for use outdoors	31/12/2005	Office of Parliamentary Counsel received draft Regulations on 27 February 2006. Regulations signed on 3 May 2006.
Directive 2001/84/EC of 27 September 2001 on the resale right for the benefit of the author of an original work of art	1/1/2006	This Directive is linked to 2004/48/EC below (infringement of IP rights). 1/1/2006. Government approval to draft Bill was obtained in July 2005 and drafting by the Parliamentary Counsel is progressing steadily. It is hoped that the Bill will reach all stages in the Houses before the end of 2006. Letter of Formal Notice issued by the Commission.
Directive 2003/10/EC to lay down requirements on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks arising from physical agents (noise)	15/2/2006	Health & Safety Authority preparing Regulations. Expected date of transposition: End-June 2006.
Directive 2003/18/EC on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work	15/4/2006	Following public consultation draft Regulations will be finalised for submission to the Department by the Health and Safety Authority by mid-June 2006. Expected date of transposition: End July 2006.
Directive 2004/48 EC on the Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights Linked to Directive 2001/84/EC above	26/4/2006	Parliamentary Counsel commenced drafting of the Bill to give effect to the Directive. (See 2001/84/EC above.)
Directive 2004/22/EC of 31 March 2004 on measuring instruments	30/4/2006	Draft implementing Regulations have been prepared. It is anticipated that the Directive will be transposed by operational date of October 2006. Expected date of transposition: October 2006.

Consumer Strategy Report.

289. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the steps he has taken to formulate guidelines for local authorities on the need to encourage the sale of fresh fruit and vegetables, as recommended by the consumer strategy report 2005. [18476/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The report of the Consumer Strategy Group was published in May 2005. The most important recommendation was that a new National Consumer Agency be established. However there were other recommendations which affected consumers' interests.

One of these recommendations urged an increase in the number of casual trading licences issued to traders under the Casual Trading Act, 1995. Related to this was another recommendation that there be statutory based guidelines to ensure a consistent approach to casual trading by local authorities.

These recommendations have been accepted by Government. I hope to publish the new Consumer legislation later this year. I intend using this legislation to amend the Casual Trading Act, 1995 to enable me to issue statutory guidelines to local authorities so that a consistent approach towards trading is adopted. I intend using these guidelines to promote an increase in casual trading licences for the sale of fruit and vegetables.

Departmental Staff.

290. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18517/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): I appointed six staff in my Department following my appointment as Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in September 2004. These staff members remain in

place with the exception of one Personal Assistant who was replaced in September 2005.

At present the staff members are as follows: 1 Special Advisor (Mr. Christopher Mannion); 1 Policy Advisor (Ms Deirdre Gillane); 1 Press Advisor (Ms Caitriona Meehan); 2 Personal Assistants (Ms Melanie Hewitt and Ms Margaret Kenneally); and, 1 Personal Secretary (Ms Elizabeth O'Donoghue).

Casual Trading.

291. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if it is necessary for a casual trader to have a casual trading licence to operate in a town that has a market right; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18547/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): Selling goods at a place, including a public road, to which the public have access as of right is governed by the Casual Trading Act 1995. Casual trading is regulated by way of by-laws issued under section 6 of the Act by local authorities.

There are exemptions to casual trading under Section 2 (2) of the Act. The following activities are exempted from regulation under the Act, (i) selling by auction, (ii) selling door to door, (iii) selling for charitable purposes and (iv) the selling of certain fruit and vegetables for a certain period during the year. The Minister can add to these exemptions nationally whereas local authorities can exempt classes of selling in their own functional areas.

In the absence of an exemption for selling pursuant to a market right made by a local authority, traders must have a licence under the Act to trade in a public place, regardless of whether that place is the subject of a market right.

Social Welfare Benefits.

292. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the community welfare section of the Health Service Executive is insisting in certain cases that tenants supply proof of the landlords ownership of property in order to receive rent supplement; if her further attention has been drawn to the fact that this is causing hardship to tenants; her views on the alternative of requesting that the section check with the Private Residential Tenancies Board to ensure that such properties are registered. [18489/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The day to day administration of the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, which provides for the payment of rent supplements, is the responsibility of Health Service Executive. Neither I nor my Department has any function in relation to decisions on individual claims.

In order to make a rent supplement payment the Executive must satisfy itself that a bona fide tenancy exists in respect of a property for which a rent supplement is sought. In this regard the first step in verifying the tenancy is the completion of the appropriate application forms where the applicant supplies details of the household composition and means. On this application form the landlord must confirm details relating to the address, type of accommodation and the amount of rent being paid. In addition to the application forms, other documents such as rent books/receipts or a copy of the lease agreement may also be requested by the Executive. While the exact extent of the information required in any case is a matter for the Executive, I am satisfied that it would not be possible to award a rent supplement claim without first establishing the identity of the landlord.

My Department is committed to working with the PRTB to help ensure compliance with the new system of tenancy regulation and safeguards. However the suggestion proposed by the Deputy would only serve to delay payments of rent supplement. At the time when many rent supplement claims are being decided the tenancy will not have been registered with the PRTB, as the establishment of the tenancy will be dependent on rent supplement being awarded. I would also point out that there are instances where a tenancy qualifying for rent supplement need not be registered with the PRTB, for example renting a room in a house. In the circumstances, I do not consider that the existing arrangements place undue inconvenience on those wishing to claim rent supplement.

Comhairle Service.

293. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the projected cost for the rebranding of Comhairle; if there has been consultation with users of the service on the rebranding of Comhairle; if so, the details of same; and the number of requests for information from Comhairle for the two most recent years for which figures are available. [17925/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): Comhairle was established under the Comhairle Act, 2000. Its functions include the provision of independent information, advice and advocacy in relation to social services. Comhairle also has a particular responsibility to assist people with disabilities to identify their needs and access their entitlements.

Comhairle carries out its functions in the provision of information primarily through a nationwide network of Citizen Information Centres (CICs). The CICs are voluntary bodies providing full-time and part-time information services to the public at some 235 locations throughout the country. Over the past three years, Comhairle has been developing a strategy to strengthen the

[Mr. Brennan.]

public profile of the information services provided by the CICs, by the Citizen Information Phone Service and via the OASIS website, through the development of the 'Citizens Information' brand as a common identifier for all three services.

The costs of any rebranding of Comhairle would have to be addressed by Comhairle within the resources available to it. Any additional resources sought by Comhairle for the initiative would fall to be considered by my Department in the context of the normal estimates and budgetary process.

I understand that Comhairle has been in discussion with the CICs about the re-design of the Citizens Information brand and that a number of briefing sessions have been held with the national network of citizens information centres about a new logo.

Details of requests for information to the CICs, Citizen Information Phone Service and via the OASIS website are set out. Citizens Information Centres 2004, 676,755; 2005, 733,879. Citizens Information Phone Service 2004, 65,214; e-mail, 7,759; 2005 76,762; e-mail, 11,162. In 2004 and 2005 respectively there were 1.8m and 2.4m visits to *www.oasis.gov.ie* by users of the service.

Tax and Social Welfare Codes.

294. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of PPS numbers issued to persons not holding Irish citizenship during each year from 2002 to date in 2006; the number of PPS numbers issued to persons not holding Irish citizenship that are currently idle, such that no activity in relation to tax or social welfare is associated with them for a period of time possibly indicating that the person has left the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18186/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The Personal Public Service Number (PPS No.) is an individual's unique reference number for dealings with Government Departments and public bodies. My Department is responsible for allocating PPS Numbers for use by people, of any nationality, to access certain public services.

A PPS Number does not issue automatically except in the case of children born in Ireland. In all other cases, application must be made at one of my Department's local offices. When applying for a PPS Number, applicants are asked to prove their identity. This is usually done by presenting a passport or National Identity Card.

Documents presented by an applicant are then examined and authenticated by Local Office staff. The nationality of the applicant is recorded based on the documentation provided. Citizenship, which may be different, is not recorded. The number of PPS Numbers allocated to people

whose nationality was not recorded as Irish, since 2002, is as follows: 2002, 165,628; 2003, 104,620; 2004, 133,127; 2005, 190,884; 2006 (to 30/4/06), 68,275.

The number is used as an identifier when accessing services offered by multiple agencies. Each agency would associate further data related to its specific services with this identifier and it is not possible, or desirable from a privacy perspective, for my Department to have sight of activity across agencies. There are many reasons why a person would need a PPS Number but would not be economically active, for example, to avail of the Drugs Refund Scheme or to apply for a Driving License.

The figures quoted above refer to those people who successfully applied for, and were allocated, a PPS Number. The number of people who applied for a PPS Number and subsequently left this country is included in the total of allocations made. There is no formal mechanism for notifying my Department of individuals leaving the country.

Education Schemes.

295. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the effect of a recent High Court decision with regard to the payment of back to education allowance during the summer holidays; if students who commenced on the scheme when payment during holidays was made are entitled to such payments for subsequent years; if he will re-instate payment during the summer holidays for all recipients of the allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18230/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The back to education allowance or BTEA is a second chance education opportunities scheme designed to encourage and facilitate people on certain social welfare payments to improve their skills and qualifications and, therefore, their prospects of returning to the active work force. In 2002 the Government, in view of the expenditure constraints facing it at that time, appointed an independent Estimates Review Committee to consider the Estimates proposals received in the Department of Finance from Departments and Offices. In its report to Government, that Committee recommended discontinuation of the practice of paying the back to education allowance over the summer period to people who were formerly on the live register. The Committee concluded that people on the scheme during the academic year should be able to take up paid employment during the summer break, leading to savings in the cost of social welfare payments. If they could not find employment, they would be entitled to unemployment assistance or unemployment benefit, subject to satisfying the usual conditions and therefore no hardship would occur.

Following the decision to discontinue payment of BTEA for the summer months one person, who was a participant at the time the change was introduced, sought a judicial review. The hearing took place on 7 February 2006 and judgement was delivered on 28 February 2006. The judgement found in favour of one individual but did not find in favour of any of the other people attached to the proceedings. The court decided that restitution was due only in respect of the summer vacation period in 2003 and not subsequent years and only in the case of the one individual whose action was successful.

There are wider matters for consideration arising from this case including the issue raised by the Deputy. Furthermore, in view of the possible ramifications in other areas, it is necessary to consider whether the judgement warrants appeal. I recently received advice from the Attorney General's office in the matter and this is being considered at present. With regard to reinstatement of summer payment to all BTEA participants, I am satisfied that the present arrangements ensure that the scheme continues to provide appropriate support to those people who qualify for the scheme and I have no plans to alter the current arrangements.

Social Welfare Benefits.

296. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason rent assistance was refused in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18276/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The supplementary welfare allowance scheme, which includes rent supplement, is administered on my behalf by the Community Welfare division of the Health Service Executive. Neither I nor my Department has any function in relation to decisions on individual claims. The Health Service Executive has advised that it has no record of any application for rent supplement from the person concerned since May 2005. If the person concerned wishes to apply for rent supplement she should make a formal application to her local community welfare officer.

Health Service Allowances.

297. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of hours a carer is allowed to work outside the home and not affect their carers allowance or carer's benefit payment in May and June 2006. [18305/06]

298. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the income a carer is entitled to earn and still retain their carer's allowance or carer's benefit in May and June 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18306/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 297 and 298 together.

Support of carers has been a priority of Government since 1997. Payments to carers have been greatly improved over that period and qualifying conditions for carers allowance have been significantly eased, coverage of the scheme has been extended and new schemes such as carers benefit and the respite care payment have been introduced. The further development of support for carers continues to be a priority for me and for Government.

Under the Regulations governing Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit, a person may participate in employment for a maximum of 10 hours per week. Following improvements in Budget 2006 the hours will increase to 15 hours per week from June 2006. From April 2006 the income limit from employment for recipients of Carer's Benefit has increased by €40 to €290 per week. In line with other social assistance schemes, a means test is applied to the carer's allowance so as to ensure that limited resources are directed to those in greatest need. This means test has been eased significantly over the years, most notably with the introduction of disregards of spouses' earnings.

Provision has been made in successive Budgets for substantial increases in the income disregards. From April 2006 the weekly income disregards increased by €20 to €290 for a single carer and by €40 to €580 for a couple. This means that a couple with two children can earn up to €32,925 per annum and still receive the maximum rate of carer's allowance. The same couple will be able to earn up to €54,400 and receive the minimum rate of carer's allowance as well as free travel, the household benefits package and the respite care grant.

Departmental Staff.

299. **Mr. Haughey** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he has satisfied himself that there are enough staff in his Department's offices at the Northside Civic Centre, Bunnratty Road, Dublin 17 to ensure the speedy processing of claims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18328/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The staffing allocation to the Department's Local Office in Coolock, which is located at the Northside Civic Centre, Bunnratty Road, Dublin 17, is 27.5 posts. 27 posts are currently filled in this Office. As with all other offices in the Department, the staffing allocation to Coolock is reviewed regularly and adjusted as required by any changes in claim loads or other relevant factors.

Health Service Allowances.

300. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a person (details supplied) in County Cork is entitled to a respite care grant, or part thereof, in respect of their late spouse. [18423/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2005, *inter alia*, extended entitlement to the Respite Care Grant to all carers irrespective of means or contribution record, but subject to certain conditions relating to employment and to a medical report. The person to whom the Deputy refers made a successful application for the Grant in 2005 and payment was made to her in August 2005. Unfortunately, her husband, for whom she had been providing care, passed away on 2 May 2006. This means she will not be eligible for the Grant again in 2006 as she will not have been providing care on the first Thursday in June, the date, laid down by regulation as that on which she would have needed to have been providing it.

Social Welfare Benefits.

301. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs his plans to increase the fuel allowance payment; if he will propose other interim proposals to deal with the massive increase in fuel charges for those on low incomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18425/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The aim of the national fuel scheme is to assist householders on long-term social welfare or health service executive payments with meeting the cost of their additional heating needs during the winter season. Fuel allowances are paid for 29 weeks from end-September to mid-April. The allowance represents a contribution towards a person’s normal heating expenses. The scheme has been improved in recent budgets. The means test has been eased and the duration of payment increased from 26 weeks to 29 weeks. Budget 2006 provided for an increase in the rate of fuel allowance of €5.00 from €9.00 to €14.00 (€17.90 in designated smokeless areas). Some 264,400 customers (145,800 with basic fuel allowance and 118,600 with smokeless fuel supplement) will benefit in 2006 at an estimated cost of €125.1 million.

Budget resources have been concentrated on providing significant real increases over and above inflation each year in all primary social welfare pension, benefit and assistance rates. This approach delivers a positive outcome for pensioners and others by substantially increasing their income in real terms over the whole year, to better assist them in meeting their normal basic living costs, including heating. In addition to the fuel allowance, over 320,000 pensioner and other households qualify for electricity or gas allow-

ances through the household benefits package, payable towards their heating, light and cooking costs throughout the year, at an overall cost of €109 million in 2005. As currently structured, these allowances are linked to unit energy consumption, so that these people are protected against unit price increases in electricity or gas. If an individual has an exceptional heating cost by virtue of a particular infirmity or medical which they are unable to meet out of household income, it is open to them to apply to their local community welfare officer or a special heating supplement under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme. Any changes to the Fuel Allowance Scheme or any other initiatives on fuel charges would have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in the context of future Budgets and in the light of the resources available to me for improvements in social welfare generally.

EU Directives.

302. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18455/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): There are no outstanding EU directives within the competency of my Department that have not been transposed into law.

Question No. 303 withdrawn.

Health Service Allowances.

304. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 455 of 21 March 2006, the way in which he estimated that the cost of abolition of the means test for receipt of the carer’s allowance would be €140 million in a full year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18502/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The estimated cost of €140 million was based on data available last year and the rate of carer’s allowance at that time. According to Census 2002 there are 48,500 carers caring for 29 or more hours per week of which 15,700 are working for over 10 hours per week and so would not be eligible for carer’s allowance. Some 25,000 people were in receipt of a carer’s allowance. Approximately, 6,000 of the remaining group received the respite care grant in 2005. It was assumed that these 6,000 people would constitute the additional recipients of carer’s allowance if the means test were abolished. The cost of paying a full rate carer’s allowance to this group plus the cost of the free schemes which they would also receive would be approximately €54 million in a full year.

It is estimated that approximately 14,000 recipients of carer's allowance in 2005 were in receipt of another social welfare benefit or pension immediately prior to their receipt of carer's allowance. Assuming that, if the carer's allowance means test were abolished, other social welfare payments would also be payable, this could lead to an additional full year cost of approximately €74 million, depending on the level of the other payment. In 2005, approximately 2,550 recipients of carer's allowance were in receipt of a reduced rate payment. Abolition of the means test would mean that group would be entitled to a full rate payment. This would have full year cost of approximately €10 million. The combination of the cost associated with these three groups is approximately €140 million in a full year. Given increases in rates of payment from January 2006 this cost would now be higher.

I continue to keep an open mind on this issue but I think it is debatable whether such a proposal could be considered to be the best use of resources. The view of some support organisations is that if this level of resources were available, it would be more beneficial to carers if it were invested in further increases to carers allowance and in the type of community care services which would support them in their caring role, such as additional respite care facilities, more home helps, public health nurses and other such services.

Departmental Staff.

305. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18518/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): Since I took up office, I have appointed on a contract basis for my term of office four non-established civil servants, a Special Adviser, Mr. Frank Lahiffe, a Press Adviser, Mr. Tom Rowley, a Personal Secretary, Ms. Mary Browne and a Personal Assistant, Mr. Bobby Holland. All four appointees are employed full-time. The duties carried out by the Advisers (Special Adviser and Press Adviser) attached to my Department are as set out in Section 11 of the Public Service Management Act, 1997 i.e. to assist the Minister by providing advice, on a wide range of issues, by monitoring, facilitating and securing the achievement of Government objectives that relate to my Department and by performing such other functions as may be directed by me. The roles of my Personal Secretary and Personal Assistant are to provide administrative support and back-up in my capacity as a T.D. and in my constituency office. The terms of contract for the above positions are as determined by the Department of Finance and are subject to the Civil Service Regulation Acts

1956 to 1996 and any other Act for the time being in force relating to the Civil Service.

Driving Tests.

306. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for Transport when notifications of a driving test will be given for a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17914/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): There is no record in my Department of an application for a driving test having been received from the person concerned.

Road Traffic Offences.

307. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Transport his proposals on introducing mandatory testing for alcohol or drugs at the scene of a road traffic accident; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17926/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The Road Traffic Acts provide that a member of the Garda Síochána may require a person in charge of a mechanically propelled vehicle to provide a preliminary breath specimen where the vehicle is involved in a road collision. Garda discretion in relation to the use of preliminary roadside tests in such circumstances is necessary, having regard to possible injuries sustained, and I do not propose to alter that position.

The Road Traffic Acts also place an obligation on a person to provide a blood or urine sample in a hospital. This applies where an event occurs involving a vehicle which results in a person being injured, or a person claiming or appearing to have been injured, where the person is admitted to or attends a hospital, and a member of the Garda is of the opinion that, at the time of the event, the person had consumed an intoxicant. An intoxicant includes alcohol and drugs or any combination of alcohol and drugs.

Air Safety Standards.

308. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Transport the information he has received regarding the recent passage of Irish aircraft into the no fly exclusion zone surrounding the Sellafield plant and the consequent interception by Royal Air Force planes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18079/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): It is not possible for me to answer the Deputy's question based on the information supplied. For the matter to be investigated further more details would be required, for example the date of the flight and particulars of the aircraft involved.

Road Traffic Offences.

309. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for

[Ms C. Murphy.]

Transport if the system introduced on 3 April 2006 by the Garda which resulted in all offences being dealt with under the fixed charge processing system includes provision for offences under by-laws introduced by local authorities and includes all non penalty points road traffic offences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18422/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I made a number of regulations on 28 March 2006 to extend the fixed charge system which is provided in the Road Traffic Act 2002 from 3 April 2006 to a wide range of offences.

Firstly, this new fixed charge system applies to the enforcement by the Garda Síochána or traffic wardens authorised by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform of a range of specified offences under section 103 of the Road Traffic Act 1961. The offences concerned are all listed in the Road Traffic Acts 1961 to 2005 (Fixed Charge Offences) Regulations 2006 (SI No. 135 of 2006).

Secondly, the fixed charge system was extended for the enforcement by traffic wardens employed by local authorities of specified parking offences, non-display of motor tax disc or non-display of insurance disc offences under section 3 of the Local Authorities (Traffic Wardens) Act 1975. The range of offences that come within the ambit of section 3 enforcement are non-penalty point offences and include offences contained in bye-laws made by local authorities in relation to the use of public car parks provided by the local authority or bye-laws in relation to on-street pay parking schemes. The offences concerned are all listed in the Local Authorities (Traffic Wardens) Act 1975 (Fixed Charge Offences) Regulations 2006 (SI No. 136 of 2006). The extension of the fixed charge system that I have referred to relates to offences that involve the driving or use of a mechanically propelled vehicle.

A further extension of the fixed charge system will be pursued in due course to extend the application of the fixed charge system to the commission of non-penalty point offences that do not involve the use of a mechanically propelled vehicle.

Taxi Regulations.

310. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport the procedures which are in place to ensure that taxi drivers do not abuse the taxi licensing system; if his attention has been drawn to the number of taxi drivers convicted of abuses of the licensing system since 2002; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17859/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The licensing of small public service vehicles, taxis, hackneys and limousines, and the drivers of such vehicles, is currently governed by the Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) Regulations

1963 to 2002 made under the Road Traffic Acts, the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 and regulations made under that Act in 2005 and 2006 by the Commission for Taxi Regulation.

It is an offence to drive or use a mechanically propelled vehicle in a public place for the carriage of persons of reward unless the person holds a licence to drive a small public service vehicle and there is a small public service vehicle licence in force in respect of the vehicle. The investigation of complaints concerning non-compliance with the public service vehicles regulations, and the enforcement of those regulations, are matters for the Garda Síochána. Information in relation to the number of taxi drivers convicted of abuses of the licensing system is not available in my Department.

Driver Education.

311. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the driver education programme, driver for life programme, which is currently being piloted in County Carlow; his views on this programme; his further views on whether it should be expanded nationwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17868/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): There are various voluntary driver education programmes in operation around the country and I welcome the introduction of such programmes. However, while these programmes may be commendable, the operation of such initiatives is not subject to regulation by my Department. The proposed Road Safety Authority will have a general duty to promote the development and improvement of driving standards and make recommendations in this regard.

Public Transport.

312. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to meet the increasing demand for public transport on the route between Tallaght, Walkinstown and the city centre; if he proposes to increase the number of buses servicing this route at peak commuter times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17898/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The provision of services on a particular route is a matter for Dublin Bus itself having regard to the demand for such services and compliance with the requirements of the Transport Act 1958 and the administrative arrangements established to support those requirements.

In November 2005, I approved a proposal in relation to Luas services between Tallaght and the city centre, involving Exchequer funding, from the Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) aimed at increasing passenger capacity on the Tallaght Luas line by 40%. At present between

30,000 and 40,000 passengers per day are being carried on the line. The increase in capacity will be achieved by increasing the length of the trams by 10 metres. This will mean that they will be the same length (40 metres) as trams on the Sandyford Luas line. The first of the extended trams will enter service in 2007 and the upgrade will be completed in 2008. The project will not involve interruption to services.

Rail Services.

313. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport if the Irish Rail facility at North Esk will be included in the re-signalling works to be completed by the company in preparation of its re-opening of the Midleton rail line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17934/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I am informed by Iarnród Éireann that the development of the Cork-Midleton Commuter Service does not require re-signalling at North Esk.

Road Safety.

314. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Transport the number of those cars which were legally insured and entitled to be driven on roads here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17955/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): My Department does not collate this information. However, information provided to my officials by the Motor Insurers Bureau of Ireland (MIBI) who are notified of accidents involving vehicles registered outside the State indicates that most vehicles involved in accidents here do have appropriate insurance in place. These figures include vehicles registered in the United Kingdom who make up a third of accidents and are generally right-hand drive vehicles. Victims of uninsured drivers are compensated by the Motor Insurers Bureau of Ireland.

State Airports.

315. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of the Great Southern Hotel group employees regarding possible redundancies and diminution of employment conditions following the privatisation of the chain; if he has met or will meet with employees to discuss these concerns; if he will reconsider the sell-off; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17962/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Earlier this year the Government was informed that the board of the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) had decided to sell the Great Southern Hotels Group (GSH), a wholly owned subsidiary of the DAA. Decisions in relation to the sale of the hotels are a matter for the Boards of both bodies

and I have no function in the matter. The view of the DAA is that the disposal of the GSH group offers the best opportunity for the hotels to reach their full potential in the niche markets to which they are best suited. I share DAA's view that this decision is ultimately in the best interests of GSH, its employees and the communities and interests they serve.

The GSH has retained advisors to examine and advise on all aspects of the disposal process for the hotel group. To date, the focus has been on communicating with staff and trade unions and developing an appropriate strategy for the sale of the hotels. I understand that the Executive Chairman and senior management of GSH, along with the advisors, have now visited all of the hotels and met with the staff of each hotel to discuss the issues, which led to the decision to sell the group. Meetings also continue to take place between the unions and GSH and its advisors and further discussions are planned. Early on in the process I too met with the GSH trade union representatives to discuss their concerns relating to the future of the hotels. I understand that the GSH advisors are currently finalising a marketing plan for the sale of the hotels and that the sale process will commence shortly.

Driving Tests.

316. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the number of driving tests that were cancelled by applicants for which no alternative applicant could be found in time for a test to be carried out in each of the years this century; the number of test hours lost in each of these years; the cost to his Department in each of these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17975/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): In 2005 approximately 14% of tests scheduled were lost due to very late cancellations or indeed where no notice at all was given and the candidate simply failed to show up for the appointment. The position in other years would be similar. This amounts to about 23,000 test slots of an hour each or the work of about 15 full time testers. The total associated cost would be over €1 million. It is my expectation that improvements in systems, and indeed the reduction of the backlog, may help to recover many of these slots and increase the capacity of our existing service.

317. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the number of driving test applications received in each of the years 2004 and 2005 and to the end of April 2006. [17976/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The information requested is set out in the table supplied.

[Mr. Cullen.]

Year	Applications Received
2004	177,667
2005	177,216
2006	68,862 (to 28/4/06)

318. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the number of extra driving tests being carried out as a result of the overtime package for driver testers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18024/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The bonus overtime scheme for driver testers commenced on 6 February 2006. Under this scheme almost 14,000 driving tests will be scheduled outside normal hours up to 10 June 2006. This will represent about 9,000 more than would have been done in overtime without the bonus.

Public Transport.

319. **Mr. Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport the progress to date on the application for passenger licences under the Road Transport Act, 1932 by a company (details supplied) in County Waterford. [18034/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): In accordance with long standing practice, details of applications received in my Department remain confidential until a decision is made. However, I can confirm that the applications referred to in the Deputies question have been received in my Department and they are now at an advanced stage of consideration. The operator will be contacted directly by Bus Licensing Section of my Department with the outcome of their considerations in due course.

EU Directives.

320. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport when he transposed Directive 2003/20/EC into Irish law; the categories of vehicles for which Ireland was granted exemptions from the directive; the reason an exemption was sought in each case; when these derogations were applied for by Ireland; when he expects these categories to be included in law here; if a publicity or information campaign has been organised by his Department to inform passengers and transport providers of the new requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18312/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Directive 2003/20/EC (which amends Directive 91/671/EEC) was transposed into national law by means of the European Communities (Compulsory Use of Safety Belts and Child

Restraint Systems in Motor Vehicles) Regulations 2006, which were made on 5 May 2006. A notice setting out the principal requirements in relation to the wearing of safety belts and child restraints in motor vehicles arising from the making of these Regulations was published by my Department in the national daily newspapers of 13 May 2006. Information on the Regulations is available on the Department's website at www.transport.ie. I understand that the National Safety Council will shortly be publishing information notices in the national newspapers concerning the new safety belt and child restraint wearing requirements.

The Directive provides for certain exemptions from the requirements to wear safety belts and child restraints which Member States may wish to avail of in giving effect to the Directive in their national law. The Regulations avail of the following new exemptions: to allow a child of 3 years of age or over to travel in a small public service vehicle on a seat (other than a front seat) if no appropriate child restraint is available; to allow a child of 3 years of age or over to wear a safety belt in a rear seat of a passenger car or LGV where 2 child restraints are already fitted and it is not possible to fit a third restraint.

In the case of the former exemption, this option was availed of because it is considered that it would be unreasonable to expect that small public service vehicles would always have the appropriate child restraint available. In relation to the latter exemption, it is considered that the measure is practical and reasonable and not availing of it would cause difficulties for families with small children.

The Regulations restate the long-standing exemptions provided for in the Road Traffic (Construction, Equipment and Use of Vehicles) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 1991, which implemented the original safety belt wearing directive (91/671/EEC). These exemptions relate to a person wearing a disabled person's belt; a person certified by a doctor that it is inadvisable on medical grounds for him/her to wear a safety belt; driver testers and driver instructors; and members of the Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. Another long-standing exemption, which provides that where 3 or more children under 15 years of age are travelling in the rear of a car fitted with safety belts the requirement to wear safety belts/child restraints shall apply only in so far as is reasonably practicable, is being retained until 30 April 2009.

Cycle Facilities.

321. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Transport, his views on allowing cyclists to travel on that portion of the Luas track between Heuston Station and Connolly Station in view of the dangers faced by cyclists on the quays of Dublin; and

if he will make a statement on the matter. [18313/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I do not have any plans to amend the present road traffic regulations as regards cyclists and Luas tracks.

Road Network.

322. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Transport the information he has received to date from the National Roads Authority or Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council regarding the potential for the location of an archaeological heritage park at the Carrickmines Castle site in south Dublin; and the potential suitability of the retention of the eighteenth century farmhouse at that site for use as an interpretative centre or as part of an archaeological heritage facility. [18314/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): On 16 September 2002, my predecessor at the Department of Transport issued instructions to the NRA to carry out a number of alterations to its plans so as to preserve as much of the original site at Carrickmines as possible. Any preservation or display initiatives subsequent to the construction phase would fall to the relevant road authority, in this case Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council.

I understand from the National Roads Authority (NRA) that the directions in respect of the archaeological works at Carrickmines issued during 2004 by my colleague the Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government to Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, set out a requirement for the preparation of a Conservation Plan relating to the preservation of certain features and structures at Carrickmines. The preparation of this conservation plan is a matter for Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council who are required to submit their proposed plan to the National Monuments Section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government.

Road Safety.

323. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport the advantages, in terms of road safety, of the registration requirement for imported cars other than the VAT receipts to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18331/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): My Department has no function in relation to the registration of imported cars. This is a matter for the Revenue Commissioners. The advantage in terms of road safety of the registration of imported cars is that registration provides a unique identifier which facilitates the Gardai in the enforcement of traffic law.

324. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport the changes that will occur in terms of the investigation and research into the causes of road accidents under the proposed new Road Safety Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18382/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The Road Safety Authority (RSA) will not have any formal involvement in the investigation of road collisions. The direct and immediate investigation of road accidents and their causes will continue to be primarily a matter for the Gardai. Where road conditions are a contributory factor the National Roads Authority, or the local authority, will also continue to investigate and to develop its programme in terms of potential improvements to road safety.

It is not intended that the RSA will be an investigative body, however it will have responsibility to collect, collate and analyse statistical data that will be supplied by each of the agencies involved. I would expect to see the results of such analysis reflected in future Road Safety Strategies. The RSA will also have a central role in conducting, commissioning and coordinating a broad range of road safety research functions.

Driving Tests.

325. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the maximum number of driving tests that is possible to conduct in a 12 month period under the current driving test procedures and with current resources. [18438/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The number of standard 50 minute tests that could be scheduled to be conducted in normal time within a 12 month period, based on 115 whole-time equivalent testers, is approximately 195,000 taking into account factors such as annual leave, time allowances for staff to travel to test centres, weather conditions, sick leave and normal training absences.

However tests actually conducted by individual testers are also affected by late cancellations or applicants failing to attend. The number of tests lost in 2005 for these reasons amounted to almost 23,000 or 14% of tests arranged. Non-compliance of applicants with conditions also resulted in a further 7,000 tests approximately not being conducted in 2005.

EU Directives.

326. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Transport the European directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18456/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The information sought by the Deputy is summarised in the table. It should be noted that in addition to the directives listed, there are a number of technical directives relating to the type approval of motor vehicles where the provisions governing

the sale or use of component parts have not been implemented. A list of the directives and the relevant outstanding provisions are being compiled in my Department and will be forwarded to the Deputy shortly.

Directive Number, Date of Issue and Summary Title	Implementation Date	Comments
Commission Directive 1999/17/EC of 18 March 1999 relating to motor vehicle headlamps.	01/10/1999	Already transposed in regard to entry into service for vehicles Regulations signed 6 December in regard to type approval. Sale/entry into service of components/separate units remain to be transposed.
Directive 2002/24/EC of 18 March 2002 relating to the type-approval of two or three-wheel motor vehicles.	09/05/2003	Type approval provisions were transposed by SI 421 of 2003 on 12 September 2003. S.I. 412 of 2005 signed on 27 July to transpose for entry for service. Sale/entry into service of components/separate units remain to be transposed.
Directive 2000/79/EC of 27 November 2000 the Organisation of Working Time of Mobile Workers in Civil Aviation.	01/12/2003	Intend to have the Directive transposed later in 2006.
Directive 2003/35/EC of 26 June 2003 providing for public participation in programmes relating to the environment.	25/06/2005	Clarification is being sought at present on a small number of outstanding issues. Drafting of Regulations will commence shortly.
Directive 2003/42/EC of 13 June 2003 on occurrence reporting in civil aviation.	04/07/2005	Intend to have the Directive transposed by late 2006.
Commission Directive 2004/104/EEC of 14 October 2004 relating to the radio interference of vehicles and relating to type-approval of motor vehicles and their trailers.	31/12/2005	Regulations signed on 6 December 2005. S.I. Nos. 782 and 783 of 2005 for the bulk of the requirements. Sale/entry into service of components/separate units remain to be transposed.
Directive 2004/49/EC of 29 April 2004 on safety on the Community's railways.	30/04/2006	Most of the Directive has been transposed through the Railway Safety Act 2005. Regulations made on 1 May have transposed further provisions of the Directive. The remaining elements of the Directive will be implemented by the later in 2006.
Directive 2004/36/EC of 21 April 2004 on the safety of third-country aircraft using Community airports.	30/04/2006	Preliminary work has commenced with a view to implementing the Directive later in 2006.
2005/49/EC of 25 July 2005 relating to the radio interference of vehicles and the type-approval of motor vehicles and their trailers.	30/06/2006	S.I. Nos. 165 and 166 signed on 11 April 2006 for Type Approval and partial entry into service of passenger cars. Some textual amendments still outstanding.
Directive 2005/66/EC of 26 October 2005 relating to the use of frontal protection systems on motor vehicles.	25/08/2006	S.I. Nos. 165 and 166 signed on 11 April 2006 for Type Approval and Entry into Service of passenger cars, To be implemented as soon as is practicable for small vans (entry into service).
Directive 2005/78/EC of 14 November 2005 relating to the measures to be taken against the emission of pollutants from engines for use in vehicles.	08/11/2006	Implementation issues under consideration.
Directive 2005/55/EC of 28 September 2005 relating to the measures to be taken against the emission of pollutants from engines for use in vehicles.	09/11/2006	Implementation issues under consideration.
Directive 2005/64/EC of 26 October 2005 on the type approval of motor vehicles with regard to their reusability, recyclability and recoverability.	15/12/2006	S.I. No. 166 signed on 11 April 2006 for Type Approval of Motor Vehicles. To be implemented as soon as is practicable for small vans (entry into service).
Directive 2005/35/EC of 7 September 2005 on ship-source pollution and on the introduction of sanctions for infringements.	01/04/2007	Implementation issues under consideration.
Directive 2005/14/EC of 11 May 2005 relating to insurance against civil liability in respect of the use of motor vehicles.	11/06/2007	Documentation has been circulated to stakeholders for observations.
Directive 2005/65/EC of 26 October 2005 on enhancing Port Security.	15/06/2007	Implementation issues under consideration.

Directive Number, Date of Issue and Summary Title	Implementation Date	Comments
Directive 2005/45/EC of 7 September 2005 on the minimum level of training of seafarers.	20/10/2007	The bulk of the Directive is already in place.
Commission Directive 2006/27/EC of 3 March 2006 on the braking, statutory markings, maximum design speed, maximum torque and maximum net engine power of two- or three-wheel motor vehicles.	31/12/2006	Implementation issues under consideration.

Rail Services.

327. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport when it is intended to rationalise the fare structure on the suburban rail system that continues to result in commuters in the outer suburban area's such as Sallins and Kilcock paying substantially more for daily commuting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18504/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The structure of rail fares is a matter for Iarnród Eireann. As is common internationally, Iarnród Eireann operates two fare structures — a Dublin commuter area, which encompasses Balbriggan, Maynooth, Hazelhatch and Kilcoole, and the national network.

With the dramatic growth in longer distance commuting, issues have arisen in regard to fare arrangements between the two areas. These issues are most relevant around the boundary areas of the fare structures. Iarnród Eireann has informed me that it is currently engaged in a review of all fares structures. It is expected this review will be completed by the end of the year.

A number of season tickets are available that offer very good value to regular commuters from these stations, including the monthly and annual taxsaver tickets which can reduce the cost to commuters by up to 42%.

Port Development.

328. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the various asset or property transactions entered into by Shannon Foynes Port Company since its establishment, particularly the sale of a warehouse (details supplied) and lands; if these meet with established guidelines for State bodies either disposing of or acquiring assets; if his attention has further been drawn to recent statements by the chief executive officer of the Shannon Foynes Port Company in relation to that company's intention to seek developer interest in acquiring their strategically located land in and adjacent to Limerick docks; and his views on whether this seeking of developer interest results in potential conflict of interest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18506/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Mr. Gallagher): Shannon Foynes port is a State-owned company established under the Har-

bours Act 1996. The Act provides that the principal objects of the company include the provision of such facilities, services and lands in its harbour for ships, goods and passengers, as it considers necessary. The company is required to take all proper measures for the management, control, operation and development of its harbour. Decisions regarding the use of the land within the port estate are primarily a matter for the port company.

Regarding compliance with established Government guidelines, the company is required to confirm on an annual basis that it is fully compliant with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The company's latest annual report for 2005 confirms compliance for that year. With regard to the former Koala Warehouse property referred to in the Deputy's question, in June 2004 Shannon Foynes Port Company informed my Department that the company proposed to sell this site as part of a composite transaction that offered a number of benefits to the company.

Turning to more recent events, on 15 March last Shannon Foynes Port Company announced that it is conducting a strategic review of its property portfolio, which could result in a major expansion and upgrade of its facilities in the Shannon Estuary at a cost of over €100 million. The company has recently sought expressions of interest with regard to the Limerick Docklands and is seeking tenders for two sites within the docklands.

The Government's Ports Policy Statement from January 2005 outlines that the disposal of non-core assets is a potential source of funding for new port developments. Any such new developments will, of course, be subject to rigorous capital appraisal in accordance with Department of Finance guidelines.

There are six different port installations in the Shannon Estuary that fall within the jurisdiction of Shannon Foynes Port Company. The company projects significant increases in its volume of trade over the coming years and states that investment in new modern facilities that can handle bigger ships is required to accommodate this growth in trade. Whatever the conclusions of the strategic review, the company has said it will continue to work in partnership with other stakeholders in the region.

As is required by the Code of Practice, Shannon Foynes Port Company has a Code of

[Mr. Gallagher.]

Business Conduct for Directors and Employees, which covers procedures with regard to any potential conflicts of interest. If any such potential conflicts arise in relation to the seeking of developer interest, this would be a matter for the company in the first instance.

Road Safety.

329. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport further to his public pronouncements, the number of serious road accidents deemed to have been caused by road conditions at recognised accident blackspots; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18507/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Overall responsibility for the planning, design and implementation of National Road Projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority and the relevant local Authority — Roads Act 1993. Section 17(1). Statistics relating to road accidents are based on information provided by the Garda Síochána, and are currently published by the National Roads Authority (NRA) in their annual Road Accident Facts reports. The most recent report, now entitled “Road Collision Facts”, relates to 2004 and is available in the Oireachtas Library and on the NRA website. Statistics relating to 2005 are not yet fully analysed or authenticated.

The 2004 report refers in particular to the various contributory factors to collisions where such data is available. In that context the Report in respect of 2004 notes that driver error accounted for 88% of all contributory factors in respect of all collisions where such were identified. Pedestrian error was the next most listed factor at 8% with road factors accounting for 2% of all of those listed. The remaining factors listed related to vehicle and environmental factors.

The NRA Report does not specifically publish information with regard to the number of road accidents deemed to have happened at recognised accident blackspots. As part of the Government’s Road Safety Strategy 2004 to 2006, the NRA, the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government and Local Authorities have been implementing low cost remedial measures at approximately 240 locations on national roads and another 400 locations on non-national roads. In addition a further 20 higher cost works are being carried out at other locations on national roads.

Transport 21.

330. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the extent to which research has been carried out into accessing Dublin Airport by road, rail or otherwise as per Transport 21, in the future in view of the chaotic traffic situation that already

exists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18508/06]

331. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport the way in which it is intended, in the context of Transport 21 or otherwise, to alleviate traffic congestion in the vicinity of Dublin Airport; his views on whether he should take particular initiative to resolve the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18509/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 330 and 331 together.

Transport 21 will put in place a greatly enhanced network for the Greater Dublin Area, which will significantly improve access to Dublin Airport. Transport 21 will fund the building of 2 Metro lines, Metro North and Metro West. Metro North will provide a direct link from the City Centre to Dublin Airport and beyond to Swords, while Metro West will bring airport bound passengers from the Western suburbs of Dublin to interchange with Metro North, and onwards to Dublin Airport.

Metro interchanges with greatly expanded Luas, bus, DART and suburban rail networks, will enable passengers in the Greater Dublin Area to conveniently access Dublin Airport by public transport. The greatly enhanced commuter rail network to be built under Transport 21 will be a high quality public transport alternative to car travel in the Greater Dublin Area and will contribute significantly to reducing road congestion, including in the area of Dublin Airport. There will also be a continuing important role for bus services, both commuter and long distance, in providing improved access to the airport.

However, even when this enhanced public transport network is in place, many people will, for various reasons, continue to travel to Dublin Airport by car. Enhanced public transport will help reduce road congestion, but Transport 21 will also make that car journey easier by improving road infrastructure en route to and in the vicinity of Dublin Airport.

The M50 motorway is a key part of the road infrastructure serving Dublin Airport. An upgrade project is currently underway to improve the capacity of the M50 motorway by providing three lanes in each direction and the upgrading of most junctions to provide freeflow movements. Work has already commenced on the first phase of this work. In addition, Fingal County Council has, in its Draft Masterplan for Dublin Airport, identified further necessary regional and local road improvements to service Dublin Airport.

While this improved road and public transport infrastructure is being built, I understand that the Dublin Airport Authority is focussing on facilitating buses, coaches and taxis accessing the airport and ensuring that pick-up and set-down facilities are adequate. The Authority is also focussing on the development of a mobility management

strategy to encourage staff and passengers to explore their transport options.

Driving Tests.

332. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the average waiting time for a driving test in each of the years this century; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18510/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The information requested is set out in the table.

Year	National Average Waiting Time at 31 December
2000	25 weeks
2001	15 weeks
2002	11 weeks
2003	29 weeks
2004	31 weeks
2005	33 weeks

Ministerial Staff.

333. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Transport the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18519/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): No staff have been employed by me since January 2005. However, the table shows a list of personal staff that have been employed by me since September 2004.

Name	Role
Colin Hunt	Special Advisor
Dan Pender	Press Officer
Sean Dower	Personal Assistant
Inez O'Neill	Personal Secretary

Driving Tests.

334. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the number of driving tests in each of the years this century where the tester was paid overtime or a financial bonus over and above their normal pay; the number of driving tests carried out by testers as part of an incentive scheme to curb driving test waiting times in each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18526/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): A bonus scheme for driver testers operated between 2000 and 2001. This bonus scheme resulted in about 24,000 driving tests being delivered outside normal hours. A second bonus scheme commenced in 2003. Three testers participated in the scheme

which delivered approximately 1,000 bonus tests. In 2003, however, just over 20,000 tests were done in overtime without attracting a bonus.

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of driving tests carried out by testers on overtime is not available for the years 2000 and 2001. The figures for 2003 to 2005 are set out in the table.

Year	Tests conducted on Overtime (Approx)
2002	24,800
2003	20,600
2004	19,900
2005	18,300

Rail Network.

335. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Transport the state of development of the section of line from Ennis to Claremorris in respect of the western rail corridor; the extent of moneys allocated towards the relaying of this section; when he expects this section to be open for passenger and freight traffic; the state of development of the section from Claremorris to Colooney and Sligo; the allocation for 2006; the numbers employed and the work to be carried out and completed in 2006; when he expects this section to be open for passenger and freight traffic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18527/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Transport 21 provides for the re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor between Ennis and Claremorris on a phased basis and the preservation of the remaining alignment as far as Collooney. The current position regarding the Western Rail Corridor is that Iarnród Éireann has submitted proposals to my Department relating to Phase 1 (the reopening of the Ennis to Athenry section) and Phase 2 (re-opening of the Athenry to Tuam section). These are currently being examined in my Department. When this examination is completed I will make a decision on Iarnród Éireann's applications and the allocation of funding.

Departmental Staff.

336. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the average, median range and lower and upper quartiles of the gross pay of a driving tester in the last year for which figures are available. [18528/06]

337. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the amount paid in travel and subsistence to driver testers in the past three years for which figures are available; and the typical proportion this constitutes of the gross pay of the average driver tester. [18529/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 336 and 337 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the tables.

2005 Driving Tester Gross Pay

	€
Average Pay	45,000
Median Pay	46,000
Lower Quartile	14,000-42,000
Upper Quartile	49,000-57,000

Driving Tester Travel and Subsistence

	2003	2004	2005
Travel and Subsistence	€1,848,000	€1,918,000	€1,944,000
Proportion of Gross Pay	38%	37%	36%

Road Traffic Offences.

338. **Mr. Kelleher** asked the Minister for Transport if he intends to bring in legislation to deal with the problem of cars not registered here not having the correct tax, insurance or national car test documentation and the fact that the Gardaí are unable to seize or impound these vehicles due to the fact that they are registered outside of the State; his views on whether this is becoming a major problem in the interest of road safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18543/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): As I previously informed the house in March this year, this issue will be dealt with in the upcoming Road Traffic Bill. The Government approved priority drafting of the Road Traffic Bill 2006 in April. It is intended that the Bill will be published during the current Dáil session. Provision is made in the Bill to amend section 41 of the Road Traffic Act 1994 to allow An Garda Síochána to impound vehicles registered outside the State which do not have motor insurance in place.

With regard to motor taxation and NCT documentation, vehicles registered outside the State are not liable to Irish motor tax or to the NCT. In accordance with EU Directive 96/96/EC all vehicles in the EU are required to undergo a periodic roadworthiness test in the country in which the vehicle is registered. However, An Garda Síochána currently have powers to remove from the road vehicles that they consider not to be roadworthy. The Revenue Commissioners decide in accordance with EU Directives whether or not drivers of foreign-registered vehicles are required to re-register their vehicle in the State.

I would say that this issue has very little to do with road safety. As I have said on many occasions recently, driver behaviour is responsible for over 90% of accidents and that is the major issue that we all need to address.

It is important to remember that victims of uninsured drivers will be compensated by the Motor Insurer's Bureau of Ireland. My officials have ascertained that nearly all foreign-registered vehicles involved in accidents reported to the MIBI have insurance in place.

Light Rail Project.

339. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Transport when the Luas line will be extended to Citywest, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18546/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Transport 21 provides for a spur from the Tallaght Luas line to the Citywest Campus (Line A1). The Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) is at present progressing this project. The inclusion of it in the Transport 21 project was contingent on agreement being reached between the RPA and private developers on the sharing of the costs involved in the project.

Public consultation on the proposed route from Belgard to Fortunestown Lane began on 23 February 2006 following the signing, in September 2005, of Heads of Agreement between the RPA and developers in relation to the scheme. My Department recently approved an extension of the project to Garter Lane arising from an agreement among the developers, which, *inter alia*, involves additional private sector involvement in funding the scheme.

South Dublin County Council have confirmed their strong support for the project. Subject to compliance with the relevant statutory procedures etc, construction should be completed in 2009.

Grant Payments.

340. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of older people who benefited from the grants scheme for security equipment and social monitored alarms in 2005; and the breakdown of the figures for socially monitored alarms, window locks, door locks and door chains designed to strengthen points of entry to the dwelling, security lighting and smoke alarms. [18031/06]

341. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of additional older people who are expected to benefit from the increase in grant amounts for security equipment and social monitored alarms scheme. [18032/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 340 and 341 together.

Over 6,500 individuals have been approved for funding under the 2005 Scheme of Community Support for Older People. Of these, over 5,000 were approved for socially monitored alarms; almost 1,600 for equipment designed to strengthen points of entry to the dwelling; almost 3,000 for security lighting and in the region of 1,600 for smoke alarms. As can be seen from these figures, many individuals received grants for two or more of the security features provided for under this scheme.

Earlier this year my Department carried out an extensive review of the scheme, including a consultation process with a geographic spread of participating groups and organisations. As a result of this review, I have incorporated the following important changes to the scheme for 2006:

- The 2006 scheme will be open for applications throughout the year;
- The maximum individual grant in respect of physical security equipment is being increased to €200 from €150;
- The maximum individual grant in respect of security lighting is being increased to €200 from €150;
- A new grant of €150 in respect of interior emergency lighting has been introduced for qualifying older people living on our offshore islands;
- An administration subvention will be made available to participating groups in 2006.

These changes are intended to make the scheme more accessible to applicant organisations and older people in their communities over the course of the year, and to facilitate participation by a wider range of groups. As already stated, over

6,500 individuals benefited under the 2005 scheme. It would not, however, be possible at this time to estimate the number of additional older people expected to benefit from the increases in grant amounts and, indeed, from the other changes to the 2006 scheme.

Questions Nos. 342 and 343 answered with Question No. 105.

Question No. 344 answered with Question No. 77.

Community Development.

345. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the expenditure to date on various projects in County Kildare funded by his Department; the source of such funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18394/06]

351. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if closing dates for grant aid available from his Department have been reached in respect of 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18400/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 345 and 351 together.

I refer the Deputy to my replies to Questions Nos. 114 of 19 May 2005; 221 of 26 October 2005 and 285, 286 and 289 of 8 February 2006. As the Deputy will be aware my Department was established on 6 June 2002. Details of the expenditure to date on various projects in County Kildare funded by my Department are set out in the following appendix.

My Department's schemes have varying arrangements regarding closing dates, details of which are on my Department's website www.pobail.ie. If the Deputy would like information in relation to a particular scheme, I would be glad to provide details to him.

Appendix RAPID Leverage Fund (Kildare-Athy RAPID Area Allocations)

Scheme	2004 Funding	2005 Funding	2006 to date
	€	€	€
Local Authority Housing Estate Enhancement	20,000	45,000	45,000
RAPID Playgrounds	30,000	30,000	
Sports Capital Top-ups*	90,600	63,600	
Traffic Measures	N/A	22,500	45,000
Health Sector Co-fund	N/A	38,500	
Total	140,600	199,600	90,000

* The Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs tops up the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism allocation.

The RAPID Leverage Fund was initiated in 2004. The above figures represent this Departments allocation to the Athy RAPID area. The Local Authority Housing Estate Enhancement, Play-

ground, Traffic Measures and Health Sector Co-fund schemes receive matching funding from other Departments.

[Éamon Ó Cuív.]

Under the RAPID Programme, the Athy Area Implementation Team (AIT) received support budget funding. Total allocation under the sup-

port and communications budget: 2002 — €14,500; 2003 — €9,600; 2004 — €9,200; 2005 — €12,500.

Local Development Social Inclusion Programme.

Name	Allocations €				
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
OAK Partnership *	866,730	743,940	706,742	779,920	793,935
Action South Kildare	672,195	651,977	586,945	638,294	649,765
Total	1,538,925	1,395,917	1,293,687	1,418,214	1,443,700

*Oak Partnership serves, roughly equally, parts of both Co. Kildare, and Co. Offaly

Community Development Programme

The following table outlines funding under the Community Development Programme to Projects

in Kildare. The 2002 to 2005 columns represents funding currently committed for 2006.

Name	Total Funding				
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
The Bridge CDP 5 Frances Lane Newbridge County Kildare	N/A	Start-Up Funding €13,000	Annual core funding — €59,000 *Once-Off Grants — €4,000	Annual core funding — €62,400 *Once-Off Grants — €8,000	Annual core-funding — €92,600
Athy CDP Woodstock Street Athy County Kildare	Annual Core Funding Pre 24 June €39,991 Post 24 June €46,737	Annual core funding — €60,000 *Once-Off Grants — €8,000	Annual core funding — €103,285 *Once-Off Grants — €2,000	Annual core funding — €105,400 *Once-Off Grants — €4,000	Annual core-funding — €111,200
North West Kildare Allenwood, Naas County Kildare	N/A	N/A	N/A	Annual core funding — €60,000	Annual core-funding — €60,000 Start-Up Funding €10,706
Total	€86,728	€81,000	€168,285	€239,800	€274,506

*In addition to core funding, applications are invited each year from Community Development Projects for once-off grants towards small scale refurbishment projects, purchase of equipment, and programme activities. Decisions on such applications are taken on the basis of resources available. The applications for 2006 are currently under consideration and projects will be notified in due course.

Details of funding approved under the Scheme of Community Support for Older People (CSOP) and the Programme of Grants for Locally Based Community & Voluntary Groups are available on my Department's website at www.pobail.ie.

LEADER Programmes

The following is the expenditure to end April 2006 on the LEADER Programmes in County Kildare: LEADER + €2,629,823 has been paid out from an allocation of €3,887,400 for the period 2000-2006. Area Based Rural Development Initiative €606,632 has been paid out from

an allocation of €1,227,600 for the period 2000-2006.

Dormant Accounts Fund

Under the initial round of funding, administered on behalf of the Dormant Accounts Fund Disbursements Board by Pobal (formerly known as Area Development Management Ltd), a total of twelve applications from organisations based in County Kildare were approved for funding of over €2.7 million in 2005. A breakdown of these approved projects is provided in the table below. No funding has yet been approved for projects in 2006.

Dormant Accounts Board Approvals (County Kildare)

Group/Organisation	Grant
	€
KARE, County Kildare	194,000
Hospitaller Order of St John of God, Celbridge, County Kildare	167,336
Board of Management, Scoil Phadraig Naofa, Athy, County Kildare	41,000
Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, County Kildare	300,000
Kildare Youth Services (Curragh Youth Project)	81,226

Group/Organisation	Grant
	€
Camphill Communities of Ireland, Kilcullen, County Kildare	360,000
Athy Youth Project, County Kildare	58,775
Athy Travellers' Club, County Kildare	50,420
Athy Town Council	70,838
ASSET, Athy, County Kildare	100,000
Cheshire Ireland, Newbridge, Co. Kildare	1,272,273
Dyspraxia Association of Ireland	50,500
Total	2,746,368

Community Services Programme

This Department through its Community Services Programme administered by POBAL, currently funds 5 Projects in County Kildare and expenditure in 2006 is expected to be €565,858. This Programme transferred from Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment on 1st January 2006. It was previously called the Social Economy Programme and was administered by FÁS.

Community Services Groups in Kildare

Group Name	Annual Budget 2006	Paid to Date
	€	€
Ar an Uisce Enterprise	150,788	45,228
Centre for Performing Arts	56,747	20,156
Larkwood Products Ltd.	140,339	42,703
Lullymore Heritage Park	150,788	90,473
Naas Sports Group Ltd.	67,196	26,424

National Drugs Strategy.

346. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which he is prepared to assist groups involved in the fight against drugs in the eastern region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18395/06]

347. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of applications for funding he has received from local or community groups in the eastern region involved in the fight against drugs. [18396/06]

349. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which his attention has been drawn to the growth of drug abuse on a county basis; his intentions for dealing with the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18398/06]

350. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his expected expenditure in 2006 for utilisation in the preven-

tion of drug abuse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18399/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 346, 347, 349 and 350 together.

My Department has overall responsibility for the co-ordination of the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008, which aims to tackle drugs misuse in a comprehensive way. The National Drugs Strategy Team plays a vital role in overseeing the work of the Local and Regional Drugs Task Forces. Twelve of the 14 Local Drugs Task Forces (LDTFs) are located in Dublin, with the others in Bray and Cork. There are 10 Regional Drugs Task Forces (RDTFs) in the areas not covered by Local Drugs Task Forces. Thus all areas are now serviced by a Drugs Task Force.

Local Drugs Task Forces are well established and are now implementing the second round of Action Plans at an annual cost of €16m. Since 1997, nearly €125m has been allocated to support this work across the 14 LDTF areas. Over 400 community-based projects have been established, employing more than 300 staff, and delivering services such as advice and support for drug misusers and their families, community drug teams offering treatment, outreach and crisis intervention services and drug training programmes for community groups.

Progress is now being made by the RDTFs, all of which have prepared Action Plans for their Regions. A sum of €5m has been allocated to the 10 RDTFs towards the implementation of those plans for 2006 and €322,000 of this has been drawn down to date. Funding will be increased on an incremental basis over the coming years to achieve the full roll out of the Action Plans, which are estimated to have a full cost in the region of €12.2m per annum. It is expected that the rate of progress being made by RDTFs will accelerate in the latter part of the year, especially in view of the employment of full-time co-ordinators.

Additionally there are a number of funds which I have made available to community based drug projects. The Emerging Needs Fund was devised to provide a flexible and timely response to evolv-

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ing needs in regard to drug misuse in Local Drugs Task Force areas. My recent announcement concerning the approval of €2.27m for 39 projects brings the total approved to date from this Fund to just over €3.1m.

The Young People's Facilities and Services Fund was established in 1998 to assist the development of youth facilities (including sport and recreational facilities) and services in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists, or has the potential to develop. My recent announcement of almost €2m for the provision of four new youth facilities in Carlow and Waterford brings the total commitment from the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund to almost €101m since its establishment.

The Premises Initiative, established to meet the accommodation needs of community-based drugs projects in LDTF areas, has now been extended to meet the accommodation needs of community-based drugs projects in RDTF areas.

Overall an allocation of €43m has been made to my Department's Vote for the Drugs Initiative/Young People's Facilities and Services Fund in 2006. This represents an increase of 37% on the original 2005 allocation and a massive 61% increase on the 2004 allocation. I am satisfied that the implementation of the LDTF and RDTF Action Plans, along with the range of additional funding initiatives represents a comprehensive response to the problem of drugs misuse in the eastern region and nationwide.

Community Development.

348. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his future intentions regarding the RAPID programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18397/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): As I have already indicated, I believe that the RAPID Programme should continue into the future and that RAPID in its current refocused form provides a long-term model to support disadvantaged communities.

Questions Nos. 349 and 350 answered with Question No. 346.

Question No. 351 answered with Question No. 345.

EU Directives.

352. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18457/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): There are no European Directives within my Department's competency which have to be implemented.

Decentralisation Programme.

353. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the extent to which the decentralisation programme for his Department has progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18482/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Very good progress has been achieved. A site has been acquired at Knock Airport and the OPW are currently evaluating tenders for the construction there of the new headquarters of the Department.

Of the 140 posts due to transfer to Knock Airport, some 65 will transfer to temporary accommodation in Tubbercurry from mid-2006. When the new headquarters is ready for occupation, the Tubbercurry posts and those posts still remaining in Dublin at that stage will transfer to Knock Airport.

As regards Na Forbacha, 7 of the 10 posts due to transfer there from Dublin are now in place.

Progress with the decentralisation of bodies reporting to or under the aegis of the Department is also very good.

The decentralisation of Pobal, formerly ADM, to Clifden has progressed very well. Of the 40 posts due to transfer there, a total of 20 will be in place shortly.

I am answering today other Dáil questions specifically relating to the decentralisation programme of Foras na Gaeilge.

Grant Payments.

354. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if he will review funding for an organisation (details supplied); the network that supports practitioners with young people at risk after 30 November 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18483/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): The organisation in question is funded by my Department under the White Paper funding scheme for Federations and Networks. Funding totalling €198,000 is provided over the period 2003 to 2006.

The funding provision under the White Paper schemes expires at the end of November, 2006. A review of the effectiveness of the current spend under the White Paper is in progress in my Department and it is anticipated that following this review, a new scheme will be advertised in the coming months. It will be open to the organis-

ation in question to apply for further funding at that stage.

Departmental Staff.

355. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18520/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I do not directly employ staff. However I take it that you are referring to staff employed by the Department at my nomination. No new staff have been employed by the Department in such capacity since January 2005. The following are employed by my Department on my nomination since prior to January 2005.

Name	Role/ Grade
Éadaoin Ní Mhongaile	Media Advisor
Pádraic Ó hUiginn	Advisor
Máire Ní Fhlatharta	Personal Assistant
Máirín Ní Choisdealbha	Personal Secretary
Muireann Ní Thuairisg	Clerical Officer

Question No. 356 withdrawn.

Quarantine Regulations.

357. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the facilities which are available and the requirements for those who are bringing dogs with EU passports and other animals into the country through Shannon, Dublin and Cork Airports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17947/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): Since July 2004, under the EU Pet Passport system, it is possible to bring eligible dogs and cats directly into Ireland without the imposition of quarantine. Such animals travelling directly into Ireland must:

- travel from a qualifying country (specified under the EU Pet passport system).
- be identified by means of a microchip.
- have been vaccinated against rabies.
- have, at least six months before entry, been successfully blood-tested for rabies anti-bodies.
- have been correctly treated for against tick and tapeworm.

Animals arriving by air travel as manifested freight into Dublin airport are subsequently checked for compliance with the conditions of entry at the quarantine premises at Lissenhall, Dublin. Where owners use an airline which has

not opted to be an ‘approved’ airline for the purposes of the pet passport system, prior approval to land the animal must be obtained from my Department.

In general it is not possible to bring dogs and cats directly into Ireland by air except through Dublin airport. In exceptional circumstances, my Department will consider requests to allow an animal to be brought in through Shannon or Cork airports. There is a common travel area between Ireland and the UK and EU passports for dogs and cats are not required.

Grant Payments.

358. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive the forestry premium payment. [17951/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The forest premium payment was made to the person in question on 8 May 2006.

359. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when a decision will be made on an application under the national reserve for a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon; the reason for the delay in same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17841/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application for an allocation of entitlements from the Single Payment Scheme National Reserve under Category B.

Category B caters for farmers who, between 1 January 2000 and 19 October 2003, made an investment in production capacity in a farming sector for which a direct payment under Live-stock Premia and/or Arable Aid schemes would have been payable during the reference period 2000- 2002. Investments can include purchase or long-term lease of land, purchase of suckler and/or ewe quota or other investments.

The person named has been deemed successful under Category B of the reserve on the basis of an investment in suckler cow quota during the reference period. My Department has issued a formal letter setting out the details of the allocation.

If the person named is dissatisfied with my Department’s decision he has the opportunity to appeal the decision to the Independent Appeals Committee. An appeals application is available from any of my Department’s offices or on the Department website at www.agriculture.gov.ie.

Assisted Animal Reproduction.

360. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the position regarding the introduction of artificial insemination straws for a

[Mr. Ring.]

particular breed of cattle; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17906/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): Under the European Communities (Trade in Bovine Breeding Animals, Their Semen, Ova and Embryos) Regulations, 1996, S.I. 112 of 1996, bovine semen used in A.I. must be approved for use by my Department.

A.I. organisations or individuals can apply to my Department, through the Irish Cattle Breeding Federation, to have semen from a bull approved for use in A.I. Applications may be made for unrestricted use of the semen, use of the semen for official test purposes or use of the semen for special breeding purposes. My Department is not aware of outstanding applications for the approval of semen for use in A.I. in respect of the Belted Galloway breed that have been delayed or refused.

Grant Payments.

361. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when the single farm payment will be made to a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [17927/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application for the Single Payment Scheme 2005 on 16 May 2005. The person named also submitted a Private Contract Clause application to transfer entitlements by way of a lease agreement under the 2005 Single Payment Scheme. The application was successful and payment was made to the applicant for leased entitlements. The applicant is also due a further payment in respect of the 2005 decoupled Dairy Premium and this will issue shortly.

Genetically Modified Organisms.

362. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if there have been documented cases here of contamination of conventional crops by genetically modified strains; and if so, if she will provide information on the crops, locations and dates of such instances. [17960/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): There have been no reports here of cases of contamination of conventional crops by genetically modified strains. In the absence of legislative on labelling thresholds for the adventitious presence of GM seed in conventional seedlots placed on the market in the EU, most member States (including Ireland) have been operating a voluntary agreement, since 2000, aimed at ensuring that GM seed is not inadvertently marketed in the Community. This involves each consignment of seed in excess of 2 kg, of designated species, being notified to the competent authorities and being accompanied by a

certificate from a recognised laboratory stating that the seeds do not contain GMOs above the 0.1% level of detection. Ireland, along with the Other Member States involved, undertake annual random sampling of imported seedlots to verify compliance with interim thresholds for adventitious contamination set at levels recommended by the EU Scientific Committee on Plants in 2001 of 0.3% for oilseed rape and 0.5% for all other species including maize.

Since 2000 my Department has carried out random tests on a number of seedlots. Of 179 maize seedlots tested, no seedlot has been found with GM content exceeding the threshold of 0.5%. Eight seedlots had GM content detected at levels below the threshold — three in importations in each of the years 2001 and 2002 and one in each of the years 2003 and 2004. None have been detected since.

363. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if the appropriate allowance will be made for a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath who wishes to purchase outright the Irish Land Commission annuity; if in view of the circumstances the amount being sought will be reduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17963/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): A special discounted buy out scheme, providing Land Purchase annuitants with the opportunity to buy out their annuities at a reduced price was introduced on the 1st January 2006. My Department has written to all annuitants, including the person named, providing each with an application form giving details of the scheme, the amount of their reduction under the terms of the scheme, the amount required to buy out their annuity and information on how to make their payment. The scheme provides that participating annuitants will receive a 25% discount off the capital sum outstanding on their annuity, assuming they discharge all their current arrears at the same time. In the case of the person named this reduction amounts to €5,421.90. This is a voluntary scheme, which will end on the 30th June 2006.

Grant Payments.

364. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food further to the single payment scheme national reserve 2005, the maximum nominal fee per hectare under category A leased land; when and the mechanisms under which this was decided; the way in which this information was communicated and made available to farmers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17977/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The position is that the EU Regulations governing category A of the Single Pay-

ment Scheme National Reserve provide that the land acquired by an applicant must have been acquired free of charge or at a symbolic price. The application form made available to farmers clearly sets out the fact that the land must have been acquired free of charge or for a nominal consideration.

A Single Payment Advisory Committee, comprising representatives of the farming organisations, Teagasc and officials from my Department was established to advise on various aspects of the National Reserve including the question of what should constitute a “nominal consideration” in the context of Category A. I am satisfied that the figure of up to €100 per hectare which has been applied as a nominal amount per hectare is reasonable.

365. **Mr. Crawford** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Monaghan will be advised of their full single payment rights; if they have been granted additional rights as a young qualified farmer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18002/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application under the inheritance measure of the 2005 Single Payment Scheme. The applicant was subsequently notified that his application was unsuccessful as the land was leased, not inherited.

The person named submitted an application for consideration to transfer entitlements in by way of Private Contract Clause (Lease), he was notified that his application was successful and the requested entitlements were transferred to his name, and payment issued to him on 9 December 2005 in respect of the transferred entitlements. A further application to transfer entitlements was also submitted by the person named by way of Private Contract Clause (Lease). These entitlements have now been transferred to the applicant and a further payment will issue to him shortly.

The person named submitted an application for an allocation of entitlements from the Single Payment Scheme National Reserve under Categories A, B and D.

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/her holding to a third party during the reference period 2000 — 2002. Category B caters for farmers who, between 1 January 2000 and 19 October 2003, made an investment in production capacity in a farming sector for which a direct payment under Livestock Premia and/or Arable Aid schemes would have been payable during the reference period 2000- 2002. Investments can include purchase or long term lease of land, purchase of suckler and/or ewe quota or other investments. Category D caters for farmers who com-

menced farming after 31 December 2002 or who commenced farming in 2002 but who received no direct payments in respect of that scheme year.

It should be noted that the rules governing the Single Payment Scheme National Reserve stipulate that an applicant who is found to be eligible under more than one category may only receive an allocation of entitlements under whichever category is most beneficial.

My Department requested additional information from the applicant and this is now being examined.

A formal letter setting out my Department’s decision will issue shortly to the person named and if he is dissatisfied with my Department’s decision in relation to the National Reserve he then has the opportunity to appeal this decision to the Independent Payment Appeals Committee. An appeals application form is available from any of my Department’s offices or on the Department website at www.agriculture.gov.ie.

366. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the action she will take in relation to a person (details supplied) in County Sligo to have their entitlements granted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18005/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): An application under the 2005 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 29 April 2005. The person named had established 131.47 entitlements based on his farming activity in 2001 and 2002. The Single Payment of €1,434.67, which issued on 1 December 2005, represented the full payment due.

However, as 65.73 entitlements were also established in 2000 under the herd number quoted, by a now deceased relative of the person named, an official of my Department has contacted the person named directly, advising that an application under the inheritance measure of the Single Payment Scheme, together with supporting documentation, should be submitted. When this documentation is received and processed, the Single Payment application will be further processed with a view to the issue of any outstanding payment.

367. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if she will review an application, for entitlements from the national reserve, from a person (details supplied) in County Cork; when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18018/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application to the National Reserve under category B. Category B caters for farmers who, between 1 January 2000 and 19 October 2003, made an investment in production capacity in a farming sector for which a direct payment under

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Livestock Premia and/or Arable Aid schemes would have been payable during the reference period 2000- 2002. Investments can include purchase or long term lease of land, purchase of suckler and/or ewe quota or other investments.

The Regulations governing the Single Payment Scheme provide that applicants who apply under more than one measure of the Scheme must be examined to ensure that the application of both measures does not result in double benefit to the applicant for the same reason. The person named has already benefited from another measure i.e. New Entrant during the reference period and therefore this National Reserve application will now be assessed to establish whether the provisions precluding double benefit or accumulation in certain circumstances are appropriate to the case.

Following this examination the person named will be notified of the outcome and should he be dissatisfied with my Department's decision, he has the opportunity to appeal this decision to the Independent Payment Appeals Committee. An appeals application form is available from any of my Department's offices or on the Department website at www.agriculture.gov.ie.

368. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if she will review an application, for entitlements from the national reserve, from a person (details supplied) in County Cork; when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18019/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application for an allocation of entitlements from the Single Payment Scheme National Reserve but did not indicate under which category of the reserve he wished to be considered for entitlements.

An official from my Department contacted the person named on 1 March 2006 and it was established that the person named did not qualify under any of the categories of the National Reserve.

There are four main categories A, B, C and D. 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/her holding to a third party during the reference period 2000-2002.

Category B caters for farmers who, between 1 January 2000 and 19 October 2003, made an investment in production capacity in a farming sector for which a direct payment under Livestock Premia and /or Arable Aid Schemes would have been payable during the reference period 2000 to 2002. Investments can include purchase or long term lease of land, purchase of suckler and/or ewe quota or other investments.

Category C caters for farmers who, between 1 January 2000 and 19 October 2003, participated in the Milk Quota Restructuring Scheme and who converted to a farming sector for which a direct payment under the Livestock and/or Arable Aid Premium Schemes would have been payable during the period 2000-2002.

Category D caters for farmers who commenced farming after 31 December 2002 or who commenced farming in 2002 but who received no direct payments in respect of that scheme year.

It should be noted however that the rules governing the Single Payment Scheme stipulate that an applicant who is found to be eligible under more than one category in the Reserve may only receive an allocation of entitlements under whichever category is most beneficial to him.

Departmental Staff.

369. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food her views on adding extra resources in terms of staff to her Department's offices here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18022/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The introduction of the Single Payment Scheme (SPS), falling disease levels and efficiency gains means that staff numbers in my Department are currently on a downward trend.

The introduction of the Single Payment Scheme (SPS) and efficiency gains generally will result in a reduction of over 400 staff in my Department's local and other offices. My Department is actively managing the transition to ensure an orderly redeployment of staff. Where additional work becomes available in the Single Farm Payment area, this work is transferred to local offices. My Department is also consulting with other Government Departments, including the Department of Justice, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social & Family Affairs, to fill vacancies in those Departments from surplus Agriculture staff.

Grant Payments.

370. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive the single farm payment, in view of the fact that the herd number has been fully transferred into their name. [18053/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted an application requesting the transfer of entitlements by way of inheritance in respect of the Single Payment Scheme. The entitlements in question were amended to take account of the provisions relating to Agri-Environmental Measures in the relevant EU Regulations. The calculation of entitlements has now been com-

pleted. The applicant has been notified that his application for inheritance has been successful and that payment will issue shortly.

371. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the reason a forestry grant has not been awarded to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18054/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The Forest Service of my Department has been in correspondence with the Solicitors representing the person in question relating to documentation required in connection with a change of ownership of the plantation. That documentation has now been received. Payment of the premium will be made at the earliest possible date.

Questions Nos. 372 and 373 withdrawn.

374. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when the remainder of the special beef premium will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18058/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person named submitted four applications under the 2004 Special Beef Premium Scheme, in respect of a total of forty-two animals.

Following computer validation, it was found that eight of the animals on the second application and three on the fourth application, were non-CMMS compliant, in that they were not recorded as being in the herd of the person named on the date the applications were received by the Department.

The appropriate regulatory penalty was that no premium would be payable. The person named, having been advised accordingly, subsequently appealed this decision and, after due consideration, the appeal was allowed. Arrangements are now being made to process the applications further, with a view to payment issuing shortly.

375. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive the single farm payment 2005 and dairy top-up; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18321/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): An application under the 2005 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 16 May 2005. This person also applied under the Consolidation and Private Contract Clause measures of the Single Payment Scheme. The application for the consolidation of entitlements has been accepted and fully processed to payment stage. The Private Contract Clause application to transfer in entitlements by way of

a lease agreement has been successful. Full payment including Dairy Premium will be issued to the person named shortly.

376. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if she will review an application, for entitlements from the national reserve, from a person (details supplied) in County Cork; when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18323/06]

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.

The person named did, however, apply to transfer out some entitlements under the inheritance/gift measure of the Single Payment Scheme to a relative. This transfer has been completed. Payment of €11,190.75, in respect of the entitlements retained, will issue shortly to the person named.

EU Directives.

377. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the European Directives that have to be implemented by her Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18458/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The 23 directives currently due for implementation in my Department are set out in the schedule below. Six are overdue for transposition. Directives 2005/70/EC, 2005/74/EC and 2005/76/EC relating to plant protection products are being implemented through a package of four Statutory Instruments, three of which have been signed into effect. The remaining Statutory Instrument will be signed before 31 May 2006. Preparations for the transposition of Directives 2006/35/EC and 2006/36/EC relating to plant health, and Directive 2005/57/EC relating to plant protection products are well advanced and the Statutory Instruments will also be implemented before 31 May 2006. In all other cases I intend to have the directives implemented by the due date. Schedule Directives to be implemented by the Department of Agriculture and Food: 23.

Title of Directive

Commission Directive **2005/70/EC** of 20 October 2005 amending Council Directives 76/895/EEC, 86/362/EEC, 86/363/EEC and 90/642/EEC as regards maximum residue levels for certain pesticides in and on cereals and certain products of animal and plant origin. (OJL 276, 21/10/05, p35)

Commission Directive **2005/74/EC** of 25 October 2005 amending Council Directive 90/642/EEC as regards the maximum residue

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levels of ethofumesate, lambda-cyhalothrin, methomyl, pymetrozine and thiabendazole fixed therein (OJL 282/10/05, p9)

Commission Directive **2006/35/EC** of 24 March 2006 amending Annexes I to IV to Council Directive 2000/29/EC on protective measures against the introduction into the Community of organisms harmful to plants or plant products and against their spread within the Community (OJL 88, 25/3/06, p9)

Commission Directive **2006/36/EC** of 24 March 2006 amending Directive 2001/32/EC recognising protected zones exposed to particular plant health risks in the Community and repealing Directive 92/76/EEC (OJL 88, 25/3/06, p13)

Commission Directive **2005/57/EC** of 21 September 2005 amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include MCPA and MCPB as active substances (OJL 246, 22/9/05, p14)

Commission Directive **2005/76/EC** of 8 November 2005 amending Council Directives 90/642/EEC and 86/362/EEC as regards the maximum residue levels of kresoxim-methyl, cyromazine, bifenthrin, metalaxyl and azoxystrobin fixed therein (OJL 293 9/11/05, p14)

Commission Directive **2005/72/EC** of 21 October 2005 amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include chlorpyrifos, chlorpyrifos-methyl, mancozeb, maneb and meitram as active substances. (OJL 279, 22/10/05, p.63)

Commission Directive **2006/9/EC** of 23 January 2006 amending Council Directives 90/642/EEC as regards the maximum residue levels of diquat, fixed therein (OJL 22, 26/01/06, p24)

Commission Directive **2006/4/EC** of 26 January 2006 amending the Annexes to Council Directives 86/362/EEC and 90/642/EEC as regards maximum residue levels for carbofuran (OJL 23, 27/01/06, p 69)

Commission Directive **2005/43/EC** of 23 June 2005 amending the Annexes to Council Directive 68/193/EEC on the marketing of material for the vegetative propagation of the vine (OJL 164, 24/06/05 p37)

Commission Directive **2006/30/EC** of 13 March 2006 amending the Annexes to Council Directives 86/362/EEC, 86/363/EEC and 90/642/EEC as regards maximum residue levels for the benomyl group (OJL 75, 14/03/06, p.7)

Commission Directive **2006/10/EC** of 27 January 2006 amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include forchlorfenuron and indoxacarb as active substances (OJL 25, 28/01/06, p24)

Commission Directive **2006/19/EC** of 14 February 2006 amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include 1-methylcyclopropene as active substance (OJL 44, 15/02/06, p44)

Commission Directive **2006/13/EC** of 3 February 2006 amending Annexes I and II to Directive 2002/32/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on undesirable substances in animal feed as regards dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs (OJL 32, 04/02/06, p46)

Commission Directive **2005/86/EC** of 5 December 2005 amending Annex I to Directive 2002/32/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on undesirable substances in animal feed as regards camphechlor. (OJL 318, 06/12/05, p16)

Commission Directive **2005/87/EC** of 5 December 2005 amending Annex I to Directive 2002/32/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on undesirable substances in animal feed as regards lead, fluorine and cadmium. (OJL 318, 06/12/05, p17)

Commission Directive **2006/26/EC** of 2 March 2006 amending, for the purposes of their adaptation to technical progress, Council Directives 74/151/EEC, 77/311/EEC, 78/933/EEC and 89/173/EEC relating to wheeled agricultural or forestry tractors (OJL 35, 07/03/06, p22)

Commission Directive **2006/16/EC** of 7 February 2006 amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include oxamyl as active substance (OJL 36, 08/02/06, p.37)

Council Directive **2005/24/EC** of 14 March 2005 with regard to the use of ova and embryos and storage centres for semen from pure-bred breeding animals of the bovine species. (OJL 78, 24/03/05, p43)

Commission Directive **2006/5/EC** of 17 January 2006 amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include warfarin as active substance (OJL 12, 18/01/06 p, 17)

Commission Directive **2006/6/EC** of 17 January 2006 amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include tolyfluanid as active substance (OJL 12, 18/01/06 p, 21)

Council Directive **2005/94/EC** of 20 December 2005 on Community measures for the control of avian influenza and repealing Directive 92/40/EEC (OJL 10, 14/01/06, p16)

Commission Directive **2006/39/EC** of 12 April 2006 amending Council Directive 91/414/EEC to include clodinafop, pirimicarb, rimsulfuron, tolclofos-methyl and triticonazole as active substances (OJL 104, 13/04/06, p30)

Ministerial Staff.

378. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Agri-

culture and Food the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by her since January 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18521/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): A Press Adviser vacancy has existed since February 2005 and an appointment is pending.

Grant Payments.

379. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the criteria for qualification for the national reserve; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18549/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The four main categories and qualifying criteria for the 2005 Single Payment Scheme National Reserve are as follows: Category A: Farmers who inherited or otherwise obtained a holding free of charge or for a nominal sum from a farmer who retired or died before 16 May 2005 where the holding was leased out to a third party during the reference period.

Category B(i) B(ii) B(iii) and B(iv): Farmers who made an investment between 1 January 2000 and 19 October 2003, which resulted in an increase in production capacity. Investments include purchase or long term lease of land, purchase of suckler and/or ewe quota or other investments.

Category C: Farmers who sold their milk quota into a re-structuring scheme between 1 January 2000 and 19 October 2003 and who converted to a farming sector for which a direct payment under the Livestock and/or Arable Aid Schemes would have been payable in respect of the years 2000 to 2002.

Category D: New entrants to farming since 31 December 2002 and farmers who commenced farming in 2002 but who received no direct payments in that year. The applicant's total income could not exceed €40,000 and any off-farm income could not exceed €20,000. Farming qualifications were required for this category.

Vetting Procedures.

380. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the vetting procedures which are in place to ensure the suitability in terms of physical and mental health in order to obtain a public service vehicle licence for the transport of high capacity passenger vehicles; the criteria which are applied; his views on whether they are adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17863/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that there is no requirement to hold a

public service vehicle driver's licence to drive high capacity passenger vehicles.

I am further informed that the only requirement is to hold the appropriate driving licence to drive such vehicles.

Road Safety.

381. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of left-hand drive cars which were involved in road fatalities in the past 12 months; [17955/06]

383. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of vehicle accidents resulting in the death of non-nationals which involved a left-hand drive car; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18330/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 381 and 383 together.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that for the period 1 January, 2006 to 9 May, 2006 four collisions involving left hand drive cars resulted in deaths of non — Irish nationals and in the same period six left hand drive cars were involved in fatal road traffic collisions.

I am also informed that the specific statistics requested are not available for 2005 or previous years.

A new foreign language road safety campaign was recently launched by my colleague the Minister for Transport. The objective of the campaign is to provide safety information to various minority ethnic groups. It focuses on legal requirements and road safety advice for driving in Ireland. Leaflets have been printed in a number of different languages and distributed to Garda Stations and workplaces where non — Irish nationals are likely to work.

Taxi Regulations.

382. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the testing regime for qualification as a taxi driver and the details of the testing process; the number of stages, the subjects tested, the points pass threshold that currently exists and so on; if there are circumstances whereby a higher pass threshold exists for Irish drivers than does for foreign drivers; if so, the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18112/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the testing for qualification as a public service vehicle driver commences at the local Garda station. The applicant submits his application to the local District Officer. Checks are carried out to ensure that the applicant is a fit and proper person to hold a licence.

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The application is then processed and in accordance with the regulations the applicant is tested on his/her knowledge of the taxi meter area, the taxi regulations regarding drivers and the carriage of passengers and road traffic legislation.

There is no distinction between foreign drivers and Irish drivers in this procedure.

The licensing of small public service vehicles (taxis, hackneys and limousines), and the drivers of such vehicles is currently governed by the Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) Regulations 1963 to 2002 made under the Road Traffic Acts, the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2003 and Regulations made under that Act in 2005 and 2006 by the Commission for Taxi Regulation.

Question No. 383 answered with Question No. 381.

Human Rights Issues.

384. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason he is allowing the breaching of human rights in prisons here; and if he will stop closing down positive educational and workshop services for prisoners. [17844/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I strongly reject the assertion in the Question that I am somehow allowing the breaching of the Human Rights of prisoners. Prisoners Human Rights are safeguarded by law, by prison visits and inspections by oversight bodies viz, Prison Visiting Committees, the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention and the Council of Europe's European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and by the daily management and operational practices in all our prisons and places of detention.

No decision has been taken to close educational or workshop services for prisoners. It is my policy to ensure that available resources are used to best advantage in maximising the provision of such services. On-going implementation of the Proposal for Organisational Change, which has been agreed with the Prison Officers' Association, should facilitate improved access to prisoner programmes as additional vocational training staff become available. In addition, the workshops at St. Patrick's Institution, which have been closed temporarily for renovation, will reopen in the near future and it is envisaged that the general education unit at Cloverhill Prison will be opened later this year.

Garda Stations.

385. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Garda

stations without a fax machine, computer or resident squad car in Sligo, Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17857/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The detailed information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and is currently being compiled by the Garda authorities. I will contact the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

Citizenship Applications.

386. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made on an application for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17858/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I informed the Deputy in response to Parliamentary Question No. 553 on 21 February 2006 that my officials could not proceed with the processing of the declaration of the person in question until that person made contact with my Department.

An e-mail was received on 25 April 2006 from the Irish spouse of the individual concerned, informing my officials that the family was now residing outside the State and requesting that the declaration be finalised.

A copy of my Department's letter of 5 August has now been sent on to the person concerned at his new address.

Visa Applications.

387. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason a person (details supplied) was refused a visitors visa to enable them to visit their partner here in summer 2006; if a full review of the decision made on 26 April 2006 will be undertaken by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17864/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Ukraine on 17th April, 2006. The decision of the Visa Officer to refuse this application was taken on 28th April, 2006. The application was refused because the Visa Officer could not be satisfied, on the basis of the documentation supplied, that the applicant had demonstrated a sufficient obligation to return home following the visit. In addition it was considered that the applicant failed to demonstrate sufficient family, economic or professional ties to her country of origin. It is open to the applicant to appeal this decision; however, to date, no appeal has been received. All appeals must be submitted within two months of the initial refusal decision.

Garda Strength.

388. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his plans to increase the number of Gardaí in the Dublin south central area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17899/06]

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 An Garda Síochána as at 31 March 2006 was 12,439. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June 1997 and represents an increase of 1,737 (or 16.2%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period.

I have been further informed that the personnel strength (all ranks) of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) South Central Division as at 31 March 2006 was 711. This compares with an equivalent strength of 638 when I entered office in June 2002 and represents an increase of 73 (or 11.44%) in the Division's strength since then.

It is the responsibility of Garda management to allocate personnel to and within Divisions on a priority basis in accordance with the requirements of different areas. The allocation of such resources is determined by a number of factors including demographics, administrative functions, crime trends and other operational policing needs.

Garda personnel assignments throughout the country, together with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy, are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

I should also say that the current recruitment drive to increase the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 members in line with the commitment in the Agreed Programme for Government is fully on target. This will lead to a combined strength, of both attested Gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the first group of newly attested Gardaí under the accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March and a further 275 newly attested Gardaí will come on stream every 90 days from here on in. 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 DMR South Central Division will be given the fullest consideration.

Citizenship Applications.

389. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be approved for naturalisation. [17952/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform

(Mr. McDowell): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in the Citizenship section of my Department on 18 March 2004. This application was examined recently by my officials.

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. One of these conditions is that the applicant has had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of the application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, has had a total residence in the State amounting to four years.

In the context of determining if an applicant meets the residence requirement for naturalisation, certain periods of residence in the State must be excluded. These include periods of residence in respect of which an applicant does not have permission to remain in the State, periods granted for the purposes of study and periods granted for the purposes of seeking recognition as a refugee within the meaning of the Refugee Act, 1996.

It appears that the person in question does not meet the statutory residency criteria. Although she indicated in her application that she arrived in the State in 1993, the documentation supporting her application indicates that she first obtained permission to remain in the State in May 2000 and that this permission expired in May 2003. It also appears that she has not renewed her permission to remain since that time. If she renews her permission during the course of this month or the next, and maintains that permission without gaps, she will meet the statutory residency requirement for naturalisation in May 2008. A letter setting out the situation will issue to the individual in question very shortly.

Child Protection.

390. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in relation to children using internet cafes; if a section of each internet café could be screened off for children where the internet would be safeguarded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17957/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform

(Mr. McDowell): As a matter of general policy obviously to allow children unsupervised access to the internet is inappropriate and every opportunity should be availed of to advise parents and guardians of the need for vigilance. You may be aware that on the 7th February 2006, European Safer Internet Day, my colleague Mary Hanafin, TD, Minister for Education and Science, launched a Webwise initiative (www.webwise.ie) in Ireland. This website was developed by the

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National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE), an agency of the Department of Education and Science. It provides information and resources in four specific areas, surfing, chatting, sharing, and gaming to teachers, parents and students to help ensure that children's on-line activity is positive and safe. That Department is maintaining a three pronged approach to internet safety based on having information on the latest technologies, educating our teachers and parents and using technologies such as content filtering.

You may also be aware that the Internet Advisory Board (IAB) was established in February 2000 under the aegis of my Department. My Department provides secretarial and other supports for the Board's work. The Board works closely with the Gardaí, the Service Providers and Government. As well as its role in monitoring and supporting self-regulation by the internet service provider industry, the Internet Advisory Board has a major role in the promotion of awareness of Internet downside issues. Its hard-hitting awareness campaigns are aimed at parents in particular, to help them to keep their children safe while online, especially in the home.

The Internet Advisory Board forms part of the a system of self-regulation by the Internet Service Provider industry, the components of which include: an Internet Advisor Board (IAB) which promotes awareness of Internet downside issues and monitors the progress of self regulation by the Internet service Provider Industry; a public hotline for reporting child pornography; and industry Code of Practice and Ethics setting out the duties and responsibilities of each Internet service provider.

The Board's work programme in relation to child protection has included: Promotion of advice and research on Internet downside issues. The Board conducted an information campaign in September 2005, which inter alia included a hugely successful free information booklet aimed at helping parents to understand the new communications technologies being used by their children. The Board also contributed to the MakeITSecure information campaign conducted under the aegis of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources in November 2005. Monitoring and contributing to international initiatives in relation to combating illegal and harmful use of the Internet. The Department continues to monitor international progress in relation to child protection on the internet and is represented on the management committee of the EU's Safer Internet Plus programme whose specific remit is the protection of children and young people while online. Child Pornography Hotline (www.hotline.ie). The www.hotline.ie service was launched in November, 1999 by the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The hotline provides a central point of contact for members of the

public who become aware of any child pornography on the Internet in Ireland. The hotline accepts reports about such material and attempts to identify the source. If the material is hosted in Ireland, it will request the relevant ISP to remove it, in accordance with the Code of Practice and Ethics. The hotline liaises with the Gardaí as appropriate.

The Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland funds the operating costs of the hotline. The Government, through the Information Society Fund, made a once off contribution to the promotion and launch of the hotline. All of us who are concerned with protecting our society, and particularly our children and young people from illegal and harmful use of the Internet, from teachers, to legislators, and above all parents, must be ever vigilant and ready to take necessary action. It follows that parents should have a mechanism for reporting any illegal material that they or their children come across while online, and the Hotline fulfils that role. I will arrange to bring your suggestion to the attention of the Internet Advisory Board.

Deportation Orders.

391. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of deportation orders signed in each year since May 2002; the number of persons who have been deported in each year; the action which has been taken regarding those who have not been deported in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17969/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The total number of cases considered for deportation under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act, 1999 (as amended), during the years 2002-2006 (to 30 April 2006) and the results thereof are shown in the Table below:

Table : Deportation orders made and effected, 2002 to 2006 (to 30 April 2006)

Year	Number of deportation orders made	Number of deportation orders effected
2002	2,430	521
2003	2,411	591
2004	2,915	599
2005	1,899	396
2006 (to 30 April 2006)	770	119

The majority of the above cases referred to in the Table involve persons who claimed asylum but their claims were rejected.

My Department's records show that, at present, there are in excess of 7,300 persons represented as evading Deportation Orders or Dublin II Regulation Transfer Orders, whose whereabouts are unknown to the Garda National

Immigration Bureau. However, it is believed that most of these have already left the State. If, however, it is the case that any of these persons are still in the State, their presence here is illegal and they are therefore subject to arrest and detention for the purposes of their removal from the State.

In a very significant number of cases, Deportation Orders have not been effected arising from challenges in the High Court by way of Judicial Review. There are, at present, 425 'live' judicial review cases ongoing and the enforcement of Orders in these cases is generally suspended pending the outcome of such proceedings.

Citizenship Applications.

392. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made in respect of an application (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if this application has been received by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17970/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in the Citizenship Section of my Department on 16 February 2006. The first element of the assessment process involves determining if the applicant meets the statutory residency requirement set out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956, as amended. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform may, in his absolute discretion, grant an application for a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled, including having had a period of one year's continuous residency in the State immediately before the date of the application and, during the eight years immediately preceding that period, have had a total residence in the State amounting to four years. In the context of naturalisation certain periods of residence in the State are excluded. These include periods of residence in respect of which an applicant does not have permission to remain in the State, periods granted for the purposes of study and periods granted for the purposes of seeking recognition as a refugee within the meaning of the Refugee Act, 1996.

According to information in her application, the individual concerned arrived into the State in April 2004 and has permission to remain in the State until 2010. Consequently, it appears that she will meet the residency requirement in April 2009. A letter is due to issue shortly informing her of the situation. If the person concerned decides to submit another application in April 2009, her application will be assessed against the statutory provisions in operation at that time. As the Deputy is no doubt aware, the enforcement of Deportation Orders is an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

Road Traffic Offences.

393. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of cars impounded for breaching road traffic regulations each year from 2002 to date in 2006; the breakdown of the number of cars which were domestic registered and those which were foreign registered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17971/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the breakdown of domestic registered and foreign registered cars impounded for breaching road traffic regulations is set out in the following table:

Year	Domestic Registered	Foreign Registered
2002	8,541	474
2003	9,385	445
2004	9,204	462
2005	11,947	718
2006 (15/05)	4,891	387

Garda Equipment.

394. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the location of each Garda station which holds an intoxiliser; the location of each Garda station where staff are trained in the use of this equipment; the number of Gardaí trained at each location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17973/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I regret that it has not been possible in the time available to obtain the information requested by the Deputy. I will be in touch with the Deputy in relation to this matter when it becomes available.

Garda Stations.

395. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the concerns expressed by the Garda Representative Association in relation to many Garda stations here and the fact that the ten worst stations have been highlighted with complaints of rat infestation, faulty wiring, lack of office space, inadequate toilets and showers, and lack of parking space and storage; and if he will establish a programme to deal with substandard Garda stations. [17974/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Deputy can be assured that there is a major work programme in place to progress the renovation or replacement of specific Garda stations in order to bring them up to the highest standard. Last year, alone, the Office of

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Public Works spent €26 million on Garda Building projects such as Bantry, Ballyshannon, Roscrea, New Ross and Ballina Garda Stations as well as a major building programme in the Garda College. A wide range of projects are scheduled between now and 2007, which include Ballymun, Claremorris, Oranmore and Finglas. Indeed, between the start of 2005 to the end of 2007, the Office of Public Works will spend approximately €112 million on a wide range of Garda building projects. I am determined that the progress made to date will be maintained.

The stations referred to by the Deputy form part of an overall list of 40 to 50 projects that have been prioritised and are being advanced. It is important to note that progress on the Garda major building programme is achieved by consensus and with the cooperation and commitment of all concerned — the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Garda authorities and Representative Associations and the Office of Public Works from whose Vote the capital works to Garda properties are funded. Indeed, the GRA and other Associations are actively involved and consulted in relation to both the prioritisation of various projects and on the identification of the actual accommodation requirements at each station.

On a more general note, the administration of the building programme will be streamlined over the coming months. Interviews have just taken place for the recruitment of a new civilian Accommodation Officer in An Garda Síochána with specific skill in this area and an appointment is expected in the near future. Also, the upcoming transfer of Accounting Officer functions to the Garda Commissioner will improve the efficiency of the system as some of the functions currently

split between the Gardaí and my Department will transfer to An Garda Síochána.

Asylum Support Services.

396. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of people, as far as practicable, receiving financial support from the Reception and Integration Agency in the Dublin 15 area in the past three years. [17991/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Reception and Integration Agency is responsible for the accommodation of asylum seekers through the policy of direct provision. Direct Provision is the means by which the State discharges its obligations under international law and the Constitution to provide for the basis requirements of asylum seekers. For the most part, it represents a cashless system with the State assuming responsibility for providing suitable accommodation on a full board basis. RIA also has a number of self-catering centres within the accommodation portfolio. Asylum seekers residing in these centres receive full social welfare benefits. These allowances are paid by Community Welfare Officers (operating under the aegis of the Department of Social and Family Affairs). The RIA has no role in providing direct financial support to asylum seekers.

RIA operated one accommodation centre for asylum seekers in the Dublin 15 area — Ard Erdrad Apartments — from March 2004 to March 2006. Ard Erdrad was a self-catering centre with a maximum capacity of 100 persons. Those residing there would have been in receipt of full social welfare benefits from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The Integration Unit of the RIA administers a small grants scheme and has provided grants to two projects within the Dublin 15 area.

Year	Organisation	Project Description and Amount
2005	Blakestown CDP	To part fund a new African/Irish Intercultural Women's Group. Amount awarded: €2,719.
2005	Blanchardstown Area Partnership	Integration events in primary schools and Community Development Projects; Additional materials for primary school children in the Accelerated Language Learning Project. Amount awarded: €5,000.

RIA is the responsible authority for the European Refugee Fund in Ireland. Following a recent call for proposals, an independent selection committee has allocated a grant of €320,000 to the Blanchardstown Area Partnership for the period April 2006-December 2007. The project is aimed at facilitating the integration of refugees in the Dublin 15 area.

Residency Permits.

397. **Mr. Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kerry was refused permission to remain here despite having

provided conclusive supporting evidence of their continuous residence in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17992/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The person in question applied for permission to remain in Ireland on the basis of having an Irish born child prior to 1 January 2005, in accordance with the revised arrangements announced by me on 15 January 2005. It is a requirement under the revised arrangements that each applicant is resident with their child on a continuous basis since the child's birth and that evidence of such residence be provided with each

application. The person in question has not provided satisfactory evidence of being continuously resident in the State since her child was born on 3 October 2003. On this basis, her application for permission to remain in the State under the revised arrangements was refused.

Asylum Applications.

398. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of minors originating from African countries who were returned here from the UK under the Dublin Convention since January 2004. [17993/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The EU Dublin II Regulation which came into operation on 1 September 2003 lays down the criteria for determining the Member State responsible for processing an asylum application lodged in the EU. The Regulation replaced the Dublin Convention which, however, continued to apply to relations between the EU and Denmark until recently.

As the number of unaccompanied minors originating from African countries who were returned to Ireland under the EU Dublin arrangements since January 2004 is less than 10, I am advised by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner that in order to protect the identities of the asylum applicants in question it is not possible to provide more detailed statistical information.

Garda Strength.

399. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if Garda numbers in the Blanchardstown area have kept up with the increase in population in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17994/06]

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 An Garda Síochána as at 31 March 2006 was 12,439. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June 1997 and represents an increase of 1,737 (or 16.2%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period.

I have been further informed that the personnel strength (all ranks) of Blanchardstown Garda Station as at 31 December, 1997 and 15 May, 2006 was 89 and 164, respectively. This represents a major increase — 84% — in the number of personnel allocated to Blanchardstown Garda Station during that period. This increase reflects in part the fact that the District “K” Headquarters in Dublin Metropolitan Region West has moved from Cabra Garda Station to Blanchardstown Garda Station during that period.

Garda personnel assignments throughout the country, together with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy, are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources and that the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

I should also say that the current recruitment drive to increase the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 members in line with the commitment in the Agreed Programme for Government is fully on target. This will lead to a combined strength, of both attested Gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the first group of newly attested Gardaí under the accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March and a further 275 newly attested Gardaí will come on stream every 90 days from here on in. 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 Blanchardstown Garda Station will be given the fullest consideration.

Tribunals of Inquiry.

400. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, in respect of his meeting on 10 June 2005, with a private investigator (details supplied) in County Meath, he discussed with his Departmental staff the intended meeting with the private investigator; the reason his Departmental staff were not present at the meeting; when he first created a minute of the meeting; if he created a schedule of the copy documents supplied by the private investigator; and if so, when; if any of the documents received touched on issues of relevance to the Morris Tribunal; if so, if these documents were forwarded by him to the Tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18093/06]

401. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, in respect of his meeting on June 10, 2005, with a private investigator (details supplied) in County Meath, which he attended the meeting in his capacity as Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform; if he was accompanied by a Garda driver on the night in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18094/06]

402. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the action he took regarding the documentation supplied to him in respect of his meeting on 10 June 2005, with a private investigator (details supplied) in County Meath; if it is in his possession or the possession of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18095/06]

403. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if prior to his meeting on 10 June 2005, with a private investigator (details supplied) in County Meath, he checked with the Morris Tribunal as to whether or not the person he was meeting was likely to be recalled as a witness at that Tribunal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18096/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 400 to 403, inclusive, together.

I can confirm to the Deputy that I have met and spoken to the person concerned on a number of occasions.

Garda Strength.

404. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Gardaí in the Dublin metropolitan area and in the Garda districts of Coolock, Raheny and Santry who were engaged in community policing in each year since 2000. [18097/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The detailed information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and is currently being compiled by the Garda authorities. I will contact the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

Registration of Title.

405. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of acres of land involved in an application for registration (details supplied); and when registration will be completed. [18098/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I wish to inform the Deputy that I have requested the Land Registry to contact him directly concerning the current position of the application in question.

Residency Permits.

406. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he has made a decision regarding the application of a person (details supplied) for leave to remain here on humanitarian grounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18099/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The person concerned, a Nigerian national, arrived in the State on 24 September, 1999 and claimed asylum. Her application was refused by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner on 11 April, 2001. Her subsequent appeal was refused by the Office of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal and she was notified of this recommendation by letter on 9 October, 2001.

In accordance with section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, the person concerned was informed on 13 November, 2001 that the Minister was proposing to make a deportation order in respect of her. She was in accordance with the Act, given the option of making representations within 15 working days setting out the reasons why she should not be deported i.e. be allowed to remain temporarily in the State; leaving the State before the deportation order was made; or consenting to the making of the deportation order. Representations setting out reasons why she should not be deported were subsequently received.

I expect the case file in this matter to be submitted to me shortly for decision. This decision will be taken having regard to considerations specified in section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended. These considerations include matters relating to the common good, the person's family and domestic circumstances, as well as humanitarian considerations. Consideration will also be given to the prohibition of refoulement which is contained in section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 as amended.

Prison Building Programme.

407. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason the tender to review the effectiveness of the Prison Service's capital expenditure programme specifically excludes all PPP projects from examination; if there are plans to assess PPP projects using the same criteria as non-PPP capital expenditures; if so, when and by whom; and if no such plans exist, the reason he is shielding PPP contracts from the oversight being used to evaluate public projects. [18100/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Expenditure Review Initiative forms part of the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) programme which seeks to reform and enhance financial management procedures within the Public Service. The tender for the Capital Expenditure Review by the Irish Prison Service (IPS) is in accordance with the standard procedures as laid down by the Department of Finance.

The tender undertaken by the IPS seeks to review major capital expenditure projects completed between 2000 and 2005. There were no Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects undertaken by the IPS during this period. The reference in the tender was made for information purposes for potential bidders and not with any intention of excluding projects. The only PPP projects currently under detailed consideration are the replacement of the Mountjoy complex at the Thornton Hall site in North County Dublin and the development of a prison complex on Spike Island to cover the Munster area.

All PPP projects comply with the procedures issued by the Department of Finance in relation to Capital Expenditure and PPPs. As a strong advocate of value for money myself I would support the Expenditure Review process. In the future, if any further expenditure review is proposed for this area, it would definitely include completed PPP projects.

Asylum Applications.

408. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of people seeking asylum here who have applied and are awaiting a decision since pre-2003, 2003, 2004, 2005, and to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18101/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in tabular format below.

Cases outstanding in the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner* and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal** (at end April 2006)

Pre 2003	2003	2004	2005	2006 (30/4/06)
15	11	58	701	1,808

*By date of application.

**By date of appeal.

Over recent years very considerable work has been undertaken in the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal as well as within the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service generally to deal with applications for asylum and speed up processing times. The work involved has resulted in a situation where:

- Processing has continued to move strongly in both ORAC and RAT. At the end of April 2006 there were 2,593 cases on hands in both agencies compared to some 7,000 cases on hands at the end of January 2004.
- The number of applications over six months in the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) at the end of April 2006 stood at 524 as compared to some 6,500 at the end of September 2001. The backlog of applications has been eliminated in ORAC with only 55 cases on hands over six months at the end of April 2006 and some 469 in RAT a significant number of which are at an advanced stage of processing.
- There is continued momentum in processing timescales for asylum applications with new arrangements for speedier processing of prioritised asylum applications (from nationals of Nigeria, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and South Africa) intro-

duced from January 2005 with a 17 working day processing time at first instance in ORAC and 15 working days at appeals stage in RAT. Currently, almost 40% of total applications fall into the prioritised category.

- With effect from 1 November 2005, all applicants for asylum are notified of their interview date by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner at the time they make their applications. The interview appointment is normally within 20 working days of application. However, for those applicants within the prioritised category, interviews in ORAC are held, more speedily, within 9 to 12 days.
- The typical processing time in the ORAC for non-prioritised cases is in the region of 8-9 weeks. The average length of time taken to process and complete substantive appeals in the RAT is approximately 14 weeks.
- For a variety of reasons, there will always be some applications and appeals which take significantly longer than the average to complete which can arise for reasons such as judicial review proceedings.

I am sure the Deputy will agree that the large investment in resources by the Government in the asylum determination process in recent years in order, inter alia, to meet our obligations under the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees, has had a very significant impact in terms of processing times and the elimination of backlogs of claims outstanding.

Illegal Immigrants.

409. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of people who have been refused permission to land here having arrived by plane or ship in each of the past five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18102/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The information requested by the Deputy is provided in the tabular statement below.

Year	No. of persons refused leave to land
2002	6,267
2003	5,901
2004	4,940
2005	4,893
2006 (30.04.06)	1,786

[Mr. McDowell.]

Also included in the table are figures relating to numbers refused at land borders, i.e. land border with Northern Ireland.

Garda Deployment.

410. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Gardaí stationed in Clondalkin Garda Station, Ronans-town Garda Station and Lucan Garda Station in April 2006; and if any of the Gardaí attached to the above stations were assigned to other duties away from their stations. [18104/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The detailed information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and is currently being compiled by the Garda authorities. I will contact the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

Proposed Legislation.

411. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when he will introduce legislation to outlaw sex trafficking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18249/06]

413. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the situation regarding the law relating to human trafficking; his intentions to change same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18252/06]

415. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the timetable for the transposition of European legislation into law here in the area of human trafficking. [18254/06]

430. **Mr. Ardagh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding the transposition into law here of the Palermo Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children; the further legislation which is being considered to tackle the problem of trafficking in women and children; and when it is anticipated that these actions will take place. [18271/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 411, 413, 415 and 430 together.

Under current Irish Criminal Law it is an offence, punishable by up to life imprisonment, to traffic a person under 17 years of age, male or female, into, through or out of Ireland for the purpose of that person's sexual exploitation. This is provided for in the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998.

Under the Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act 2000, it is an offence for a person to organise or knowingly facilitate the entry into Ireland of

another person whom that person knows or has reasonable cause to believe is an illegal immigrant. The penalty on conviction on indictment for this offence is a maximum of 10 years imprisonment or an unlimited fine or both.

Inevitably, when a person is trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation other serious offences will be committed, such as rape, sexual assault, assault and false imprisonment.

Legislation creating an offence of trafficking in persons for the specific purpose of sexual or labour exploitation is contained in the draft Criminal Justice (Trafficking in Persons and Sexual Offences) Bill which is at an advanced stage of preparation in my Department. This Bill will allow for compliance with the EU Framework Decision on combating trafficking in persons adopted by the Council of Ministers on 19 July, 2002. The legislation will also allow for full compliance with the later EU Framework Decision on combating the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography.

The criminal law aspects of other international instruments will also be taken into account in the preparation of the legislation. These instruments are the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings.

I intend to seek Government approval to draft this Bill very soon and expect that it will be published later this year.

Visa Applications.

412. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in respect of a C visit visa issued to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18250/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): A C Visa is normally granted for visits of less than 90 days. However in the case of the person in question the C visa was granted in order to allow her to enter the State and pursue an application for residency based on marriage to an Irish national. The supporting information provided with her visa application was not considered sufficient to grant residency without further investigation. A letter issued to the person in question on 9 January 2006 advising her of the visa decision and inviting her to make an application for permission to remain in the State on her arrival.

In this regard, an application for permission to remain in the State based on marriage to an Irish national was received from the person concerned in March 2006. Applications of this type, in fair-

ness to all other such applicants, are dealt with in strict chronological order and currently take approximately fourteen months to process. It should be noted that marriage to an Irish national does not confer an automatic right of residence in the State. The person concerned cannot register with the Garda National Immigration Bureau until her application for residency has been processed.

It has always been the case that non-EU nationals could not enter employment pending the outcome of an application for residency, unless of course they have a valid work permit. Applications for a work permit should be made on behalf of a non EU national by an employer to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The Deputy should also note that a person who is awaiting a decision on a residency application based on marriage to an Irish national is free to leave the State at any time. A visa required national must be in possession of a valid Irish visa to allow the person concerned travel to the State. As the person in question is a visa required national, she would require a re-entry visa to return to the State. It is not the normal practice of my Department to assist persons who do not have residency in the State with a re-entry visa prior to travelling except in certain emergency circumstances. Applications of this nature are considered on a case by case basis by the Immigration Division of my Department.

Question No. 413 answered with Question No. 411.

Crime Levels.

414. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of arrests that have been made, charges that have been brought and prosecutions that have been obtained under human trafficking legislation here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18253/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Under current Irish criminal law it is an offence, punishable by up to life imprisonment, to traffic a person under 17 years of age, male or female, into, through or out of Ireland for the purpose of that person’s sexual exploitation. This is provided for in the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998.

Under the Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act 2000, it is an offence for a person to organise or knowingly facilitate the entry into Ireland of another person whom that person knows or has reasonable cause to believe is an illegal immigrant. The penalty on conviction on indictment for this offence is a maximum of 10 years imprisonment or an unlimited fine or both.

In trafficking cases, it is also possible for the prosecuting authorities here to bring charges for

a range of offences covered by our criminal law, including sexual offences, false imprisonment, possession of false documents, etc.

Legislation creating an offence of trafficking in persons for the specific purpose of sexual or labour exploitation is contained in the draft Criminal Justice (Trafficking in Persons and Sexual Offences) Bill, which is at an advanced stage of preparation in my Department.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that 83 persons have been arrested on suspicion of committing breaches of the provisions of section 2 of the Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act 2000. A number of files have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions and proceedings have been initiated in respect of 24 section 2 breaches. To date, 3 persons have been convicted in respect of a total of 10 breaches of the provisions concerned. In the majority of these cases, Garda investigations related to smuggling of persons, as opposed to human trafficking.

In common with other EU countries, to date, all the indications are that, in Ireland, trafficking in human beings takes place on a much smaller scale than illegal immigration. In the recently published United Nations Report “Trafficking in Persons Global Patterns” Ireland ranks at the low end of destination or transit countries in western Europe.

By its very nature, human trafficking is a clandestine activity and, owing to the intimidation associated with it, victims are often reluctant to come forward to the authorities. This is the experience internationally and, for these reasons, the level of prosecutions cannot be used, on its own, to assess the success of law enforcement measures. Such an approach fails to take account of Garda activity aimed at preventing trafficking and disrupting criminal elements.

Successful prosecutions, no matter what legislation is in operation, will depend on the existence of evidence that will stand up in court and for that to happen, there must be a willingness to co-operate with Garda investigations. That is partly why, on 5 May, I launched a poster campaign. This campaign, which is facilitated by Crimestoppers, will help raise awareness of trafficking among the general public. It will also provide an important point of contact for those who may be victims of, or vulnerable to, this insidious crime. The posters are being displayed at airports, ports, bus and railway stations, among other places. Anyone who rings the free phone number 1800 25 00 25 can be assured that the call is anonymous, safe and free of charge. Victims of trafficking, or anyone with knowledge of trafficking activities, should not be afraid of contacting the authorities for assistance. An Garda Síochána, my Department and the International Organisation for Migration are all participating in the campaign and are available to provide whatever assistance is necessary to victims who come to our attention.

[Mr. McDowell.]

An Garda Síochána and, in particular, the Garda National Immigration Bureau take a proactive and vigorous approach in preventing and combating trafficking of human beings. A number of ongoing Garda operations are in place to tackle the phenomenon. The approach taken in tackling trafficking is, where possible to prevent it occurring, or where it does occur, to seek to prosecute the perpetrators and to protect the victims.

Question No. 415 answered with Question No. 411.

Proposed Legislation.

416. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he has received approaches to change, amend or otherwise alter the Geneva Conventions Act 1967, the Criminal Justice (United Nations Convention on Torture) Act 2000, the International Criminal Court Bill, 2003 or laws pertaining to war crimes or universal jurisdiction; the nature of such approaches; the location they came from; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18256/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Deputy will be aware that I have brought forward an amendment to the Criminal Justice (United Nations Convention Against Torture) Act 2000 as a Committee Stage amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill 2004.

The objective of my amendment is to bring the definition of torture contained in section 1 of the 2000 Act into line with the definition contained in Article 1 of the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The definition of torture in the 2000 Act appears to include torture by a person other than a public official. This is in contrast to the definition of torture contained in Article 1 of the Convention which is clearly restricted to torture by or at the instigation of a public official. My amendment will remedy this discrepancy. The necessity for this amendment was highlighted during a judicial review application in relation to the issuing of a deportation order.

In relation to the International Criminal Court Bill 2003, which is at Report Stage in Dáil Éireann, the Deputy will also be aware that amendments have been tabled in the normal way by both the Government and opposition parties during Committee and Report Stages. In addition, representations were received from Amnesty International both directly to me and through other Deputies.

I presume that the Deputy is referring in his question to the Geneva Conventions Act 1962. I have received no approaches to amend the Geneva Conventions Act 1962 or the Geneva Conventions (Amendment) Act 1998.

Garda Deployment.

417. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if it is proposed to increase the Garda traffic corps numbers in County Offaly; the location of members currently assigned to the traffic corps in County Offaly; his plans to create new Garda corps locations in County Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18257/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that in the Laois/Offaly Division there are currently two Sergeants and twelve Gardaí attached to the Traffic Corps based in Portlaoise.

I am also informed that from 3 July, 2006 there will be an additional Sergeant and five Gardaí allocated to the Traffic Corps in the Laois/Offaly Division and they will be based in Tullamore.

As a result of the Government's approval of my proposal to increase the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 members, the Garda Commissioner will be in a position, as each cycle of recruit training is completed, to assign additional new members to the areas of greatest need with particular regard to certain priorities, including the Traffic Corps. Between now and 2008, the Traffic Corps will increase its numbers to a complement of 1,200 on the following phased basis:

2006	805
2007	1,030
2008	1,200.

It is intended that by the end of the first half of 2006 the numbers in the Traffic Corps will have increased by 120 and thereafter increased by a further 60 each quarter to reach a total complement of 805 at the end of 2006. The new members will be assigned to Divisions which have been established, as a result of close analysis and evaluation of road safety issues, to be in most need of additional resources to pursue enforcement strategies.

Crime Levels.

418. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the rise in graffiti, particularly on older brick and stone buildings; if he will ensure that the Gardaí prioritise this issue; and if he will further ensure that adequate recreational facilities are provided for young people to deter them from engaging in such criminal behaviour. [18259/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I can assure the Deputy that the Garda authorities take the defacing of and damage to property very seriously. The Garda have Operations Encounter and Assist in place, focussing on tackling anti-social behaviour

including offences of criminal damage, such as defacing property. When gardaí detect such offences, culprits are processed through the courts, or via the Juvenile Liaison System, as appropriate.

The Criminal Damage Act, 1991 and the Litter Pollution Act, 1997 provide for the offences of damaging or defacing property and I am informed by the Garda that, in 2005 there were 7,800 proceedings commenced for damaging property belonging to another under the Criminal Damage Act, 1991, resulting in 1,702 convictions. Proceedings were also commenced on three occasions for an offence contrary to sections 19(1), 19(6) and 24 of the Litter Pollution Act, 1997 which specifically relates to defacement of a structure or article, resulting in one conviction.

My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Environment and Local Government and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has embarked on a pilot project to specifically deal with incidents of graffiti. This initiative will involve the removal of graffiti from sites in targeted areas and the clean up operation is due to commence in the latter half of this year. The allocation of funding for this project is €3 million.

Regarding deterring young people from criminal behaviour, I would advise the Deputy that my Department funds Garda Youth Diversion Projects. These projects are community-based, multi-agency initiatives that aim to divert young people from becoming involved in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour by providing suitable activities to facilitate personal development, promote civic responsibility and challenge offending behaviour. The number of such projects has grown from 12 in 1997 to 64 at present, a growth made possible in part by funding under the National Development Plan 2000-2006. It is estimated that the 64 Garda youth diversion projects cater for approximately 2,500 participants per annum. The allocation of funding for the 64 Garda Youth Diversion Projects (along with 7 Local Drug Task Force Projects) in 2006 is just over €6.6 million, which is an increase of €1.2 million on 2005. It is my intention to ensure that 100 schemes will be established nationwide before the end of 2007. I have asked the Garda Commissioner to bring forward proposals for further community based initiatives in this area in light of the additional funding.

It is important to emphasise too that a wide range of educational and support services for young people generally is provided by a number of Government Departments. In this context, I would advise the Deputy that the Office of the Minister for Children is currently developing a policy to promote positive recreation opportunities for young people aged 12 to 18. It is expected that the policy will be published later this year.

Garda Communications.

419. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he has satisfied himself regarding the health and safety of the Garda force regarding emissions from telecommunications antennae for both the existing and proposed Garda telecommunications system and existing and proposed private operators' systems that are placed on masts on top of or close to Garda stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18260/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am advised by the Garda Authorities that the Garda Chief Medical Officer has undertaken a review of health issues as they pertain to exposures to non-ionizing radiation from both existing and proposed telecommunications systems and found that all systems were well within the limits of exposure set down by the International Commission for Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIP) and European Commission Recommendation 1999/519/EC.

Last year the Office of Public Works concluded an agreement with all mobile phone operators to grant licences for the use of State Property including Garda Telecommunications masts. I am advised by the Office of Public Works that all operators granted a licence under the agreement are required to comply with all national and EU health and safety legislation and guidelines issued by the ICNIP.

Garda Deployment.

420. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his Department's policy in regard to the legislation, staffing and reporting relating to the Garda carriage office. [18261/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the staffing of the Garda carriage office includes Gardaí and civilian personnel under the direct control of the Chief Superintendent, Regional Traffic Division. The Inspector in charge of the carriage office reports to the Chief Superintendent, Regional Traffic Division.

The legislation pertaining to the carriage office is contained in the Public Service Vehicle Regulations 1963-2002.

Citizenship Applications.

421. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the procedure to be followed in the case of a Moldavian national who has been here legally for some years and who wishes to marry their Irish partner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18262/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Although no specific details are

[Mr. McDowell.]

provided, I can advise the Deputy of the normal procedure which is adopted in the circumstances outlined.

A non-EU national, who is not an asylum seeker, but is legally resident in the State and subsequently marries an Irish national in Ireland, he/she should attend their local Immigration Office following the marriage in order to change their immigration status. The non EU national must be accompanied by the Irish national spouse at this time. It should be noted that marriage to an Irish national does not confer an automatic right of residence in the State.

Asylum Applications.

422. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position regarding the application for family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18263/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Deputy put down a similar Parliamentary Question (9988/06) which I answered on the 9th March 2006.

I wish to reiterate that the onus is on the person in question to show that their marriage is valid and recognised for the purpose of family reunification.

In this regard no further information has been received from the person in question relating to his marital status.

Garda Investigations.

423. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a Garda report will issue in relation to a file appertaining to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 20; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18264/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that a number of incidents involving the person referred to have been investigated by An Garda Síochána and investigation files have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions. A prosecution was directed on the 29 July, 2003 against the person referred to for an alleged assault pursuant to section 2 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act, 1997, which occurred on the 14 March, 2003. He was convicted of the offence of assault on 6 September, 2004. The conviction was affirmed following an appeal.

A further prosecution was directed by the Director of Public Prosecutions on 10 February, 2005 for an offence of careless driving contrary to section 52 Road Traffic Act 1961-2002, which is alleged to have occurred on 30 August, 2004.

Summonses were issued on 18 March, 2005 in respect of this prosecution. As the Garda Síochána were unable to effect service of the summons in the normal way, a decision was made to effect service by means of registered post. Following the non-appearance of the person referred to, the judge issued a bench warrant on 8 June, 2005.

Following this it came to the notice of the Garda Síochána that the person had not collected registered mail, which contained the summons. Gardaí made an application for cancellation of the arrest warrant, which was acceded to by the courts, and the warrant was cancelled on 23 August, 2005. This warrant had not been executed and no attempt had been made to execute it.

On 27 February, 2006 an application to re-issue summonses for the alleged offence of careless driving was acceded to. The summons ordered the person referred to appear on 29 March, 2006. The service of this summons was effected on 20 March, 2006 between the hours of 7pm and 8pm when the summons was delivered, by hand, by a member of An Garda Síochána. The summons was placed in a sealed envelope, which was then placed in the person's letter-box. However, the person failed to attend court on 29 March, 2006.

The prosecution sought an adjournment of the case to 31 May, 2006, in lieu of seeking an arrest warrant. This was granted by the court. The prosecuting Garda member posted notification of this adjournment, along with a copy of the summons, to the person referred to on 3 April, 2006.

In addition, on 11 March, 2005 an incident occurred in the village of Chapelizod involving the person referred to and a neighbour. An investigation was conducted by Gardaí and a file was submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions. On 2 September, 2005 a direction was received that the person referred to should be prosecuted for dangerous driving and the Gardaí served the summonses on the person on 26 October, 2005, which directed his attendance on 8 February, 2006. The matter was adjourned, for mention, on 17 February, 2006.

The purpose of the adjournment was to afford the person an opportunity to have legal representation and seek sanction for a video link for witnesses as they were juveniles. On 17 February, 2006 the case was further adjourned, for hearing, to the same court on 12 July, 2006. The person referred to did not attend court on 17 February, 2006.

The presiding judge ordered that the subject be notified of the new adjourned date by means of ordinary post. An Garda Síochána has complied with this order by sending a letter, dated 20 February, 2006, through the ordinary post to the person.

Gardaí are not aware of any correspondence delivered to the subject on 2-3 April, 2006

between the times referred to in Parliamentary Question No. 328 of 6 April, 2006.

Asylum Support Services.

424. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will authorise the transfer of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare to accommodation more adjacent to the Rotunda Hospital for the duration of her pregnancy, in view of previous medical information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18265/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I would refer the Deputy to my response to Parliamentary Question No. 704 of 25 April 2006. The position remains unchanged.

Citizenship Applications.

425. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if a review of an application for naturalisation will be offered to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18266/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I informed the Deputy in response to Parliamentary Question No. 189 on 2 February 2006 that I expected that the application for a certificate of naturalisation of the person referred to would be finalised in the early part of 2007. This is still the position.

Grant Payments.

426. **Ms Harkin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application for accessible transport project funding for a group (details supplied) in County Sligo. [18267/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I wish to inform the Deputy that the Accessible Transport Project Funding Scheme is currently nearing completion, and it is anticipated that each applicant organisation will be notified shortly of the outcome if its application.

Residency Permits.

427. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress to date in the determination of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22 who is anxious to obtain employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18268/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I refer the Deputy to Parliamentary Question No. 147 of Thursday, 27

April, 2006 (ref: 15895/06) and the written reply to that Question. The position is unchanged.

Garda Stations.

428. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if it is intended to refurbish the Garda station in Kilcormac, County Offaly; the Garda numbers assigned to this station; if there are plans for the grounds surrounding this station; if plans exist to assign additional Gardaí to this station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18269/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): A pilot Equity Exchange programme which involved offering existing Garda stations that are deemed non-viable for repair in exchange for building a new station either on the same or an alternative suitable site was run last year by the Office of Public Works. However, I understand that the response from the market at that time was poor and that the Office of Public Works is currently reviewing the programme with a view to relaunch. Kilcormac is one of a number of Garda Stations currently being considered for inclusion in the relaunch of the Programme. In the meantime, the OPW will carry out any essential maintenance works necessary to the Station.

I will revert to the Deputy with the information he had sought concerning Garda personnel at the Station.

Garda Training.

429. **Mr. Ardagh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the improvements in the training of Gardaí in human trafficking which are being considered and being implemented, following a recent programme (details supplied) on the subject. [18270/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): A training programme has been prepared for delivery to key Garda personnel throughout the State. This training programme has been designed specifically to enable members of An Garda Síochána identify victims of trafficking whom they may encounter in the course of their duties, ensure that members fully understand the complexity of this phenomenon and ensure that victims receive appropriate assistance from all the relevant agencies.

Member of the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) also regularly attend meetings, seminars and conferences aimed at sharing information and intelligence and devising strategies to combat immigration offences, including trafficking and smuggling of human beings. These facilitate training and keep An Garda Síochána up to date concerning international trends. For example, GNIB personnel have participated in a series of EU training seminars in a number of EU

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Member States entitled “training of border guards, border police and customs officials in identifying of and providing assistance to the victims of trafficking”. The training is provided by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and is funded under the EU AGIS programme. In September 2005, Dublin was the venue for one of these seminars. It brought together representatives of border guards, customs services and immigration liaison officers from thirteen European countries, including Ireland. The Irish delegation also included personnel from the Garda College in Templemore.

The Gardaí also participate in the Interpol Working Group on Trafficking in Women and Children. This group has developed a best practice manual which provides practical guidelines for investigators. The manual is laid out in a structured way to assist the investigator identify and locate advice on specific issues. Meetings of the working group are attended by members from Garda specialist units.

Question No. 430 answered with Question No. 411.

Grant Payments.

431. **Mr. Ardagh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the assistance which is given to a group (details supplied); and the further assistance the Government will give the group to continue their work. [18272/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I can advise the Deputy that my Department through the Probation and Welfare Service provides funding to the Ruhama project. An annual grant of €275,000 was paid to the project in 2005 and similar amount has been approved for the current year.

The funding provided is for services to offenders, referred by the Probation and Welfare Service. Clients referred by the Service to Ruhama receive both individual and group counselling to assist in the area of prevention and rehabilitation, directly, and in liaison with other agencies.

The project itself has successfully helped women to exit prostitution and take up educational opportunities, training, employment or to develop enterprises.

Ruhama received time bound grant assistance of €381,000 under the Equality for Women Measure to enable them to develop a model of intervention that would help women in prostitution overcome the barriers they faced in joining mainstream social economy or community education schemes.

In addition, Ruhama received a grant of €26,768 to enable them to engage a coordinator

in 2005 to combat trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation; they also received a contribution of €12,000 to set up ‘Ireland-en-Route’, an interagency forum established to address the problem of trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation.

Garda Stations.

432. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of additional Gardaí appointed to each of the stations in the Kildare and Carlow division over the past five years; the opening hours of each of these stations; the number of Gardaí in each station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18354/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The detailed information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and is currently being compiled by the Garda authorities. I will contact the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

Crime Levels.

433. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of assaults and burglaries committed in the Carlow and Kildare division over the past five years; the number of successful prosecutions arising from these crimes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18355/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the attached tables show the total number of headline offences of assault and burglary by group, recorded, detected and convictions for the Garda Division of Carlow/Kildare for the years 2000 to 2005 inclusive. These figures are operational and liable to change.

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. The figures provided for 2000 and 2001 are incomplete due to the phased implementation of PULSE. The first full year captured is 2002 and is a more accurate base year to use.

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. To put this in context, during the two full years of the Rainbow Coalition Government, with a population of 600,000 less than at

present, the headline crime figures were as follows; 1995-102,484; 1996-100,785.

Headline Offence of Assault Recorded, Detected and Convictions for the Garda Division of Carlow/Kildare for the Years 2000 to 2005.

Year	Recorded	Detected to date	Convictions to date
2005	196	151	24
2004	203	149	42
2003	222	157	60
2002	283	228	102
2001	119	98	30
2000	70	64	13

Headline Offence of Burglary Recorded, Detected and Convictions for the Garda Division of Carlow/Kildare for the Years 2000 to 2005.

Year	Recorded	Detected to date	Convictions to date
2005	1623	202	39
2004	1,633	211	102
2003	1,607	201	91
2002	1,675	212	81
2001	1,434	209	49
2000	1,384	219	18

Visa Applications.

434. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made on an application from a person (details supplied) to enter this country on a holiday visa or multiple entry visa. [18356/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Irish Consulate in Bucharest on 8th May, 2006.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the visa application in question was approved on 11th May, 2006.

Firearms Licensing.

435. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the figures for the number of licensed firearm certificate holders who have been charged under the Firearms and Offensive Weapons Act. [18371/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that since the computerisation of the firearms licensing system in January, 2000 their records show that proceedings have been brought against 8,265 licensed firearm certificate holders for offences under the Firearms and Offensive Weapons Act, 1990. Prior to that date the fire-

arms licensing system was a manual system and the information sought by the Deputy for the years prior to 2000 could only be obtained by the disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources.

Departmental Properties.

436. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the amount which has been spent on the renting, leasing or purchasing of de-mountable temporary accommodation over the past five years; if his Department arranges this through the Department of Finance; the tendering process which is in operation; the frequency in which it is reviewed; the length of time the arrangement lasts; the average period of renting or leasing; the number of units which have been rented and leased over five, eight and ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18379/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): As the Deputy will be aware, in many instances provision of this type of accommodation, where required, is arranged for by the Office of the Public Works.

In so far as the Irish Prison Service is concerned, I understand that it has been their practise to use temporary accommodation for a wide range of reasons e.g. classrooms, visiting facilities, security, where permanent accommodation is not available, or during construction/maintenance projects. Due to the number of projects involved over the period requested, it would be impossible to supply the information requested in detail without the application of considerable staff resources which could not be justified.

I can however give recent examples of where rental demountable accommodation was used. The first was used in Limerick Prison during the construction of a new cellular/administration block 2000/2003. As the Office of Public Works were managing the project they invited three companies to tender for the construction and hire of a three storey prefab for the purpose of visits and administration accommodation in 2000. The capital cost of fitting out the prefab with all services and removing on completion was €248,583.00. The prefab structure was on hire on a monthly charge from January 2001 to September 2003 at a total cost of €380,893.00.

Currently two prefab structures are being used during major construction works at Portlaoise Prison. The prefabs have been constructed and fitted out as a three storey visitor centre, education facility and a separate staff facility at a cost of €783,254.00 including high security works. These prefabs are currently being leased for a three year period at a total cost of €6,050.00 per month.

Also at Shelton Abbey, Arklow a rental contract has just recently been put in place for the provision of temporary education accom-

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modation at a cost of €6,461.40 per month excluding V.A.T.

I wish to advise the Deputy that all such projects are subject to the normal accounting and procurement procedures of the Civil Service, including expenditure sanction by the Department of Finance as appropriate.

I would also like to point out to the Deputy that I have reversed the unacceptable trend of spiralling overtime costs which has been a feature of our prisons operations for many years. As a result of my determination to tackle this unsustainable dependence on overtime to run our prisons there was a reduction in the overtime bill of some €13.4m in 2004 compared to 2003.

Employment Statistics.

437. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of man-days lost in sick leave in the prison service; in the Gardaí; in the probation service; in the court system; the rate per person serving; and the percentage of total man-hours lost in this way. [18380/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): In light of the scale of this query and the number of agencies involved, it has not been feasible for my Department to prepare a response in the time available.

Accordingly, my Department will respond directly in writing to the Deputy with the information requested as soon as it is to hand.

Garda Investigations.

438. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the details which are listed on the collision report forms used by An Garda Síochána in the aftermath of road accidents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18381/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Gardaí supply details of road accidents on Form C(T) 68 to the National Roads Authority complete with map title and grid reference number. This is an NRA form compiled in consultation with the Garda Síochána. The Form C(T) 68 is a comprehensive document with data captured under the following headings: Station; Day and date; Time and place; County, local authority and townland; Vehicle details; Occupants Pedestrians involved; Pedestrian visibility at night; Collision type; Investigation at scene; Driver/cyclist details; Road factor contribution; Lighting and weather conditions; Speed limit; Vehicle defects and number of vehicles involved; Tax; Insurance; Certificate of road worthiness; Driving licence (full licence/provisional); Alcohol testing; Contributory factors. The National Roads Authority may pro-

pose changes to the accident report form in consultation with the Garda Síochána should it feel that further data should be captured on the form. I am informed by the Garda authorities that they have agreed with the NRA a review of the form with a view to improving the capture of data, including forensic data.

Ground Rents.

439. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the action he is taking arising from the ongoing difficulties for elderly homeowners whereby ground rent leases are expiring on dwelling houses entitling the ground landlord to one eighth of the gross price of the house; if he is considering measures to enable homeowners to acquire the freehold of the property which they already own; the timescale for such measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18418/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The position is that a statutory scheme for the acquisition of the fee simple in dwelling houses is set out in the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) (No. 2) Act 1978. Part III of that Act provides a special procedure, operated by the Land Registry, whereby a person may acquire the fee simple in their dwelling house.

As regards expired leases on dwelling houses, the position that the ground rent tenant may be entitled to acquire the fee simple: As a yearly tenant arising by operation of law or by inference, where rent has been paid to and accepted by the landlord after the expiry of the lease and the conditions in section 15 of the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rent)(No. 2) Act 1978 are satisfied; Under section 13 of the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rent)(No. 2) Act 1978, where the application was made within 12 months of the commencement of the Act; or Under section 3(2)(c) of the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) Act 1967 (as revived by section 73 of the Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act 1980), where the lease was a building lease or a propriety lease.

As regards any future measures regarding ground rents, the position is that a High Court challenge to the constitutionality of certain provisions of existing ground rents legislation was heard during 2005 and the Court’s judgment was given earlier this year. As the period within which an appeal against that ruling can be taken has not expired, however, it would not be appropriate to proceed with any proposals for legislative changes at this time.

Garda Operations.

440. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the action taken by the Gardaí in response to the ongoing vandalism and lawlessness at the Broombridge

Rail Station, Dublin 7 (details supplied); if the Gardaí in Cabra have sufficient manpower to ensure that these activities will cease; the reason the Gardaí failed to respond to calls from residents at various times; if additional Gardaí will be allocated to this district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18419/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): In view of the number of matters raised by the Deputy, the Garda authorities have not yet completed a report. I will contact the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

Visa Applications.

441. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in relation to family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 22; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18420/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The refugee in question made an application for family reunification in respect of her husband and children under section 18 of the Refugee Act, 1996 in January 2005. The application was forwarded to the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner for investigation as required under section 18 of the Act.

A report was forwarded to the Family Reunification Section of my Department on the 22nd December 2005. Following further examination, a letter has recently issued to the refugee's representative seeking clarification of a number of points. Once a response has been received, the application will be examined further.

Citizenship Applications.

442. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress in the application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare in view of the fact that all details have been submitted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18421/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): In my response to Parliamentary Question No. 697 on 21 March 2006, I informed the Deputy that my officials had written to the person concerned seeking further docu-

ments in connection with her application for naturalisation. No reply has been received to that letter to date.

Documentation, in addition to that referred to by the Deputy in the details accompanying his Question, was sought in the correspondence issued to the individual in question. I also informed the Deputy in my response to his earlier Question that it is not possible to continue with the processing of the application without this documentation. This is still the position.

Departmental Publications.

443. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of reports which have been published in his Department since June 1997; the name of each report; the estimated cost of each report; the date of publication of each if applicable; and the length of time it took to prepare each. [18427/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): In light of the extensive period of time covered by the question some points of detail are not readily available in the time provided.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tabular statement below. As can be seen from the content of this table, a broad range of my Department's activities are captured by the terms of the question. The reports listed vary considerably in nature, scale and purpose but, taken together, the value of the activities reflected in this table cannot be overestimated.

Some of the documents are annual or other regular reports on the activities of my Department and its agencies including the Prison Visiting Committees. Many of these were not specifically commissioned by my Department but are reports required, either on foot of legislative provisions or the terms of reference of the bodies in question. Other reports included in the attached list comprise detailed research projects which have a vital role in creating the foundation for sound, evidence based policy making. Others again represent the culmination of major reviews of legislation and policy in such key areas as the management of the Garda Síochána or the structure of the Prison Service. A further category of reports are those which include the findings of inquiries established over time into certain matters in the public interest.

Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
Report of the Consultative Group on the Private Security Industry	Not available	December 1997	Not Available
Probation & Welfare Service Annual Report 1994	Not Available	1997	Not Available
Ireland's combined 2nd and 3rd reports under the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women	Not available	February, 1997	Not available

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Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
21st to 25th Interim Report of the Committee on Court Practice and Procedure	Not available	September, 1997	Not Available
The Report of the Steering Group on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Garda Síochána	Not available	June, 1997	12 months
Working Group on a Courts Commission	Not available	Working Paper — Information and the Courts — November, 1997 Fifth Report on Drugs Courts — February, 1998 Sixth Report (Conclusion) November 1998	Not available
Towards an Independent Prisons Agency — Report of Expert Group	Not available	March, 1997	Not Available
Prison Service Operating Cost Review Group	Not Available	August, 1997	1 Year
Report of the Expert Group appointed to consider changes in the criminal law which were recommended in the Garda SMI Report	€4,890.36	November, 1998	7 months
Report of the Firearms Legislation Review Group	€6,348.69	November, 1998	4 Months
Illegal & harmful use of the Internet — First Report of the Working Group	€19,231.00	July, 1998	17 months
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Annual Reports 1998-2004	From 2002 onwards the Strategy Statement was amalgamated with the Annual Report 1998 — €6,950.55 1999 — €5,555.00 2000 — €8,387.89 2001 — €12,374.50 2002 — €38,216.67 2003 — €41,076.99 2004 — €26,126.71	1998 report in 2000 1999 report in 2000 2000 report in 2001 2001 report in 2003 2002 report in 2003 2003 report in 2005 2004 report in 2005	Not available
Building a Future Together — Report of the Establishment Group for the National Disability Authority and Disability Support Service	€2,500.00	June, 1998	Not Available
Report by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Legislation for 1997	No direct costs	April, 1998	Not Available
National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women First Report	€7,403.00	March, 1999	Not Available
Report of the Working Group on Qualifications for Appointment as Judges of the High and Supreme Courts	Not available	February, 1999	Not Available
Gender Proofing the European Funds	€27,934.00	July, 1999	1 Year
Report of the Drug Court Planning Committee	Not available	August 1999	Not Available
Inquiry of the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform arising from the early release from prison of Philip Sheedy	Not available	April, 1999	3 Months
National Childcare Strategy — Report of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare	Not readily available. Research commissioned for the report: €133,422.00	January, 1999	1 Year 7 Months
A Study of the Economics of Childcare in Ireland	Included in above at cost of €89,494.00	Linked to above	Not Available
A Place and a Name — Report of the Victims Commission, Mr. John P. Wilson	€71,100.99	July, 1999	Not Available

Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
Probation & Welfare Service Annual Report 1995	Not Available	1999	Not Available
Towards Equal Citizenship — Progress Report on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities	€82,129.20	December, 1999	Not Available
Report of Group to Review the Psychology Service of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform	€3,810	1999	Not Available
Young Offenders in Penal Custody	Not Available	1999	Not Available
Report of the National Steering Group on Deaths in Prison Custody	Not Available	May 1999	Not Available
Report by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Legislation for 1998	No Direct Costs	April, 1999	Not Available
An Empirical Study of Community Service Orders in Ireland	Not Available	1999	Not Available
Probation & Welfare Service Annual Report 1996	Not Available	1999	Not Available
Irish Prison Service Report 1995-1998	Not Available	1999	Not Available
Irish Prison Service Report 1999-2000 and Irish Prison Service Annual Reports 2001, 2002, 2003 & 2004	Total cost = €86,565.44	1999-2000 Report — August, 2002 2001 Report — March, 2003 2002 Report — October, 2003 2003 Report — December 2004 2004 Report — December, 2005	Not Available
How Unequal? Men and Women in the Irish Labour Market	€82,342.00	October, 2000	2 Years
Databank of Gender disaggregated statistics in the context of the European Funds	€81,428.00	April, 2000	1 Year
Refugee Law Comparative Study	€42,500.00	March, 2000	1 Year 9 Months
First Progress Report of the Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community .	€7,990.74	December 2000	Not Available
P2000 — Working Group Report on Equality Proofing	€5,006.45	January, 2000	Not Available
Criminal Legal Aid Review Committee — Review of the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme and associated matters	€15,000.00	February, 2000 (1st Report) February, 2002 (Final Report).	Not Available
Probation & Welfare Service Annual Report 1997	Not Available	2000	Not Available
Inquiry carried out by Mr. Justice Francis D. Murphy under the provisions of Section 21 of the Courts of Justice (District Court) Act, 1946 (The Ó Buachalla Inquiry)	€670,000.00	November, 2000	8 Months
Review of the Coroner Service — Report of the Working Group	€24,959.00	December, 2000	24 Months
Review of the Gaming and Lotteries Acts 1956-86 — Report of the Interdepartmental Group	€18,606.00	June, 2000	13 Months
The Impact and Effectiveness of the Garda Special Projects	€50,085.00	May, 2000	Not Available
A Study of HIV & Hepatitis B & C amongst the Prison Population Part 1 & 2.	€66,185.00	2000	Not Available
A General Health Care Study of the Irish Prisoner Population	€183,105	July, 2000	Not Available

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Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
Report by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentences Persons Legislation for 1999	No Direct Costs	April, 2000	Not Available
Integration a Two Way Process	Cost Not Available — various Departments involved.	February, 2000	1 Year 3 Months
Mountjoy Redevelopment Committee — First Report	€3,000	May, 2000	Not Available
Commission on Liquor Licensing Interim Report on Off-Licensing Second Interim Report Report on Admission and Service in Licensed Premises Final Report.	€280,856.78	May, 2001 July, 2002 December, 2002 April, 2003	Not Available
Mountjoy Redevelopment Committee — Second Report	€3,000.00	February, 2001	Not available
Irish Prison Service Strategy Statement 2001 — 2003	Not Available	September, 2001	Not Available
Probation & Welfare Service Annual Report 1998	Not Available	2001	Not Available
The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness Report of the Working Group on the Review and Improvement of the Maternity Protection Legislation	€8,625.33	February, 2001	11 Months
Gender disaggregated statistics on use of transport and on housing tenure and Follow On Report	€13,840.00 €26,776.00	February, 2001 August, 2004	1 Year 1 Year
The Development of Mechanisms to Monitor Progress in Achieving Gender Equality in Ireland.	€54,998.00	October, 2001	18 Months
Draft National Plan for Women	€42,283.00	October, 2001	6 Months
Research Project on the Effective Recruitment of People with Disabilities into the Public Service	€7,618.43	March, 2001	Not Available
The Study of Participants in Garda Special Projects	€28,283.00	October, 2001	Not Available
Probation & Welfare Service Annual Report 1999	Not Available	2001	Not Available
Prison Health Care Services	Not Available	May, 2001	Not Available
Drug use among Prisoners: An Exploratory Study	€22,855	April, 2001	Not Available
Report of Mr. John Olden on the Management of the Life Sentence of Mr. Thomas Murray	€7,648.00	July, 2001	Not Available
Report by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Legislation for 2000	No Direct Costs	April, 2001	Not Available
Imprisonment for Fine Default and Civil Debt	€38,203.62	May, 2002	1 Year 5 Months
The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Parental Leave Act 1998	€11,973.81	April, 2002	1 Year 2 Months
Uptake of Parental Leave and Force Majeure Leave Research by MORI MRC	€56,711.58	April, 2002	9 Months
Review of the Parental Leave Act, 1998: Attitudinal Survey of Employees, Employers and Trade Union Representatives regarding the provisions of the Act (Newmarket Consulting Ltd)	€60,795.06	April, 2002	5 Months

Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
Equality for Women Measure Annual Report 2001 2002 2003	€7,000.00 €8,000.00 €9,000.00	September, 2002 September, 2003 September, 2004	2 months for each
Getting out of the House — Women returning to employment, education and training	€49,729.00	September, 2002	1 Year
Conference Report of Gender Mainstreaming in UK and Ireland Structural Funds Conference	€2,160.00	May, 2002	1 Year
IRELAND — Report to the UN on the National Plan for Women 2002 on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action	€8,610.00	September, 2002	5 Months
Aspirations of Women collected in the course of the Consultation process on the National Plan for Women 2002	€82,201.00	September, 2002	5 Months
Review of Submissions to the Public Consultation on Immigration Policy	€1,270.00	August, 2002	6 Weeks
International Comparative Study of Migration Legislation and Practice	€77,200.00	August, 2002	8 Months
Report of the Review Group on Investment based naturalisation	€8,880.00 approx.	August, 2002	2 Years 1 Month
Towards the Development of a National Action Plan Against Racism in Ireland	€9,472.00	March, 2002	Not Available
26th Interim Report of the Committee on Court Practice and Procedure — Issues of Court Practice and Procedure arising from the early release of Philip Sheedy from prison.	€1,433.00 (covers cost of both 26th and 27th Interim Reports)	November, 2002	Not Available
27th Interim Report of the Committee on Court Practice and Procedure — The Courts of E Government — Meeting the E Commerce Challenge	€1,433.00 (covers cost of both 26th and 27th Interim Reports)	November, 2002	Not Available
Quality Childcare and Lifelong Learning	€424,727.00	September, 2002	2 Years 7 Months
Report of the Committee to Review the Offences Against the State Acts, 1939 — 1998 and Related Matters	€79,152.01	May, 2002	Not Available
The Development of a new Multidisciplinary Sex Offender Rehabilitation Programme for the Irish Prison Service	€59,080 + €15,920 (for publishing the report)	January, 2002	Not Available
Report by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Legislation for 2001	No direct costs	April, 2002	Not Available
Review of Equality Initiatives in the Justice and Equality Sector	€42,258.00	March 2003	12 Months approx.
Research on the Integration into the Local Community of Persons who achieve Refugee Status/Leave to Remain	€57,668.32	September, 2003	Not Available
Report of the Legal Advisory Group on Defamation	€1,108.00	March, 2003	7 Months
Developing Sectoral Strategies to address gender pay gaps	€38,517.00	March, 2003	1 Year
Study of Gender pay gaps at Sectoral Level in Ireland	€118,917.00	February, 2003	1 Year
Women and Men as Entrepreneurs and Business Managers	€32,881.00	November, 2003	1 Year
Research on Information gaps on the role of women in agriculture	€33,509.00	March, 2003	1 Year
Women and Men in Ireland — Facts and Figures	€10,000.00	December, 2003	1 Year

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Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
Ireland's combined 4th and 5th Reports under the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women	€9,880.00	May, 2003	4 Months
Diverse Voices: A summary of the outcomes of the consultative process and a proposed framework for the National Action Plan Against Racism	€5,448.00	July, 2003	Not Available
National Anti-Racism Awareness Programme Report on Activities 2001-2002	€7,828.00	February, 2003	Not available
Report of the Coroners Rules Committee	€5,204.00	November, 2003	24 Months
Drugs Crime & Community in Dublin "Monitoring Quality of Life in the North Inner City"	€10,800.00	June, 2003	13 Months
Cory Collusion Inquiry Report — Lord Justice Gibson and Lady Gibson	€1,586.00	December, 2003	Not Available
Cory Collusion Inquiry Report — Chief Superintendent Breen and Superintendent Buchanan	€1,962.00	December, 2003	Not Available
Garda Youth Diversion Project Guidelines	€58,338.00	May, 2003	Not Available
The Prison Adult Literacy Survey: Results and Implications	€29,080 + €3,000 (for publishing the report)	September, 2003	Not Available
A Study of the level of Learning Disability among the prison population in Ireland.	€98,021	A 'Text Only' version of this report was published on the IPS website April 2003, at minimal cost. It is not being otherwise published.	Not Available
Report by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Legislation for 2002	No direct costs	April, 2003	Not Available
First Annual Report of the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention for the Year 2002-2003	No direct costs	July, 2003	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Cloverhill Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2002-2003	No direct costs	July, 2003	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Mountjoy Prison and the Dóchas Centre by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2002 -2003	No direct costs	July, 2003	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Portlaoise Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2002-2003	No direct costs	July, 2003	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Limerick Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2002-2003	No direct costs	July, 2003	Not Available
Annual Report of the Parole Board 2002	€930 (publication cost)	September 2003	Not Available
Codifying the Criminal Law	€64,717.53	November, 2004	1 Year 11 Months
Report on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace in EU Member States	€54,208.00	June, 2004	4 Months
Extending the Scope of Employment Equality Legislation: Comparative Perspectives on the Prohibited Grounds of Discrimination	€21,216.78	September, 2004	2 Years
Indicator Research for the National Strategy for Women	€40,000.00	September, 2004	1 Year
An Attitudinal Survey of the Role of Women on the Farm	€34,206.00	July, 2004	1 Year
Report on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace in EU Member States	€54,207.00	June, 2004	6 Months

Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
The Final Report of the Garda SMI Implementation Steering Group	€1,701,415.92 (Cost for the last six years, inclusive of cost of consultants appointed to assist project)	June, 2004	6 Years 6 Months
United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination — First National Report by Ireland.	€13,569.00	March, 2004	Not Available
Developing Childcare in Ireland	Not readily available. The work was carried out by Department staff	June, 2004	2 Months
Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into certain Gardaí in the Donegal Division.	First Report — €72,700 Second Report — €73,338.00	First Report — July, 2004 Second Report — June, 2005	2 Years 3 Months and 3 Years 2 Months
Report of the Inspection of Wheatfield Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2003-2004	No Direct Costs	February, 2004	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Fort Mitchel Place of Detention by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2003-2004	No Direct Costs	February, 2004	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Loughan House Place of Detention by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2003-2004	No Direct Costs	February, 2004	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Arbour Hill Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2003-2004	No Direct Costs	April, 2004	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Cloverhill Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2003-2004	No Direct Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Report by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Legislation 2003	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Wheatfield Prison	*Minimal Irish translation Costs'	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Arbour Hill Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Fort Mitchel Place of Detention	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Castlerea Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Loughan House Place of Detention	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Cloverhill Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Mountjoy Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Cork Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Shelton Abbey Place of Detention	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to the Training Unit Place of Detention	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Limerick Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to the Midlands Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to Portlaoise Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available

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Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to St. Patrick's Institution	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report for 2003 of the Visiting Committee to the Curragh Place of Detention	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2004	Not Available
Annual Report of the Parole Board 2003	Published and translated into Irish at a cost of €2,533.96	November, 2004	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Limerick Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2003-2004	No Direct Costs	December, 2004	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Portlaoise Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2003-2004	No Direct Costs	December, 2004	Not Available
Study into Convictions under Section 15A of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977	€3,175.00	February, 2005	3 Years 9 Months
Immigration and Residence in Ireland — Outline Policy Proposals for an Immigration and Residence Bill	€25,000.00	April, 2005	8 Months
Closing the Gap Conference Report	€3,655.00	April, 2005	Not Available
National Action Plan Against Racism (includes the final report on activities of Know Racism 2001-2003)	€38,952.00	January, 2005	Not Available
Review and Evaluation of the National Anti Racism Awareness Programme, Know Racism (published as part of the National Action Plan Against Racism)	€19,314.00	January, 2005	Not Available
28th Interim Report of the Committee on Court Practice and Procedure — The Rules Committee of the Courts	€2,048.00	January, 2005	Not Available
A study of the Number, Profile and Progression Routes of Homeless Persons before the Court and in Custody	€11,166	July, 2005	Not Available
29th Interim Report of the Committee on Court Practice and Procedure — Inquiry to Examine all aspects of Practice and Procedure relating to Personal Injuries Litigation	€4,732.00	January, 2005	Not Available
Making the Link: Evaluation of a Pilot Juvenile Arrest Referral Scheme in Dublin's North Inner City	€20,000.00	April, 2005	18 Months
Annual Report on the Garda Síochána Superannuation Scheme	Cost is minimal	October of each year	1-2 Days
School Age Childcare in Ireland	€25,000.00	June, 2005	4 Years
Report of Mountjoy Complex Replacement Site Committee	No Direct Costs	February, 2005	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Castlerea Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2004-2005	No Direct Costs	February, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Cloverhill Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	April, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Portlaoise Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	April, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to the Training Unit Place of Detention	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	April, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Arbour Hill Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	April, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Midlands Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	April, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Loughan House Place of Detention	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	April, 2005	Not available

Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Castlerea Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	April, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Shelton Abbey Place of Detention	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	April, 2005	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of St. Patrick's Institution by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2004-2005	No Direct Costs	April, 2005	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Mountjoy Prison and Dochas Centre by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2004-2005	No Direct Costs	April, 2005	Not Available
Second Annual Report of the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention for the year 2003-2004	Irish Translation costs of €5,902.77	April, 2005	Not Available
Report by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Legislation 2004	Irish Translation costs of €529.02	May, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Limerick Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Wheatfield Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Cork Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to Mountjoy Prison	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2005	Not Available
Annual Report for 2004 of the Visiting Committee to St. Patrick's Institution	*Minimal Irish Translation Costs	May, 2005	Not Available
Third Annual Report of Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention for the year 2004-2005	Irish Translation cost of €4,319.28	July, 2005	Not Available
Report of the Auctioneering/ Estate Agency Review Group	€35,605.32	July, 2005	12 Months
Annual Report of the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime	€600 approx. Published on Wessite Only	May, 2005	1 Month
An Evaluation of Intervention Programmes in Ireland working with abusive men and their partners and ex-partners	€62,305.64	September, 2005	1 Year 5 Months approx.
Report on the Youth Justice Review	€4,580	December, 2005	8 Months
Market Research into Public Opinion regarding Fireworks Policy	€19,965.00	October, 2005	1 Month
Annual Report of the Parole Board 2004	Published and translated into Irish at a cost of €2,448.07	August, 2005	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Cork Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2004-2005	No Direct Costs	October, 2005	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of the Training Unit by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2004-2005	No Direct Costs	October, 2005	Not Available
Report on the Operation of the European Arrest Warrant Act 2003 in the year 2004 made to the Houses of the Oireachtas by the Central Authority in the person of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform pursuant to section 6 (6) of the European Arrest Warrant Act 2003	Not Available	December 2005	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of the Midlands Prison by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2004-2005	No Direct Costs	December, 2005	Not Available
Equality for Women Measure Annual Report 2004	€13,500	December, 2005	2 Months

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Name of Report	Estimated Cost	Date of Publication	Length of Time Taken to Prepare
Degrees of Equality: Gender Pay Differences among recent graduates (ESRI)	€100,000	November, 2005	23 Months
Gender Audit Report	€72,000	March, 2005	18 Months
Time Use Survey	€94,350	November, 2005	12 Months
Report on the Operation of Part III of the Extradition Act, 1965 in the year 2004 made to the Houses of the Oireachtas by the Government pursuant to Section 6 of the Extradition (Amendment) Act, 1987 as amended by section 15 of the Extradition (Amendment) Act, 1994	Not Available	December 2005	Not Available
Second Progress Report of the Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Taskforce on the Travelling Community	€5,566.00	December, 2005	Not Available
The High Level Group Report on Traveller Issues	None — Published on Website	March, 2006	Not Available
Report by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Legislation 2005	Not available at present	April, 2006	Not Available
Report of the Inspection of Loughan House by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2004-2005	No direct costs	May, 2006	Not Available
Keeping Drugs out of Prison — IPS Drugs Policy & Strategy	No direct costs	3 May, 2006	Not available
Report of Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and An Garda Síochána on Trafficking in Human Beings	Not Applicable. This was exclusively an 'in-house' report.	5 May, 2006 on the Department's website	7 Months approx.
Market Research into Public Opinion regarding Crime and Law Enforcement	€16,335.00	March, 2006	1 Month
Report of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 Implementation Review Group	€7,123.26	February, 2006	1 Month
Report of Legal Costs Working Group	€10,428.72	10 January, 2006	13 Months
Report of the Inspection of Shelton Abbey by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2004-2005	No direct costs	May, 2006	Not available
Probation & Welfare Service Multi-Annual Reports 2000-2003	Not Available	PWS Website in March, 2006	Not Available
Report on the Operation of Part III of the Extradition Act, 1965 in the year 2005 made to the Houses of the Oireachtas by the Government pursuant to Section 6 of the Extradition (Amendment) Act, 1987 as amended by section 15 of the Extradition (Amendment) Act, 1994	Not Available	April 2006	Not Available
Report on the Operation of the European Arrest Warrant Act 2003 (as amended) in the year 2005 made to the Houses of the Oireachtas by the Central Authority in the person of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform pursuant to section 6 (6) of the European Arrest Warrant Act 2003	Not Available	April 2006	Not Available

*These Visiting Committee reports were translated into Irish at an overall total cost of €5,863.81. However, as there was also a translation of another document included in this figure, it is not readily feasible to break down the costs more accurately.

Visa Applications.

444. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will reconsider the refusal of a visa for a child (details supplied) to join their parents and brother here; if his atten-

tion has been drawn to the fact that the child's mother is employed and a taxpayer here; his views on whether it is acceptable to prohibit access for a six year old to their family here; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[18428/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in my Department on 24th January, 2005. The decision of the visa officer to refuse this application was made on 8th February, 2005. An appeal was received on 10th March, 2005 and the decision to refuse was upheld on 7th April, 2005.

A new scheme to facilitate family reunification in respect of non-national workers resident in the State was approved by the Government with effect from February, 2006. It is likely that this application would be encompassed by the changes introduced by this scheme. In this regard, it will be necessary for the applicant to make a fresh application, which will be assessed in accordance with the new arrangements. Details of the new scheme are available on my Department's website (www.justice.ie).

Road Traffic Offences.

445. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of cases in which proceedings commenced in respect

Year	Section 49(2) Blood	Section 49(3) Urine	Section 49(4) Breath	Total
2000*	291	167	295	753
2001*	2,270	1,233	3,747	7,250
2002	2,252	1,399	6,627	10,278
2003	2,130	1,365	5,726	9,221
2004	2,107	1,422	5,597	9,126
2005	1,574	1,063	6,635	9,272

The following table sets out the breakdown of convictions to date under sections 49(2), 49(3), and 49(4) of the Road Traffic Act, 1961 in respect

Year	Section 49(2) Blood	Section 49(3) Urine	Section 49(4) Breath	Total
2000*	233	131	229	593
2001*	1,604	870	2,208	4,682
2002	1,498	938	3,580	6,016
2003	1,331	865	3,175	5,371
2004	1,260	805	3,477	5,542
2005	691	443	3,886	5,020

*The figures provided for 2000 and 2001 are incomplete due to the phased implementation of PULSE. The first full year captured is 2002.

Proceedings may commence in a year subsequent to the year of arrest and are not necessarily commenced and concluded in the same year.

I have also been informed by the Garda authorities that there is no undue delay in instituting proceedings where the blood, urine and breath level exceeds the legal limit.

In cases where the certificate from the evidential breath testing instrument indicates the breath alcohol concentration exceeds the legal limit, it is the policy of An Garda Síochána to charge the person concerned.

of a drink driving offence in each of the years 1999-2005 inclusively with a breakdown for each of the years of cases based on blood, urine and breath samples; the typical reason for the delay in taking cases; the number of cases during this period where proceedings did not and will not ever be commenced; the typical reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18429/06]

446. **Mr. J. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the breakdown of the convictions for drink driving in respect of blood, urine and breath samples in each of the years 1999 to 2005. [18430/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 445 and 446 together.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the breakdown of cases where proceedings commenced under sections 49(2), 49(3) and 49(4) of the Road Traffic Act, 1961 in respect of blood, urine and breath samples in each of the years 2000 to 2005 is set out in the following table:

of blood, urine and breath samples in each of the years 2000 to 2005:

In the case of blood and urine, specimen analysis is carried out by the Medical Bureau of Road Safety and, on receipt of a certificate from the Bureau indicating blood or urine concentration exceeding the legal limit, an appropriate summons is applied for to bring the case before the Courts.

Proceedings are not commenced for drink driving primarily because the blood, urine or breath alcohol concentration does not exceed the legal limit. Where a person fails or refuses to provide a blood, urine or breath specimen proceedings

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may be instituted for such failure or refusal and proceedings may not be commenced for drink driving.

I am also informed that records are not compiled in such a way as to indicate the number of cases where proceedings were not commenced and the amount of time it would take to compile such information could not be justified.

Planning Issues.

447. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he intends to produce an environmental impact statement for the proposed Kilsallaghan development in Fingal; and the proposed timetable for the project. [18431/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The planning process for the development will address in a comprehensive manner the various issues which arise in the context of an Environmental Impact Assessment. These will include, but not be limited to, matters such as archaeology, traffic, flora and fauna etc. Work is underway and well advanced under a number of these headings but cannot be completed until the final design of the proposed development becomes available following the relevant tendering processes. At that stage, there will be an opportunity for full consultation based on the various detailed studies, surveys and reports which will then be made available. It is intended that this will take place late this year with construction commencing in the first quarter of 2007.

Garda Stations.

448. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Garda stations in each county; the number of stations in each county with a Garda residence; the number of residences that have a Garda residing in the station; and if he will make a state. [18432/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The detailed information requested by the Deputy is not readily available and is currently being compiled by the Garda authorities. I will contact the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

Human Rights Issues.

449. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the steps he will take to counteract human trafficking of women to Ireland for prostitution in view of the fact that this country has not ratified the UN Trafficking Protocol or the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking and the

non-governmental organisations sector working to prevent this trafficking receives minimal State aid. [18433/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): In common with other EU countries, to date, all the indications are that, in Ireland, trafficking in human beings takes place on a much smaller scale than illegal immigration. In the recently published United Nations report “Trafficking in Persons Global patterns” Ireland ranks at the low end of destination or transit countries in western Europe. Garda operations have uncovered a small number of trafficking cases. These indicate the involvement of eastern European nationals in trafficking and attempted trafficking activity. The Gardai have encountered a small number of cases of eastern European women being trafficked into Ireland for the purpose of sexual exploitation within their own ethnic communities. An Garda Síochána and the Garda National Immigration Bureau, in particular, take a proactive and vigorous approach in preventing and combating trafficking of human beings. A number of ongoing Garda operations, including “Operation Hotel” and “Operation Quest”, are in place to tackle the phenomenon. The approach taken in tackling trafficking is, where possible, to prevent it occurring, or where it does occur, to seek to prosecute the perpetrators and to protect the victims.

On 5 May I launched a poster campaign to assist in addressing trafficking. This campaign, which is facilitated by Crimestoppers, will help raise awareness of trafficking among the general public. It will also provide an important point of contact for those who may be victims of, or vulnerable to, this insidious crime. The posters are being displayed at airports, ports, bus and railway stations, among other places. Anyone who rings the free phone number 1800 25 00 25 can be assured that the call is anonymous, safe and free of charge. Victims of trafficking, or anyone with knowledge of trafficking activities, should not be afraid of contacting the authorities for assistance. An Garda Síochána, my Department and the International Organisation for Migration are all participating in the campaign and are available to provide whatever assistance is necessary to victims who come to our attention.

This month also, I published on the Department’s website the report of a working group on human trafficking comprising representatives of my Department and An Garda Síochána. I fully support the conclusions and recommendations in the report, which is clear evidence that my Department and An Garda Síochána are committed to tackling trafficking in human beings at a national level and to working with our European Union and other colleagues to tackle it internationally.

I can advise the Deputy that my Department through the Probation and Welfare Service pro-

vides funding to a community based project known as Ruhama. An annual grant of €275,000 was paid to the project in 2005 and a similar amount has been approved for the current year.

Clients referred by the Service to Ruhama receive both individual and group counselling to assist in the area of prevention and rehabilitation, directly, and in liaison with other agencies.

The project itself has successfully helped women to exit prostitution and take up educational opportunities, training, employment or to develop enterprises.

In addition, in 2005, Ruhama were given a grant of €26,768 to enable them to engage a co-ordinator to combat trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation and my Department, under the Equality for Women Measure in the National Development Plan, has provided grant assistance of €381,000 for the development of the 'Next Step Initiative', a model of intervention to help women in prostitution develop the skills and confidence to join mainstream society.

My Department also contributed €12,000 towards the setting up of 'Ireland-en-Route', the inter-agency forum established to address the problem of trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation.

Under current Irish Criminal Law it is an offence, punishable by up to life imprisonment, to traffick a person under 17 years of age, male or female, into, through or out of Ireland for the purpose of that person's sexual exploitation. This is provided for in the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998.

Under the Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act 2000, it is an offence for a person to organise or knowingly facilitate the entry into Ireland of another person whom that person knows or has reasonable cause to believe is an illegal immigrant. The penalty on conviction on indictment for this offence is a maximum of 10 years imprisonment or an unlimited fine or both.

Inevitably, when a person is trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation other serious offences will be committed, such as rape, sexual assault, assault and false imprisonment.

Legislation creating an offence of trafficking in persons for the specific purpose of sexual or labour exploitation is contained in the draft Criminal Justice (Trafficking in Persons and Sexual Offences) Bill which is at an advanced stage of preparation in my Department. This Bill will allow for compliance with the EU Framework Decision on combating trafficking in persons adopted by the Council of Ministers on 19 July, 2002. The legislation will also allow for full compliance with the later EU Framework Decision on combating the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography.

Firearms Issues.

450. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for

Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of legally held firearms here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18434/06]

451. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of legally held firearms that were found to be used in crimes here in 2005. [18435/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 450 and 451 together.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the information requested is not readily available. I will write to the Deputy with the information as soon as I obtain it from the Gardaí.

452. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of offences committed here in 2005 which involved the use of a firearm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18436/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that the total number of headline offences recorded in the year 2005 which involved the use of a firearm was 536 and the total detected was 214. The figures provided are provisional, operational and liable to change.

In relation to firearms in general, I propose bringing forward a range of measures to strengthen the law governing the control of firearms in the Criminal Justice Bill, 2004, which is currently before the Select Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights. These new measures include increases in fines and penalties generally for offences under the Firearms Acts and the creation of mandatory minimum sentences, of between five and ten years, for certain firearms offences, including possession of a firearm in suspicious circumstances, possession of a firearm with criminal intent, possession of a firearm with intent to endanger life or cause serious injury to property, possession of a firearm while hijacking a vehicle, and use or production of a firearm to resist arrest.

In this context I also propose to introduce a statutory basis for an amnesty during which firearms may be surrendered to the Garda Síochána before the proposed new penalties and minimum mandatory sentences are introduced. This will enable those in possession of firearms, who are not in compliance with the legal requirements, to regularise their position, and thus enable the Garda Síochána to concentrate on more serious offenders.

EU Directives.

453. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first

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issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[18459/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The information requested by the Deputy is as follows:

	EU Measure	Date of Measure	Transposition Deadline	Current position
1	Council Directive 2004/82/EC of 29 April 2004 on the obligation of carriers to communicate passenger data	29/04/2004	05/09/2006	The position in relation to the Directives listed 1-4 is that the Immigration and Residence bill will, in the main, provide the legislative vehicle for implementing the provisions of these Directives. Drafting of this Bill is at an advanced stage
2	Council Directive 2004/83/CE of 29 April 2004, on the minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted	29/04/2004	10/10/2006	
3	Council Directive 2005/71/EC of 12 October 2005 relating to the specific admission procedure for third-country nationals for the purpose of scientific research	12/10/2005	12/10/2007	
4	Council Directive 2005/85/EC of 1 December 2005, relating to the minimum standards concerning the procedure for granting and withdrawal of refugee status in the Member States	01/12/2005	1/12/2007 1/12/2008 (Article 15)	
5	Directive 2005/60/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 26 October 2005 on the prevention of the use of financial systems for the purpose of money laundering and terrorist financing	26/10/2005	15/12/2007	The Minister for Finance has the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Directive. However, a number of amendments to Criminal Law will also arise for which my Department is responsible. Arrangements for the assessment of the legislative changes required are already in train with a view to meeting the transposition deadline.
8	Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services	13/12/2004	21/12/2007	I have established a Working Group to consider the application of an exemption for certain insurance products from the scope of the Directive. The Working Group is expected to report to me by end Summer 2006.
9	Council Directive 2002/90/EC defining the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and residence	28/11/2002	05/12/2004	The transposition date does not apply to Ireland as this is a Schengen-related measure and therefore the deadline only applies to Schengen Member States. The legislative changes required to transpose this Directive will be brought forward by means of the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill which is expected to be published this year.

	EU Measure	Date of Measure	Transposition Deadline	Current position
10	Council Directive 2001/40/EC of 28 May 2001 on the mutual recognition of decisions on the expulsion of third country nationals	28/05/2001	No longer relevant	The transposition date does not apply to Ireland as this is a Schengen-related measure and therefore the deadline only applies to Schengen Member States. Due to difficulties among Member States in implementing this Directive, the instrument is due to be repealed by the draft Council Directive on common standards on procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third country nationals. Discussions on this instrument are ongoing at Council working group level
11	Directive 2006/24/EC of 15 March 2006 of the European Parliament and Council on the retention of data generated or processed in connection with the provision of publicly available electronic communications services or of public communications networks and amending Directive 2002/58/EC.	15/3/2006	17/9/2007	Ireland intends to challenge the legal base of this Directive before the European Court of Justice.

Firearms Licensing.

454. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied) concerning licensed firearm certificate holders; and the number of those certificate holders who have been charged under the Firearms and Offensive Weapons Act 1990. [18495/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The issues raised in the Deputy's correspondence relate to amendments being proposed to the Firearms Acts, 1925 to 2000 in the context of the Criminal Justice Bill, 2004 which is currently before the House. I have already responded to all of the issues raised by the Deputy in the course of the Committee Stage of the Bill on 26 April 2006 and 3 May 2006.

With regard to persons charged with offences under the Firearms and Offensive Weapons Act, 1990 I am informed by the Garda authorities that since the computerisation of the firearms licensing system in January, 2000 their records show that proceedings have been brought against 8,265 licensed firearm certificate holders for offences under that Act. Prior to that date the firearms licensing system was a manual system and the information sought by the Deputy for the years prior to 2000 could only be obtained by the disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources.

Garda Equipment.

455. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason after approval for funding was given by the Government four years ago to provide a digital telecommunications system for Gardaí, it is not available to all members of the force; when this will be so;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18496/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform

(Mr. McDowell): Following completion of a pilot Digital Radio project, An Garda Síochána submitted a detailed business case for a national system to my Department in January, 2004. The case outlined various implementation options and costings. Following discussions between officials of my Department, An Garda Síochána and the Department of Finance, it was decided to adopt an "outsourced service provision model" and also to procure a system capable of being used by the other emergency services and non-commercial State bodies. This enables economies of scale as well as allowing for inter-agency communication in the event of major incidents or cross agency operations. Accordingly, an inter-agency procurement group chaired by the Department of Finance was established at the end of 2004 to take the project forward. Following preparation of detailed specification of requirements, a Restricted EU tender procedure was launched on 4th January last. The first phase has been completed and it is planned to issue detailed tender documents to the selected suppliers in the next few weeks and to commence implementation later this year, including full national coverage in 24 months. This is a major infrastructure project and I am advised that similar systems already installed or being installed in other EU countries have taken 4-5 years to complete.

The Garda Information Services Centre has been set-up in Castlebar and as a result mobile telephones are made available to Gardaí to report incidents to the centre for entry onto the Pulse system. These phones also enable communications with the local station. The facility is already in place in the South and South

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Eastern Garda Regions and will be extended nationwide over the course of this year. While this system is not a replacement for a digital radio system, it does provide members with certain mobile communications facilities.

Garda Deployment.

456. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when he expects to fill all vacancies currently requiring replacement in the Garda force in County Mayo at present; the number of members by rank to be so appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18497/06]

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 An Garda Síochána as at 31 March 2006 was 12,439. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June 1997 and represents an increase of 1,737 (or 16.2%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. I am further informed that the personnel strength (by rank) of the Mayo Division as at 16 May, 2006 was as set out in the table hereunder:

Rank	16/05/06
Chief Superintendent	1
Superintendent	6
Inspector	3
Sergeant	45
Garda	205
Total	260

Garda management have informed me that a further eight Gardaí are due to be allocated to the Mayo Division in conjunction with the next allocation of Probationer Gardaí on 9 June, 2006. Every effort is made to fill vacancies when they arise taking account of overall policing needs and availability of suitable personnel.

It is the responsibility of Garda management to allocate personnel to and within Divisions on a priority basis in accordance with the requirements of different areas. The allocation of such resources is determined by a number of factors including demographics, administrative functions, crime trends and other operational policing needs.

Garda personnel assignments throughout the country, together with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy, are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

I should also say that the current recruitment drive to increase the strength of the Garda Síochána to 14,000 members in line with the commitment in the Agreed Programme for Government is fully on target. This will lead to a combined strength, of both attested Gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,000 by the end of this year. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the first group of newly attested Gardaí under the accelerated recruitment programme came on stream in March and a further 275 newly attested Gardaí will come on stream every 90 days from here on in. 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 Mayo Division will be given the fullest consideration.

Drug Seizures.

457. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a full reply will be available on foot of Parliamentary Question No. 312 of 6 April 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18498/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The information sought by the Deputy has now been collated by the Garda authorities. The precise extent of illegal drug use is difficult to determine by virtue of its hidden nature but a number of data sources are used to estimate its prevalence within society. These include drug treatment and law enforcement data as well as official survey data at national level.

The joint Prevalence Survey undertaken in partnership between the National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD) and the Drugs and Alcohol Information and Research Unit (DAIRU) in Northern Ireland is generally regarded as providing the most reliable baseline data currently available on drug prevalence in Ireland. This study surveyed 8,434 people aged 15-64 throughout the island of Ireland between October, 2002 and April, 2003. The survey recorded drug prevalence data relating to lifetime drug use, recent drug use (use within the last year) and current drug use (use within the last month).

Details of the drug prevalence results recorded within the former East Coast Area Health Board, of which County Kildare was a part, are as outlined in the following table:

	Lifetime use	Recent use (within the previous year)	Current use (within the previous month)
ECAHB	25.8%	6.4%	4.1%

Details of proceedings commenced and convictions recorded for drug offences and drug trafficking offences for the Carlow / Kildare Garda Division are summarised in the tables below.

County Kildare forms part of the Garda Division of Carlow / Kildare.

Data on proceedings commenced and convictions recorded to date for drug offences* in the Garda Division of Carlow/Kildare for the years 2003 to 2005

Year	Offences in respect of which proceedings commenced	Convictions (Number of persons)
2005**	847	76
2004	705	214
2003	480	272

*Drug offences referred to are possession of drugs for sale and supply and importation offences.

**Provisional.

Data on proceedings commenced and convictions recorded for drug trafficking offences* in the Garda Division of Carlow/Kildare for years 2003 to 2005

Year	Offences in respect of which proceedings commenced	Convictions (Number of persons)
2005**	98	2
2004	101	30
2003	83	41

*Drug trafficking offences under the Criminal Justice Act 1994.

**Provisional.

It should be noted that data relating to convictions in the above tables relates to convictions during the years in question. Not all proceedings commenced in a given year are concluded in the same year.

The Garda authorities further inform me that all drug cases which are detected by An Garda Síochána are investigated thoroughly with the intention of bringing offenders before the Courts. Investigation files are submitted to the Law Officers for consideration as to what charges, if any, are to be preferred and convictions are determined by the Courts.

Garda Operations.

458. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress of Operation Plaza; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18499/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I regret that it has not been possible in the time available to obtain the information requested by the Deputy. I will be in touch with the Deputy in relation to this matter when it becomes available.

Ministerial Staff.

459. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed

by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18522/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I wish to advise the Deputy that the following staff are employed in my office. All of these staff were employed prior to January 2005.

Name	Grade
Cormac Lucey	Special Adviser
Hugh Hardiman	Personal Assistant
Mary McCowan	Personal Secretary

Drug Seizures.

460. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the type, quantity and street value of drugs seized in the Bray area, County Wicklow in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18545/06]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I regret that it has not been possible in the time available to obtain the information requested by the Deputy. I will be in touch with the Deputy in relation to this matter when it becomes available.

Psychological Service.

461. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the average waiting time for an assessment under the National Education Psychologist Service in County Kildare; the number of educational psychologists for County Kildare; the number of schools which have no direct service in the county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18350/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): All primary and post primary schools in County Kildare have access to psychological assessments either directly through the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA) that is administered by NEPS and full details of which are available on my Department's website.

In addition, NEPS provides a service to every school in the event of a critical incident regardless of whether the school already has a dedicated service from a NEPS psychologist. Also in relation to all schools, NEPS processes applications for Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations and responds to queries and requests for assessments in relation to individual children from other sections of my Department and from the specialist agencies.

According to the latest information, approximately 50% of schools in County Kildare (64 schools out of a total number of 129) have access

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to a dedicated service from NEPS and this represents more than 65% of the student population. Five NEPS psychologists (4.4 whole time equivalents) are currently involved in servicing County Kildare.

In common with many other psychological services, NEPS operates a staged model of service to schools, whereby an initial referral usually leads to a consultation and provision of advice to teachers and parents on appropriate teaching and management strategies. Progress is kept under review and only those children who fail to respond to these interventions will need to see a psychologist. The psychologists do not keep waiting lists of children requiring assessment in the sense of lists of names that are worked through in order. Each psychologist is responsible for a number of named schools, and visits each on a regular basis. The school authorities provide names of children who are giving cause for concern and discuss the relative urgency of each case during the psychologist's visits. This allows the psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and such children will be seen or referred on in a matter of weeks, if not days.

Since the establishment of the NEPS in 1999, the number of NEPS psychologists has increased from 43 to 122 at present. The Public Appointments Service recently concluded a new recruitment competition for the appointment of Educational Psychologists to NEPS. Regional panels have been established to allow my Department give greater priority in filling vacancies to areas with the greatest need. My Department is currently in the process of recruiting a further nine psychologists.

Schools Building Projects.

462. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in relation to a school building (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17842/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school referred to by the Deputy originally applied for an extension and refurbishment to provide for improved ancillary accommodation only and the application did not include proposals for additional mainstream classrooms. Given the then falling rates of enrolment at the school and having regard to competing demands on the building programme the application was at that time afforded a lower priority rating.

As part of a recent re-assessment of the application and having regard to subsequent increasing enrolments, the consequential need for additional mainstream accommodation became apparent. Accordingly a detailed assessment of recent and projected enrolment trends, demographic trends and housing developments in the

area was carried out by my Department in order to ensure that any capital funding provided will deliver accommodation appropriate to the school's need into the future. This assessment has recently been completed and the long term projected staffing figure, on which future accommodation needs will be based, has been agreed with the school authority.

My Department is now in the process of drawing up of a detailed accommodation brief, which may require a site visit, in respect of this school. Following completion of the brief, the project will be considered for the appointment of a design team to carry out architectural planning.

School Curriculum.

463. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the effectiveness of the drug prevention education programmes in our schools here; if they have been rolled out to all schools; her plans to revise these programmes based on findings of international best practice. [17846/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Drug prevention education is implemented as part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curricula in primary and post-primary schools. The SPHE curriculum is mandatory in all primary schools and post-primary schools up to Junior Certificate Level in which substance use is one of 10 modules taught. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) SPHE course committee is currently finalising a Framework SPHE curriculum for Senior Cycle students at post-primary level, for submission to Council after which it will be submitted to my Department for consideration.

At primary school level, a national 2 day programme of in-service training in SPHE was provided for all primary teachers during 2001-'02 and '02-'03. In addition, the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), through its SPHE Cuiditheoireacht service from September '03 provides support for the implementation of SPHE in schools and for the formulation of Substance Use Policies through school visits. Further support and guidance in this area is available through the provision of 'Drop in' clinics in various Education Centres around the country. Furthermore, the SPHE trainers provided half-day seminars for designated members of teaching staffs in primary schools and parents — in non Local Drugs Task Force Areas — to help them formulate Substance Use Policies; the trainers also facilitated evening meetings for Substance Use Policy Committees. A callsave helpline is also provided for information and advice on the topic.

The Substance Misuse Prevention Programme (SMPP or 'The Walk Tall' Programme) is a national programme, established in 1996, to provide in-service to teachers in primary schools in the area of legal and illegal substances. The programme teaching and resource materials focus

on both alcohol and drugs in an age appropriate manner. The programme was offered to all primary and special schools 1998-2001. Approximately 3,048 (95%) schools participated in the training.

The programme has an integrated approach to drug education and is a key strategy in drug abuse prevention education. Teaching and resource materials developed by the 'Walk Tall' Programme are made available to all primary and special schools nationally. In the last academic year the Walk Tall Support Service produced a CD ROM of the programme materials and a handbook for teachers "Understanding Substances and Substance Use" and made it available to all schools nationally.

Summer training courses are offered nationally to teachers. 16 courses took place in '05. Approximately 350 teachers participated on the courses. The uptake on the summer courses nationally demonstrates that teachers outside of Local Drug Task Force Areas are receiving training on the 'Walk Tall' Programme. Courses took place in Limerick, Kildare, Athlone, Carlow, Kilkenny, Louth, Carrick-on Shannon, Mayo, Wicklow, Tipperary, Monaghan, Cavan and Tralee.

The support service has a full time staff of three, comprised of a national support officer and two assistants on secondment from teaching duties. A part-time panel of approximately 20 teachers is available to deliver summer training courses nationally. The programme currently offers a dedicated support service to all schools in the 14 Local Drugs Task Force Areas in Dublin, Bray and Cork. At present officials in my Department are examining a proposal from the SMPP Steering Committee to expand the 'Walk Tall' programme to provide schools outside the Local Drugs Task Force Areas with a dedicated service also.

At post-primary level, the substance misuse prevention programme 'On My Own Two Feet' which is an integral part of the SPHE curriculum, draws on three approaches: knowledge-attitude, decision-making and social competence. As such it is a comprehensive life-skills programme.

All post-primary schools are invited to in-service training in SPHE each spring and autumn on a regional basis. A selection of SPHE topics are offered to teachers, including substance use education. Health Promotion Officers and Regional Development Officers along with experts in specific areas, such as substance use education are involved in the delivery of this in-service. In addition, there is a dedicated Regional Development Officer who works with post-primary schools in the Local Drugs Task Force Areas, in assisting them with policy development and implementation of the policy guidelines on substance use in schools.

Evaluation studies of the effectiveness of substance misuse prevention programmes such as 'Walk Tall' and 'On My Own Two Feet' are few

but those that have been conducted show positive outcomes: an evaluation of the 'Walk Tall' programme concluded that the programme is in line with the most effective approaches that are used in programmes abroad another study conducted in the Local Drugs Task Force Areas found that the programme integrated very well with the SPHE curriculum. The 'Walk Tall' programme has been piloted in Northern Ireland and permission has been sought by the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to use the 'Walk Tall' materials as part of a Personal Development Curriculum.

I am confident that together these initiatives are ensuring that the education system plays its role in combating drug abuse among young people. Clearly, however, this issue requires action on many fronts. To this end, the Government has put in place the National Drugs Strategy which aims to reduce drug abuse through investment in a mixture of different facilities and programmes and through actions by a range of Departments and Agencies.

The evidence available to me from both the national Misuse Prevention Programme (SMPP) and the national SPHE Support Service informs me that the substance misuse education prevention programmes being implemented as an integral part of the SPHE curricula is in line with best international practice and while all programmes of this nature are constantly under review, I do not have any plans at present to revise the programmes.

School Accommodation.

464. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the fact that a significant number of children have been refused places in a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; if her attention has further been drawn to the fact that the cut-off date for enrolment in the school is to be four years of age on or before the 31 of December 2005; if her attention has further been drawn to the distress caused to parents who have other children in the school and who have had children's names down for a significant period of time; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17847/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): School Planning Section has been appraised of the situation, by the school management authorities of the school referred to by the Deputy. My officials have been informed that the school accepts enrolments from parents in the first three weeks of March each year. The school authority is currently carrying out a comprehensive survey in its area to determine the actual shortfall in Junior Infant places. When the results of this survey are available the Board of Management will make a decision on how best to cater for the actual shortfall in places.

[Ms Hanafin.]

The school authority has been advised by officials in School Planning Section that it has the option to apply for an additional classroom, should it be required, to cater for an additional Junior Infant intake for September 2006. I understand that parents in the area have been kept informed by the school authorities of these matters.

With regard to the area as a whole, I am conscious that Dublin 15 is one of the most rapidly developing areas in the country and, as a result, there has been a marked increase in the demand for primary school places. My Department is taking a number of measures to increase the capacity of existing schools in the area concerned along with the development of new schools to meet this growing demand. All building projects arising from these interventions are awarded a band 1 priority rating under my Departments prioritisation criteria for large-scale building projects to ensure that they are delivered as expeditiously as possible.

In the Littlepace/Castaheaney area a new school building has recently been completed at Mary Mother of Hope National School, with an additional project underway with a target delivery date of September 2007. In addition a new primary school campus is planned for a school site in Ongar which will have a minimum of 32 classrooms. Part of this project will provide a permanent accommodation solution for Castaheaney Educate Together National School which has agreed to increase its junior infant intake by one extra class grouping this year. This project also has a target completion date of September, 2007. This particular area is also served by the Scared Heart National School Huntstown where an extension project to provide a 32 classroom school is nearing completion.

In the Diswellstown area, St. Patrick's National School has recently moved into a new 24 classroom school. This will facilitate an annual 3 stream intake. However, as an exceptional matter the Board of Management has agreed to take a fourth stream of Junior infants this year. In addition to this, the Board of Management of St. Mochta's National School, which currently has an intake of 3 junior infant classes, has agreed to enrol a fourth Junior Infant class for September 2006. An extension project to cater for this development will also attract a Band 1 priority rating. Other developments in the Dublin 15 area include the planned expansion of St. Brigid's National School in Castleknock and extensions to St. Brigid's Boys and Girls National Schools, Blanchardstown.

In addition, a new Educate Together school opened in Tyrrelstown in September 2005. My Department has approved the provision of six additional classrooms for September 2006 to cater for new enrolments and Special Education

Teachers. It is anticipated that this school will enrol three junior infant classes.

I am confident that the measures outlined will assist in alleviating the immediate demand for pupil places in the area. However, due to the current level of demand emanating from the Dublin 15 area, the need to provide even further school accommodation is under consideration and my Department is engaging with the key school Patron authorities that are active in the area in this regard.

Special Educational Needs.

465. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will review the contents of correspondence (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17849/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I can confirm that my officials recently issued a letter to the parent in question in response to the issues raised in the correspondence referred to by the Deputy. The general allocation system is intended to cater for children with high incidence special educational needs and learning support needs. I am advised that the pupil in question is diagnosed with a high incidence disability and is in receipt of support from the learning support/resource teacher in the school.

It is a matter for each school to determine the pupils with learning support and high-incidence special education needs that will receive supplementary teaching support. The school can use its professional judgement to decide how these hours are divided between different children in the school, to ensure that all their needs are met.

Educational Projects.

466. **Mr. Blaney** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on including a school (details supplied) in County Donegal in the school support programme in view of the fact that the six points under the variables for review are very relevant to this area and the fact that they are located within the CLÁR area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17865/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The new DEIS programme is designed to ensure that schools serving the most disadvantaged communities benefit from the maximum level of support available. Over the years, no less than 8 separate schemes for disadvantaged primary schools have been put in place. Some schools were benefiting from just one or two of these and others were benefiting from more. The DEIS initiative is designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from a comprehensive package of supports.

While the whole rationale behind the new programme is to ensure that the most

disadvantaged schools benefit from all of the available supports, schools that are benefiting from existing schemes will keep the extra resources — financial and human — that they are getting under these initiatives for the 2006/07 school year. After that they will continue to get support in line with the level of socio-economic disadvantage among their pupils.

In relation to how schools were identified to benefit from the new programme, this process was managed by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of my Department and supported by quality assurance work co-ordinated through the Department's regional offices and the Inspectorate. In the primary sector, the identification process was based on a survey carried out by the ERC in May 2005, from which a response rate of more than 97% was achieved.

The analysis of the survey returns from primary schools by the ERC identified the socio-economic variables that collectively best predict achievement, and these variables were then used to identify schools for participation in the School Support Programme. The variables involved were: % unemployment, % local authority accommodation, % lone parenthood, % Travellers, % large families (5 or more children) % pupils eligible for free books. A review process has been put in place for primary and second-level schools that did not qualify for participation in the new School Support Programme (SSP) and that regard themselves as having a level of disadvantage which is of a scale sufficient to warrant their inclusion in the Programme. The review process will operate under the direction of an independent person, charged with ensuring that all relevant identification processes and procedures were properly followed in the case of schools applying for a review. The closing date for receipt of review applications was Friday 31st March, 2006. The school to which the Deputy refers has submitted an application for review and a formal acknowledgement has issued to the school. It is anticipated that the review process will be completed before the end of the current school year.

School Accommodation.

467. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the way in which her Department prepares for growing communities where additional school places are likely to be needed within the next five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17897/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The process of assessing the need for new or additional educational facilities at primary or post-primary level in any given area entails consideration of all relevant factors, including enrolment and demographic trends, housing developments and the capacity of existing schools to meet the demand for places. Liaison with exist-

ing schools is an important part of the process also, as the school authorities would usually alert my Department where, in their view, the need for additional accommodation is anticipated. In this way, every effort is made to ensure that there is adequate existing provision, or that timely arrangements are made to extend capacity or provide new infrastructure where necessary.

Over and above the statutory consultation provisions in relation to draft area development plans, my Department has in recent years worked to strengthen contacts with local authorities to enable informed decisions to be made in planning future educational provision. For example, a specific forum, the Dublin School Planning Committee, chaired by officials of my Department, interacts with the Dublin local authorities. This forum comprises representatives of the local authorities in Dublin together with representatives of the Patron bodies of primary schools and it works proactively in monitoring demographic changes and their likely impact.

The criteria for prioritising large scale building projects were revised last following consultation with the Education Partners. Under the revised criteria, school projects in rapidly developing areas are assigned a band 1 rating which is the highest priority possible. This is clear evidence of my Department's commitment to ensuring that the needs of rapidly developing areas are met as quickly as possible.

The School Planning Section of my Department is also working proactively with some local authorities to explore the possibility of the development of school provision in tandem with the development of community facilities. This enhanced co-operation has the effect of minimising my Departments land requirements and thus reducing site costs while at the same time providing local communities with new schools with enhanced facilities.

In addition, under the provisions of the Strategic Development Zones (SDZ) it is generally the position that sites must be reserved for schools and that the schools must be developed commensurate with housing and other developments such as community facilities.

My Department has recently adopted an area based approach to school planning where, through a public consultation process involving all interested parties, a blueprint for schools' development in an area for a 10 year timeframe is set out. The areas covered in the pilot phase of this new approach to school planning include the rapidly developing areas of north Dublin, south Louth and mid-Meath and the N4/M4 route running from Leixlip to Kilbeggan and including all rapidly developing towns and villages on that route. Taken in combination I believe the measures outlined will improve the speed and effectiveness of the response to emerging needs in rapidly developing areas.

School Staff.

468. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the roles of responsibility for deputy principal post holders and boards of management in national schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17909/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Deputy Principal is required to assist the Principal teacher in the day-to-day organisation and supervision of the school. Section 15 of the Education Act, 1998 outlines the role and responsibility of boards of management of national schools. It states “It shall be the duty of a Board to manage the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents and to provide or cause to be provided an appropriate education for each student at the school for which that board has responsibility”. The Board of Management of a primary school is responsible for the recruitment, selection, appointment, discipline and dismissal of staff in a school.

469. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will put in place a system of centralised payment for national school part-time teachers and caretakers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17910/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department provides funding towards the cost of caretaking services in primary schools under two separate schemes. One is the 1978/79 scheme under which my Department meets the full cost of salary. These staff members are paid directly through my Department’s payroll. The 1978/79 scheme is being phased out as posts become vacant and no new posts are being created.

The 1978/79 scheme has been superseded by a more extensive school support grant scheme towards the funding of ancillary services in schools including caretaking services. The scheme is flexible in nature giving Boards of Management and schools discretion as to the manner in which these services are provided.

There are no plans to pay the school caretakers funded under this scheme, directly through my Department’s payroll. My Department is planning to develop a centralised payroll for the payment of part-time resource teachers employed in primary schools. However, there are a number of other projects being undertaken at present in payroll development. These include the establishment of an on line claim system for payment of casual and non casual staff members and the development of an integrated payroll for the payment of casual and non casual teachers in Secondary and Community/Comprehensive schools. It is planned to develop the payroll for the payment of part-time resource teachers when these projects have been fully implemented.

Departmental Agencies.

470. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will reconsider the composition of the Grangegorman Development Agency membership due to there being no representation of the Dublin Institute of Technology students’ union; and if in view of the commitment to partnership, she will take steps to appoint a representative of the Dublin Institute of Technology students’ union; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17917/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I recently announced the appointment of Mr. John Fitzgerald, City Manager, Dublin City Council as Chairman of the Grangegorman Development Agency and I am now actively considering the other appointments to the Agency.

The Deputy will be interested to know that Section 22 of the Grangegorman Development Agency Act 2005 provides for the establishment, by the Agency, of a consultative group that is representative of all stakeholders interested in the development of the Grangegorman Site. I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the student body of the Dublin Institute of Technology is specified as a stakeholder under this section of the Act.

Schools Building Projects.

471. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason for delay in progressing a school building project (details supplied) in County Tipperary. [17936/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An initial application for additional accommodation, to include a number of specialist rooms, an administration area, a General Purpose/ Dining area and servery, storage areas and a PE Hall, was received from the management authority of the school referred to by the Deputy. Subsequently the school submitted an application for funding towards the provision of six small rooms in temporary accommodation for special needs education.

Given the extent of additional accommodation being sought it was decided to examine the overall accommodation needs of the school in order to ensure that any capital funding which might be provided will deliver accommodation to meet the school’s long-term needs. This examination is underway and my officials are in contact with the school authority in this regard.

When the examination is complete a decision will be taken on how best to meet the school’s long-term needs and any building project required will be progressed in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

472. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Science when an allocation for

additional accommodation from a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary will be considered by her Department; the reason the delay in assessing and allocating funding in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17937/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An application for capital funding towards the provision of an extension to provide ancillary accommodation has been received from the school referred to by the Deputy. The project has been assessed in accordance with the prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects. The project is being considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

School Staffing.

473. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on the implementation of the Irish National Teachers Organisation five point plan in relation to investing in children's futures, increased support for teachers, school infrastructure, support leadership and proper funding for primary schools in 2006. [17943/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Major improvements in school staffing have been made in recent years with the hiring of more than 5,000 additional primary teachers. This represents the largest increase in teacher numbers since the expansion of free education. Today there is one teacher for every 17 children, the lowest pupil teacher ratio in the history of the State.

Aside from decreasing average class size, the unprecedented increase in school staffing in recent years has also greatly improved the services provided for children with special needs and those from disadvantaged areas. Under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) the action plan for educational inclusion that I launched in May, 2005, there will be a reduction in class sizes to 24:1 at senior level and 20:1 at junior level in the 180 primary schools serving communities with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. With more than 600 extra resource teachers put in place in this school year, children with special needs are getting more support than ever before. It should be acknowledged how much progress has been made in this area in recent years.

Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year. Accordingly, over the next 2 years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage.

The mainstream staffing of a primary school is determined by reference to the enrolment of the school on the 30th September of the previous school year. The actual number of mainstream posts sanctioned is determined by reference to a staffing schedule which is issued annually to all primary schools.

At present the general rule is that the schedule provides at least one classroom teacher for every 29 pupils in the school. Of course, schools with only one or two teachers have much lower staffing ratios than that — with two teachers for just 12 pupils in some cases and so on — but the general rule is that there is at least one classroom teacher for every 29 children in the school. Next year this is being reduced to 28 children per classroom teacher and in 2007/2008 it will be reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with the Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced. Funding for In-Career Development for primary and post-primary teachers and other school support programmes expenditure (€ Millions) for the year 2006 is €35.05. This represents an increase of €1m over the 2005 expenditure figure.

I am pleased to say that over the past 10 years; more than €200 million has been invested by my Department in the area of continuous professional development for teachers and other school personnel. During this time my Department has developed teacher education as a continuum, running from pre-service training, induction through to programmes of continuous professional development. Among other things, this investment has seen very significant increases in the provision of training for school personnel working with pupils with special educational needs and pupils in schools designated disadvantaged. In addition, my Department is continuing to build capacity within the Education Centre network in order to continue to develop a comprehensive and coherent provision of professional development opportunities for local school communities.

Other areas of support include my Department's Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) programme has been extended substantially, enabling it not only to reach more principals and their deputies, but also to develop training for aspirant school leaders. I see this latter aspect as an important way to encourage more teachers to become school principals giving them the chance to gain new skills and to consider their suitability to become a principal or deputy principal in the future. The Deputy will also be aware that I recently established the Teaching Council, which will focus on teaching and learning in schools. Among the objectives of the Teaching

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Council that will support Teaching and learning are:

- to regulate the teaching profession and the professional conduct of teachers,
- to establish and promote the maintenance and improvement of standards in teacher education and training,
- to promote the continuing education, training and professional development of teachers.

In time, the work of The Teaching Council will have a significant impact on the educational environment in Ireland. I am satisfied that the funding and support I am providing in 2006 will meet the continuous professional development needs of school personnel.

Finally, I will continue to ensure that there is a continuation of this upward trend of investment in the very important area of continuous professional development for the teaching profession. Modernising the educational infrastructure in over 3,200 primary and 750 post-primary schools is not an easy task given the legacy of decades of under-investment in this area as well as the need to respond to emerging needs in new population areas. Nonetheless, I am determined to ensure that every child in this country is educated in a suitable and comfortable environment. My commitment to this goal can be judged by the investment of over €2 billion that was spent on school buildings during the period 2000 to 2005 with a further €500 million being invested in 2006. Our infrastructural investment will continue into the future. In the last budget, the Minister for Finance provided €3.9 billion in capital funding for the education sector over the next five years. This increased funding will allow us to greatly improve our education infrastructure at all levels over the next five years.

The scheme of release time was introduced for the 2000/2001 school year. This scheme enables teaching principals of primary schools to be released from their teaching duties for a specified number of days annually to undertake administrative leadership and management functions. The number of days release time allowed varies between 14 and 22 and is determined by the number of mainstream class teachers in the school. Paid substitution is provided by my Department for the days that principals are on release time. Following discussion with the relevant interests, my Department has decided to introduce, on a pilot basis, a system whereby a fully qualified primary school teacher may be employed to act as nominated substitute teacher for the Principals in a cluster of schools taking release days. Twenty clusters have been established under the pilot scheme. The position will be monitored by my Department during the pilot.

My Department is currently engaged in the development of a computerised on-line system for the submission of claims for the payment of certain categories of teachers. The implementation of this project should help to further reduce the administrative burden on principal teachers. The main sources of funding for primary schools are my Department's Capitation grants scheme and the Ancillary services (caretaker/secretary) grant scheme.

Primary schools' running costs are met by my Department's scheme of capitation grants. These grants are intended to contribute towards the general operating costs of national schools. The capitation grant has been increased substantially in recent years. Since 1997 the standard rate of capitation grant has been increased from €57.14 per pupil to €133.58 with effect from 1st January, 2005 and has been further increased by €12 per pupil with effect from 1st January, 2006 bringing the standard rate to €145.58. This represents an increase of almost 155% in the standard rate of capitation grant since 1997.

Funding to primary schools for secretarial and caretaking services has increased from the €50.79 per pupil that applied in the 2000/2001 school year, to €139.00 per pupil at present. Increased funding for the provision of caretaking and secretarial services was secured to compensate for the phasing out of Community Employment schemes and enabled my Department to put improved secretarial and caretaking supports in place for schools. The significant increase in the funding of schools in the primary sector over recent years is a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address the needs of primary schools.

School Patronage.

474. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the powers she has to establish a primary school or second level school with her or the Government serving as the patron; and if she will make a statement on the matter.
[17983/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Section 8 of the Education Act 1998 set out the basis for the patronage of schools. It is already the case that I, as Minister for Education and Science, am patron of Model Schools in the primary sector. In the post-primary sector, the Minister for Education and Science, and the State, through the Vocational Education Committees, is involved in the patronage of schools in the voluntary, community and comprehensive sectors.

School Accommodation.

475. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount spent on the provision of temporary school buildings over the past

three years; and the breakdown on a county basis. [17984/06]

476. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount spent on temporary school buildings in Dublin 15 in each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17985/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 475 and 476 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in the format in which it has been sought. If the Deputy is interested in obtaining details of temporary accommodation at any specific school, I will be glad to assist him on receipt of the name and address of the school.

With regard to the area as a whole, I am conscious that Dublin 15 is one of the most rapidly developing areas in the country and, as a result, there has been a marked increase in the demand for primary school places. My Department is taking a number of measures to increase the capacity of existing schools in the area concerned along with the development of new schools to meet this growing demand. All building projects arising from these interventions are awarded a band 1 priority rating under my Departments prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects to ensure that they are delivered as expeditiously as possible.

In the Littlepace/Castaheaney area a new school building has recently been completed at Mary Mother of Hope National School, with an additional project underway with a target delivery date of September 2007. In addition a new primary school campus is planned for a school site in Ongar which will have a minimum of 32 classrooms. Part of this project will provide a permanent accommodation solution for Castaheaney Educate Together National School which has agreed to increase its junior infant intake by one

extra class grouping this year. This project also has a target completion date of September, 2007.

This particular area is also served by the Sacred Heart National School Huntstown where an extension project to provide a 32 classroom school is nearing completion. In the Diswellstown area, St. Patrick's National School has recently moved into a new 24 classroom school. This will facilitate an annual 3 stream intake. However, as an exceptional matter the Board of Management has agreed to take a fourth stream of Junior infants this year. In addition to this, the Board of Management of St. Mochta's National School, which currently has an intake of 3 junior infant classes, has agreed to enrol a fourth Junior Infant class for September 2006. An extension project to cater for this development will also attract a Band 1 priority rating.

Other developments in the Dublin 15 area include the planned expansion of St. Brigid's National School in Castleknock and extensions to St. Brigid's Boys and Girls National Schools, Blanchardstown. In addition, a new Educate Together school opened in Tyrrelstown in September 2005. My Department has approved the provision of six additional classrooms for September 2006 to cater for new enrolments and Special Education Teachers. It is anticipated that this school will enrol three junior infant classes.

I am confident that the measures outlined will assist in alleviating the immediate demand for pupil places in the area. However, due to the current level of demand emanating from the Dublin 15 area, the need to provide even further school accommodation is under consideration and my Department is engaging with the key school Patron authorities that are active in the area in this regard.

In the five years period to the end of 2005, a total of €75,590,037 was expended on the purchase of temporary accommodation for primary and second level schools across the country. The annualised details are as in the following tables.

Year	Permanent Accommodation Scheme	Funding Allocated	Small Schools Scheme	Funding Allocated	Total Schools	Funding
		€m		€m		€m
2003	20	2.6	20	5	40	7.6
2004	41	6.3	50	14.2	91	20.5
2005	74	14.5	97	30	171	44.5
2006	75	19	135	74	210	93

Year	Total Capital Expenditure at Primary & Post Primary Level	Expenditure on Temp Accommodation	Temp Accom as a % of total Capital Expenditure
2001	317,685,928	9,108,090	2.87
2002	344,134,813	21,463,576	6.24
2003	326,961,430	25,838,453	7.90
2004	333,119,761	12,711,802	3.82
2005	501,261,866	6,468,116	1.29

477. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has made an assessment of the projected demand for primary and secondary school places in the Castleknock area over the next five years; the measures she intends to take to extend existing schools; the measures she intends to take to provide new schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17986/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department is continually monitoring the situation regarding demand for primary and post primary schools in the Dublin 15 area as a whole, including Castleknock. Officials from School Planning Section of my Department are in regular contact with the Planning Department of Fingal County Council and receive regular updates on housing completions, planning applications, potential infill etc.

My Department is included among the prescribed authorities to whom local authorities are statutorily obliged to send draft development plans or proposed variations to development plans for comment. As a matter of course meetings are arranged with local authorities to establish the location, scale and pace of any major proposed developments and their possible implications for school provision.

Officials in the School Planning Section of my Department are strengthening contacts with local authorities to enable informed decisions to be made in planning future educational provision. For example, a specific forum, the Dublin School Planning Committee, chaired by officials of my Department, interacts with the Dublin local authorities. This forum comprises representatives of the local authorities in Dublin together with representatives of the Patron bodies of primary schools and works proactively in monitoring demographic changes and their likely impact.

My Department is taking a number of measures to increase the capacity of existing schools in the area concerned along with the development of new schools to meet this growing demand. All building projects arising from these interventions are awarded a band 1 priority rating under my Departments prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects to ensure that they are delivered as expeditiously as possible.

A number of building projects are underway or planned for the Castleknock area. A major project to build a 16 classroom school for Castleknock Educate Together N.S. is underway and a project to build a 4 classroom extension and ancillary accommodation at St. Thomas the Apostle N.S., Laurel Lodge is at Stage 3 of architectural planning.

Castleknock NS was listed under the devolved Permanent Accommodation Scheme for the provision of 3 classrooms and special education rooms. Other developments in the area include the planned expansion of St. Brigid's National

School in Castleknock. I am confident that these measures will ensure sufficient primary school places for the short to medium term.

At post primary level students have increased mobility and a large number from the Castleknock area travel outside of their immediate vicinity to other schools. I am confident that there are sufficient post primary places available both within the immediate area or within a short commuting distance to cater for demand.

In spite of the significant school building programme being carried out in the Castleknock area, I am conscious that there is also significant housing development continuing and, the need to make further provision at primary and post primary level in addition to that outlined above is being kept under continuous review by my Department.

Schools Building Projects.

478. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has entered into negotiations with a company (details supplied) with regard to the purchase of the designated primary school site on the former Phoenix Park Racecourse, Dublin 15. [17987/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): A site has been reserved for future primary school provision in the Phoenix Park area. The matter of proceeding with the site acquisition process for this site is still under consideration in the School Planning Section of my Department. Therefore no negotiations have taken place to date regarding the purchase of this site.

Special Educational Needs.

479. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she intends to support the establishment of the ACORN ABA school for autistic children on the northside of Dublin. [17988/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Deputy will be aware of my commitment to ensuring that all children, including those with autism receive an education appropriate to their needs, preferably through the primary and post primary school network.

My Department supports an eclectic approach to the education of children with autism where a range of teaching methods can be applied specific to the needs of individual pupils. I am pleased to advise the Deputy that Dublin's northside already has many facilities catering for children with autism including pre-school classes for children with autism, five of which are located on the north side of Dublin, special classes for children with autism attached to special schools and mainstream schools, 12 of which are located on the

northside of Dublin, special classes for asperger's syndrome, two of which are located on the north side of Dublin plus a range of supports for pupils with autism integrated in mainstream classes. A pilot scheme facilitated the establishment of 12 specific autism units nationwide, one of which is located on the northside of Dublin.

A specific function of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) which is now operational, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is to identify appropriate educational placements for all children with special educational needs, including children with autism for the area in question. An application for the facility in question is currently under consideration in my Department.

Schools Building Projects.

480. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has applied the same analysis used for projected school needs in the Castleknock area as she has in relation to the Hansfield SDZ, Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17989/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): In analysing the need for future educational provision in the Hansfield SDZ, my Department based the level of future demand on an average occupancy rate of three per household and the average national figures for school attendance as a percentage of total population. It was also assumed that demand for educational provision emerging in the area would be met within the Hansfield area as schools in the surrounding area are operating at maximum capacity at present.

The situation in the Castleknock area differs from Hansfield in that the my Department is seeking to optimise the use of existing accommodation along with developing new schools on greenfield sites. For example, there are expansion projects planned for St. Brigid's National School and St. Mochta's National school along with such projects as the completed new school for St. Patrick's, Diswellstown.

My Department is currently examining the demand the future provision on Greenfield sites in the Castleknock area, in light of future planned developments and consequential demand for school provision which cannot be met by existing school infrastructure.

Site Acquisitions.

481. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has satisfied herself with regard to the site for the primary school in Tyrellstown, Dublin 15; if she intends to purchase the site as a permanent site for the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [17990/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The purchase of a site to provide a permanent accommodation solution for Tyrellstown Educate Together National School is under consideration in the School Planning Section of my Department.

Physical Education Facilities.

482. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Science the policy within her Department concerning the approval of physical education buildings in post-primary and primary schools in the school building and modernisation programme; if she will review this policy in view of the exponential rise in awareness and concern regarding obesity; if additional funding will be allocated to the provision of physical education facilities in schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18061/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Applications for the provision of PE or sports facilities in schools are considered in the context of all other applications on hand for capital investment e.g. applications for new schools; refurbishment projects; extensions; new sites; remediation programmes. All applications are considered in the context of available resources and the published criteria for prioritising school building projects.

My Department is committed to funding the provision of PE, general purpose and outdoor play areas in schools as part of the schools' capital investment programme. Providing recreation areas such as hard core ball courts; General Purpose rooms at primary level and PE Halls at post-primary level are considered an integral part of the design stage for any major refurbishment programme of existing school buildings — providing always that the site is of sufficient size — or where a new school on a greenfield site is being built.

Schools Building Projects.

483. **Mr. Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Science the ranking of a school within the school building and modernisation programme (details supplied) in County Tipperary; if the school is ranked within the top eight schools under consideration for approval; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18062/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An application for a new PE Hall at the school to which the Deputy refers has been assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects. The project has been assigned a Band 4 rating and its progress will be considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme from 2006 onwards.

Departmental Agencies.

484. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the strong groundswell of support that exists for the addition of a representative from the Dublin Institute of Technology Students Union onto the board of the Grangegorman Development Agency; if she intends to facilitate the union's call for a seat in view of the representations made by TDs and Senators from all parties, the DIT Governing Body, the DIT Grangegorman development Committee and others; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18063/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I recently announced the appointment of Mr. John Fitzgerald, City Manager, Dublin City Council as Chairman of the Grangegorman Development Agency and I am now actively considering the other appointments to the Agency. The Deputy will be interested to know that Section 22 of the Grangegorman Development Agency Act 2005 provides for the establishment, by the Agency, of a consultative group that is representative of all stakeholders interested in the development of the Grangegorman Site. I am pleased to advise the Deputy that the student body of the Dublin Institute of Technology is specified as a stakeholder under this section of the Act.

School Curriculum.

485. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on introducing, even on pilot basis, a safe driving course specifically adapted for secondary school pupils to instil road safety measures in their formative years (details supplied); if her attention has been drawn to this course; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18064/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I have received correspondence on this matter from the person referred to by the Deputy. The question of introducing a road safety and driver education syllabus into schools has been examined by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) on foot of a report from a task group set up in 2000 and which included representatives of the Department of Education and Science, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the National Safety Council, the Garda Síochána, the Irish Insurance Federation, the Society of the Irish Motor Industry, Rosary College Crumlin, the CCEA Northern Ireland and the NCCA. The NCCA also commissioned a study on driver education in post primary schools from Dr. Ray Fuller of Trinity College Dublin.

The NCCA, whose role is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on curriculum and assessment issues, recommended that road safety

be addressed within the context of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and that driver education, and specifically learning to drive for pupils aged 17, should not become part of the school curriculum. The NCCA noted that this concurred with the practice in other jurisdictions.

At the start of the 2001/02 school year the National Safety Council, with assistance from my Department, distributed copies of *Staying Alive* — a road safety resource for Transition Year and the Senior Cycle — to all second level schools. This pack contained a wide range of learning opportunities and activities on topics such as personal responsibility and decision-making, environmental issues and risks and rules for road users. A CD-ROM with additional material downloaded from the Internet was included in the pack along with copies of the Rules of the Road. In the preparation of the *Staying Alive* resources material, views were sought from a range of organisations with interests in the promotion of road safety. Prior to its issue to second level schools, the material was piloted in 20 schools and the response from teachers in those schools was very positive.

A new high-level Government Road Safety group of which I am a member has met and the role of education in addressing road safety will be discussed in this forum.

School Enrolments.

486. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of appeals which have been made to the Secretary General of her Department under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 in 2005, 2004 and 2003; if she can the breakdown a county basis and city basis where applicable; and the school concerned and the outcome in each case. [18075/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): In 2005 my Department dealt with 270 appeals under section 29 of the Education Act. These appeals cover both primary and post-primary schools and relate to refusals to enrol, permanent exclusions and suspensions of over 20 days cumulative in a school year. There were 253 appeals in 2004 and 164 appeals in 2003. The breakdown on a county basis is not readily available but will be compiled and forwarded to the Deputy.

Site Transfers.

487. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if the transfer of the site for a project (details supplied) in County Galway has been formally closed; when this project will proceed to construction; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18179/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy is aware contracts for the transfer of the site for the project in question have been signed. In order for this transaction to formally close, the agreement of the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests is required. It is the responsibility of the vendor to refer the transfer contracts to the Commissioners. Accordingly, confirmation from the vendor's solicitor of the agreement of the Commissioners is still awaited. The question of the project proceeding to construction will be considered further when the site transfer is completed.

Special Educational Needs.

488. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to recognise prior service by special needs assistants in the assessment of their claims for increments based on prior service and request for job security. [18180/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Discussions are continuing between officials in my Department, the Department of Finance and the unions concerned with a view to finalising an incremental credit scheme for Special Needs Assistants in the near future. The details of the agreement, when reached, will be issued to all schools by means of a circular letter. Any existing and future claims for incremental credit on behalf of Special Needs Assistants will be dealt with in accordance with the terms of this circular.

Bullying in Schools.

489. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of pupils who were suspended or expelled for bullying in schools in each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18242/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Schools are not required to provide the information in the format requested by the Deputy. In January 2005, the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) issued guidelines to the management authorities of all primary and post primary schools on reporting student absences and expulsions. These guidelines advise that a school must report to the NEWB where a decision has been taken to expel a student. Although schools are requested to supply the reasons for expulsion, the level of detail required to identify expulsions arising from bullying is not provided.

Schools are also required to periodically report to the NEWB on student absences. Suspension is one of seven possible categories of absence which are reported on. Again, having made enquiries with the NEWB, the level of detail required to

identify suspensions arising from bullying is not provided.

School Staffing.

490. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools that have failed to supply the data requested in Parliamentary Question Numbers 875 of 25 April 2006 and 522 of 3 May 2006, which was requested by her Department by 31 October 2005; the counties in which these schools are located; the power she has to ensure that this information is supplied; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18243/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): A total of four ordinary national schools and one special school have not returned their Annual Return forms yet. These schools are located in Louth, Cork, Mayo, Sligo and Dublin South. A further two ordinary national schools have not responded to queries made regarding errors in their returns. These are located in Dublin City and Wexford.

I can assure the Deputy that officials within my Department are pursuing the outstanding schools as a matter of urgency and have contacted the school authorities on numerous occasions. The Ancillary Services Grant for 2005/2006 has not been paid to any of the seven schools to date and will not be paid until forms have been received or queries responded to satisfactorily. In addition the second moiety of the Capitation Grant, which is due in June, will also be withheld if matters are not finalised.

School Curriculum.

491. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Science if level eight of the agri-business management course will be provided at Waterford Institute of Technology in view of the high number of students from the region who are anxious to complete the level at Waterford IT; if permission and funding will be granted by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18244/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 sets out a statutory procedure to be followed by Institutes of Technology when seeking new course approvals. In accordance with the statutory procedure and established practice new courses can only be considered in the context of the Annual Programme and Budget submission for the year in which it is proposed to commence the courses.

I understand that the agri-business management course was not included in the Waterford Institute of Technology's Operational Programme and Budget submission for the academic year 2006/2007 and because of this my Depart-

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ment is not in a position to consider approving this course for commencement in the forthcoming academic year. If however, Waterford Institute of Technology wishes to include this course in its Operational Programme and Budget submission next year, the matter can be considered at that time.

Decentralisation Programme.

492. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress that has been made to date in regard to the decentralising of part of her Department to Mullingar; the number of personnel that it is proposed to decentralise under the proposal; the number and grade of personnel who have sought to participate in the scheme of decentralisation as proposed; if a site has been acquired to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18245/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The number of posts to decentralise

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Grade	Principal Officer	Assistant Principal Officer	Higher Executive Officer/ Administrative Officer	Executive Officer	Staff Officer	Clerical Officer	Other
No. required	14.50	27.60	50.50	63.03	12.33	58.13	55.00
Internal Applicants	4.00	10.00	13.00	11.00	7.00	14.00	2.00
External Applicants	2.00	4.00	22.00	21.00	4.00	55.00	2.00
Apparent Shortfall	8.50	13.60	15.50	31.03	1.33	n/a	51.00

Notes

1. The internal/external applicants are those who applied to decentralise on or before 7 September 2004 with Mullingar as their 1st preference.
2. The process of making contact with applicants who have indicated Mullingar as their 2nd or subsequent preference and/or applied after 7 September 2004 has begun.
3. Until 2 above is complete the shortfall is apparent rather than actual as we expect some of the applicants at 2 above to opt to decentralise to Mullingar.
4. Other includes senior staff of the Department who will not be included on the Central Applications Facility (CAF), service staff and Inspectors.
5. Thirty three (33) members of the Department's staff in Dublin are assigned to posts in which they will decentralise to Mullingar.

Schools Amalgamation.

493. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress being made with regard to a project (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18246/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The schools to which the Deputy has referred to have agreed to amalgamate into a single boy's and single girl's school. The Property Management Section of the Office of Public Works, which acts on behalf of my Department in relation to site acquisitions generally, are considering a number of site proposals with the intention of providing a site for the girl's school. Due to commercial sensitivities of site acquisitions, it is not proposed at this stage to identify specific sites being considered. With regard to the

with my Department to Mullingar is 281.09 whole time equivalents. This is based on the current level of staffing in those areas of my Department to decentralise to Mullingar. I am providing a table showing the most up to date information on the numbers/grades proposed for decentralisation, along with the current and anticipated levels of participation. The Deputy will appreciate that these figures are subject to change on an ongoing basis.

I understand that the procurement process for the site for the accommodation has not yet been finalised. The Office of Public Works (OPW) has indicated a target date of Quarter 1 2009 for the completion of the construction of the accommodation. If this target date for completion of the construction is achieved the fit-out of the accommodation for occupation will bring the delivery of this project into Quarter 2 of 2009. This timetable is contingent on obtaining planning permission and on no delays being experienced during the architectural planning and construction stages.

boy's school, the position is that the Patron has offered to provide a site to accommodate the new school and communications are ongoing with the Patron on the matter.

School Staffing.

494. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the action which has been taken regarding the redundancy package for special needs assistants employed in primary and second level schools; if confirmation of the arrangements has issued to schools; when the final arrangements will be confirmed and communicated directly to the SNAs affected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18247/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Circular Letters outlining the details of the arrangements relating to seniority and redun-

dancy for Special Need Assistants have been prepared by my Department. The Circular Letters shall be available on my Departments' website in the next fortnight. It is also proposed to issue copies of the Circular Letters directly to schools in the near future.

Schools Building Projects.

495. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in regard to a project (details supplied) in County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18248/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An application for capital funding towards the provision of additional accommodation has been received from the school referred to by the Deputy. The project has been assessed in accordance with the prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects. The long term projected staffing figure, on which future accommodation needs will be based, has been agreed with the school authority and a detailed accommodation brief is being drawn up.

In order to facilitate the delivery of appropriate school accommodation, it was considered that a site extension was required. The Property Management Section of the OPW, which acts on behalf of my Department in relation to site acquisitions generally, was requested to pursue site acquisition in this case. A site was identified and an agreement on price subject to contract was reached. The Vendor has now withdrawn the offer on that site. The OPW will need to re-advertise for an alternative site in the area. Once site acquisition is finalised, the project will be considered for the appointment of a design team to carry out the architectural planning.

School Accommodation.

496. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the demand for a pobalscoil in the Ballymun area of Dublin in view of the significant increase in the number of children attending gael-scoileanna in the general area; and her Department's response in relation to same. [18287/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An application has been received in School Planning Section of my Department for the establishment of a Pobal Scoil in Ballymun. This application will be assessed in due course and the applicant will be notified of the outcome.

Schools Recognition.

497. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason she deferred the decision to give official recognition to a school (details supplied) in County Wicklow on 21 April 2006 when she gave six other schools recognition

on that date; when official recognition will be given to this gaelscoil; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18288/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): On 21st April I announced that, following consideration of the report and recommendations of the New Schools Advisory Committee on the recognition of new primary schools, I approved the establishment of six new schools from September 2006 in accordance with Section 10 of the Education Act, 1998 and the published criteria for the recognition of new schools.

My announcement also stated that decisions in relation to applications for three further schools, including the one referred to by the Deputy and another school in the same area, were, for the moment, being deferred pending some further analysis by my officials of issues arising from the report of the New Schools Advisory Committee. In relation to the school to which the Deputy refers, my officials are considering the comments made by the New Schools Advisory Committee with regard to the totality of provision in the area.

I expect that this analysis will shortly be completed and decisions notified to the patron bodies of the proposed schools.

Education Schemes.

498. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Science when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be sanctioned for home tuition; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18289/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I can confirm that the pupil in question is enrolled in a mainstream primary school with appropriate supports. My Department considers that school-based education provision is the most appropriate intervention for all children and has discontinued the practice whereby children who are in full-time education provision would also be able to avail of home tuition grants.

My Department wrote to this pupil's parents confirming its intention to discontinue the practice of sanctioning home tuition grants for pupils who are also in full-time education. In this particular case, the home tuition grant was sanctioned until 28th April 2006. The parents in question have recently been in further contact with my officials and the matter is currently being considered. It is expected that a decision will be conveyed to the family shortly.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

499. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18290/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 457 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy. Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year.

Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage. In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with the Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

500. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18291/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 489 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy. Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year.

Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage. In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with the Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

501. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18292/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 147 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy. Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year.

Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage. In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with the Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

502. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18293/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 191 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy.

Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year. Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage.

In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

503. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18294/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 333 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy.

Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year. Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage.

In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with

Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

504. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18295/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 456 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy.

Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year. Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage.

In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

505. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18296/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 121 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy.

Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year. Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage.

In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

506. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if

she will make a statement on the matter. [18297/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 273 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy.

Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year. Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage.

In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

507. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18298/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 500 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy.

Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year. Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage.

In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

508. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than 20 at a school (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18299/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are 657 children of nine years of age and under in classes of more than twenty in the school referred to by the Deputy.

Recently I announced that I have secured sufficient funding to provide even smaller classes

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in our primary schools in the next school year, and the Minister for Finance has committed to a further reduction in class size in the following year. Accordingly, over the next two years, my Department will put 500 extra teachers into primary schools to reduce class size and to tackle disadvantage.

In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

School Accommodation.

509. **Mr. Ardagh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the assistance she will give to a club (details supplied) to continue their use of the hall at a school as the school is closing in summer 2006. [18300/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school property referred to by the deputy is in the ownership of the Christian Brothers. Any questions regarding the future use of the property would be a matter for that Order.

Special Educational Needs.

510. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the additional resources she is planning to put in place to assist national school principals to cope with extra duties imposed on them by recent legislation in relation to education for people with disabilities and health and safety; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18301/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I do acknowledge and appreciate that the post of school principal is of critical importance in the management of primary education. In recent years many improvements have been made to assist principal teachers in the performance of their duties and to relieve their administrative burden.

Up until the 1999/2000 school year, principals were released from teaching duties to become an administrative principal where the school had a staffing of eight or more mainstream class teachers. From the commencement of the 2000/2001 school year, administrative principals were appointed to ordinary schools with seven mainstream class teachers. In addition, smaller schools with a principal plus eleven or more teachers when ex-quota posts were counted could appoint an additional teacher to facilitate the principal take on administrative duties. Further improvements were granted to this provision in the 2001/2002 school year when the staffing requirement was reduced to principal plus ten or

more teachers and in the 2002/2003 school year to principal plus nine or more teachers.

The scheme of release time was introduced for the 2000/2001 school year. This scheme enables teaching principals of primary schools to be released from their teaching duties for a specified number of days annually to undertake administrative leadership and management functions. The number of days release time allowed varies between 14 and 22 and is determined by the number of mainstream class teachers in the school. Paid substitution is provided by my Department for the days that principals are on release time. Following discussion with the relevant interests, my Department has decided to introduce, on a pilot basis, a system whereby a fully qualified primary school teacher may be employed to act as nominated substitute teacher for the Principals in a cluster of schools taking release days. Twenty clusters have been established under the pilot scheme. The position will be monitored by my Department during the pilot.

Arising from the implementation of the PCW Agreement, significant improvements were introduced to the management structure of primary schools by the allocation of additional posts of responsibility. These middle-management posts — deputy principal, assistant principal and special duties teacher are members of the management team of the school and are paid significant allowances in respect of their duties. It is a matter for the Boards of Management of schools to delegate functions to post of responsibility holders. The number of post holders ranges from two posts of responsibility in a two teacher school to, for example, 20 posts of responsibility in a 40 teacher school.

In addition to the above, funding to primary schools for secretarial and caretaking services has increased from €102 per pupil in 2002 to €139 per pupil in the current school year. My Department is currently engaged in the development of a computerised on-line system for the submission of claims for the payment of certain categories of teachers. The implementation of this project should help to further reduce the administrative burden on principal teachers.

Schools Building Projects.

511. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the need to acquire lands adjacent to a school (details supplied) in County Kildare for the provision of an extension and extra facilities required; if she has entered into or proposes to enter into discussions with Kildare County Council with a view to meeting these requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18302/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The School Planning Section of my Department has received an application for

major capital funding from the management of the school to which the Deputy refers. This application is being assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria for large-scale projects.

A decision on the proposed works is being considered in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme.

512. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department has received the projected enrolments for the next four years for a school (details supplied) in County Carlow; when she expects to make a decision on whether their application is to be approved for a new school extension under the devolved school grant scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18344/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The determination of the long-term projected staffing of the school to which the Deputy refers is currently under way in the School Planning Section of my Department. Once this process is complete the project will be considered for progress in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme from 2006 onwards. In the meantime, approval has been given to the school for the rental of temporary accommodation to meet its immediate accommodation needs.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

513. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the average national school class size in Kildare over the past five years; the average national school class size in the Republic of Ireland over the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18345/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The information requested by the Deputy in respect of the years 2001/02-2004/05 is as follows:

In 2001/02, the average class size in Kildare was 27.2, and nationally was 24.2.

In 2002/03, the average class size in Kildare was 27.2, and nationally was 24.

In 2003/04, the average class size in Kildare was 26.8, and nationally was 23.9.

In 2004/05, the average class size in Kildare was 26.8, and nationally was 23.9.

For comparison purposes, the Deputy may be interested to know that in 1996/97, the average class size in Kildare was 28.7, while nationally it was 26.6.

Information on class size is supplied to my Department on an Annual Return form by each primary school. The forms are then processed in the Department so that national data can be updated for the relevant school year. For the cur-

rent school year (2005/2006), all schools were requested to have forms returned by 31st October 2005. To date, some schools have not returned their forms and others have not responded to queries made regarding errors in their returns. In all cases the schools have been contacted with a view to having the matter finalised.

In the circumstances, I am unable at this time to supply the information requested by the Deputy in respect of the current school year for the National figure or to give a specific indication as to when it will be available. However, I can assure the Deputy that officials within my Department are pursuing the outstanding schools as a matter of urgency. The average class size in the current school year in Kildare is 26.7.

Since 2002, this Government has hired record numbers of extra teachers. Indeed, next September there will be 4000 more teachers in our primary schools than there were in 1997. Today there is one teacher for every 17 children, the lowest pupil teacher ratio in the history of the State. The majority of these extra teachers have rightly been targeted at providing support for children with special needs, those from disadvantaged areas, and those with English language needs. They have made an immeasurable difference to the lives of these children, while also providing vital backup for their classroom teachers.

Having now addressed these priority areas, and continuing to address them going forward, we are now also taking action on class size, by providing the extra teachers needed to reduce the staffing schedule by a point in each of the next two school years.

The mainstream staffing of a primary school is determined by reference to the enrolment of the school on the 30th September of the previous school year. The actual number of mainstream posts sanctioned is determined by reference to a staffing schedule which is issued annually to all primary schools. At present the general rule is that the schedule provides at least one classroom teacher for every 29 pupils in the school. Of course, schools with only one or two teachers have much lower staffing ratios than that — with two teachers for just 12 pupils in some cases and so on — but the general rule is that there is at least one classroom teacher for every 29 children in the school. Next year this is being reduced to 28 children per classroom teacher and in 2007/2008 it will be reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

In speaking about staffing in our schools, we have consistently said that priority would be given in the first instance to children in disadvantaged schools and those with special needs. We have done this. And now, in line with the Government commitment, mainstream class sizes are also being reduced.

All-Irish Schools.

514. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of gaelscoileanna in Kildare; the number of pupils attending these schools over the past five years; the level of funding provided to these schools in the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18346/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are six primary Gaelscoileanna in County Kildare. The number of enrolments in

Gaelscoileanna in Kildare. Enrolments from 2001-2002 school year to 2005-2006 school year

School	School Year				
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Scoil C. Uí Dhálaigh (19680G)	431	423	401	384	374
Scoil Uí Riada (19897I)	278	272	287	296	325
Gaelscoil Chill Dara (20023A)	239	271	303	302	335
Scoil Uí Fhiaich (20058T)	120	164	220	268	306
Gaelscoil Nás na Ríogh (20159C)	N/A	25	53	77	89
Gaelscoil Átha Í (20192A)	N/A	N/A	N/A	21	44

Schools Building Projects.

515. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of a permanent site for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18347/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school to which the Deputy refers opened with provisional recognition in September 2004. Newly established schools are required to undergo a period of provisional recognition during which, the operation of the school and the growth of pupil numbers are monitored. During the period of provisional recognition it is the responsibility of the school Patron to provide interim accommodation. This accommodation should be capable of fully meeting the needs of the developing school until permanent recognition has been secured and my Department is in a position to acquire a site and provide a permanent school building.

When permanent recognition has been granted to a school the School Planning Section of my Department will consider the acquisition of a site within the context of an application for permanent accommodation from the school authorities.

Freedom of Information.

516. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Science when a request under the Freedom of Information Act (details supplied)

these Gaelscoileanna over the past five years in provided in the attachment included.

My Department has provided a total of €2.2million in funding over the past five years to the schools in question. This funding relates to grant payments for capitation, ancillary services, equipment, minor works, free books, giving children an even break, school development planning, supervision, caretakers/secretary, part-time teachers, physical education and curriculum support.

The significant increase in the funding of schools in the primary sector over recent years is a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address the needs of primary schools.

was first received in her Department; when a decision will be made on this request; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18369/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Miss de Valera): The request was received in the Freedom of Information Unit on 28th March 2006 and the relevant information was forwarded to the applicant on 11 May, 2006.

Special Educational Needs.

517. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Science if educational supports will be put in place immediately for persons (details supplied) in County Kilkenny who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; if her Department will act on the professionals report already submitted and proactively engage with the family; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18370/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The National Council for Special Education has advised that the first child in question did not meet the criteria for the allocation of special educational needs (SEN) resources based on the professional documentation submitted. The local special educational needs organiser (SENO) is awaiting submission of a new professional report in relation to this child. When this report is received, further consideration will be given to the allocation of resources, as appropriate.

The SENO has confirmed that no application for SEN resources has been received to date in respect of the second pupil referred to by the Deputy. It is open to the school to submit an application to the SENO, together with professional documentation, for consideration.

Disadvantaged Status.

518. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will address an anomaly in the DEIS criteria whereby a junior school in a disadvantaged area allocated band two is included under Giving Children An Even Break which the senior primary school to which these students progress and which is also allocated band two is not included; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18403/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan for educational inclusion, provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP). This standardised system replaces all of the existing arrangements for targeting schools for participation in initiatives to address disadvantage.

The School Support Programme will bring together, and build upon, a number of existing interventions in schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage. The action plan is being introduced on a phased basis, starting during the current school year. It will involve an additional annual investment of €40m on full implementation. In addition, supports will continue to be provided for schools where the level of disadvantage is more dispersed.

Over the years, no less than 8 separate schemes for disadvantaged primary schools have been put in place. Some schools were benefiting from just one or two of these and others were benefiting from more. The DEIS initiative is designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from a comprehensive package of supports, while ensuring that others continue to get support in line with the level of disadvantage among their pupils.

Languages Programme.

519. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 193 of 23 March 2006 (details supplied) if the review of education provision in the area has been completed; if the interested parties have been notified of the result; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18404/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): It is intended that the review of all Irish provision at primary level in the Ballymun area will be completed in the very near future. The

outcome of this review will inform decisions on the allocation of capital resources to meet the long term accommodation needs of both gaelscoileanna in the Ballymun area.

School Accommodation.

520. **Mr. G. Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Science the progress made in setting up a community college in Charleville, County Cork which would combine schools (details supplied). [18405/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The schools referred to by the Deputy are two of three post primary schools serving the needs of the area in question, two of which are voluntary schools and a vocational school. On foot of an application for capital investment in this school, officials in School Planning Section of my Department carried out an examination of all the relevant factors such as current and projected enrolment, demographic trends and the likely impact of ongoing and proposed housing development in the area.

This examination indicated a downward trend in pupil enrolments in the longer term. The possibility of a single school to cater for the long term needs of the pupils of the area was raised with the trustees of the three post primary school for their consideration. While no final decision was taken at the time, the matter has been raised again recently with the trustees in order to inform a decision on how best to provide for the post-primary educational needs of the area into the future. The accommodation needs of the school referred to are being considered in this regard.

EU Directives.

521. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the European Directives that have to be implemented by her Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18460/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There is one Directive that has to be implemented by my Department — Directive 2005/36/EC on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications. This Directive was agreed on 7 September 2005 and comes into force on 20th October 2007.

Special Educational Needs.

522. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason special needs assistants are not provided for children with dyslexia; her views on whether children with dyslexia are being penalised by not having the services of special needs assistants in primary school, when

[Mr. Gogarty.]

intervention could make a real difference; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18485/06]

523. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will provide funding for special needs assistants for children in rural schools who are dyslexic. [18486/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 522 and 523 together.

Special needs assistants (SNAs) are sanctioned specifically to a special school or a mainstream national school to assist school authorities in making suitable provision for a pupil or pupils with special care needs arising from a disability. Such needs could range from needing an assistant for a short period each week, for example, to help feed or change the pupils or bring them to the toilet to requiring a fulltime assistant where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils.

A pupil with dyslexia alone would not typically have a special care need. If, however, a pupil with dyslexia who also has care needs arising from a disability is enrolled in a school, the school authority may apply to the special educational needs organiser, an official of the National Council for Special Education assigned to the school, for the services of an SNA to assist in catering for the pupil's care needs. Such an application must be based on:

- A recommendation from the professional who assessed the child and who diagnosed the child's special care needs;
- Evidence that describes the child's special care needs, the reasons why the support of an SNA is necessary and the benefits he/she would derive from such care support in a school setting;
- The signed certification of the professional who diagnosed the child's special care need.

Departmental Staff.

524. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by her since January 2005; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18523/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The information requested by the Deputy in relation to certain staff in my office is as follows:

Special Adviser to Minister: Ms Averil Power

Personal Assistant to Minister: Mr. Carl Gibney

Personal Secretary to Minister: Ms Paula Eager up to 24th March 2005; Ms Paula Power with effect from 25th April 2005.

Each of the above staff has a standard contract of employment which is drawn up by the Department of Finance. In addition to the above appointments, I have also assigned Mr. Kevin McCarthy, Principal Officer, from within my Department to act as Policy Co-ordinator.

Institutes of Technology.

525. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the process whereby the accounts of institutes of technology are processed; if it is normal for the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office to finalise these accounts pending final presentation to a governing body for approval and submission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18533/06]

526. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the date the 2004 accounts for Carlow Institute of Technology were forwarded to the Comptroller and Auditor General's office for finalisation, as referred to by the director of Carlow IT in a submission to the Public Accounts Committee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18536/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 525 and 526 together.

The Regional Technical Act 1992 and Dublin Institute of Technology Act 1992 provide for the audit of the accounts of the institutes of technology by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Section 16(2) of the RTC Act and section 17(2) of the DIT Act require the institutes to submit accounts annually to the Comptroller and Auditor General for audit. The responsibility for drafting the accounts and ensuring that they present a true and fair view of the Institute's financial performance for the year, and of its state of affairs at year end rests with the Institute. The Comptroller and Auditor General's responsibility is to audit the accounts and to give a report expressing his opinion on whether the accounts do indeed give a true and fair view.

The Steps in the process are as follows: Annual Accounts of an Institute of Technology are prepared in the institute and submitted in draft form to the Comptroller and Auditor General's office. Before the Comptroller and Auditor General attaches his opinion to the accounts, the final version, incorporating adjustments arising out of audit, must be approved by the Governing Body. This requirement derives from Auditing Standards.

In practice, draft accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General and, in the course of audit, matters identified which require adjustment are agreed between the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Institute. When all adjustments have been made to the accounts to the mutual satisfaction of the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office and the Institute, the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office requests the Institute to submit the amended accounts to the Governing Body for approval. Following approval, the Institute forwards to the Comptroller and Auditor General three copies of the amended accounts adopted by the Governing Body. The Comptroller and Auditor General then issues his audit report which is sent to the Institute with one copy of the accounts. The Institute then forwards a signed copy of the accounts to my Department with the Comptroller and Auditor General's report.

As regards the Annual Accounts for 2004 from the Institute of Technology, Carlow, I can confirm that the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office received these accounts in draft form on 31 August 2005 and that they received the amended accounts on 5 May 2006 and the C & AG issued his report on 11 May 2006.

School Enrolments.

527. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of junior infants and first year places that will be filled in Lucan primary and second level schools for September 2006; the combined numbers of applicants on the waiting list in each instance; the numbers of students who will not be offered a place at any Lucan school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18535/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): There are ten primary schools in the Lucan area including two new state of the art multi-denominational schools and a new Gaelscoil commenced operation in September 2005. These developments together with a number of extensions to existing schools, the provision of temporary accommodation and the re-organisation of one school to enable the enrolment of an additional two junior infant classes has increased capacity significantly in the area. In September 2006, 700 Junior Infant places will be available in the primary schools in Lucan. Therefore, the School Planning Section of my Department is satisfied that, between them, the schools have adequate accommodation to cater for current demand. In addition, a new 16 classrooms school with capacity for 60 Junior Infant places for Adamstown will progress to tender and construction this year. It is planned that this school will be enrolling students for September 2007.

My Department continues to monitor school needs in the Lucan area. In this regard all schools have been requested to submit their pre-enrolment lists with the date of birth of prospective pupils so that any newly emerging needs can be addressed as expeditiously as possible. There are four Post-Primary providers in Lucan with a combined capacity of 520 first year places. The Deputy will probably be aware that there is considerable vacant capacity at post primary level in areas adjacent to Lucan. Given that it is practice, particularly in Dublin, for post-primary students to travel some distance to attend a post-primary school, it is not unreasonable that my Department should seek to optimise the use of existing surplus capacity at post-primary schools in the general vicinity of Lucan as part of its strategy to address any shortfall for post-primary places that may emerge. This is its intention. It is important to understand that my Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. This may result in parents not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice for their child.

Special Educational Needs.

528. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to a previous parliamentary question, the breakdown of the 80 cases and when they commenced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18550/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): With regard to the 80 active legal cases involving special educational needs referred to in my previous reply to the Deputy, I would again reiterate that I cannot comment on the details of any individual case. However, I can confirm that of these 80 court cases, 60 relate to Plenary Actions and 20 are by way of Judicial Review. Also, of the 80 cases in question, 52 relate to Primary (including Special Schools), 11 relate to Post Primary and 17 relate to adults. The following table gives a breakdown of the number of cases per year on which legal proceedings were initiated.

Year	Plenary
1999	2
2000	4
2001	15
2002	17
2003	10
2004	8
2005	3
2006	1
Total	60

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Year	Judicial Review
1997	2
1998	2
2000	3
2001	1
2002	4
2005	5
2006	3
Total	20

Schools Recognition.

529. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the necessary criteria for a school making an application to her Department for official recognition; if it is necessary for all of these to be fulfilled; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18551/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Based on a report by the Commission on School Accommodation, the criteria and procedures for recognition of new primary schools were revised in 2002. The New Schools Advisory Committee was established as part of this process to assess and make recommendations on the applications for recognition of new schools.

The criteria for recognition of new primary schools is made available to all prospective applicants and is also published on my Department's website. I am arranging to have details of same forwarded to the Deputy. The Advisory Committee, upon receipt of notifications of intent, initiates a public and transparent consultation process and assesses all applications against the published criteria.

School Accommodation.

530. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the situation with respect to the application for additional accommodation by a school (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18552/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The School Planning Section of my Department recently approved the provision of temporary accommodation at the school referred to by the deputy for September 2006. In addition, in relation to the project for permanent accommodation, a letter outlining the projected long-term staffing levels has issued to the school authorities for their consideration and agreement. On receipt of the necessary agreement in this regard progress on the project will be considered in the

context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme from 2006 onwards

531. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Education and Science the schools, both primary and secondary, that have applications for additional accommodation, improvement works or new schools, with her Department for Counties Wicklow and Carlow; what these applications consist of and the stage they are at; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [18553/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The information is not readily available in the format requested by the Deputy. If the Deputy has a query about a particular school my Department will be happy to provide the information.

Defence Forces Recruitment.

532. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for Defence further to Parliamentary Question No. 462 of 9 May 2006, if, in view of the relatively small number of enlistments in 2005, he will provide the number of persons from Dublin 1, who were enlisted. [18417/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O'Dea): As previously advised statistics are not compiled for applications or enlistments to the Defence Forces based on postal address. However, based on the information available, the military authorities have advised that in 2005 a total of 3 applications were received from applicants with a Dublin 1 postal address, for general service enlistment in the Eastern Brigade of the Permanent Defence Force.

Of the three applications received one was successful and was enlisted to the Permanent Defence Force. As previously stated the number of applications received for positions in the Permanent Defence Force far exceeds the number of positions available in any year therefore not every applicant can be successful.

Defence Forces Retirement Scheme.

533. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Defence the reason for the delay in paying the balance of lump sum and pension entitlements to a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; the reason on 10 November 2005 their pay slip stated zero payment for period 2000/45 when in fact payment was due and since remains unpaid; if the case will be examined as a matter of urgency; if arrears and other outstanding payments will be awarded; if their pension entitlements will be put in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18447/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O'Dea): The application from the person concerned to retire on

grounds of ill health from his position as a civilian Storekeeper Clerk Grade II with the Defence Forces was accepted by my Department with effect from 22 January 2006. On 1 March 2006 the Minister for Finance approved the award of an ill health retirement pension and lump sum to the person concerned and he received an interim lump sum payment on 15 March 2006. The balance due issued on 12 May 2006. The Office of the Paymaster General, which acts as the paying agent for this Department in the payment of pensions, is arranging for the payment of pension to the person concerned.

The sick pay arrangements for civilian employees of my Department applied to this person during his period of service as a civilian employee with the Defence Forces. In general, civilian employees may be granted up to six months sick leave at full pay in any period of 12 months and half pay thereafter subject to a maximum of 12 months sick leave of any kind (full pay, half pay or without pay) in any period of four years or less. I understand that this person exhausted his entitlement to such paid sick leave on 1 November 2005. There are no arrears of pay due to the person concerned.

EU Directives.

534. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18461/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea): This question does not apply to my Department at this time.

Electronic Payments.

535. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Defence the reason army personnel have been instructed to open bank accounts rather than use their existing credit union accounts for the purpose of being paid their subsistence allowance in view of the fact that their pay cheques are already being paid to their credit union accounts; if he will ensure that the option is given to those concerned as to the financial institution they wish to use; if the technology used by his Department is as flexible as the commercial sector; if it will allow individual arrangements to be put in place; if he will arrange, if necessary, for the cheques to be delivered to the barracks for the persons concerned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18484/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O’Dea): In July 2004, my Department, in pursuance of Government policy in relation to increasing the use of electronic payments by the Public Sector, made a

policy decision to pay all travel and subsistence payments by electronic means only. Accordingly, following consultation with all interested parties, including the military representative associations, the issuing of payable orders for such expenses ceased in November 2004. The exclusive use of the Electronic Fund Transfer system (EFTS) for travel and subsistence payments ensures that payment is received promptly and securely by individuals. In addition, individuals have access to payments when absent on annual leave, sick leave, or away from their workplace. Payments may be made by electronic means to accounts held in banks and building societies and all employees were informed accordingly in 2004. The feedback from the vast majority of claimants has been very positive and some 50,000 travel and subsistence payments now issue electronically each year. As things stand, my Department cannot extend the electronic payment facility to credit union accounts, as no credit union is a participant in the Irish electronic payments clearing system operated under the umbrella of the Irish Payments Services Organisation (IPSO). Consequently, it is not possible to make payments direct to an individual’s credit union account. My Department will of course review its position should the situation change.

Pay is issued by electronic means by my Department to a number of credit unions in the case of a relatively small number of military personnel through the use of the credit union’s own current account held in a financial institution. The credit unions then forward monies to each member’s credit union account on foot of a payroll listing faxed to them every week by my Department’s Finance Branch. My Department has facilitated this arrangement over a long time as it involves the pay of the individual’s concerned. It is not proposed, however, to extend such a facility to travel and subsistence payments, given the additional workload involved and Government policy in the area of electronic payments.

I consider that the current policy in relation to the payment of travel and subsistence expenses represents the best use of existing technology and scarce resources and I have no reason to believe that my Department’s processing systems are not as flexible as those in use in the commercial sector.

Ministerial Appointments.

536. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Defence the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18524/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Since my appointment as Minister for Defence I have employed the following staff:

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Name	Title	Date Appointed
Derek Mooney	Special Adviser to the Minister	17 October, 2004
Suzanne Coogan	Press Adviser to the Minister	1 November, 2004
Fergal O'Brien	Personal Assistant to the Minister for Defence	30 September, 2004
Olive McNamara	Personal Secretary to the Minister for Defence	30 September, 2004

No additional staff have been employed by me since January 2005.

Local Government Regulations.

537. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of local authorities here that have by-laws to protect their graveyards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17913/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Local authorities have a general power to make by-laws under the Local Government Act 1994. The making of such by-laws is a matter for decision by individual local authorities and is a reserved function of the elected members. Details of the number of local authorities who may have made by-laws in relation to graveyards are not available in my Department.

Architectural Heritage.

538. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will ensure that number 16 Moore Street is protected from further deterioration pending the development of the O'Connell Street project; the reason for the failure to make progress on the development for the past seven years; the terms of the compulsory purchase order agreement entered into between the City Council and a property developer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17930/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question No. 211 of 14 February 2006.

Statutory protection of the architectural heritage is primarily a matter for the planning authorities to whom my Department provides advice in the exercise of their functions in that regard under the Planning and Development Act 2000. The development of the O'Connell Street project and the terms of any compulsory purchase order are also matters for Dublin City Council. On 25 August 2005, I recommended to the Council in accordance with Section 53 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, that No. 16 Moore Street should be added to their Record of Protected Structures (RPS) because of its historical and architectural interest. On 5 December 2005 Dublin City Councillors unanimously decided to place No. 16 Moore Street, together with Nos. 14,

15 and 17, on the RPS. I have been informed by the Council that the statutory notice period of their intention must be re-advertised and this now runs from 11 May to 12 June 2006.

I am satisfied that the use of the Planning Acts, together with the City Council acting vigilantly and proactively to ensure the status of the building following its formal proposal for its inclusion on the RPS, will be sufficient to ensure its protection. In this regard, I note that the Council made arrangements for the owners to carry out essential repairs to the roof of the premises to ensure that the fabric of the structure is protected while appropriate decisions were taken.

Register of Electors.

539. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if there are any proposals to amend the law in respect of a legal obligation on persons, who are legally entitled to vote, to register for voting purposes; and if they are entitled to de-register even if they remain resident. [17931/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The law relating to the registration of electors is set out in Part II of, and the Second Schedule to, the Electoral Act 1992. There are no proposals to amend the law in relation to the issues referred to in the Question.

540. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the opinion of the European Parliament Petitions Committee on petition number 517/2004 regarding obstacles for non-Irish EU citizens attempting to register to vote in the European elections here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17939/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I assume that the Question refers to an EU petition which my Department has received relating to potential costs associated with completion of a statutory declaration in respect of the first time registration of EU citizens who wish to vote in European Parliament elections in Ireland. I intend to address the matter in the Electoral (Amendment) Bill 2006, on which work is proceeding, by widening the categories of person who may witness the relevant statutory declaration. The European Commission was notified of this on 21 December 2005.

541. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if the Dublin City Sheriff has communicated with his Department regarding measures to prevent personation at elections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17945/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): No communication on the lines referred to in the Question has been received from the Dublin City Sheriff in recent times.

Dual Mandate.

542. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has satisfied himself that local authorities are honouring the commitment given by his predecessor to the effect that Oireachtas Members would in the future continue to receive full co-operation and equal treatment by the local authorities after the abolition of the dual mandate; if the local authorities have agreed to operate the revised planning guidelines in accordance with his instructions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17958/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department is at present gathering information from local authorities on the practical application of the arrangements for the supply of specified information to Oireachtas members under the Local Government Act 2001 (Section 237A) Regulations 2003. Based on the information received so far, I understand that local authorities are, for the most part, complying with these arrangements. I intend, however, when the review is complete, to issue any necessary supplementary guidance to local authorities taking account of their responses.

Under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála must have regard to Ministerial planning guidelines in the performance of their functions. I and my Department regularly engage with planning authorities on the implementation of planning guidelines, including through briefing sessions for local authority officials, and by commenting on draft development plans.

Local Authority Funding.

543. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the funding which is being provided to Sligo Borough Council for implementation of the Cranmore regeneration project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18007/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): My Department is awaiting proposals from Sligo Borough Council on the scope

of the overall regeneration work to Cranmore Estate and it is understood that these proposals are currently being finalised by the Council. The question of committing funding to this project is dependent of my Department's assessment of these proposals. In the meantime, my Department is currently examining tender proposals received from the Council in respect of the refurbishment of 13 vacant houses in the Cranmore Estate. The works to these houses will take place prior to the main regeneration work to the estate.

Local Authority Boundaries.

544. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if, in view of the negative effects the failure to achieve a boundary extension in Limerick has particularly had on parts of the Moyross area and in further view of the wishes of the residents he will give a commitment to enable the three estates to join the Moyross local authority estate and become part of Limerick City; and the time-frame within which this change will take place. [18011/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I have already communicated to Limerick City Council in relation to proposed city boundary changes, that it would be premature to pursue such proposals without making the best possible effort to build local consensus on a viable way forward. I have stressed the need to develop the Limerick/Shannon Gateway to its full potential, in line with the National Spatial Strategy, and there are a number of options which can be explored by the three local authorities involved in advance of any direction from central Government. I am today meeting the Managers from Limerick City, Limerick County and Clare County Councils to explore the issues in this regard.

Local Authority Housing.

545. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he expects the legislative framework will be in place to facilitate the sale of local authority flats under the tenants purchase scheme. [18020/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): In December 2005, with the approval of the Government, I announced a New Housing Policy Framework: Building Sustainable Communities. This sets out the key elements of the Government's vision for housing policy over the coming years. One of these elements is the introduction in 2007 of a new tenant purchase scheme for local authority tenants, which will allow for the sale of local authority flats under

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certain conditions. Legislation to underpin the new tenant purchase scheme will be made in a Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill currently being prepared by my Department.

Turbary Rights.

546. **Mr. Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when compensation for loss of turbary rights will be awarded to people (details supplied) in County Laois. [18021/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Papers in relation to this case are currently being examined in the Chief State Solicitor's Office with a view to resolving issues regarding title to the turbary rights concerned.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

547. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a company (details supplied) have used up their budget allocation for the installation of gas central heating into the homes of the elderly for 2005 and that current projects have had to be put on hold until they get further funding from his Department; his views on the allocation of extra funding as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18023/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I assume that the Question refers to the special Housing Aid for the Elderly Scheme which is operated by the Health Service Executive, formerly the Health Boards, in line with various guidelines issued from time to time by the Task Force who administer the scheme under the aegis of my Department. Under the scheme, aid is proved to improve the housing conditions of elderly persons living alone in unfit or unsanitary conditions and was extended to include the provision of suitable heating system where found necessary in 2000.

An initial allocation of €4.2 million for the scheme was notified to Dublin/North East and Dublin Mid Leinster regions in February, 2006 and it is a matter for the HSE Directorate of Services for Older People, which has responsibility for the administration of the scheme, to apportion funding to a particular area. My Department understands that while the overall funding has not been exhausted, the total allocation apportioned by them to undertake work connected with heating has been used. However, the Eastern Community Works Limited have been requested to consider this matter further with a view to making some additional funding available for the provision of heating until a

further allocation of funding will be notified to the Regions following receipt of the mid-year returns, later in the year.

Electronic Voting.

548. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the breakdown of costs to date for the storage of electronic voting machines in each area. [18026/06]

549. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the cost of purchase, storage, consultant fees related, reports and staff training related to the electronic voting machines. [18027/06]

550. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if consideration has been given for an exit strategy in relation to the electronic voting machines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18028/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 548 to 550, inclusive, together.

The total cost incurred to date in the development and roll-out of the electronic voting and counting system is some €51.3 million. In addition, information provided by returning officers to my Department indicates that the total annual storage cost for the electronic voting machines and ancillary equipment is some €696,000. The table below sets out annual storage costs for each of the 25 locations.

A programme of further assessment, testing and validation of the electronic voting and counting system is underway to address issues raised by the Commission on Electronic Voting and demonstrate that the system operates reliably, securely and accurately. The timing of the further use of the system is dependent on the progress made with this work and the ongoing work of the Commission on Electronic Voting, the associated decisions arising in this regard, and the dates at which future polls may be held.

Constituency	Annual Storage Costs (incl. VAT)
	€
Carlow-Kilkenny	29,595.00
Cavan-Monaghan	25,828.00
Clare	3,600.00
Cork City	42,499.50
Cork County	37,609.30
Donegal	15,714.00
Dublin City	72,350.00
Dublin County	62,938.66
Galway	5,253.00

Constituency	Annual Storage Costs (incl. VAT)
	€
Kerry	26,125.00
Kildare	27,125.86
Laois-Offaly	28,178.00
Limerick	57,675.86
Longford	15,095.16
Roscommon	10,374.98
Louth	298.00
Mayo	34,930.00
Meath	20,366.00
Sligo	—
Leitrim	3,000.00
Tipperary (N&S)	42,700.00
Waterford	52,888.48
Westmeath	22,805.34
Wexford	16,876.00
Wicklow	42,455.80
Total	696,281.94

Housing Grants.

551. **Mr. Stagg** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the grants which are available to local authorities to upgrade the environmental fabric of local authority estates here. [18033/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The management, maintenance and improvements to their rented dwellings is the responsibility of each local authority and the funding of such works is provided by local authorities from their own resources as part of their ongoing maintenance programmes.

My Department does, however, provide capital funding for substantial major refurbishment work to local authority dwellings under the Remedial Works Scheme which can include works of an environmental nature.

Social and Affordable Housing Programmes.

552. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position in relation to a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15, purchasing a one bedroom flat through Fingal County Council, who wishes to upgrade to two or three bedroom affordable housing accommodation due to the growth in their family size; if his Department has a policy of refusing people who have taken affordable housing, that have applied to trade up to a larger affordable house; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18041/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

(Mr. N. Ahern): Affordable housing is provided under a number of schemes viz., the Shared Ownership Scheme, the 1999 Affordable Housing Scheme, Part V of the Planning & Development Acts 2000 — 2004 and under the Affordable Housing Initiative as provided for in the Sustaining Progress Partnership Agreement. These schemes are targeted to meet a range of affordable housing needs and to assist lower income households who find themselves priced out of the market. Eligibility is determined on an applicant's need for housing and their household income.

Houses are offered for sale to eligible purchasers generally at a significant discount from the market value of comparable houses in the area. The administration of the schemes, including the making and amending of a scheme of allocation priorities is a matter for each local authority in accordance with general terms and conditions set by my Department.

While current legislation provides that previous ownership of a house does not render an applicant ineligible for an affordable house, there is no provision under the schemes for upgrading to a larger house. An option for an owner/occupier of an affordable dwelling would be to sell their existing house (subject to appropriate clawback) and purchase another dwelling through remortgaging.

Alternatively, a person may apply again for affordable housing. However, it will be a matter for the local authority concerned to consider the priority to be given to an individual's application for further affordable housing having regard to their needs and the needs of those currently on the affordable housing lists awaiting their first homes.

Nuclear Safety.

553. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to improvements that have been provided at the Sellafield plant in recent years to protect the highly active storage tanks from terrorist attack or accidental damage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18080/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): A review of security in relation to sensitive nuclear sites, including Sellafield, was undertaken by the United Kingdom authorities in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. This review, which was considered necessary given the threat posed by a malicious attack at Sellafield was welcomed by the Irish Government. Following this review, current UK policy is based on restricting access to security sensitive information to those who have an operational need for such information.

However, I have been advised by the UK Government that the highly active storage tanks are extremely robust structures, housed in mass-

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ive, thick walled and roofed, reinforced concrete cells designed to provide radiation shielding and assessed to withstand seismic events. The security review concluded that no structural modifications to the highly active storage tanks themselves were required to maintain their integrity against a range of newly perceived threats, including aircraft impact.

Arising from the improved co-operative arrangements put in place between the Government and the UK Government, the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland visited the Sellafield facility in September 2004. The detailed report by the Institute on their visit with significant references to the highly active storage tanks on the site is available on their web site at <http://www.rpii.ie/download/Sellafieldvisit.pdf>.

Under these co-operation arrangements access to Sellafield has also been provided by the UK Authorities to An Garda Síochána. A number of visits have taken place since June 2003, the reports of these, while they cannot be published for security reasons, do not identify issues of particular concern.

The Office Of Civil Nuclear Security, the body specifically responsible for the security of civil nuclear sites in the UK, reports separately on an annual basis to the Secretary of Trade and Industry in the UK. These reports are publicly available at <http://www.ecdti.co.uk/cgi-bin/perlcon.pl> and make various references to improved security initiatives at nuclear sites including reviews of vital areas which contain equipment, systems or devices, the failure of which could have serious consequences for the safe and secure operation of a nuclear site.

In January 2001, the UK Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate issued British Nuclear Fuels with a specification to formalise a programme to reduce the level of highly active liquid waste stored at Sellafield to a buffer stock limit of 200 cubic metres (m³) by the year 2015. This specification, which is a legal requirement, required that the maximum permitted holding of this liquid waste would reduce from the then permitted holding level of 1575m³ by about 35 m³ per annum until 2012, when it would be decreased rapidly to the buffer stock limit of 200 m³. I understand the operator is complying with this specification.

Notwithstanding these advances, the Government and the Institute have long been concerned about the continuing storage of highly active liquid waste in these tanks arising from reprocessing and have been pressing, and will continue to press, the UK Authorities to accelerate the rate of vitrification. Reprocessing operations are strongly opposed by Ireland on the grounds that they are an unacceptable threat to human health, the environment and the economy. The Irish Government will therefore continue to pursue every available avenue, both diplomatic and

legal, to bring about a safe and orderly end to reprocessing operations at Sellafield, and ultimately to bring about the safe and orderly closure of the plant itself.

Polling Stations.

554. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on substituting the pencils normally used at polling stations with ballpoint pens in order to provide greater protection from ballots being interfered with after marking by the voter in view of the allegation of voter fraud in the recent elections in Belarus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18081/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): While pencils are provided for the convenience of voters at polling stations, it is not a requirement of electoral law that voters must avail of them for use when voting. Voters may bring their own pens to the polling station, and may use them, for the purpose of voting. However, pencils are considered to be generally more practical than pens in such circumstances, and are easily maintained and less likely to give rise to difficulties.

Strategic Infrastructure Bill.

555. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the details of any meetings that he may have held with the President of the High Court regarding the Strategic Infrastructure Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18082/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I have not had any such meetings. The Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Bill 2006 proposes changes to the planning system to reduce delays in decision-making relating to major infrastructure projects. In that context I welcome the initiative being introduced in the High Court to improve the management and prioritisation of these cases.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

556. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will provide data for the amount of greenhouse gas emissions arising on a lifecycle basis from landfilling versus the mass-burn incineration of municipal waste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18083/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): In July 2001, the European Commission published a study of Waste Management Options and Climate Change. The full report can be accessed at <http://ec.europa.eu/comm/environment/waste/>

studies/climate_change.htm. Paragraph 3.1.2 of the report concludes that mass burn incineration of municipal solid waste, without energy recovery, gives lower net greenhouse gas fluxes than landfilling with EU-average standards of gas collection. In general, incineration options which include energy recovery have lower net greenhouse gas fluxes than landfills with best practice standards, the exception being where the energy generated replaces that generated by wind turbines.

The life cycle of products up to the point of disposal is the same for landfilling and incineration, and is not relevant to a decision between the two disposal options.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

557. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if all necessary documentation has been received from Galway County Council to enable him give approval to a project (details supplied) in County Galway to proceed; if the civil works and the treatment system, that is the entire works, are included in the estimated cost of €2.8 million; when this project will proceed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18181/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Kinvara Sewerage Scheme is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005 — 2007 as a scheme to start construction in 2007. Galway County Council's revised Preliminary Report for the scheme is being further examined in my Department following submission of additional information requested from the Council which was received on 12 May 2006. The matter is being dealt with as quickly as possible.

Following approval of the Preliminary Report the Council will be in a position to advance the collection system to construction in accordance with the new streamlined procurement procedures I have recently introduced for projects costing up to €5m.

558. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that work on site has commenced in regard to the civil works element of sewage schemes (details supplied) in County Galway; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that the delay in approving the tender documents for the design, build and operate contracts for the sewage plants is further delaying the completion of this scheme; if therefore he will immediately approve the tender documentation and enable this to proceed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18182/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the

reply to Questions Nos. 585 and 589 of 4 April 2006.

I expect to convey a decision shortly to Galway County Council in relation to the Council's revised Tender Documents for the treatment plants for Dunmore, Kilkerrin and Leenane, (which are being procured as a single contract), and the Water Services Pricing Policy Report for the project as a whole.

559. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the Environmental Protection Agency report on the quality of water at Ardmore County Waterford, which failed the test for mandatory standards; when he expects the long-awaited sewage scheme for Ardmore to commence in view of the popularity of this seaside resort; the estimated completion date of that scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18311/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Ardmore is part of the Waterford Grouped Towns and Villages Sewerage Scheme which is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 as a scheme to start construction next year at an estimated cost of almost €47 million.

Waterford County Council is advancing the scheme on the basis of there being separate contracts for the collection systems for each location and all wastewater treatment plants being procured under a single Design Build and Operate contract. I understand that the Council is currently in the process of preparing contract documents for all elements of the scheme and these will be dealt with as quickly as possible following receipt in my Department. However, I also understand that an application has been made to the Courts for a judicial review of the Part 8 planning approval for the Ardmore wastewater treatment plant. This issue will need to be resolved before this particular element of the project will be able to advance to tender stage.

Women's Refuges.

560. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the need for a women's refuge in County Laois as these women and their families presently have to travel to Kilkenny and Carlow taking them away from their doctors and their schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18361/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, through its role as chair of the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women, has overall responsi-

[Mr. N. Ahern.]

bility for issues relating to violence against women.

My Department has responsibility for homelessness, and as part of this, provides some funding, for accommodation related costs, to refuges for victims of domestic violence. My Department recoups to the local authorities 90% of their expenditure on accommodation related costs arising in respect of homeless persons, including, where appropriate, victims of domestic violence. Capital funding is available through my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme to voluntary housing bodies to provide accommodation to meet special housing needs, including accommodation for victims of domestic violence.

Decisions on both capital and current funding for accommodation for victims of domestic violence, including refuges and transitional accommodation, are matters in the first instance for the local authority in whose area the accommodation

is situated. Associated care costs are the responsibility of the Department of Health and Children. Laois County Council have not submitted proposals to my Department for the provision of a women's refuge in County Laois.

Local Authority Staff.

561. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number employed by each local authority in 2005; the category under which they were employed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18409/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Based on information supplied by the local authorities, the numbers of staff employed by them, expressed in whole-time equivalents, on 31 December 2005 and the categories are set out in the following table:

Local Authority	Managerial/ Administrative/Clerical	Professional/ Technical	Outdoor	Other	Total
<i>County Council's including Town Council's</i>					
Carlow	120	45	139	33	337.00
Cavan	180.6	69	215.5	30	495.10
Clare	279	113.5	433	172	997.50
Cork	783.52	359.35	1145.98	253	2541.85
Donegal	339.5	150.5	456	235	1,181.00
Dún Laoghaire/ Rathdown	454	227	564	59	1,304.00
Fingal	539	300	626	113	1,578.00
Galway	328.99	117.3	461.3	125.53	1,033.12
Kerry	407.2	1,51.4	512.88	151.22	1,222.70
Kildare	337.5	141	337.5	207.5	1,023.50
Kilkenny	167	84	301	59	611.00
Laois	166.9	70	155.2	15.5	407.60
Leitrim	125.25	51	116.75	30	323.00
Limerick	260	113	361	39.5	773.50
Longford	151.6	54	127.8	31	364.40
Louth	230.23	104.5	291.97	84.3	711.00
Mayo	288.4	145.2	629.6	137.8	1,201.00
Meath	253.7	107.4	247.56	139.34	748.00
Monaghan	162.8	67.6	177.78	34	442.18
Offaly	160	59.5	204	67.5	491.00
Roscommon	155.5	66.5	279	80	581.00
Sligo	206.66	76	219.03	57	558.69
South Dublin	670.8	127.8	527.5	44	1370.10
North Tipperary	168	58	204	83	513.00
South Tipperary	217.5	85	358	45	705.50
Waterford	170	63	288.5	63	584.50
Westmeath	183	66	220.5	109.5	579.00
Wexford	304.5	85	372.46	98.06	860.02
Wicklow	274.75	107	373.9	78.25	833.90

Local Authority	Managerial/ Administrative/Clerical	Professional/ Technical	Outdoor	Other	Total
<i>City Councils</i>					
Cork	371	154	894	92	1,511.00
Dublin	2,082.1	488.4	3,701.95	463	6,735.45
Galway	136.5	49.5	236.5	35	457.50
Limerick	159.8	40.3	295.5	59	554.60
Waterford	136	38	206	56	436.00

Noise Regulations.

562. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason the recently introduced regulations relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise excluded training flights at airports or aerodromes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18410/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 transpose EU Directive 2002/49/EC, relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise. Environmental noise is defined in the Directive as unwanted or harmful outdoor sound created by human activities, including noise emitted by means of transport, road traffic, rail traffic, air traffic, and from sites of industrial activity. In defining a major airport, the Directive excludes movements (take-offs or landings) that are purely for training purposes on light aircraft.

Fire Services.

563. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to update the legislation regarding fire services to reflect the increasing complexity of emergency planning, response and coordination in the twenty-first century; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18441/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Fire Services Act 1981 as amended by the Licensing of Indoor Events Act 2003, is a modern and comprehensive legislative code providing the statutory basis under which fire authorities and fire services carry out their fire fighting and other emergency functions. There are no proposals for further primary legislation in this area at this time.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

564. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to make funding available to enable applicants under the special housing aid for the elderly scheme to have essential works carried out to their homes in East Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18442/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The special housing aid for the elderly scheme is administered by a Task Force under the aegis of my Department and operated at local level by the Health Service Executive.

An initial allocation of €5 million for the scheme was notified to the Western region, which includes County Galway, in February 2006 and it is a matter for the HSE Directorate of Services for Older People, which has responsibility for the administration of the scheme, to apportion funding to a particular area. A further allocation of funding will be notified to the regions, following receipt of the mid-year returns, later in the year.

Fire Services.

565. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will arrange a meeting between his Department and SIPTU operational fire fighters as requested by them in November last year to discuss the Major Emergency Management document; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18443/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): A new Framework for Major Emergency Management has been developed by the Inter-Departmental Committee on Major Emergencies. This Framework, when implemented, will provide a new and more comprehensive basis for the preparation of plans by An Garda Síochána, the Health Services Executive and Local Authorities to prepare for, and make a co-ordinated response to, major emergencies. The Framework development process included a major contribution from local authority fire services personnel with relevant expertise. There was also extensive consultation with, and circulation of the draft document to, Government Departments, An Garda Síochána, the Health Services Executive and the local authorities, including the local authority fire services.

In the circumstances, there are no plans for a meeting of the kind mentioned in the Question. The Framework is a high-level strategic document; it does not address the detailed response procedures of the relevant agencies in relation to specific incidents or hazards and, consequently, does not alter the current role of operational fire fighters.

EU Directives.

566. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the European Directives that have to be implemented by his Department; when these directives were first issued; the timeframe for their implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18462/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I am fully aware

of the importance of timely transposition of EU environmental legislation, some 200 items of which, including more than 140 Directives, have by now been transposed in this country. There are currently eight Directives in my Department's area of responsibility which are outstanding for transposition. A further four Directives are due for transposition between August 2006 and March 2008. Details of these Directives are set out below.

Directive Number and Title	Date of Directive	Date Due for Transposition	Current Position on Transposition
Directive 2000/53/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on end-of life vehicles	18 September 2000	21 April 2002	Draft regulations issued to the Commission on 20 February 2006. It is anticipated that the legislation fully transposing the Directive will be finalized in the second quarter of 2006.
Directive 2002/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 97/68/EC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to measures against the emission of gaseous and particulate pollutants from internal combustion engines to be installed in non-road mobile machinery	9 December 2002	11 August 2004	Draft Regulations have been prepared and it is anticipated that the legislation fully transposing the Directive will be finalized by the end of 2006.
Directive 2004/26/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 97/68/EC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to measures against the emission of gaseous and particulate pollutants from internal combustion engines to be installed in non-road mobile machinery	21 April 2004	20 May 2005	The drafting of Regulations to transpose this Directive is ongoing. Legislation fully transposing this Directive will be completed at the earliest possible date.
Directive 2003/4/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on public access to environmental information and repealing Council Directive 90/313/EEC	28 January 2003	14 February 2005	Draft regulations for the transposition of this Directive are under consideration and it is intended that it will be transposed at the earliest possible date.
Directive 2003/35/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council providing for public participation in respect of the drawing up of certain plans and programmes relating to the environment and amending with regard to public participation and access to justice Council Directives 85/337/EEC and 96/61/EC	26 May 2003	25 June 2005	Work is continuing on the various instruments with a view to completing transposition at the earliest possible date.
Directive 2004/12/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste	11 February 2004	18 August 2005	My Department has prepared draft regulations to transpose this Directive. These have been submitted to the EU Commission for examination and transposition is expected to be finalized by the second quarter 2006.
Directive 2004/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the limitation of emissions of volatile organic compounds due to the use of organic solvents in certain paints and varnishes and vehicle refinishing products and amending Directive 1999/13/EC	21 April 2004	31 October 2005	The drafting of Regulations to transpose this Directive is ongoing. It is anticipated that the legislation fully transposing the Directive will be finalized in the second quarter 2006.

Directive Number and Title	Date of Directive	Date Due for Transposition	Current Position on Transposition
Directive 2002/91/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the energy performance of buildings	16 December 2002	04 January 2006	Elements of this Directive have already been transposed. Work is continuing, in co-operation with the Department of Communications Marine and Natural Resources, with a view to fully transposing the Directive by 30 September 2006.
Directive 2005/33/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 1999/32/EEC on the reduction in the Sulphur content of certain Liquid Fuels and itself amending Directive 93/12/EEC	6 July 2005	11 August 2006	Draft regulations to transpose this Directive will be made as soon as possible. It is anticipated that the Directive will be transposed by the end of 2006.
Directive 2004/107/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council relating to arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in ambient air	15 December 2004	15 February 2007	Draft regulations to transpose this Directive will be made as soon as possible. It is anticipated that the Directive will be transposed by the due date.
Directive 2004/35/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage	21 April 2004	30 April 2007	It is anticipated that the legislation transposing the directive will be finalized by the transposition date.
Directive 2006/7/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the management of bathing water quality and repealing Directive 76/160/EEC	15 February 2006	24 March 2008	It is anticipated that the legislation transposing the directive will be finalized by the transposition date.

Social Cohesion Fund.

567. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount available under the social cohesion fund; the way this money is to be distributed in 2006; when this money will be distributed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18488/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): €6 million is available in 2006 for the new Social and Community Facilities Capital Scheme. This scheme, which will fund targeted capital developments, carried out through local authorities, is designed to enhance communities, address disadvantage and improve social cohesion at a local level.

The scheme will be in addition to existing grants and supports allocated to local authorities to support community development and tackle social exclusion. Projects by local authorities, or from the community in partnership with a local authority, are eligible under this scheme and new initiatives are particularly welcome.

Local authorities have been invited to submit proposals to my Department by 19 May 2006. All projects will be appraised against the assessment criteria which are set out in guidelines issued to local authorities. When this appraisal process is complete a number of projects will be selected for grant aid. It is envisaged that allocations will be

made to successful projects by the middle of this year.

Departmental Staff.

568. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the name and role of advisers, assistants or other staff employed by him since January 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18525/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I have made appointments to a single post of Special Adviser which is shared by David Grant who works four days per week and Stephen Kearon who works one day per week.

Water Framework Directive.

569. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the status of implementation of the Water Framework Directive with particular reference to Loughs Corrib, Mask, Conn and Carra; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18534/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Water Framework Directive was transposed into Irish law in December 2003 by the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003.

[Mr. Roche.]

Ireland has to date met all implementation targets set out in the Directive. These include: transposition of the Directive into Irish law; identification of River Basin Districts (including International River Basin Districts in relation to waters shared with Northern Ireland); identification and typology of waterbodies; and publication of a Characterisation Report in relation to each River Basin District.

Work is progressing on the necessary measures to meet the remaining targets laid down by the Directive. These include further classification of waterbodies, the establishment of monitoring programmes and ecological classification systems, the development of environmental objectives and programmes of measures for the achievement of these objectives and the drafting and adoption of a river basin management plan in relation to each River Basin District.

Loughs Corrib, Mask, Conn and Carra lie within the Western River Basin District. The protection and improvement of waters in this District is being systematically addressed in the context of the Western River Basin District Management

Project which is led by Galway County Council with funding from my Department.

Local Authority Accounts.

570. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if local authorities are required to submit accounts to his Department; the financial status for each local authority as of 31 December 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18548/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): In accordance with the Accounting Code of Practice issued by my Department under section 107 of the Local Government Act 2001, the Annual Financial Statement (AFS) of a local authority for a given year is required to be prepared by 1 April and published by 1 July, both of the following year.

Section 108 of the Act requires that as soon as practicable following the preparation of the AFS, it must be sent to each local authority member and to my Department.

The financial status of each local authority as at 31 December 2005 will be available in due course in its published 2005 Annual Financial Statement.